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### Latinos in Massachusetts: Salvadorans

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# **Latinos in Massachusetts: Salvadorans**

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

May 2020

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

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## Intro

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 Salvadorans to Other Latinos and Non-Latinos in the state.

## Abstract

A civil war in El Salvador in the 1970s and 1980s created a need for the United States to accept refugees, but the U.S. Justice Department's Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) seldom granted petitions for political asylum by Salvadorans. In response, the Cambridge City Council in 1985 passed a resolution that gave sanctuary to Salvadoran and other refugees. This helped facilitate Salvadoran migration to Massachusetts. Now after several decades, the Salvadoran population mostly resides in several cities and towns in the Greater Boston area, and over 40% of their population is native born. The social and economic analysis that follows paints a mixed picture of their incorporation into Massachusetts. Salvadorans have lower levels of educational attainment, but higher labor force participation. A large share of Salvadorans are children, and investment in their education can shape their future economic success.

## Salvadorans in the Massachusetts Population

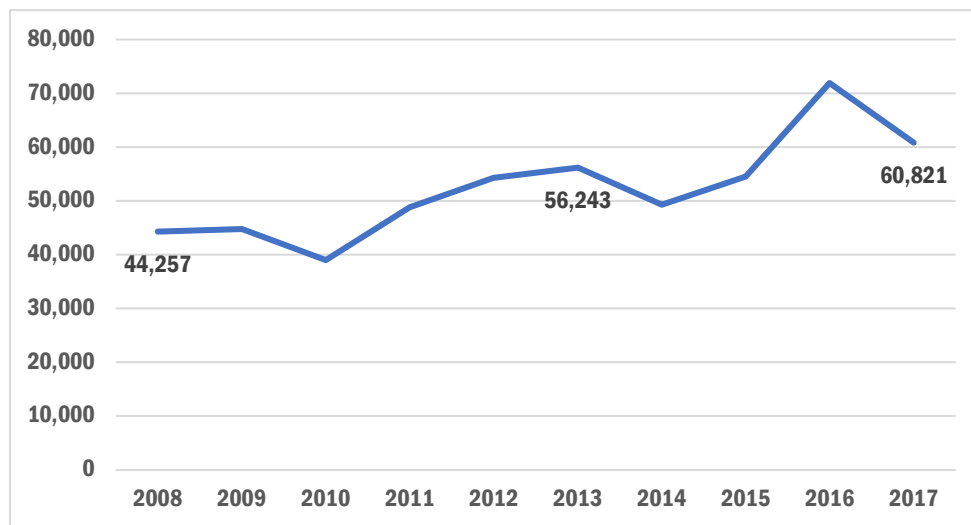
Massachusetts was home in 2017 to 918,565 Latinos, of whom 60,821, or approximately 7%, were Salvadoran. Massachusetts has the eighth largest Salvadoran population in the United States (after California, Texas, New York, Virginia, Maryland, Florida, and New Jersey). Appendix A maps the Salvadorans in the United States, while Appendix B maps the Salvadorans by cities and towns in Massachusetts. Boston has the largest Salvadoran population followed by Chelsea, Everett, Revere, and Lynn. (These five cities between them had 68% of the Salvadoran population in the state.) Figure 1 shows that the statewide Salvadoran population grew by 37% from 2008 to 2017, while the state's overall Latino population grew by 44% during this period. By comparison, the state's total population grew by 5.6% from 2008 to 2017.

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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."

**Figure 1: Salvadoran Population from 2008 to 2017**



Source: 2008-2017 American Community Survey

### ***Nativity***

Foreign-born Salvadorans in Massachusetts, who on average arrived in the United States in 2000, composed 58% of Salvadorans in the state as of 2017. With few mechanisms to obtain citizenship, only 56% of Salvadorans in that year were U.S. citizens. By comparison, 34% of Other Latinos were foreign born, and 80% of their population were citizens. The Non-Latino population was 14% foreign born, and 94% of their population were citizens.

