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# **Latinos in Massachusetts: Boston**

by Phillip Granberry, PH.D., and Vishakha Agarwal

September 2021

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**THE MAURICIO GASTON INSTITUTE  
FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
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09/08/2021

**Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Boston**

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## Prologue

I am pleased to introduce this year's *Latinos in Massachusetts* report for the City of Boston. The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy documents Boston's Latino experience and the disparities our population faces. These research publications are key for policy makers, scholarly audiences, Latino community leaders, and institutions.

As Chief of Health & Human Services for the City of Boston, I see first-hand how the changing demographics of our city enrich us all. Our Latino community in Boston continues to grow and influence the makeup of our city. This young and vibrant population of Bostonians is playing a key role in our economy and is a key component of our community.

Boston has a long history of being a destination for immigrants. In the last decade, the city has experienced an increase in immigration from across Latin America, including the Caribbean, Central and South America. The Gastón Institute's report *Latinos in Massachusetts: Boston* confirms that the already large and diverse Latino population in Boston is growing tremendously. Currently, Latinos make up one-fifth of Boston's total population, and over the last decade our numbers have grown by 35%. This increase represents the largest population growth across all major ethno-racial groups.

This study also indicates that the median age of Boston's Latinos is 29 years old -- the youngest of the ethno-racial groups. We represent the future of Boston. Even though Latinos are only responsible for one-fifth of Boston's total population, we make up 42% of students in Boston Public Schools. We must create and sustain the necessary pathways for them to thrive and find success in both their educational and professional careers.

This report helps us to more deeply understand the rich diversity of our Latino neighbors, and as a result, helps us to provide more culturally responsive services at both at the policy and systemic levels as we continue to live in a pandemic and move into a better recovery.

Over the last year and a half, we've witnessed the damaging effects of Covid-19 on our communities and on Latinos in particular. The data suggests that Latinos' over-representation in essential worker occupations left us more exposed during the heights of the pandemic – resulting in Latinos having the highest rate of infection among all ethno-racial groups. Furthermore, in March of 2020, Latinos had some of the highest

unemployment rates. Even as these numbers decline, we continue to see the effects of the pandemic on the health and economic outlook of these Bostonians.

As the Mayor's Office of Health and Human Services, we're committed to promoting the health and well-being of our residents. This report shows that we have more work to do in supporting the educational attainment of our Latino youth, elevating the community's economic prospects, and expanding Latino representation in positions of power. The City stands ready to partner with community-based organizations, service partners, schools, and the private sector to ensure stronger pathways for success and a brighter future for Latinos in Boston.

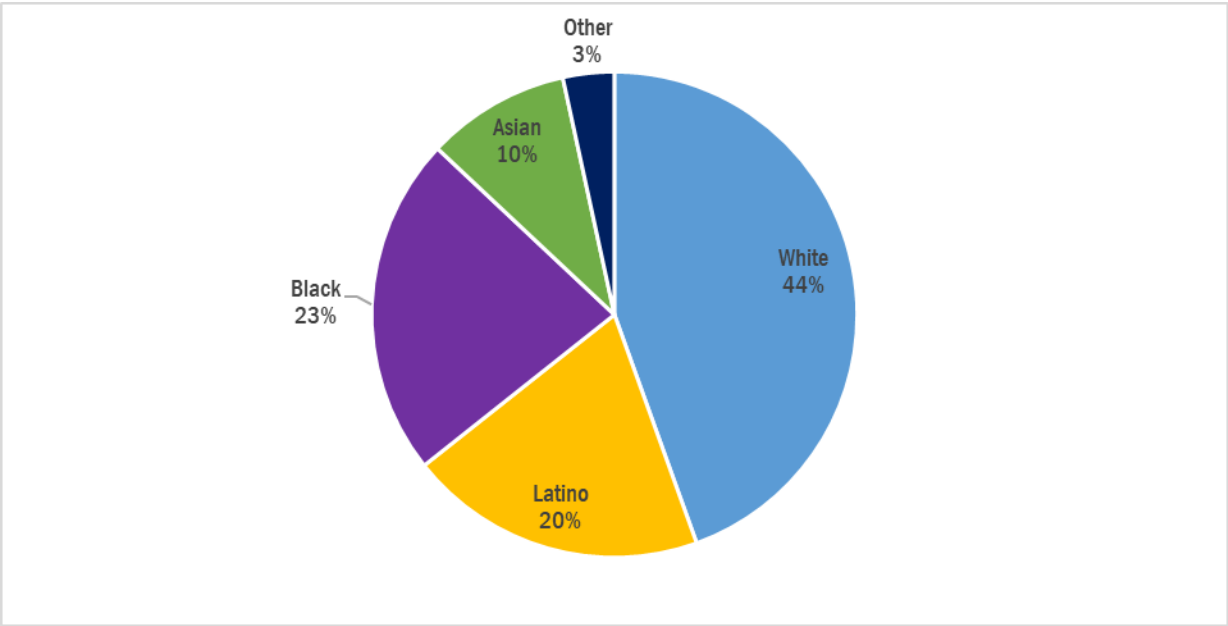
***Marty Martinez***

Chief of Health & Human Services, City of Boston

# Boston Overview: The Latino Population

As the largest city in the Commonwealth, Boston is home to an estimated 135,757 Latinos. This is the largest Latino population in the state, though in several smaller cities (Lawrence, Chelsea, and Holyoke for example) Latinos make up larger shares of their population. In Boston, Latinos represent about one-fifth of the city’s population, a smaller share than for Whites and Blacks but a greater share than for Asians (Figure 1). The Latino share in Boston is also larger than Latinos' statewide share, which is 11%.

