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## Latinos in Massachusetts: Puerto Ricans

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# **Latinos in Massachusetts: Puerto Ricans**

by Phillip Granberry, PH.D., and Krizia Valentino

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**THE MAURICIO GASTON INSTITUTE  
FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
AND PUBLIC POLICY**

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## Introduction

The Gastón Institute’s 2020 **Latinos in Massachusetts** series focuses on the ten largest Latino populations located throughout the state.<sup>1</sup> In order of size, these Latino populations are Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Brazilians,<sup>2</sup> Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Mexicans, Colombians, Cubans, Hondurans, and Ecuadorans. This report analyzes Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data from the 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Our descriptive analysis uses both household- and individual-level data to estimate population size and percentages and to compare Puerto Ricans to Other Latinos and Non-Latinos in the state.

## Abstract

Puerto Ricans are the largest Latino population in Massachusetts. They started arriving in the Connecticut River Valley after World War II to fill the state’s need for agricultural workers. Springfield has the largest population and Holyoke the largest share of Puerto Ricans in the state. This migration pattern is important because Western Massachusetts has not experienced economic growth as other parts of the state, and over 25% of Puerto Ricans in the state live there. This concentration of their population in this region shapes many of the demographic, social, and economic characteristics in this report. Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico in September of 2017. That year, Massachusetts received 6,241 Puerto Ricans from the island, and only Florida and Pennsylvania received more migration from Puerto Rico. In 2018, Massachusetts received 6,845 Puerto Ricans from the island, and Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas received more Puerto Rican migration than Massachusetts. This post hurricane migration was not equally distributed among cities and towns with large Puerto Rican populations. Springfield received 19% of this migration, while Worcester 15% and Boston only 5%.

## Puerto Ricans in the Massachusetts Population

Massachusetts was home in 2017 to 918,565 Latinos, of whom 336,369, or more than one third, were Puerto Rican. Massachusetts has the fifth largest Puerto Rican population in the United States (after Florida, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania). Appendix A maps the Puerto Ricans in the United States, while Appendix B maps the Puerto Ricans by cities and towns in Massachusetts. Springfield has the largest Puerto Rican population followed by Boston, Worcester, Holyoke, and Lawrence.

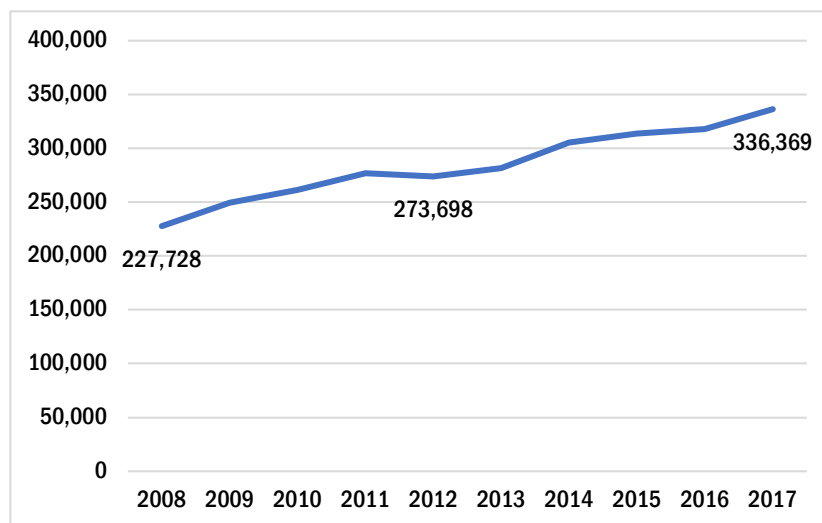
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<sup>1</sup> These reports will not identify Latinos in specific cities and towns, as previous years’ reports have done. Instead, the focus is on the most prevalent Latino ethnic groups statewide.

<sup>2</sup> We use Latino origin and ancestry, based on migration from Latin America, to identify these populations. Thus, Brazilians are included in the category “Latino” although most Brazilians self-report using a racial category – white or black – rather than identifying with the term “Latino.”

These five cities between them have 48% of the Puerto Ricans in the state. Figure 1 shows that the statewide Puerto Rican population grew by 47% from 2008 to 2017, slightly more than the overall Latino growth of 44% during this period. By comparison, the state’s total population grew by 5.6% from 2008 to 2017.

