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Recommended Citation

Mattos, Trevor; Granberry, Phillip; and Swan, Quito, "Latinos in Massachusetts: Afro-Latinos" (2020).

Gastón Institute Publications. 262.

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Latinos in Massachusetts: Afro-Latinos

By Trevor Mattos, MA, Phillip Granberry, Ph.D.,
and Quito Swan, Ph.D.

December 2020

THE MAURICIO GASTÓN INSTITUTE
FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AND PUBLIC POLICY

Foreword

Afro-Latinx communities are critical stakeholders in Black and Latinx demographic groups, and they also make up a critical fabric of Boston, Massachusetts and the United States politically, economically and culturally. The Afro-Latinx experience sheds light on the critical intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, economics, gender, and class in not only America, but in Afro-Latinx Diasporas across the Americas and the world. Afro-Latinx individuals and institutions often face racism within broader Latinx communities and White America and are often stigmatized by their non-Latino Black counterparts. At the same time, there is a strong tradition of Afro-Latinx political advocacy, cross cultural movements and community organizing that has generated solidarity amongst Black and Brown communities across the United States.

Afro-Latinx communities suffer from invisibility, misrepresentations, marginalization, and racism from the broader society. As such, research driven reports like the current one, **Latinos in Massachusetts: Black and Afro-Latinos**, produced by the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, allow us to generate fuller pictures of the dynamics of Afro-Latinx life in the Greater Boston area. The report spans critical indicators such as population demographics, nativity, marital status, labor, education, economics, medical insurance, offering key insight into the impact of these dynamics. Readers of the report will be able to make their own analyses, but a number of striking details stand out on their own. Seventy five percent of the 53,784 Afro-Latinos in Massachusetts are Afro-Dominican or Afro Puerto Rican, comprising some five percent of the state's Latino population. This is a growing population, which has increased some 57% since 2009. As these numbers increase, the significance of Afro-Latinx communities also grows.

Latinos in Massachusetts: Black and Afro-Latinos reveals some gross disparities in occupation status and education. While 29% of Afro-Latinos had high school degrees or equivalent, some 18% percent had bachelor's or higher degrees. In contrast, 23% of non-Latinos had high school diplomas, while 46% had college degrees. Some 31% of Afro-Latinos had some college degree training, compared to 21% for non-Black Latinos, who also had a 31% rate of having high school degrees.

Some 35% of Afro-Latinos work in the service industry, as compared to 33% of non-Black Latinos and 16% of non-Latinos. The unemployment rate for Afro-Latinos is 10.7%, while non-Black Latinos stands at 7.9% and 5.0% for non-Latinos. The medium household income of Afro-Latinos is \$35,347, for non-Black Latinos is \$43,986, while it rests at \$82,038 for non-Latinos. While 14% of Afro-Latinos have managerial or professional positions, 36% of non-Latinos occupy such jobs. **Latinos in Massachusetts: Black and Afro-Latinos** also reveals that only 19% of Afro-Latinos

own homes, while two-thirds of non-Latinos do. As the report stresses, “This may be one of the most critical social disparities between Latinos and non-Latinos in Massachusetts, as homeownership is widely viewed as a stepping stone to the middle class, and as such is an important asset for generating wealth and passing it down to future generations” (page 11).

It would be a misnomer to suggest that the Afro-Latinx experience is simply one of victimhood, as these communities are hubs of cultural innovation, civic leadership, economic resilience, political organization, and deep-rooted diasporic networks. Yet, these finds are still deeply troubling. The Gastón Institute’s **Latinos in Massachusetts: Black and Afro-Latinos** must be utilized and studied by city, state, educational and community leaders to address the root causes of such issues, whether they stem from long standing and intersecting issues related to systemic racism (such as class, immigration discrimination, sexism and health care) as well as emerging concerns like COVID-19.