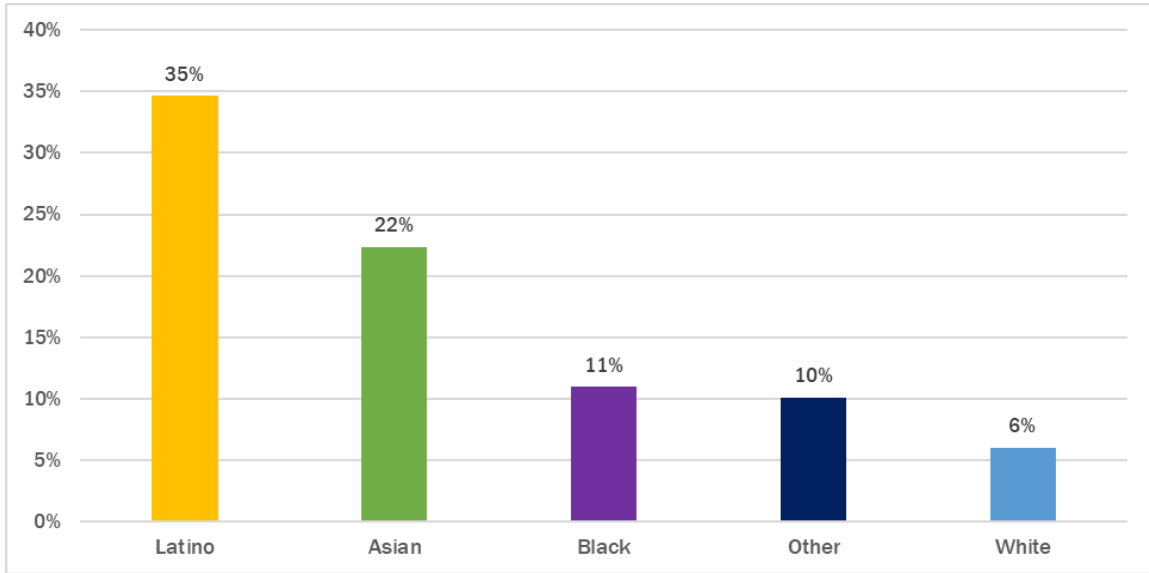
**Figure 1: Population Percentages by Ethno-Racial Group in Boston**



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey - B03002

From 2010 to 2019, Boston’s population grew by 14%. Latinos contributed the most of this growth as their population grew from 100,836 to 135,757, a 35% increase. Among other groups, only Asians experienced a faster growth (22%) than the city overall. Blacks increased by 11% and Whites by only 6%.

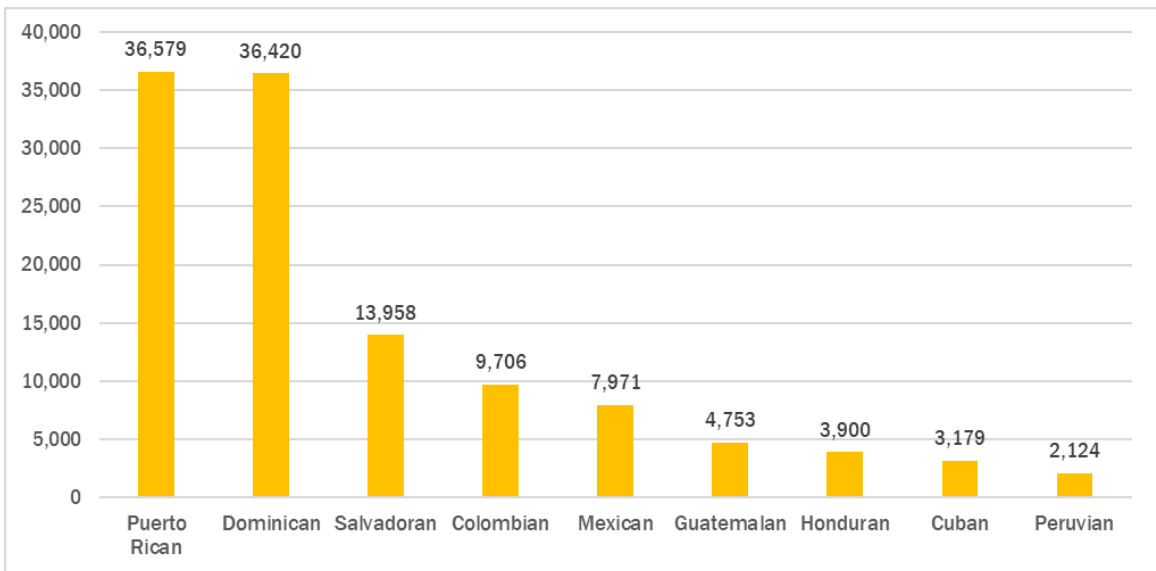
**Figure 2: Population Growth by Ethno-Racial Group from 2010 to 2019**



Source: 2006-2010 & 2015-2019 American Community Survey– B03002

One of the explanations of Boston population growth is international migration. Boston has long been a destination for international migrants, and today it has a greater concentration of foreign-born (28%) than the Commonwealth as a whole (17%). Among Latinos, the concentration of foreign-born and non-citizens in the city of Boston is about 42% and 25%, respectively. Dominicans (20,930) and Haitians (17,773) are the largest foreign-born populations in the city.