**Figure 1: Puerto Rican Population from 2008 to 2017**



Source: 2008-2017 American Community Survey

### ***Nativity***

Slightly over a third (36%) of Puerto Ricans in Massachusetts as of 2017 had been born in Puerto Rico itself. This makes no difference in their citizenship status because the Jones Act of 1917 gave Puerto Ricans birthright citizenship. Almost all Puerto Ricans in Massachusetts are United States citizens,<sup>3</sup> and they are not considered foreign born. For comparison, 55% of Other Latinos in 2017 were foreign born, and 66% of their population were citizens. The Non-Latino population was 14% foreign born, and 94% were citizens.

Only 8% of Puerto Rican children had a foreign-born parent, compared to for 73% for Other Latinos and 24% for Non-Latinos.

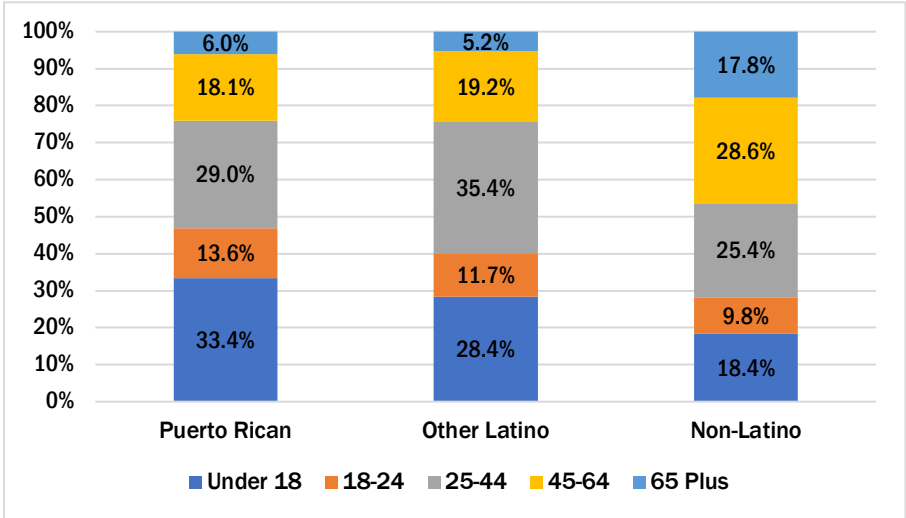
### **Age Distribution and Marital Status**

The Puerto Rican population in Massachusetts in 2017 had a median age of 26 years, lower than 30 years for Other Latinos and 41 for Non-Latinos. Figure 2 shows that 47% of Puerto Ricans were age 24 or younger compared to 40% of Other Latinos and only 28% of Non-Latinos.

<sup>3</sup> Less than 1% of Puerto Ricans were born in the Dominican Republic and were not citizens.

At the same time, the prime working-age years of 25-44 and 45-64 together accounted for a lower proportion of Puerto Ricans (47%) than of Other Latinos (55%) or Non-Latinos (54%). Non-Latinos had a much higher share of the population 65 and older while Puerto Ricans and Other Latinos had similar smaller shares.

**Figure 2: Age Categories**

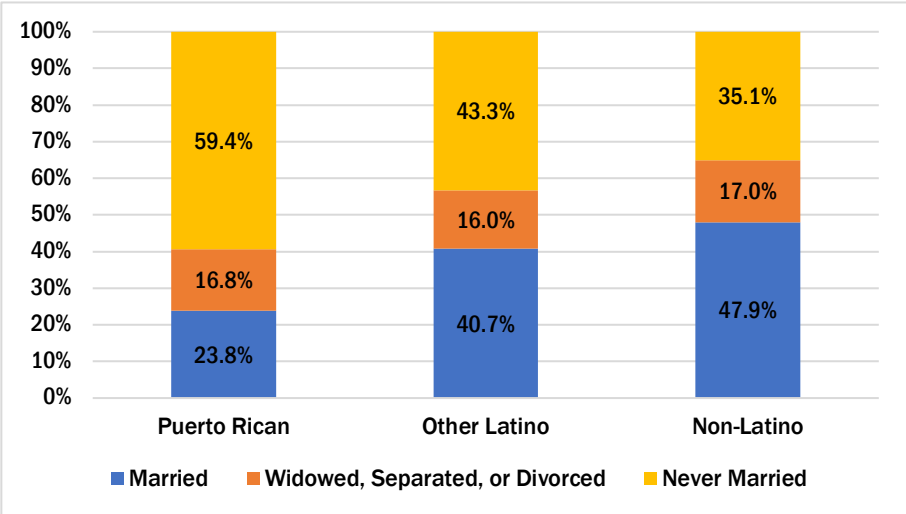


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

**Marital Status**

The Puerto Rican population’s youthfulness is a likely factor contributing to its relatively low marriage rate. Figure 3, covering all ages 15 and older, shows that Puerto Ricans were significantly less likely to be married (24%) as of 2017 than were Other Latinos (41%) and Non-Latinos (48%).