Quito Swan

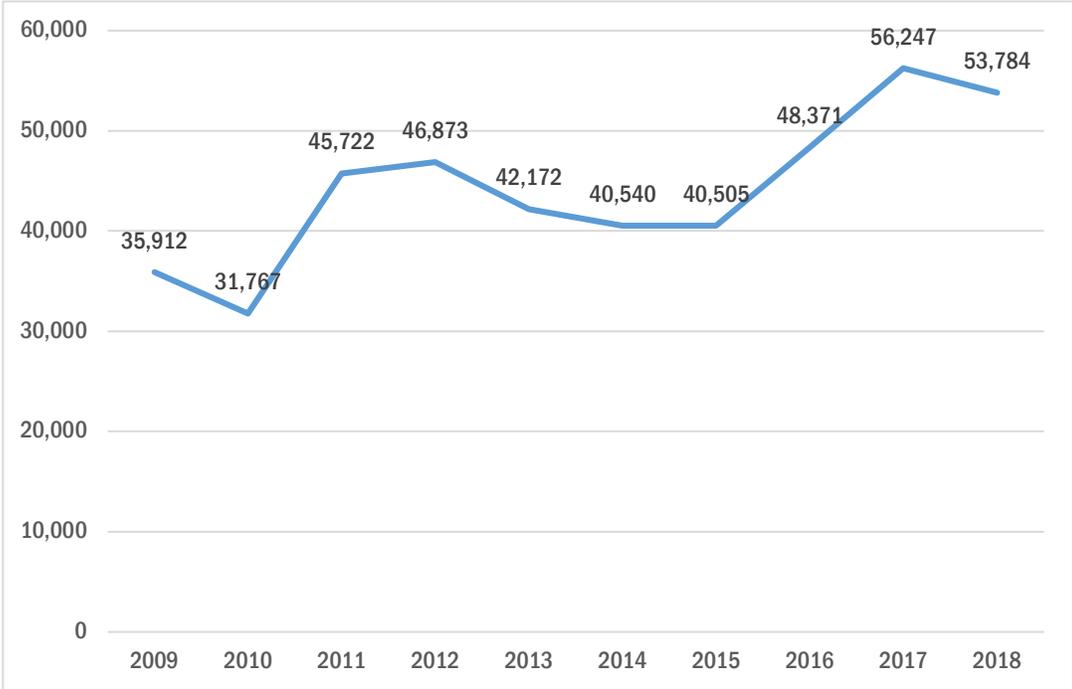
Director, William Monroe Trotter Institute for the Study of Black Culture

UMass-Boston

Latinos in Massachusetts: Afro-Latinos

As of 2018, there were 53,784 Afro-Latinos (Black Latinos) in Massachusetts,¹ making up a little more than 5% of the state’s Latino population. Their population has increased by 50% since 2009. Among Afro-Latinos, those of Puerto Rican or Dominican descent make up 75%. Most Afro-Latinos in Massachusetts live in the Greater Boston region.²

Figure 1: Afro-Latino Population 2009–2018



Source: 2009–2018 American Community Surveys

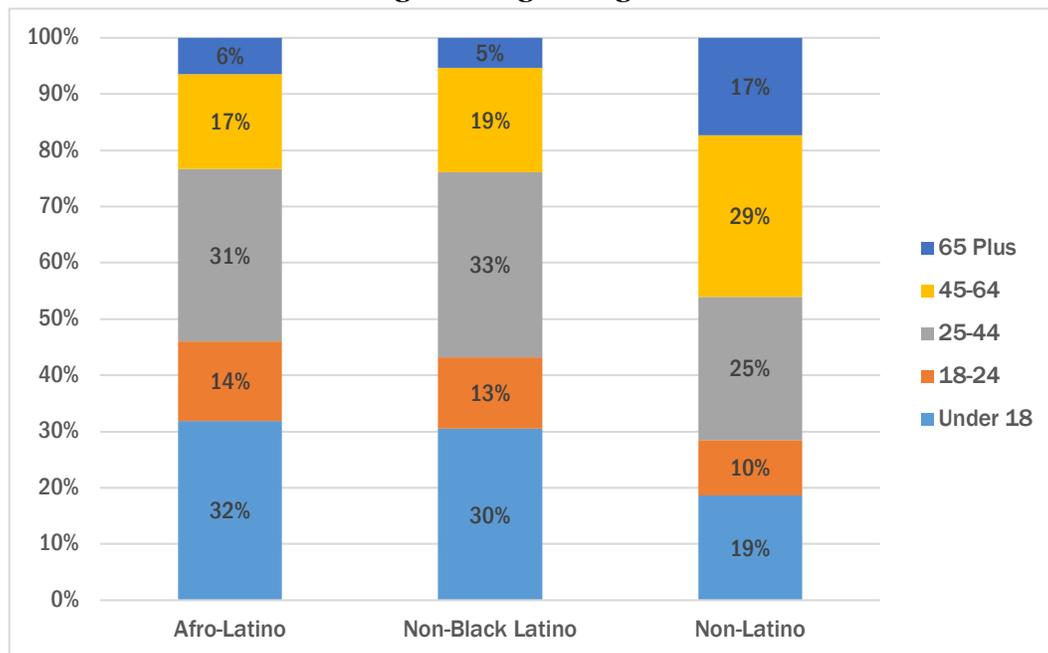
The Massachusetts Latino population differs significantly from non-Latinos in the state with respect to their demographic composition across age groups. Latinos, in general, are a much younger group than non-Latinos in the Commonwealth, and this holds true both for non-Black Latinos and Afro-Latinos. Specifically, Latinos are more likely than non-Latinos to be under age 18 (30% versus 19%, respectively). Meanwhile, non-Latinos are much more likely to be age 45 or older. While less than one-quarter of Latinos are aged 45 or older, nearly half of non-Latinos are members of older generations, such as the Baby Boomers. Over time, Latinos – Afro-Latinos included – will make up an increasingly large share of the state’s workforce, even as a steady decline in the working-age non-Latino (predominantly white) population continues.