**Figure 3: Origin of the Top Latino Populations**

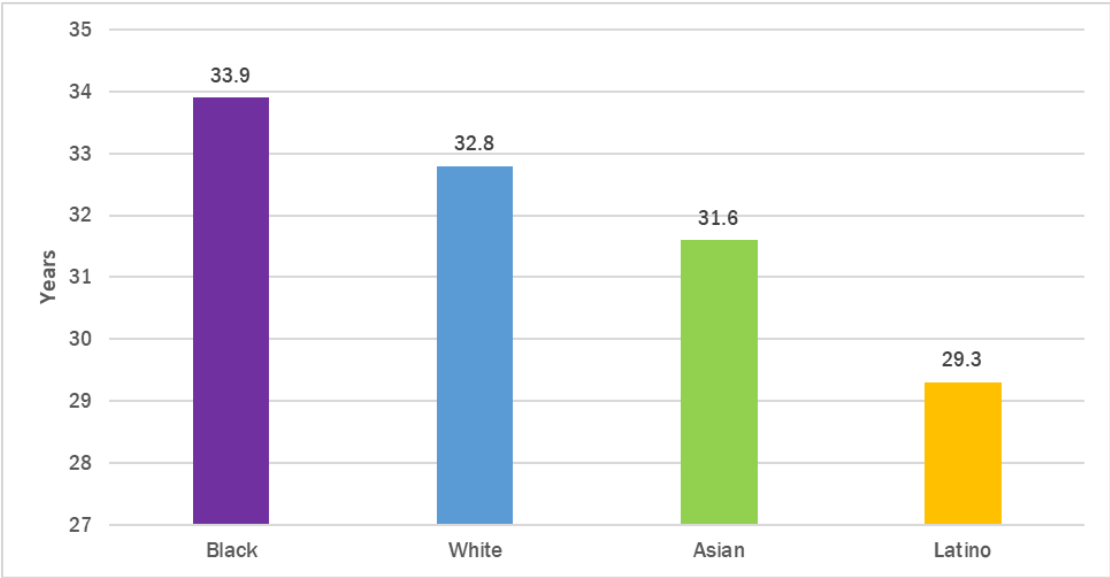


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – B03001

Puerto Ricans, who are U.S. citizens by birth, are largest Latino population in Boston, with a slightly larger population than Dominicans. Both have over 36,000 residents. Salvadorans, Colombians, Mexicans, are the next largest Latino populations with between approximately 7,900 and 14,000 residents (Figure 3). Smaller Latino populations in Boston are Guatemalans, Hondurans, Cubans, and Peruvians. Statewide, the largest Latino populations are Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Mexicans, Guatemalans, Colombians, Hondurans, Cubans, and Ecuadorians.

**Median Age and Marital Status**

**Figure 4: Median Age by Ethno-Racial Group**

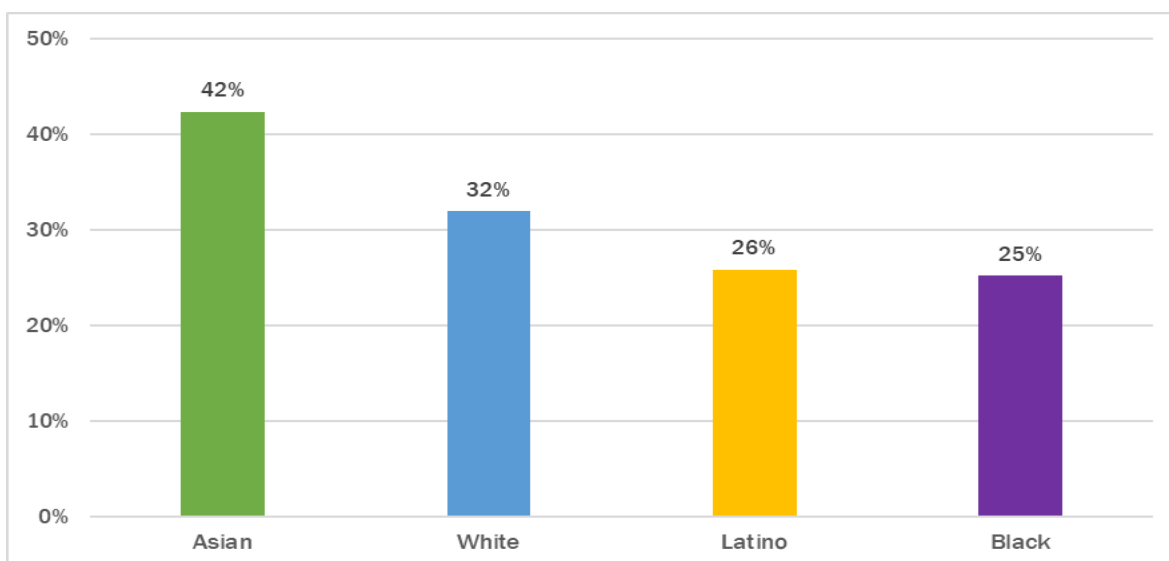


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – B01002

The median age in Boston is 32.2 years, but it varies significantly across ethno-racial groups. Blacks are the oldest group in Boston, though Whites are the oldest statewide. The median age for Blacks is 33.9 years, while that of Latinos, the youngest group, is 29.3 years (Figure 4). Across the state, the median age for Latinos is slightly younger than in Boston, at 28.1 years.