**Figure 3: Marriage Rates of the Population 15 Years and Older**



Source: 2017 American Community Survey

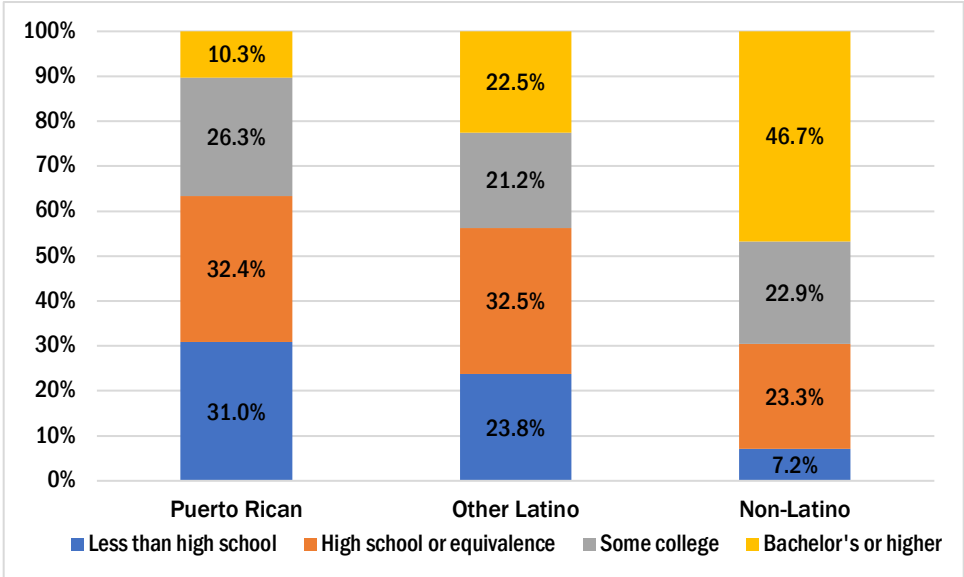
# Education

Latinos in Massachusetts overall have relatively low levels of educational attainment, and Puerto Ricans had one of the lowest levels. Figure 4 shows that Puerto Ricans had an especially high share of their 25-and-older population with less than a high school diploma: 31%, compared to 24% for Other Latinos and 7% for Non-Latinos. Correspondingly, Puerto Ricans had a lower share of their population with at least a Bachelor's degree (10%) than Other Latinos (23%) and especially Non-Latinos (47%).

The ages of 18 through 24 are especially important for obtaining higher education, and only 27% of Puerto Ricans in this age group who had not already earned a Bachelor's degree were enrolled in college in 2017, compared to 39% for Other Latinos and 61% for Non-Latinos.

English language difficulty is often referenced as a reason for low educational attainment. However, of the population age 5 and older in 2017, more than three quarters (77%) of Puerto Ricans either spoke only English or spoke it very well. This put Puerto Ricans closer to Non-Latinos (94%) than to Other Latinos (59%).

**Figure 4: Educational Attainment of the Population 25 Years and Older**

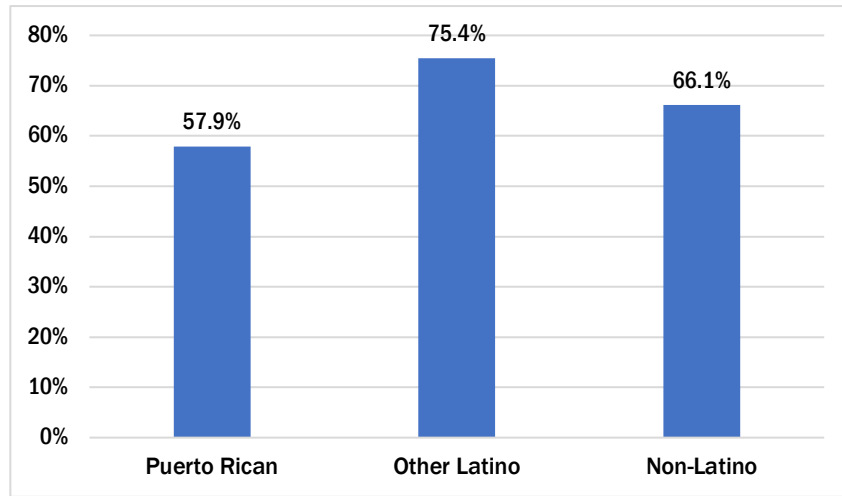


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

# Labor Force Participation

Puerto Ricans had lower labor force participation (58%) than did Other Latinos (75%), with Non-Latinos in-between at 66%. Among Puerto Ricans, men had a slightly higher labor force participation (60%) than women (56%). Younger Puerto Ricans had higher labor force participation, at 72% for those ages 25-44, but this was lower than for Other Latinos (85%) and Non-Latinos (86%) in the same age bracket.