¹ “Afro-Latinos” refers to those Latinos who identify with the Census Bureau’s race category of “Black or African American.” Other Latinos identify with other race categories.

² The data and analysis in this report do not explore impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic, but rather help establish baseline social and economic characteristics and may support future research.

Age Distribution and Marital Status

Figure 2: Age Categories



Source: 2014–2018 American Community Survey

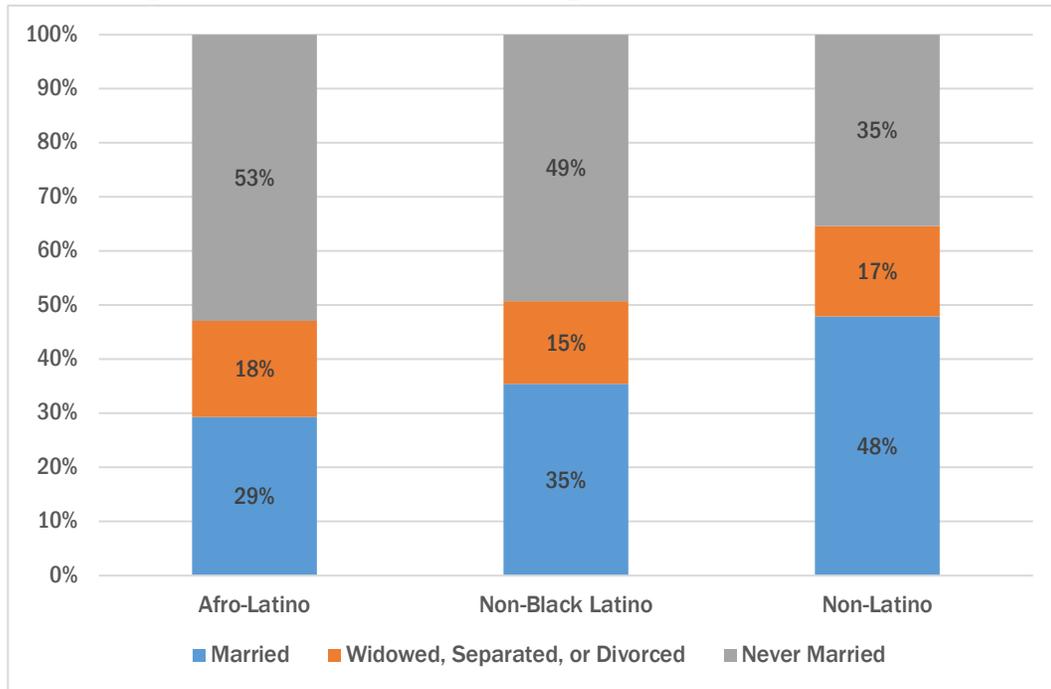
Nativity

Afro-Latinos and non-Black Latinos are similarly likely to be foreign-born – nearly one third of all Latinos statewide were born outside of the U.S. (Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory, and Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens.) By contrast, just 13% of non-Latinos in Massachusetts are foreign-born.

Marital Status

Overall, Latinos, aged 15 years and older, in Massachusetts are more likely than non-Latinos to have never married. Lower shares of the population married may be due in part to Latinos being younger on average than non-Latinos. The population share of individuals who are widowed, separated, or divorced is roughly consistent across Latino and non-Latino populations, although lower marriage rates stand out among Latinos, and particularly for Afro-Latinos.