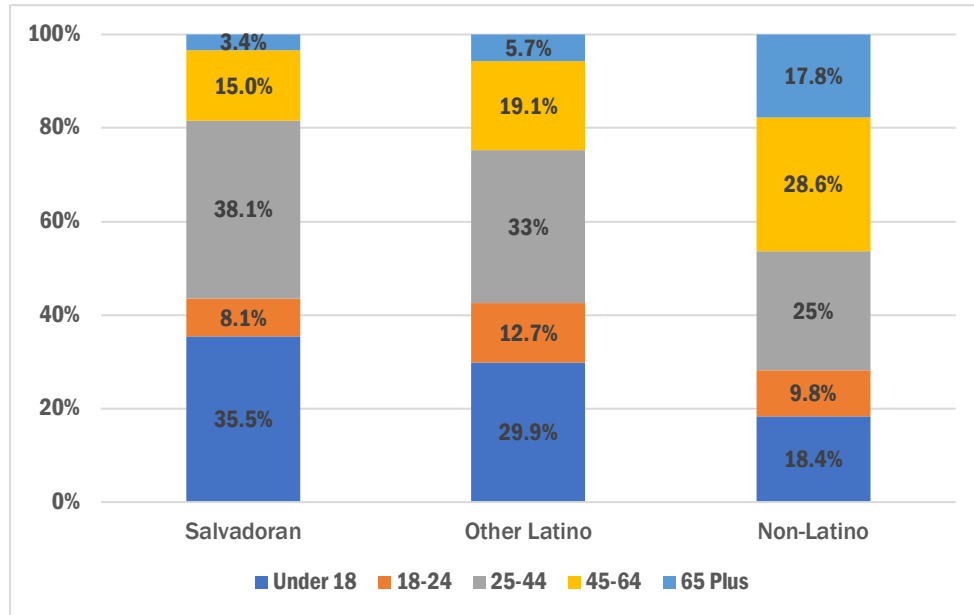
Even though 45% of Salvadorans were native born, 79% of Salvadoran children had at least one foreign-born parent compared to 44% for Other Latinos and 24% for Non-Latinos.

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

The Salvadoran population in Massachusetts in 2017 had a median age of 27 years, younger than for Other Latinos (29 years) and much younger than for Non-Latinos (41 years). Figure 2 shows that 44% of Salvadorans were age 24 or younger, compared to 43% of Other Latinos and only 28% of Non-Latinos.

At the same time, the prime working-age years of 25-44 and 45-64 together accounted for a similar proportion (53%) to those of Other Latinos (52%) and Non-Latinos (54%). Non-Latinos had the largest share of the population 65 and older while Salvadorans had the smallest share.

**Figure 2: Age Categories**

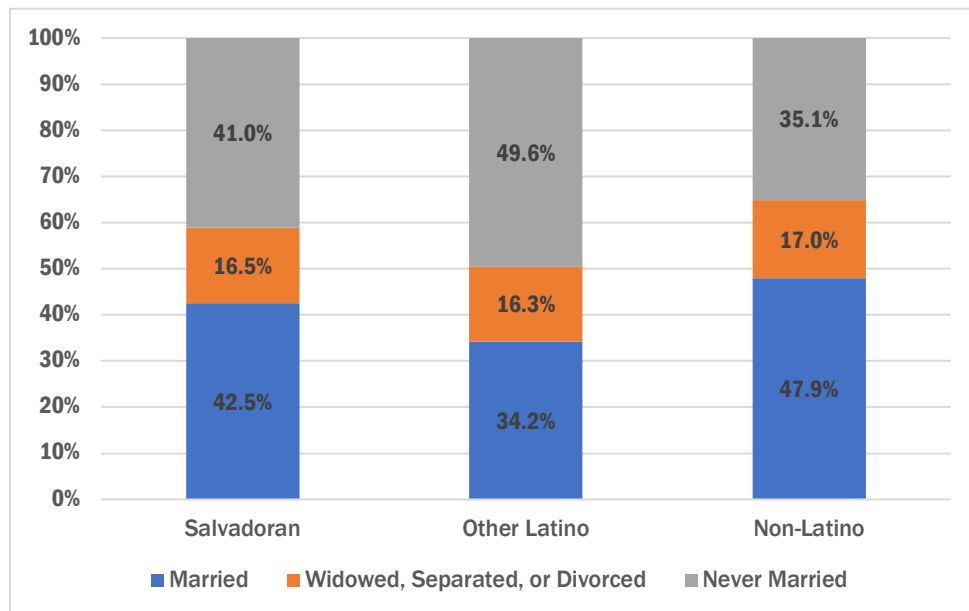


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

### ***Marital Status***

Figure 3, covering all ages 15 and older, shows the relative marriage rates. Despite its relative youth, the Salvadoran population had a higher marriage rate (43%) than for Other Latinos (34%), though slightly lower than for Non-Latinos (48%).