**Figure 5: Labor Force Participation of the Population 16 and Older**

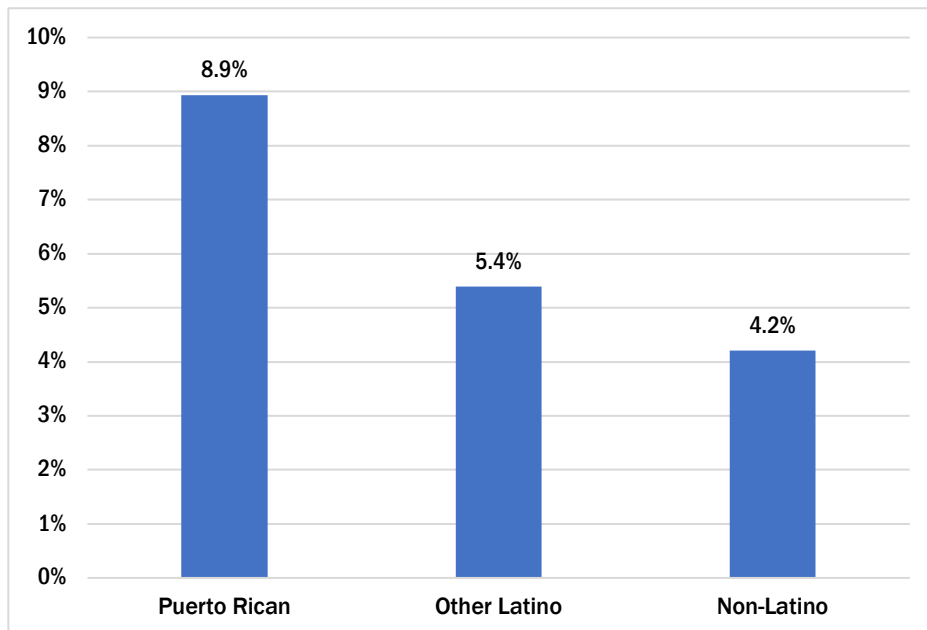


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

### ***Unemployment***

Unemployment further highlights the labor market difficulties that Puerto Ricans experience. In 2017, the ACS estimated Massachusetts unemployment at 4.5% overall, but at 8.9% for Puerto Ricans. As Figure 6 shows, this was more than double the rate for Non-Latinos and even 3.5 percentage points higher than for Other Latinos. This high unemployment even during a time of economic expansion provides some insight into why Puerto Rican labor force participation is low, as workers who become discouraged about their prospects often drop out of the labor market.

**Figure 6: Unemployment**

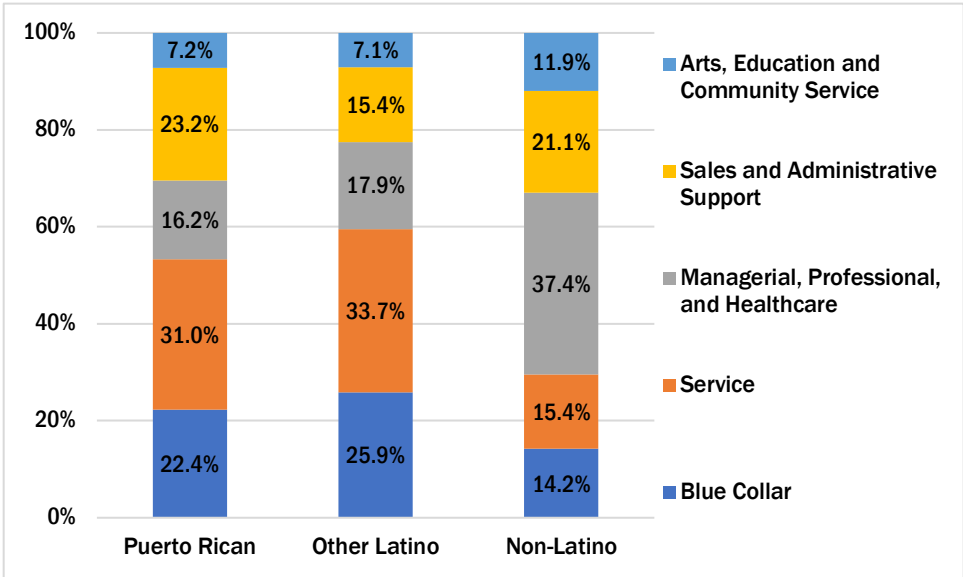


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

**Occupations**

Over half (53%) of employed Puerto Ricans (and an even higher proportion of Other Latinos, 60%) worked in service and blue-collar occupations, compared to less than 30% for Non-Latinos. In contrast, the percentage in managerial and professional occupations was 16% for Puerto Ricans, 18% for Other Latinos, and 37% for Non-Latinos. These discrepancies suggest that Puerto Ricans and Other Latinos, with lower average levels of educational attainment, fill segments of the labor market that are very different from Non-Latinos.