Figure 3: Marital Status of the Population 15 Years and Older

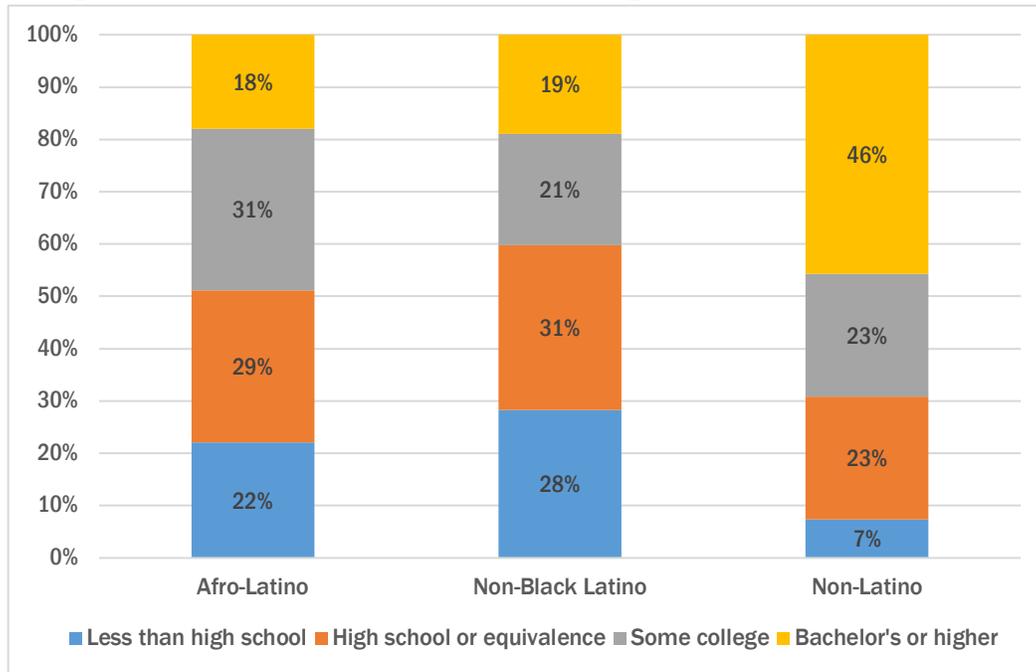


Source: 2014–2018 American Community Survey

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment levels are particularly low among Latinos statewide, and there are large disparities in outcomes between Latino students and non-Latino students. The share of Latinos 25 years or older who never completed high school is more than three times the share of non-Latinos who dropped out. Latinos are more likely to have only completed high school or some college, whereas non-Latinos are very highly educated in Massachusetts—46% have completed a bachelor’s degree or more. On the other hand, fewer than one in five Latinos (non-Black Latinos and Afro-Latinos) have completed a bachelor’s degree or more. There are few differences in the educational attainment levels between Afro-Latinos and non-Black Latinos.

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

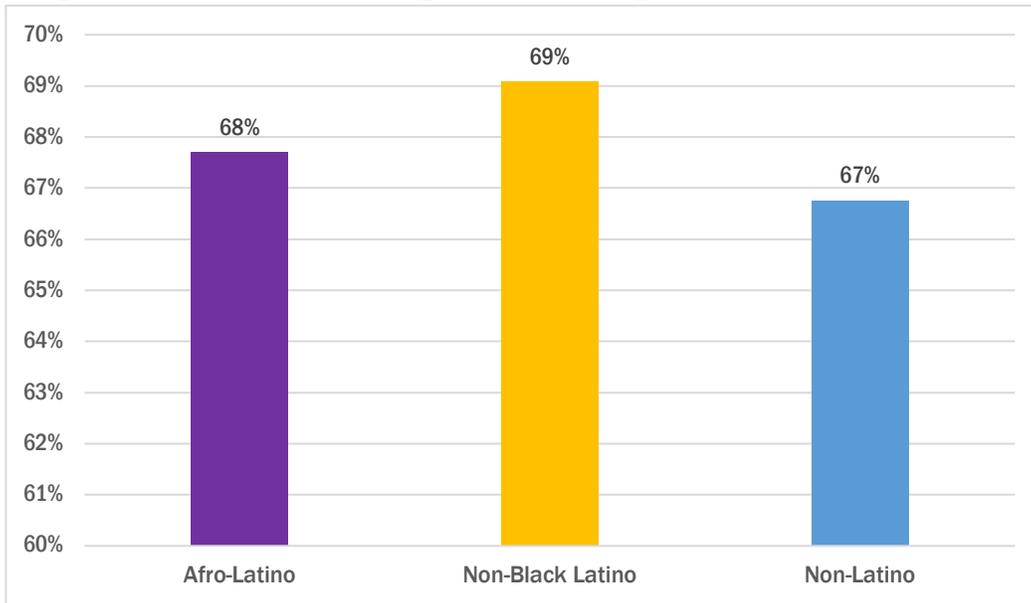


Source: 2014–2018 American Community Survey

Labor Force Participation

Labor force participation among Latinos tends to be a bit higher than for non-Latinos in Massachusetts. For Afro-Latinos, however, labor force participation was about the same as for non-Latinos (roughly 68%) in 2018. Non-Black Latinos had a labor force participation rate of 69%.