**Figure 5: Marriage Rates by Ethno-Racial Group (Ages 15 and older)**



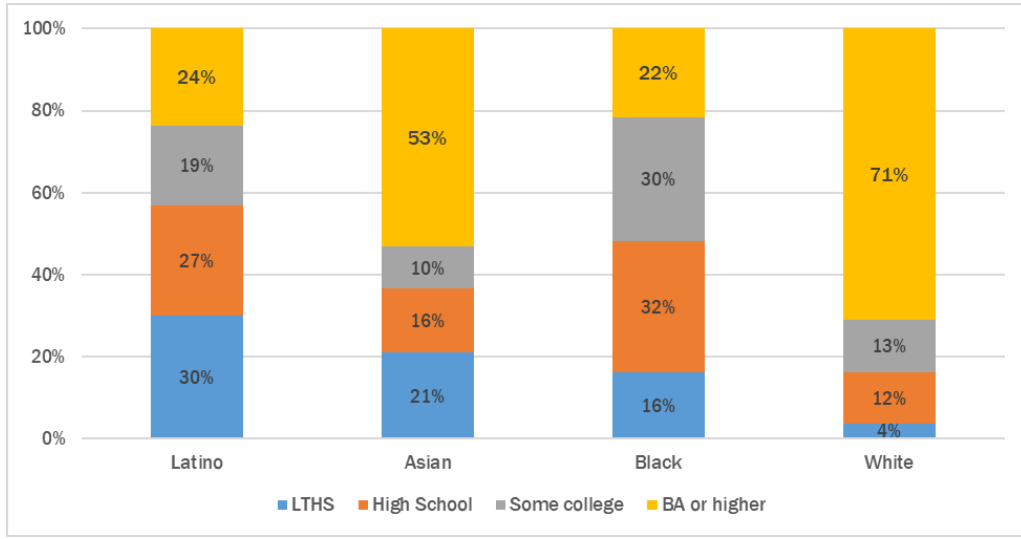
Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – B12002

Boston, with an overall marriage rate of 32%, is possibly influenced by its younger and more mobile population than the state as a whole, which has a marriage rate of 48%. Boston's Latino marriage rate of 26% shown in Figure 5 is slightly higher than for Blacks in Boston but lower than for Asians and Whites. It is also lower than for Latinos statewide (33%).

### ***Education***

Figure 6 highlights the fact that Latinos have the highest share of their adult population lacking a high school diploma: 30%, compared to 21% for Asians, 16% for Blacks, and 4% for Whites. At the other end of the educational scale, only Blacks (22%) have a smaller share of their population with at least a Bachelor's degree than Latinos (24%). Asians (53%) and Whites (71%) have significantly larger shares with at least a Bachelor's degree. This educational disparity shapes the labor force participation of Latinos, which is presented next.

**Figure 6: Educational Attainment by Ethno-Racial Group (Adults 25 years and older)**

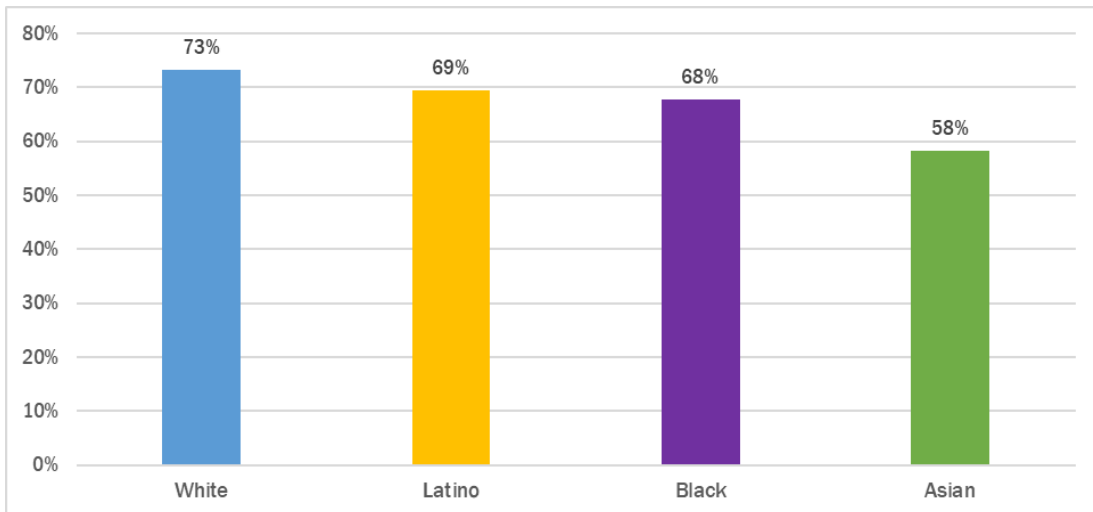


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – C15002

***Labor Force Participation***

Even with their lower levels of educational attainment, Latinos’ labor force participation suggests their importance to Boston’s economic and social wellbeing. Figure 7 identifies Latinos as having a labor force participation rate of 69%, only slightly lower than Whites (73%) and slightly higher than Blacks (68%). The statewide Latino labor force participation rate is slightly lower at 68%.