**Figure 7: Occupational Distribution of Employed Workers**



Source: 2017 American Community Survey

**Wages**

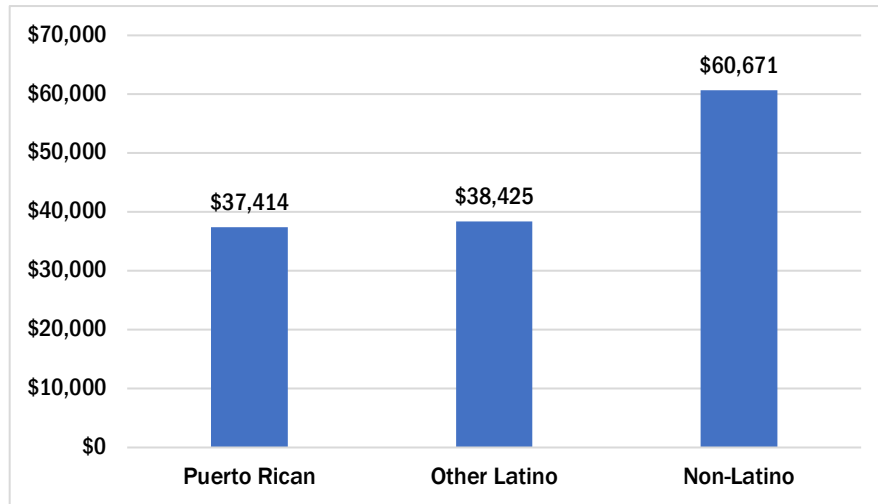
Given the previous labor market information, it is not surprising that Puerto Ricans earn relatively low wages, as shown in Figure 8. Full-time Puerto Rican workers in 2017 had a median wage income of \$37,414, which was approximately \$1,000 less than the median for Other Latinos and \$23,000 less than for Non-Latinos. The overall wage income disparity between Latinos and Non-Latinos persisted when analyzed by nativity, age, and educational attainment.

**Poverty**

With their higher unemployment and lower wage income, one-third of Puerto Ricans (34%) were below the poverty threshold. This was much higher than for Other Latinos (17%) and Non-Latinos (8%). Even more alarming was that 44% of Puerto Rican children in 2017 were living below the poverty threshold, compared to 22% for Other Latino children and 9% for Non-Latino children.



**Figure 8: Median Wage Income of Full-Time Workers**



Source: 2017 American Community Survey

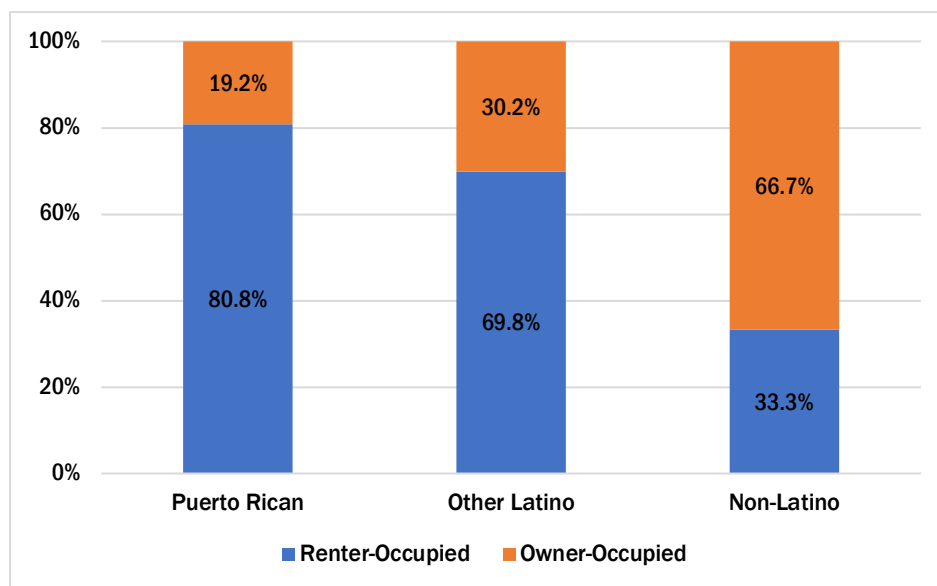
### ***Standard of Living***

The final measures of Puerto Ricans' status in Massachusetts are projected to identify how they are rewarded for their economic, social, and political participation. We look at homeownership, household income, housing costs, and medical insurance.