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



Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## Education

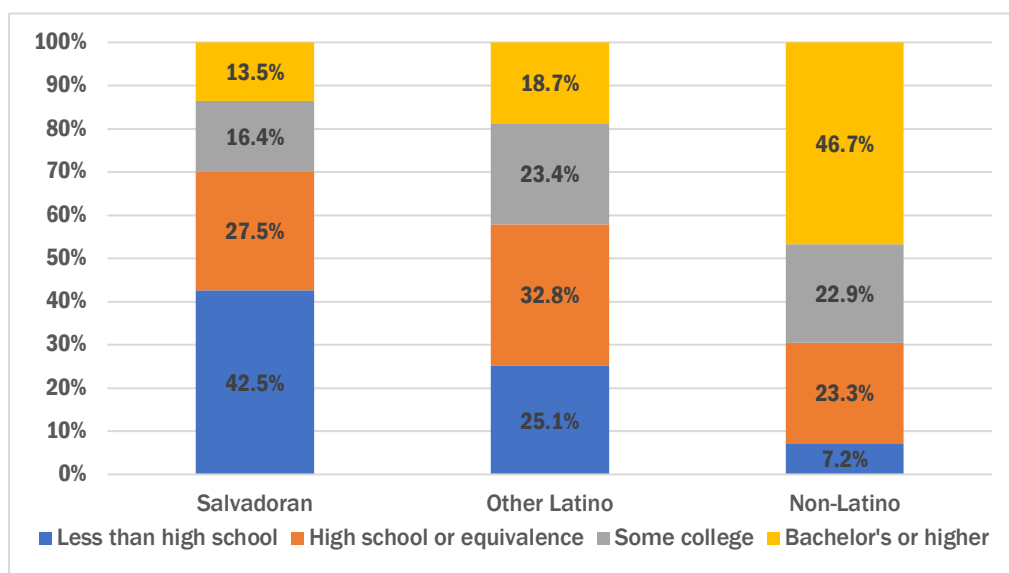
Latinos in Massachusetts overall have relatively low levels of educational attainment, and this is true of Salvadorans in the state. Figure 4 shows that Salvadorans in 2017 had an especially high share of their 25-and-older population with less than a high school diploma: 43%, compared to 25% for Other Latinos and 7% for Non-Latinos.

Correspondingly, Salvadorans had a lower share of their population with at least a Bachelor's degree (14%) than Other Latinos (19%) and especially Non-Latinos (47%).

The ages of 18 through 24 are important for obtaining higher education, and only 41% of Salvadorans in this age group who had not already earned a Bachelor's degree were enrolled in college in 2017. This was higher than for Other Latinos (38%) but much lower than for Non-Latinos (61%).

English language difficulty is often referenced as a reason for low educational attainment. Of the population age 5 and older, 51% of Salvadorans in 2017 either spoke only English or spoke it very well. This put Salvadorans lower than Other Latinos (66%) and Non-Latinos (94%).

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

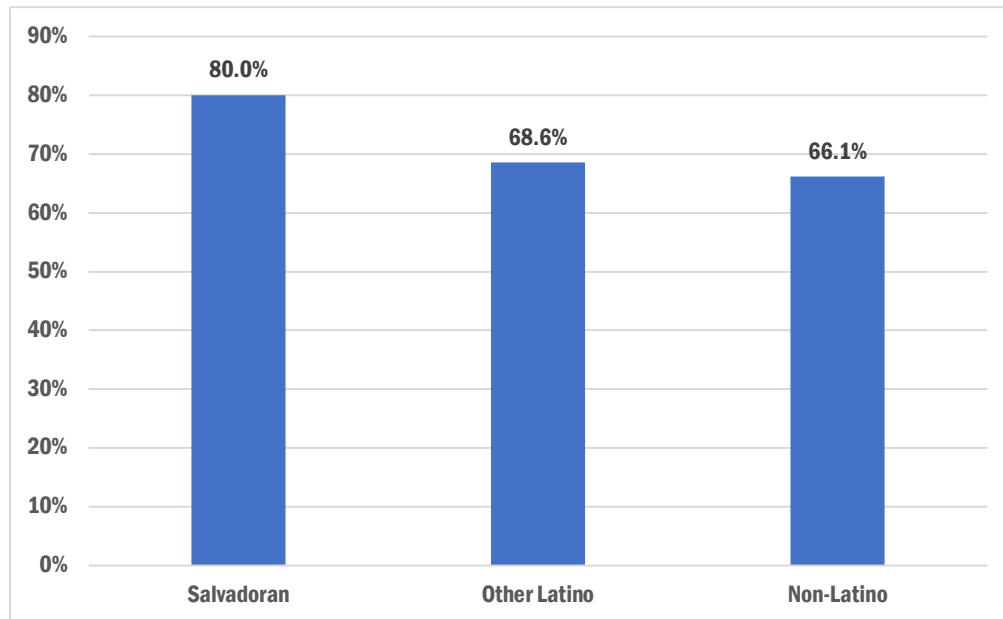


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## Labor Force Participation

Salvadorans had a much higher labor force participation rate (80%) than did Other Latinos (69%) and Non-Latinos (66%). Among Salvadorans, men had higher labor force participation (88%) than women (70%). Younger Salvadorans had higher labor force participation, which was 85% for those 25-44. This was higher than for Other Latinos (80%) and Non-Latinos (86%) in this same age group.

