Latinos in Massachusetts: Guatemalans

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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.¹ In order of size, these Latino populations are Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Brazilians,² 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.

Economic factors have historically affected the migration patterns of Central Americans such as Guatemalans. Prior to the 1980s, Central American migration to the United States showed a marked bipolarity. The majority of migrants were upper- and middle-class individuals who could afford to travel and relocate. A minority were single women hired to do domestic work in the U.S. However, in the 1980s a dramatic shift emerged in the migration pattern. ³ Armed conflicts in Central America, in which the U.S. under the Reagan administration supported brutally authoritarian right-wing forces, created social turmoil throughout the region. Emigration not only began to increase steeply, but it took on a different aspect. Sometimes whole families fled, sometimes only children, sometimes one or both parents came and left their children with other relatives back home. Guatemalans who have come to the U.S. since the ‘80s have represented a much broader range of class and occupational backgrounds than those who had come earlier.

For this report our descriptive analysis uses both household- and individual-level data to estimate population size and percentages and to compare Guatemalans to Other Latinos and Non-Latinos in the state.

Guatemalans in the Massachusetts Population

Massachusetts was home to 918,565 Latinos in 2017, of whom 39,918, or approximately 4%, were Guatemalan. Massachusetts has the tenth largest Guatemalan population in the United States. Appendix A maps the Guatemalans in the United States, while Appendix B maps the Guatemalan population by cities and towns in Massachusetts. Lynn has the largest Guatemalan population followed by Boston, Chelsea, Waltham, New Bedford, and Lawrence. (These six cities between them had 58% of the Guatemalan population in the state as of 2017.) Overall, Figure 1 shows that the population grew by 57% from 2008 to 2017, despite a decline toward the end of that time. In this same

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¹ 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.

² 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.”

period, the state’s overall Latino population grew by 44%. By comparison, the state’s total population grew by 5.6% from 2008 to 2017.

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

![Graph showing Guatemalan population from 2008 to 2017](image)

Source: 2008-2017 American Community Survey

Foreign-born Guatemalans in Massachusetts, who on average arrived in the United States in 2000, composed 56% of Guatemalans in the state as of 2017. With 44% of their population native born, 60% of Guatemalans in 2017 were U.S. citizens. By comparison, 35% of Other Latinos were foreign born, and 79% of their population were citizens. The Non-Latino population was 14% foreign born, and 94% of their population were citizens.

Even though less half of the Guatemalans were native born, 78% of Guatemalan children in 2017 had at least one foreign-born parent compared to 45% of Other Latinos and 24% of Non-Latinos.

**Age Distribution and Marital Status**

The Guatemalan population in Massachusetts had a median age of 25 years, younger than Other Latinos (29 years) and much younger than Non-Latinos (41 years). Figure 2 shows that 48% of Guatemalans were under age 25 compared to 44% 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 account for a smaller proportion of Guatemalans (51%) than of Other Latinos and Non-Latinos (each 54%). Non-Latinos had a much larger share of the population 65 and older while Guatemalans and Other Latinos had similar smaller shares.
Even though the Guatemalan population was slightly younger than Other Latinos, they had a relatively high marriage rate. Figure 3, covering all ages 15 and older, shows that Guatemalans’ 47% marriage rate in 2017 was closer to that of Non-Latinos (48%) than Other Latinos (34%).
**Education**

Latinos in Massachusetts overall have relatively low levels of educational attainment, and this is true of Guatemalans in the state. Figure 4 shows that Guatemalans in 2017 had an especially high share of their 25-and-older population with less than a high school diploma: 44%, compared to 26% for Other Latinos and 7% for Non-Latinos. Correspondingly, Guatemalans had a lower share of their population with at least a Bachelor’s degree (12%) than Other Latinos (19%) and especially Non-Latinos (47%).