### ***Homeownership***

Puerto Ricans in 2017 had a very low rate of homeownership: 19%, meaning that 81% of Puerto Ricans were renters. Their homeownership rate was much lower than the rate for Other Latinos (30%) and less than a third of the rate for Non-Latinos (67%).

**Figure 9: Homeownership**

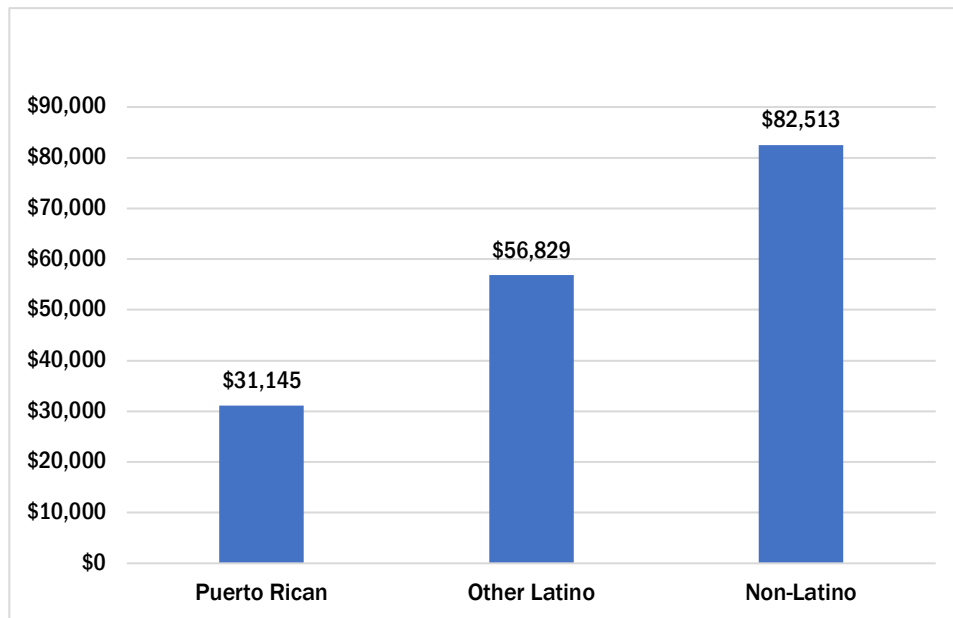


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## ***Household Income***

Household income is another aid in assessing a population’s standard of living. It accounts for the incomes of all people ages 15 years or older occupying the same housing unit, regardless of relation. Puerto Ricans’ median household income was \$31,145. This was much lower than for Other Latino households (\$56,829) and far lower than for Non-Latino households (\$82,513).

**Figure 10: Median Household Income**

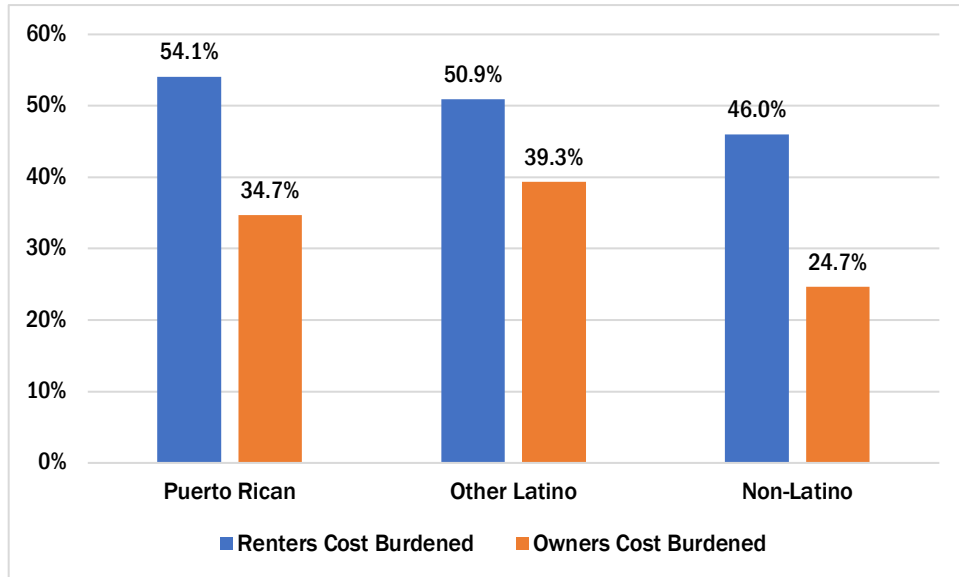


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## ***Housing Cost Burden***