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

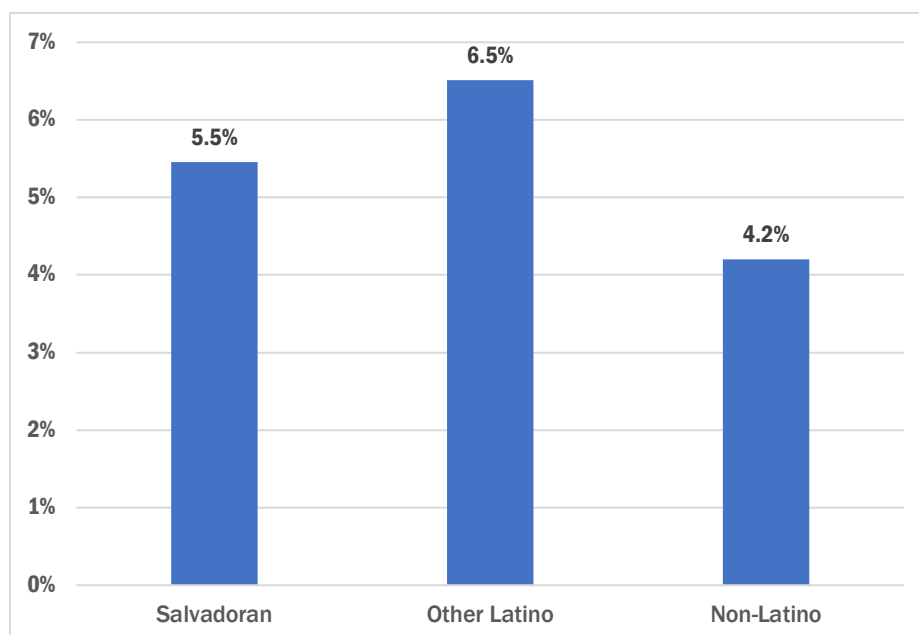


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

### ***Unemployment***

In 2017, the ACS estimated Massachusetts unemployment at 4.5% overall, but at 5.5% for Salvadorans. This unemployment rate was between the rates for Other Latinos (6.5%) and for Non-Latinos (4.2%).