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

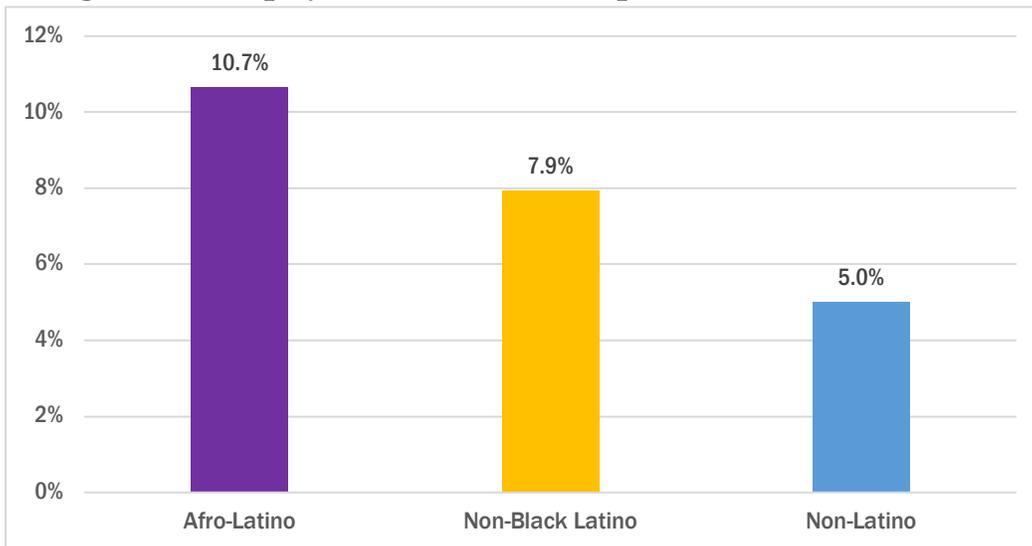


Source: 2014–2018 American Community Survey

Unemployment

Despite having relatively high labor force participation rates, Latinos – non-Black Latinos and Afro-Latinos – had much higher unemployment than non-Latinos in the Commonwealth in 2018. For Afro-Latinos, the unemployment rate was 10.7%, or more than double the unemployment of non-Latinos (5%). Non-Black Latinos also had a higher unemployment rate than non-Latinos, 7.9% versus 5%, respectively. These data reflect economic conditions before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 6: Unemployment Rates for the Population 16 Years and Older

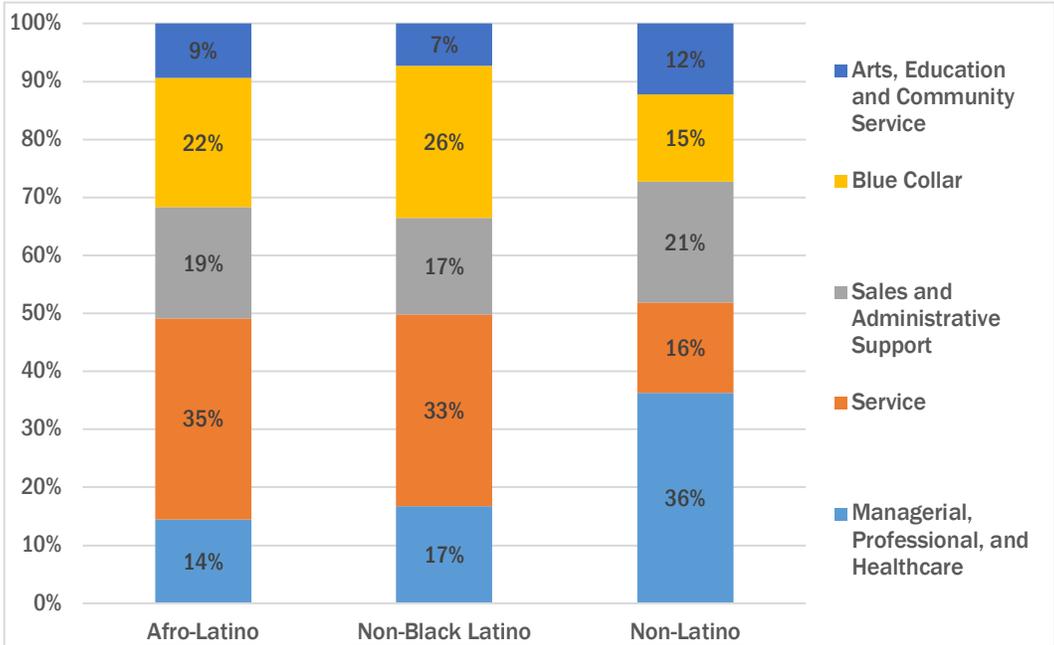


Source: 2014–2018 American Community Survey

Occupations

Similar to trends in educational attainment and unemployment, there were notable disparities between Latinos and other groups across occupation categories in 2018. The most notable gap existed in the higher-income managerial and professional occupations, where more than one-third of non-Latinos were employed, compared to just 17% of non-Black Latinos and 14% of Afro-Latinos. This largely reflects the way that Latinos have not benefited equally from the robust, knowledge-based economy in Massachusetts the way non-Latinos have. There were also significant disparities in the distribution of service workers: Latinos were more than twice as likely to work in these occupations as non-Latinos.