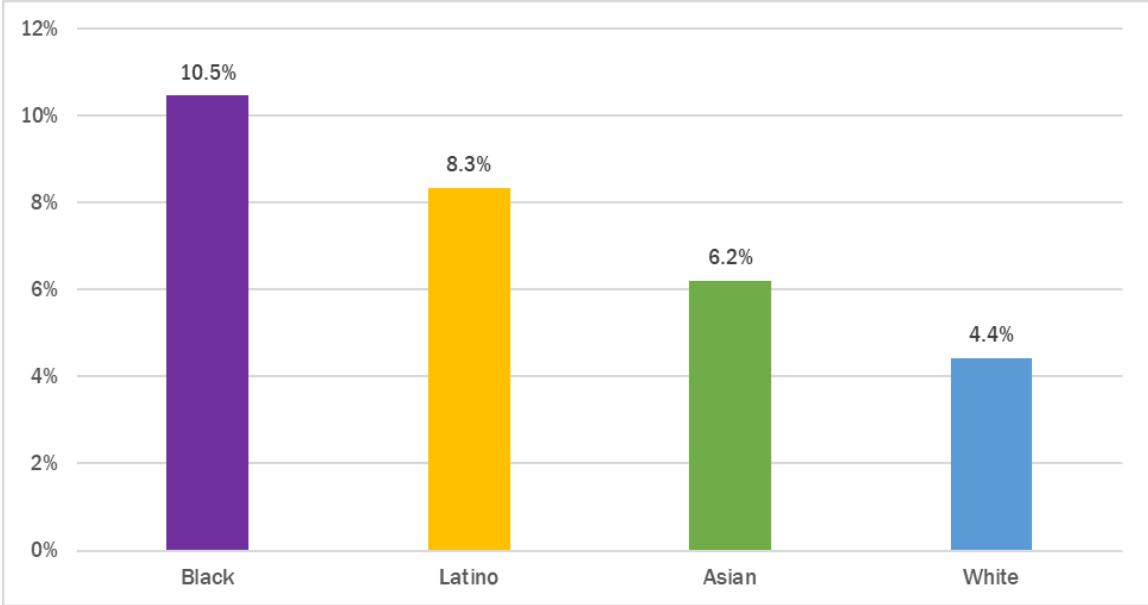
**Figure 7: Labor Force Participation among Individuals 16 Years and Older by Ethno-Racial Group**



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – C23002

The above information suggests that Latinos in Boston have a strong participation in Boston’s economy. However, Figure 8 tells a less positive story. In the 2015-2019 ACS data, before the COVID recession, the unemployment rate in Boston was 6.6%. Latinos’ unemployment rate was 8.3%, almost twice the rates for Whites and higher than for Latinos statewide (6.0%).

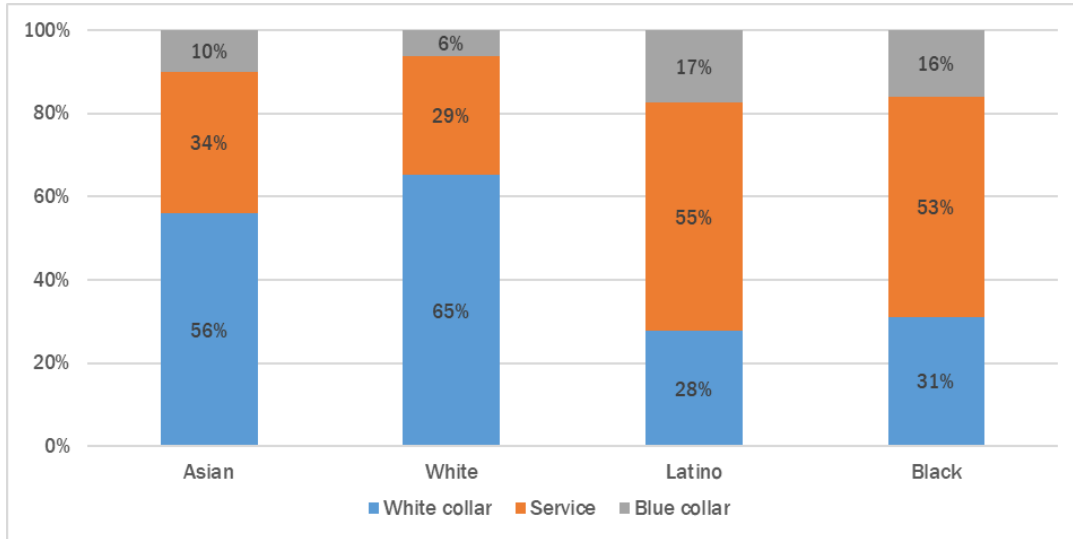
**Figure 8: Unemployment Rates by Ethno-Racial Group (ages 16+)**



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – C23002

Figure 9 provides further indication that Latinos serve as complements to other ethno-racial groups in the Boston labor market whose members have higher educational attainment. Latinos are underrepresented with only 28% working in what are traditionally considered white-collar jobs (professional and managerial) but overrepresented in the service-sector (55%) and in what are traditionally considered blue-collar jobs (e.g., construction, production, and transportation).