A housing cost burdened household spends more than 30% of its monthly income on either rent or a mortgage payment. In Massachusetts, noted for its high housing costs, 47% of all renting households in 2017 were housing cost burdened. This figure was 54% for Puerto Rican households, 51% for Other Latino households, and 46% for Non-Latino households. Among homeowners, 35% of Puerto Rican households were housing cost burdened. This was slightly lower than for Other Latino households (39%) but higher than for Non-Latinos (25%).

**Figure 11: Housing Cost Burden**

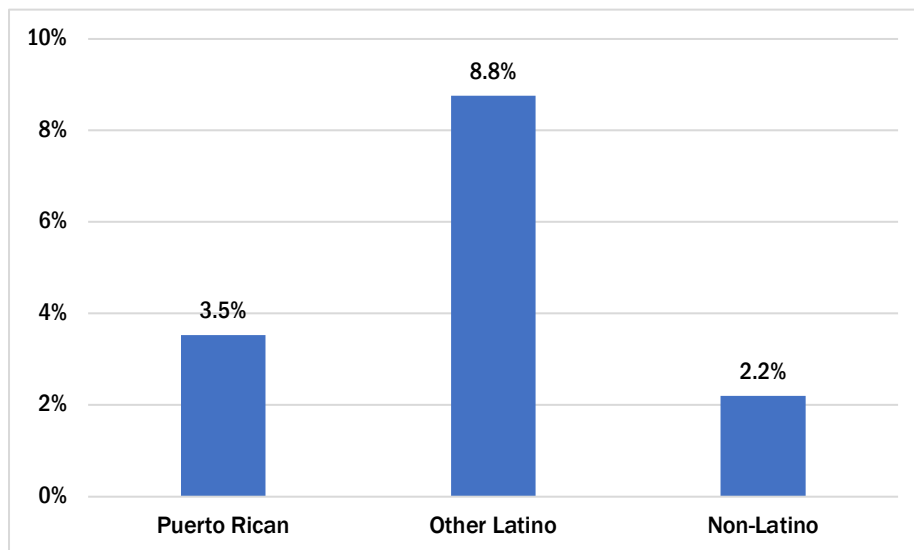


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

### ***Medical Insurance***

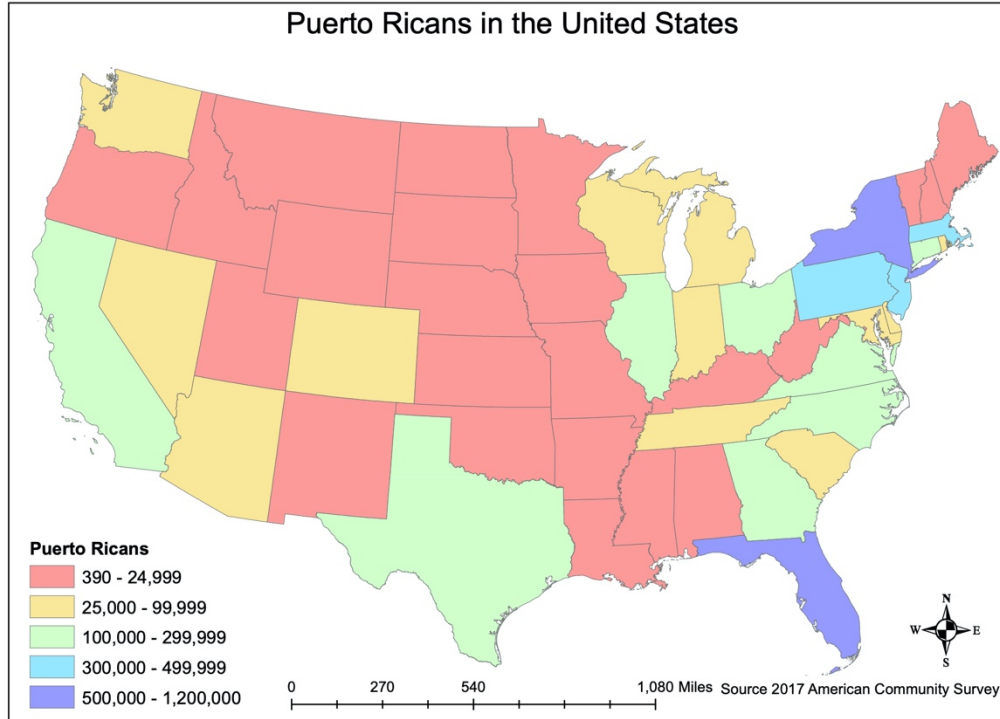
Puerto Ricans had better access to health insurance than Other Latinos. Less than 4% of all Puerto Ricans in 2017 lacked medical insurance. This was more similar to Non-Latinos (2%) than to Other Latinos (9%). The same trend held for Puerto Rican children, only 1% of whom lacked medical insurance, compared to 3% for Other Latinos and 1% for Non-Latinos.