**Figure 6: Unemployment**

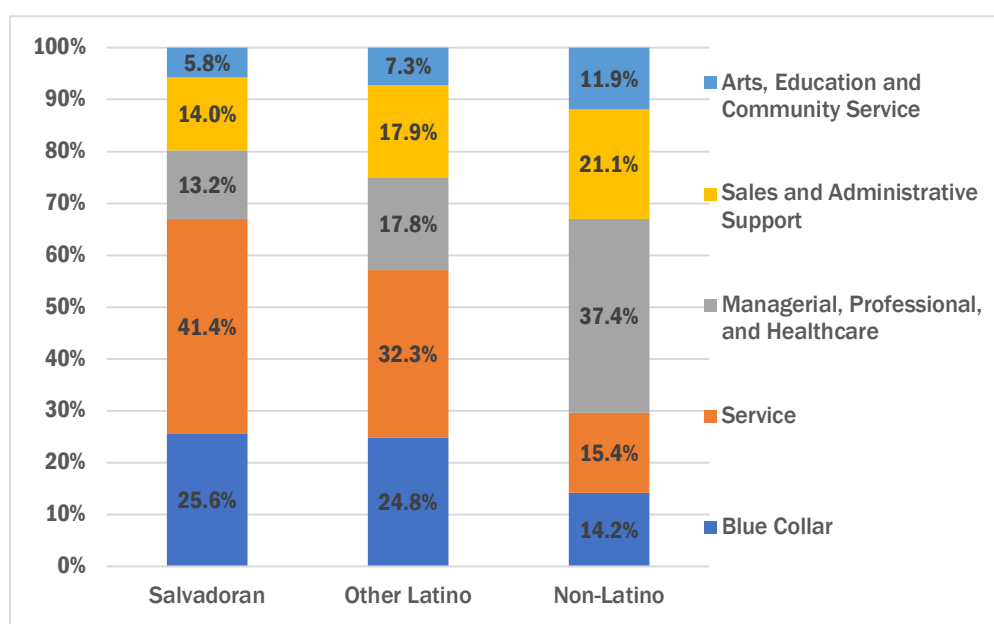


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## Occupations

Approximately two thirds (67%) of employed Salvadorans (and a lower share of Other Latinos, 57%) 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 13% for Salvadorans, 18% for Other Latinos, and 37% for Non-Latinos. These discrepancies suggest that Salvadorans and Other Latinos, with lower average levels of educational attainment, fill segments of the labor market that are very different from those for Non-Latinos.

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



Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## Wages

Given the previous occupational distribution in Figure 7, it is not surprising that Salvadorans earned relatively low wages. Full-time Salvadoran workers in 2017 had a median wage income of \$34,886, which was approximately \$4,000 less than for Other Latinos and \$26,000 less than for Non-Latinos. The overall wage income disparity between Latinos and Non-Latinos persisted when analyzed by nativity, age, and educational attainment.

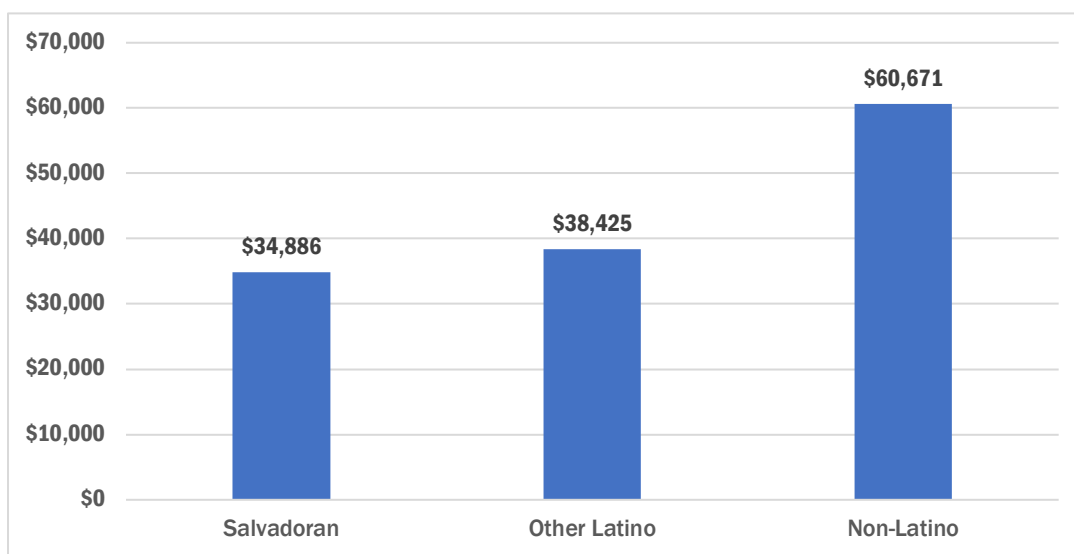
## Poverty

With their lower wage income, it is somewhat surprising that only 17% of Salvadorans were below the poverty threshold, compared to 23% for Other Latinos. (The figure for



Non-Latinos was 8%.) More alarming, however, was that 25% of Salvadoran children lived below the poverty threshold.