**Figure 9: Population Employed by Occupational Category by Ethno-Racial Group**

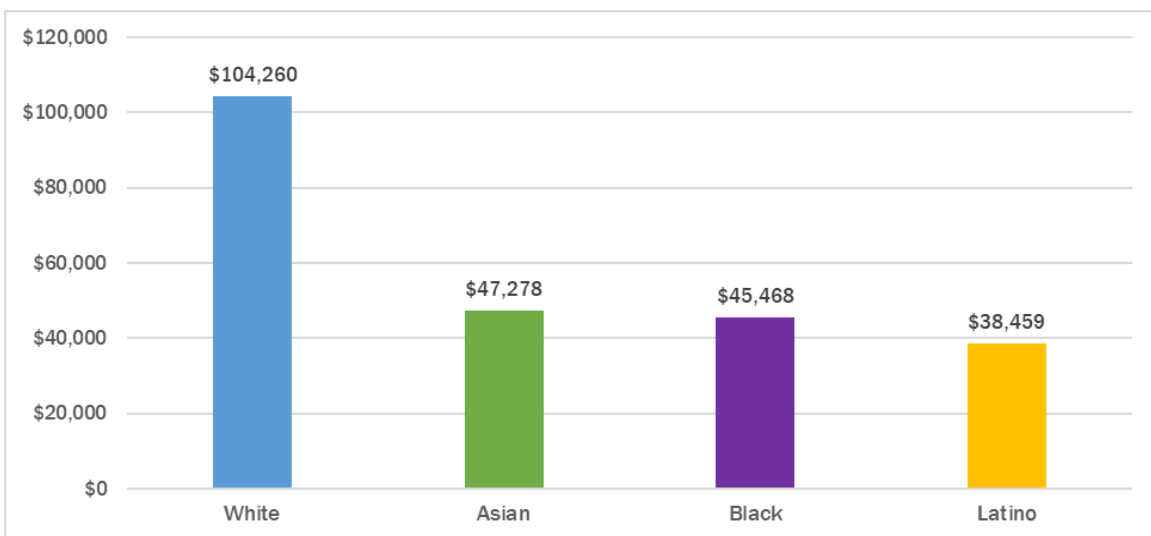


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – C24010

**Income**

As Latino occupational distribution suggests, their household income in Boston is lower than that of the other ethno-racial groups. As shown in Figure 10, they earn \$38,459 compared to \$104,260 for White residents. There is a \$10,000 difference in the median incomes of Latinos and Asians and Blacks, with the latter two groups faring better than Latinos. Latinos earn less in Boston than they do statewide. For Massachusetts, Latinos’ median household income is \$44,885.

**Figure 10: Median Household Income by Ethno-Racial Group**

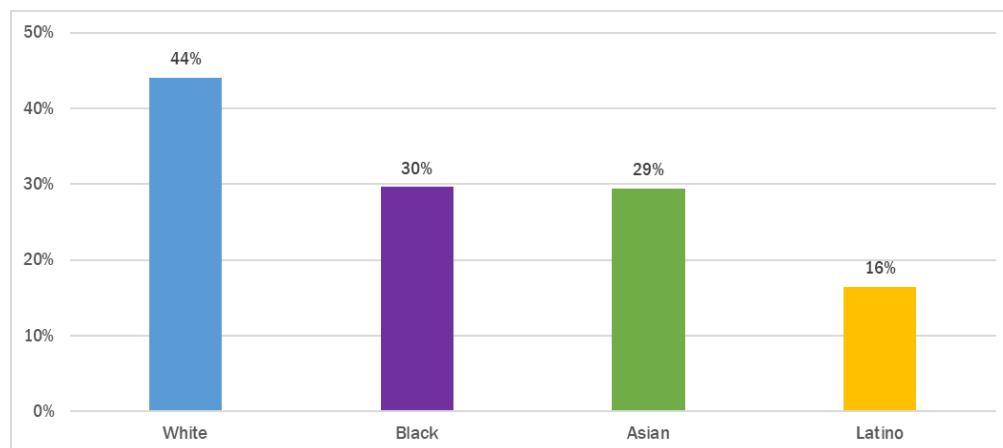


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – B19013

## ***Housing Status and Medical Uninsurance***

The final measures of Latino participation in Boston are intended to identify how well Latinos are being rewarded for their economic, social, and political participation.

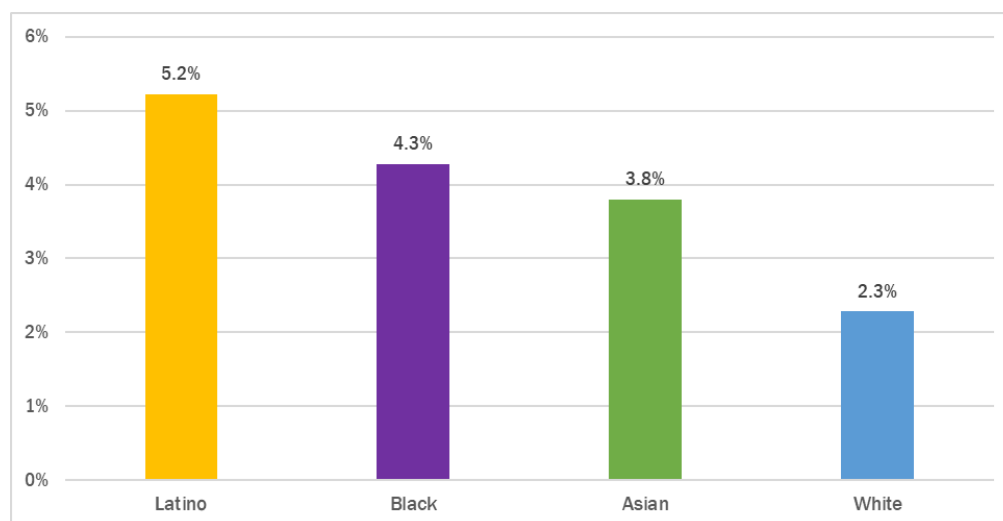
**Figure 11: Homeownership Rates by Ethno-Racial Group**



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey - B25003

Boston residents are noted for their mobility. This helps explain why the city has lower overall rates of homeownership. Among racial-ethnic groups, Latino's lower household income, not their mobility, mainly explains their relatively low homeownership rate. Latinos have the lowest homeownership rate, which is 16%, or barely one third that of Whites and barely half of the rates for Blacks and Asians. Across the state, the Latino homeownership rate, at 26%, is higher than in Boston.