**Figure 12: Medical Uninsurance**

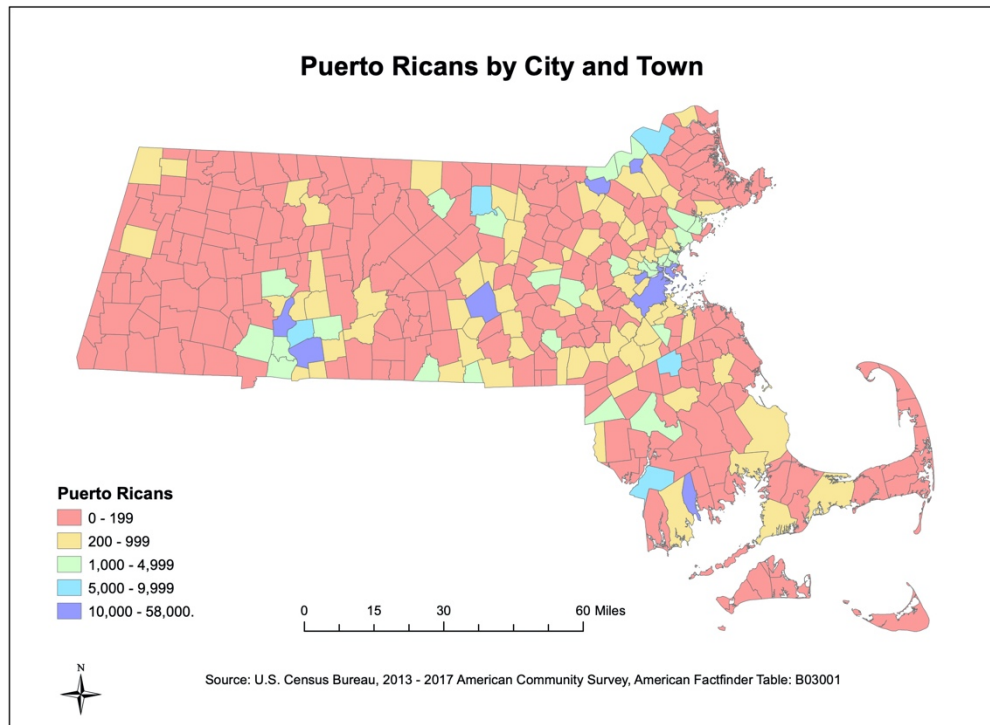


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

# Appendix A: Puerto Ricans in the United States



# Appendix B: Puerto Ricans in Massachusetts



## About the Gastón Institute

Established in 1989, the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy was created by the Massachusetts Legislature in response to a need for improved understanding about the Latino experience in the commonwealth. Now in its 30th year, the Gastón Institute continues its mission of informing the public and policymakers about issues vital to the state's growing Latino community and providing information and analysis necessary for effective Latino participation in public policy development. To learn more about the Gastón Institute, visit [www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute](http://www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute).

One of the goals of the Gastón Institute is to be responsive to the needs of the Latino and policy communities through the research we undertake. Please feel free to contact us with suggestions or requests for specific information.

## About the Authors

Phillip Granberry is a social demographer. He worked with various community-based organizations assisting recently arrived U.S. immigrants before earning a Ph.D. in Public Policy from the University of Massachusetts Boston. He has published several articles on the accumulation and use of social capital among Latinos and the sexual health communication of Puerto Rican mothers with their children. In addition to his research and teaching in the Gastón Institute and Economics Department at UMass Boston, he is Senior Researcher in demography for the Boston Planning and Development Agency.

Krizia Valentino is a graduate student in the Applied Economics program at UMass Boston, expected to graduate May 2020. She has supported data collection and analysis for a wide range of projects at the Gaston Institute, including a Survey Report for English for New Bostonians and the Latino Non-Profit Mapping Project with Amplify Latinx. In addition to her time at Gaston Institute, she is also a teaching assistant in the UMass Boston Economics department.