Figure 7: Occupational Distribution of Employed Workers



Source: 2014–2018 American Community Survey

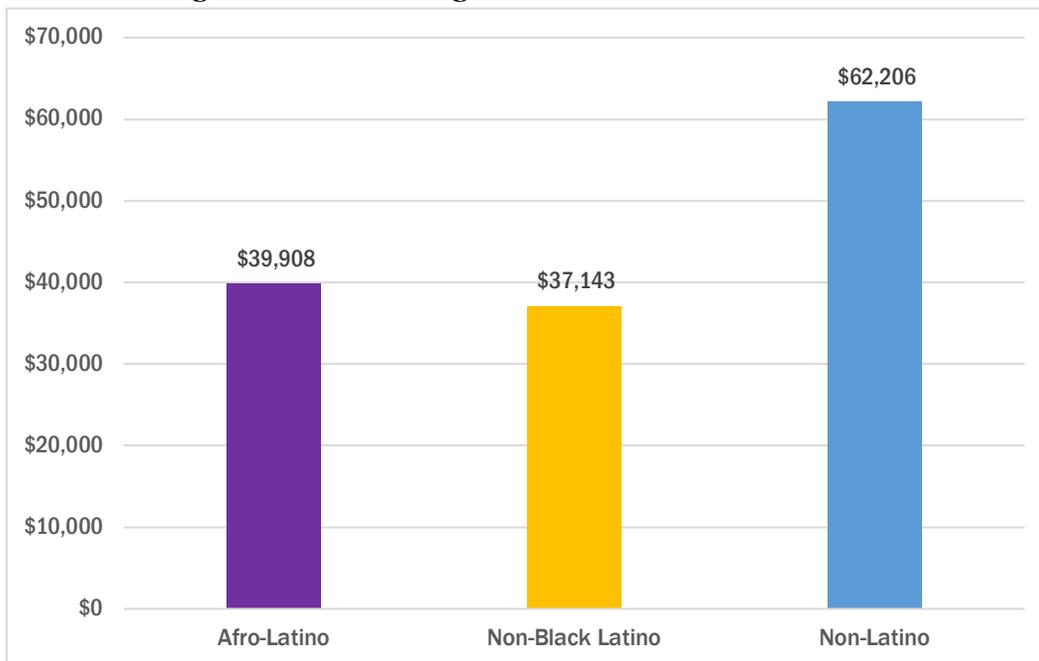
Wages

Given the concentration of Latino workers in service occupations and the lower likelihood of their working in managerial and professional occupations, we would expect gaps in income between non-Latino and Latino workers. Figure 8 demonstrates the sharp contrast in median wage income, revealing a 60% wage income gap between Latinos and non-Latinos in Massachusetts as of 2018. There was, however, little difference between non-Black Latinos and Afro-Latinos in terms of median wage income.

Poverty

Lower incomes and higher unemployment usually correspond with increased poverty, and Latinos in Massachusetts are no exception. While just 8.6% of non-Latinos statewide lived in poverty, for non-Black Latinos, the share in poverty was 25%, and for Afro-Latinos, it was 30% in 2018. Similar trends hold when we specifically examine poverty among children in the Commonwealth. Non-Latino children had a poverty rate of 9.5%, while that of non-Black Latinos was 31.6% and poverty among Afro-Latinos was extremely high at 38.8%. While the impact of the COVID-19 crisis is outside the scope of this report, it is worth noting that poverty rates have increased substantially amid the pandemic.

Figure 8: Median Wage Income of Full-Time Workers



Source: 2014–2018 American Community Survey

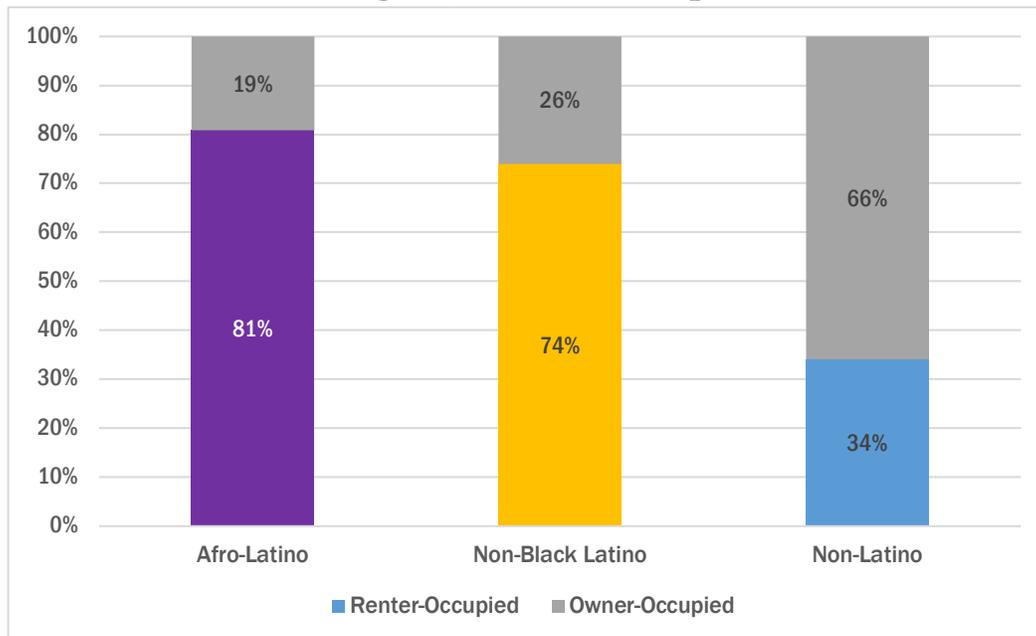
Standard of Living

In what follows, we explore metrics related to Latinos' overall quality of life and their social and economic wellbeing compared to other Massachusetts residents. Specifically, we analyze homeownership, household income, housing costs, and medical insurance.