**Figure 12: Medical Uninsurance by Ethno-Racial Group**



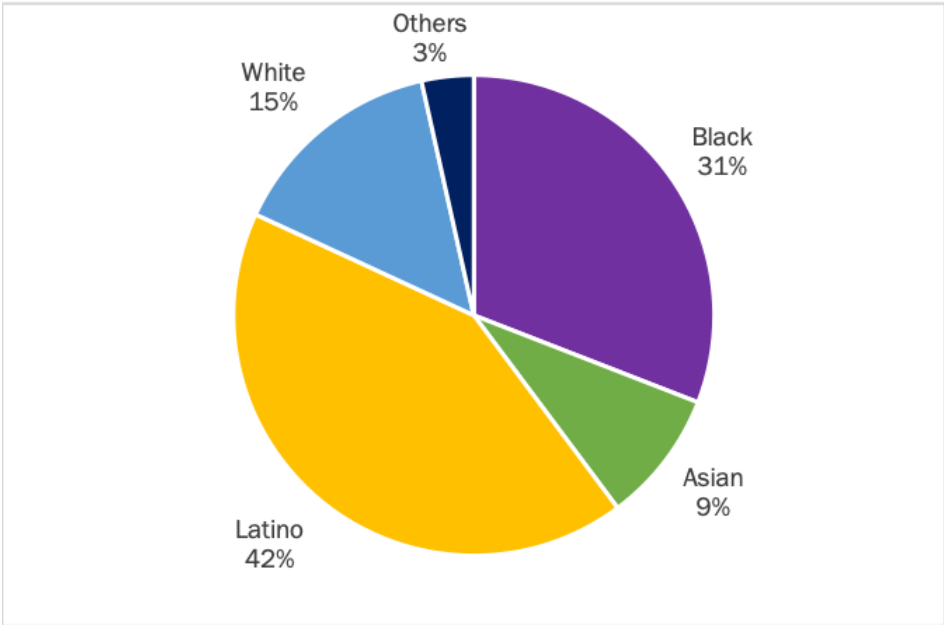
Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – C27001

Disparities exist in health insurance coverage among these populations, and Latinos have the largest share without health insurance coverage. The uninsurance rate among Latinos is 5.2%, slightly lower than their statewide rate (5.3%). Both Blacks and Asians have uninsurance rates close to 4%, while only 2.3% of Whites lack health insurance.

**Spotlight on Boston Public Schools**

Boston Public Schools are the focus of this next section. Boston Public Schools, the largest school district in the state, enrolled 51,433 students in school year 2018-2019. Latinos make up 42.1% of the school population (Figure 13). Blacks (31%) and Whites (15%) are the next largest ethno-racial groups that make up the school population in Boston. Boston's school population does not reflect the city's population make up: White residents are the largest population group in the city, but Latinos have the largest population enrolled in schools. This could be due to the median age of Latino residents in the city (Figure 4). These data are from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the school year 2018-2019.

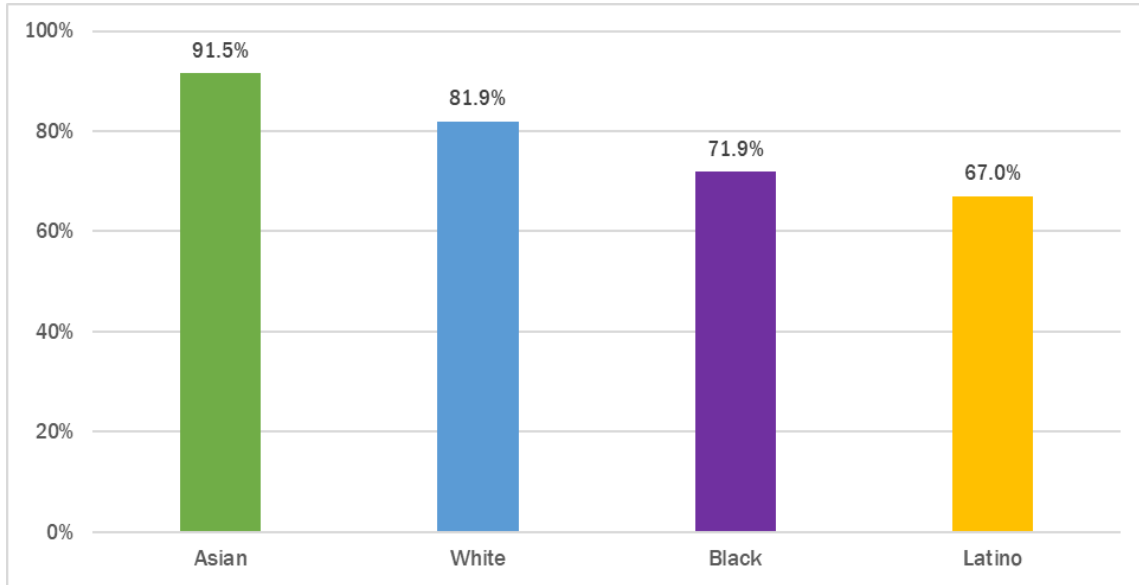
**Figure 13. School Enrollment by Ethno-Racial Composition**



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019

Boston Public Schools' four-year high school graduation rate in school year 2018-2019 was 73.2%, and this is lower than the state's rate of 88%. Latino students have the lowest graduation rate in the Boston Public Schools, 67% (Figure 14).