The ages of 18 through 24 are especially important for obtaining higher education, and 45% of Guatemalans in this age group who had not earned a Bachelor’s degree were enrolled in college in 2017 compared to 38% of Other Latinos and 61% of Non-Latinos.

English language difficulty is often referenced as a reason for low educational attainment. Of the population age 5 and older, barely more than half (56%) of Guatemalans in 2017 either spoke only English or spoke it very well. This was a lower proportion than for Other Latinos (65%) and Non-Latinos (94%).

![Figure 4: Educational Attainment of the Population 25 Years and Older](image)

**Labor Force Participation**

Guatemalans had a higher labor force participation rate (79%) than did Other Latinos (69%) and Non-Latinos (66%). Among Guatemalans, men had higher labor force participation (90%) than women (67%). Younger Guatemalans had higher labor force participation, which was at 87% for the ages 25-44. This was higher than Other Latinos (80%) and Non-Latinos (86%) in the age group.
Unemployment

In 2017, the ACS estimated Massachusetts unemployment at 4.5% overall, but 6.8% for Guatemalans. This unemployment rate was higher than for both Other Latinos (6.4%) and Non-Latinos (4.2%).
**Occupations**

Over 65% of employed Guatemalans (and a smaller proportion 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 profession occupations was 11% for Guatemalans, 18% for Other Latinos, and 37% for Non-Latinos. These discrepancies suggest that Guatemalans and Other Latinos, with lower average levels of educational attainment, fill segments of the labor market that are very different than for Non-Latinos.

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

![Occupational Distribution of Employed Workers](chart)

Source: 2017 American Community Survey

**Wages**

Given the previous occupational information in Figure 7, it is not surprising that Guatemalans earned relatively low wages in 2017. Full-time Guatemalan workers in 2017 had a median income of $37,414. Their median wage was approximately $500 less than for Other Latinos and $23,000 less than for Non-Latinos. This overall Latino wage income disparity between Latinos and Non-Latinos persisted when analyzed by nativity, age, and educational attainment.

**Poverty**

Despite their higher unemployment and lower wage income, only 20% of Guatemalans were below the poverty threshold. This was less than for Other Latinos (23%) though much higher than for Non-Latinos (8%). Slightly over 23% of Guatemalan children lived below the poverty threshold compared to 31% for Other Latinos and 9% for Non-Latinos.
Standard of Living

The final measures of Guatemalans’ 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

Guatemalans in 2017 had a lower homeownership rate (23%) than Other Latinos (26%) and barely one third the rate for Non-Latinos (67%). The Guatemalan rate of 23% means that 77% of Guatemalans were renters.

Figure 8: Median Wage Income of Full-Time Workers

![Figure 8: Median Wage Income of Full-Time Workers](image)

Source: 2017 American Community Survey

Figure 9: Homeownership

![Figure 9: Homeownership](image)

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. Guatemalans’ median household income was $55,413. This was much higher than for Other Latino households ($44,593) though lower than for Non-Latino household ($82,513). Given the Guatemalans’ relative low wage income, this reflects a larger household size.

**Figure 10: Median Household Income**

![Median Household Income Chart]

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 63% of Guatemalan households, 52% for Other Latino households, and 46% for Non-Latino households. Among homeowners, 51% of Guatemalan households were housing cost burdened. This was higher than for Other Latinos (38%) and Non-Latinos (25%).
Medical Insurance

Guatemalans had higher rates of medical uninsurance in 2017. Over 11% of all Guatemalans lacked medical insurance. This was much higher than for Other Latinos (7%) and Non-Latinos (2%). The same trend holds for Guatemalan children, as 5% lacked medical insurance compared to 2% for Other Latinos and 1% for Non-Latinos.
Appendix A: Guatemalans in the United States

Appendix B: Guatemalans in Massachusetts
Latinos in Massachusetts: Guatemalans
by Phillip Granberry, PH.D., and Krizia Valentino.
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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.

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 2020 graduate from the Applied Economics program at UMass Boston. 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.