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



Source: 2017 American Community Survey

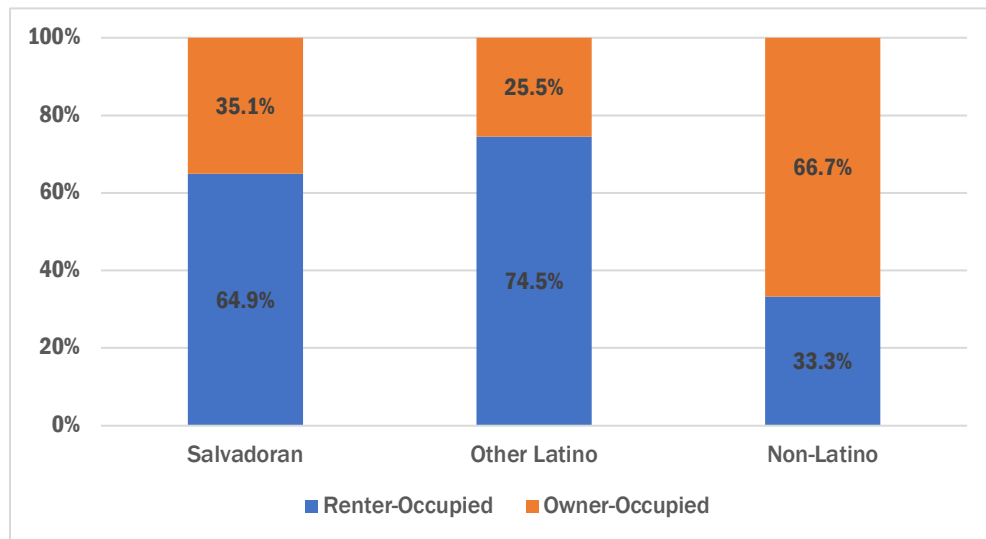
### ***Standard of Living***

The final measures of Salvadorans' participation 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***

Salvadorans in 2017 had a surprisingly high homeownership rate given their low wage earnings. Their homeownership rate of 35% was much higher than for Other Latinos (26%) though barely more than half of the rate for Non-Latinos (67%). The 35% rate means that 65% of Salvadorans were renters.

**Figure 9: Homeownership**

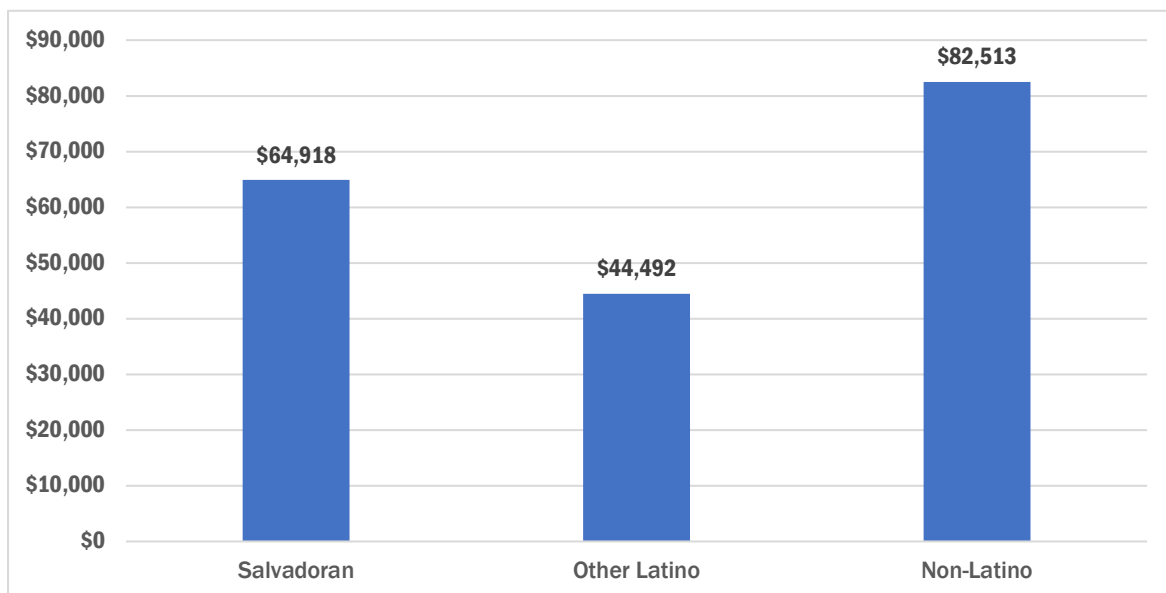


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

### ***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. Salvadoran household income was \$64,918. This was much higher than that Other Latino households (\$44,492), though lower than for Non-Latino households (\$82,513).