Homeownership

Latinos in Massachusetts – and especially Afro-Latinos – were far more likely to rent their homes than to own homes. In this way, they differ greatly from non-Latinos, two-thirds of whom owned their homes. By contrast, just 26% of non-Black Latinos owned a home, and only 19% of Afro-Latinos owned a home as of 2018. This may be one of the most critical disparities between Latinos and non-Latinos in Massachusetts: homeownership is widely viewed as a stepping stone to the middle class, and as such, is an important asset for generating wealth and passing it down to future generations.

Figure 9: Homeownership



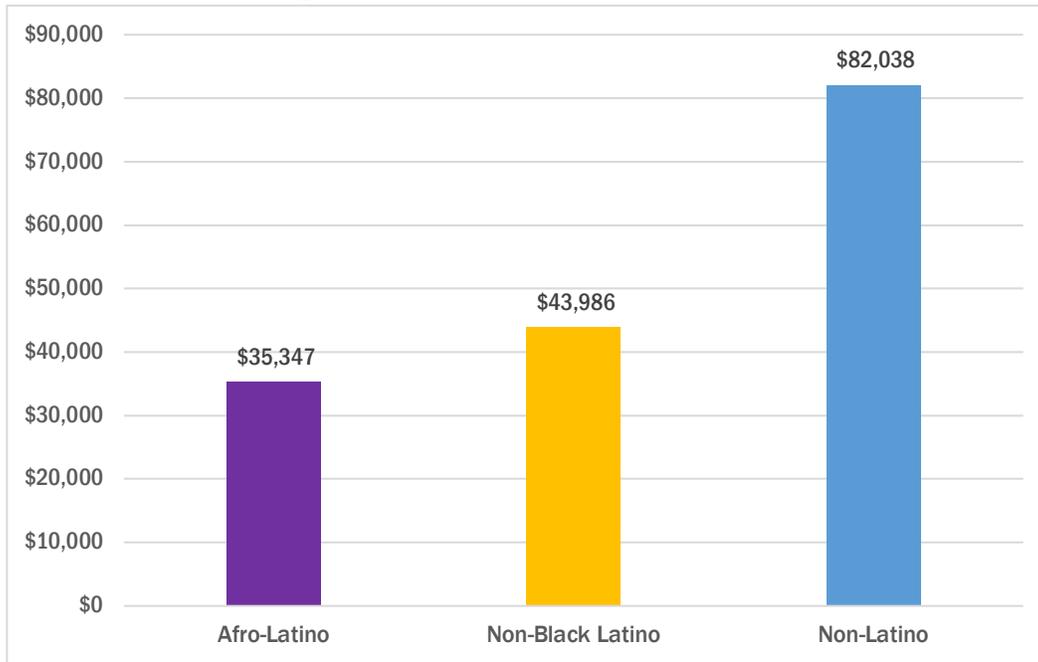
Source: 2014–2018 American Community Survey

Household Income

Household income is another important economic benchmark for assessing the economic vitality of Massachusetts communities. Encompassing the total income of all individuals in the household, this measure tells a familiar story. The income of non-Latino households exceeded \$80,000 per year, while that of non-Black Latino households was \$43,986, or about half. Afro-Latino households had even lower incomes, at \$35,347.³

³ The 2014-2018 American Community Survey income estimates are adjusted to 2018 dollars.