**Figure 10: Median Household Income**

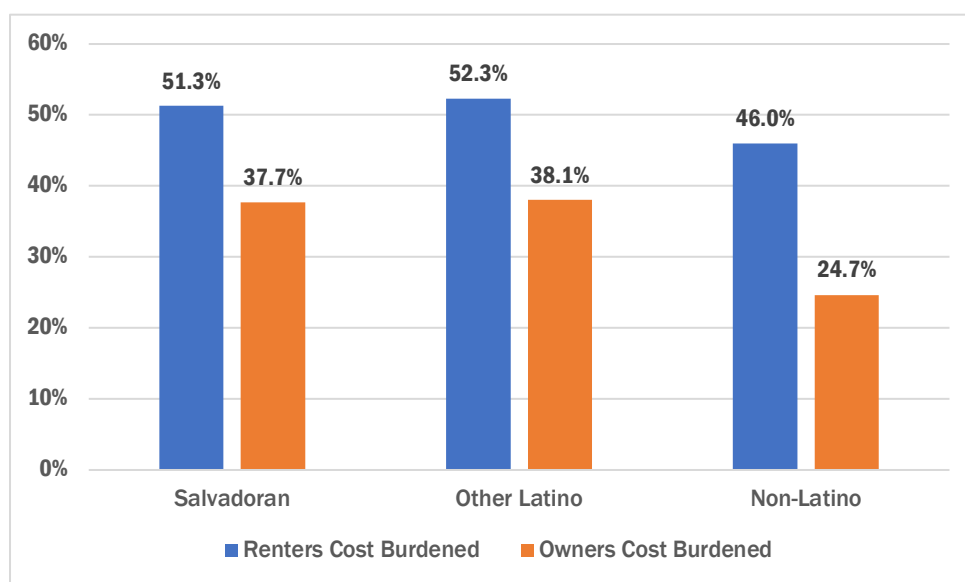


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## ***Housing Cost Burden***

A housing cost burdened household spends more than 30% of its monthly income on either a rent or mortgage payment. In Massachusetts, noted for its high housing costs, 47% of all renting households in 2017 were housing cost burdened. This figure was 51% for Salvadoran households, 52% for Other Latino households and 46% for Non-Latino households. Among homeowners, 38% of Salvadoran household were housing cost burdened. This was the same as for Other Latinos (also 38%) but higher than for Non-Latinos (25%).