Figure 10: Median Household Income

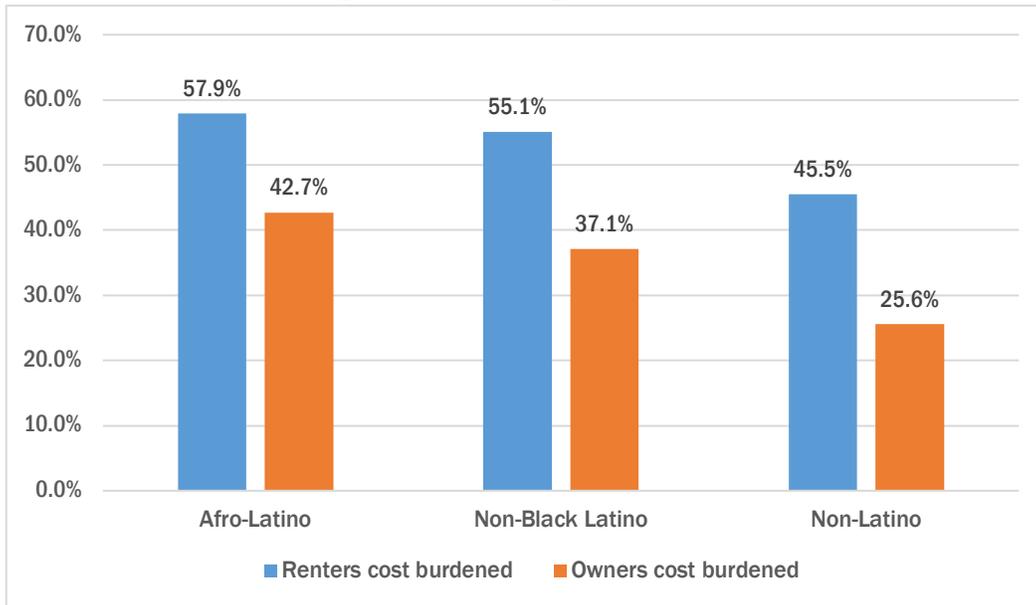


Source: 2014–2018 American Community Survey

Housing Cost Burden

Households that spend more than 30% of their monthly income on rent or mortgage payments are considered to be housing cost burdened. Due to a host of factors, including the slow pace of new construction, municipal zoning regulations, and a particularly strong labor market, Massachusetts has among the highest housing costs in the country. The high cost of living is especially difficult for lower-income communities. Overall, Latinos, and especially Afro-Latinos, were more likely to be housing cost burdened than non-Latinos, whether they be renters or homeowners. For example, nearly 60% of Afro-Latino renters were rent burdened, compared to only about 46% of non-Latino renters in 2018.

Figure 11: Housing Cost Burden

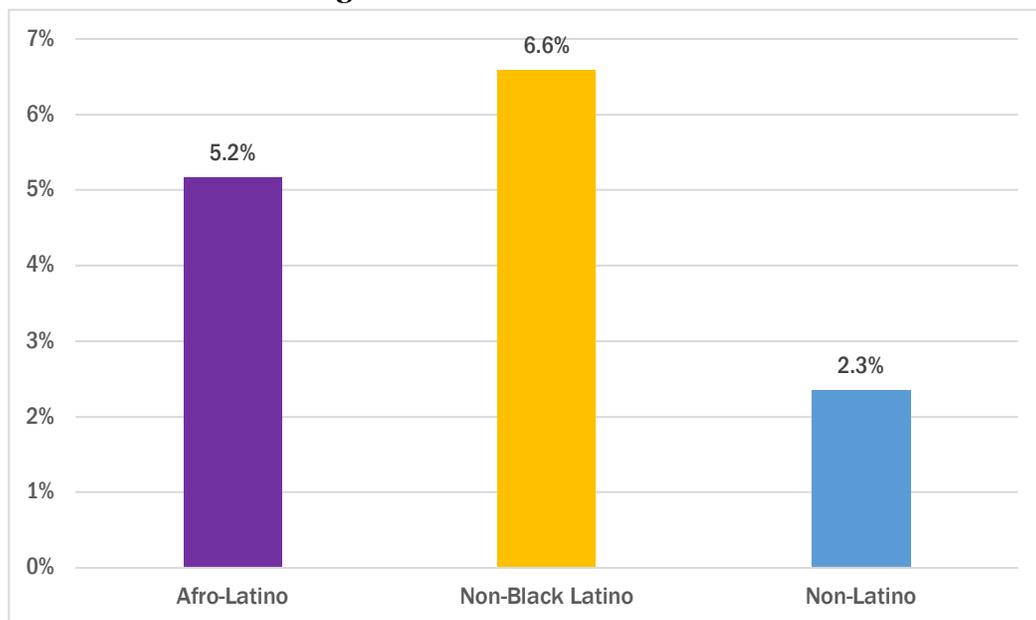


Source: 2014–2018 American Community Survey

Medical Insurance

Latinos, on the whole, are more likely to lack health insurance than non-Latinos in the Commonwealth. While 5.2% of Afro-Latinos and 6.6% of non-Black Latinos did not have health insurance, only 2.3% of non-Latinos lacked health insurance.

Figure 12: Medical Uninsurance



Source: 2014–2018 American Community Survey

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.

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

Trevor Mattos, MA, is the Research Manager at Boston Indicators, the research center at the Boston Foundation, where his work focuses on a variety of issues, including race and ethnicity, economic inequality and immigration. Trevor holds a Master's degree in Applied Economics from UMass Boston and a Master's degree in Public Policy from UMass Dartmouth.

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

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Quito Swan is Director of the William Monroe Trotter Institute for the Study of Black Culture and Professor of African Studies at UMass-Boston. A scholar of the history of the modern African Diaspora, Swan is the author of *Paulu's Diaspora: Black Internationalism and Environmental Justice* (University Press of Florida, 2020) and *Black Power of Bermuda* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). He is currently a Visiting Scholar in Residence at Pennsylvania State University's Humanities Institute.



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