**Figure 11: Housing Cost Burden**

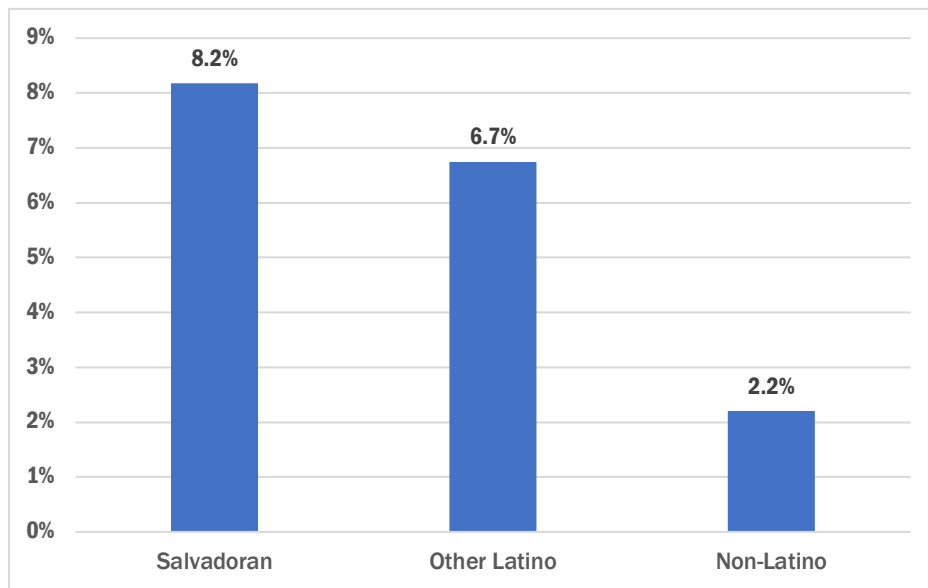


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## ***Medical Insurance***

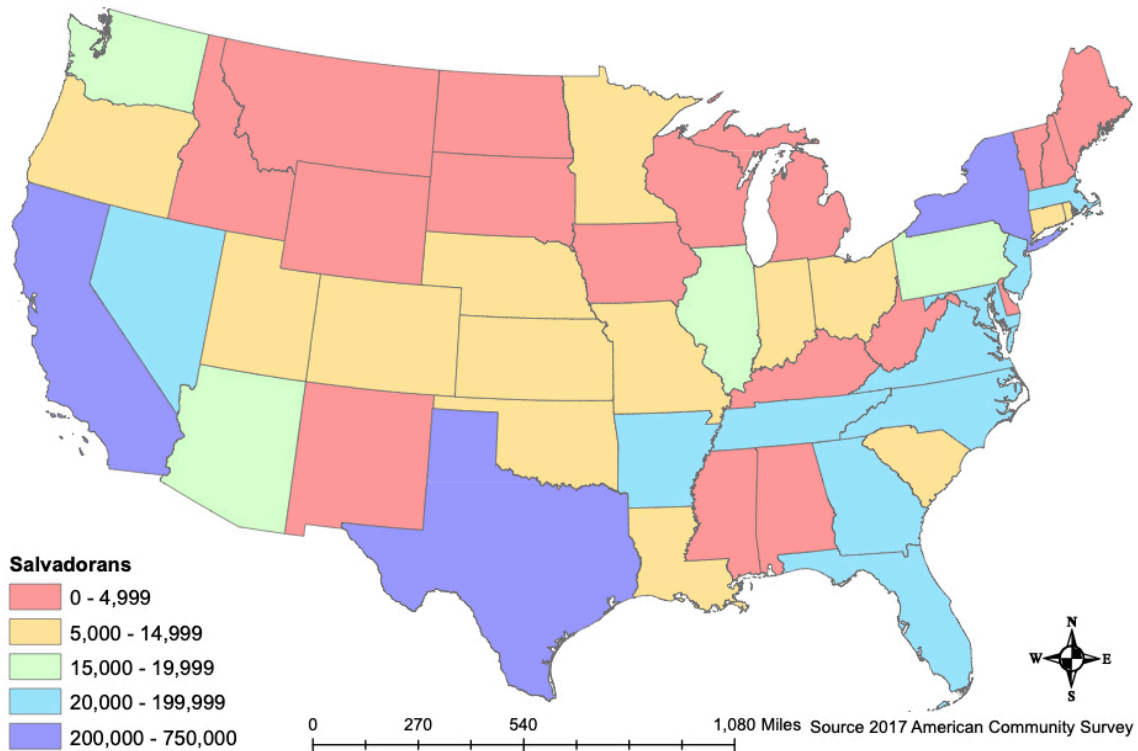
Salvadorans had slightly worse access to health insurance than Other Latinos. Over 8% of all Salvadorans in 2017 lacked medical insurance. This was higher than for Other Latinos (7%) and for Non-Latinos (2%). Among Salvadoran children, however, only 2% lacked medical insurance. This was similar to Other Latinos (2%), though higher than for Non-Latinos (1%).

**Figure 12: Medical Uninsurance**

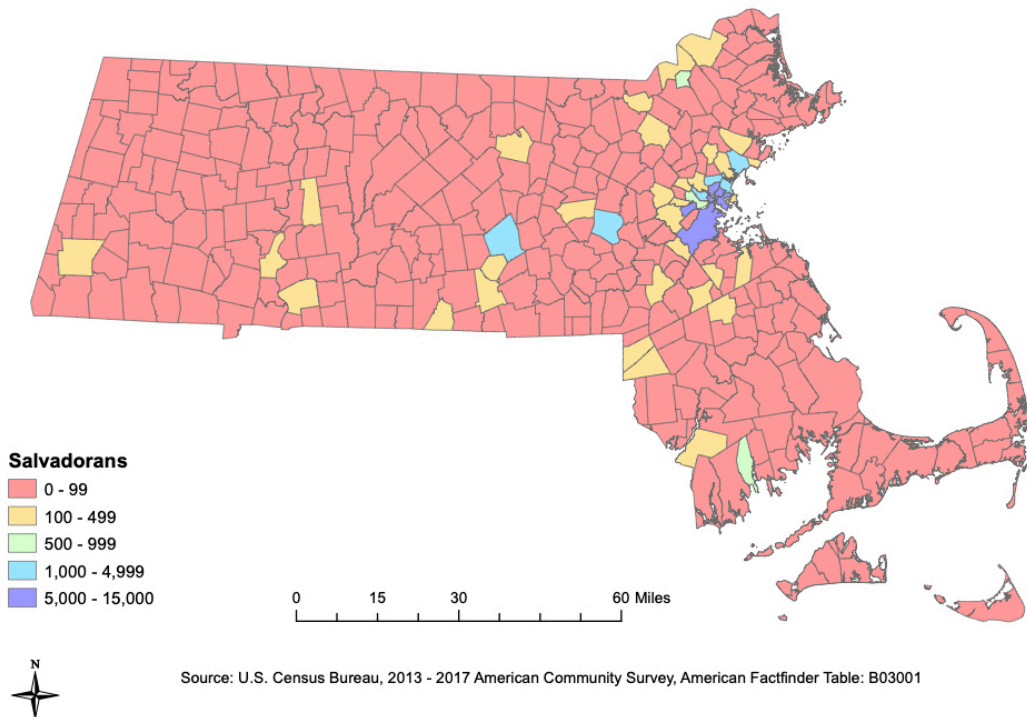


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## Appendix A: Salvadorans in the United States



## Appendix B: Salvadorans in Massachusetts



## Latinos in Massachusetts: Brazilians

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

April, 2020

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## 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 Gastón 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 Gastón Institute, she is also a teaching assistant in the UMass Boston Economics department.



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