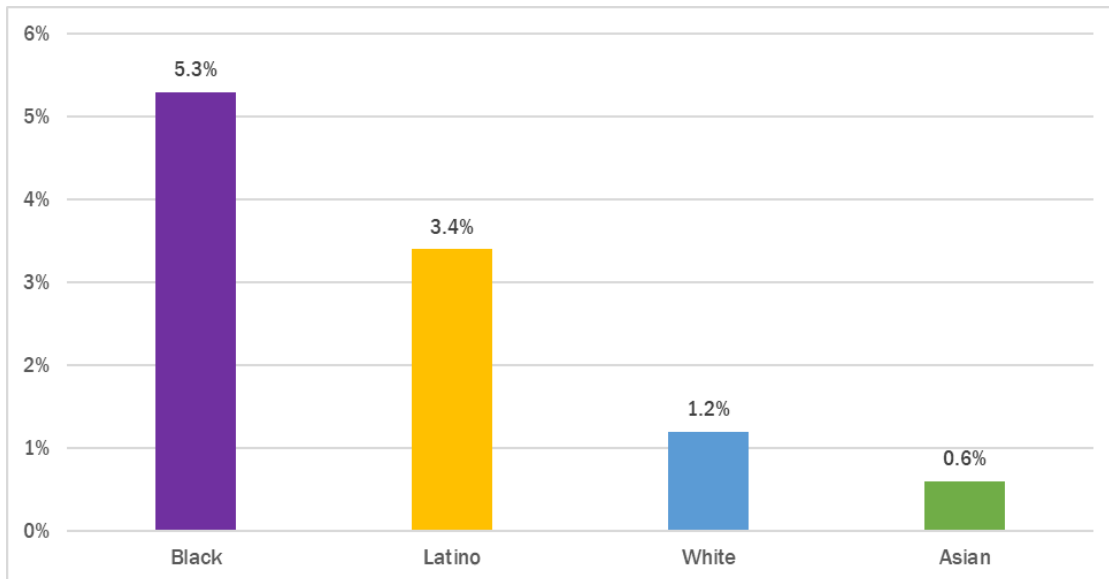
**Figure 14: Four-Year Graduation Rates by Ethno-Racial Group**



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019

Boston Public Schools' out-of-school suspension rate is 3.4%, slightly higher than the state's overall rate of 3.0%. Black students have the highest suspension rate in school year 2018-2019, 5.3%, and Latinos have the second highest rate, 3.4% (Figure 15).

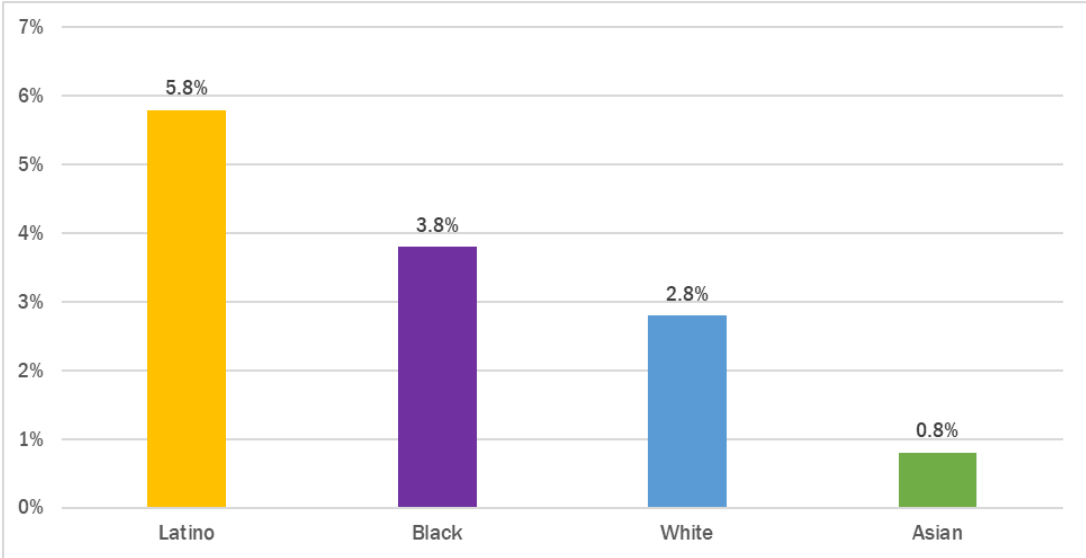
**Figure 15: Out-of-School Suspensions by Ethno-Racial Group**



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019

Boston Public Schools’ dropout rate is 4.2%, noticeably higher than the state’s overall rate of 1.8%. Latino students had the highest dropout rate in school year 2018-2019, 5.8%, and Asian students had the lowest, 0.8% (Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Dropout Rates by Ethno-Racial Group**



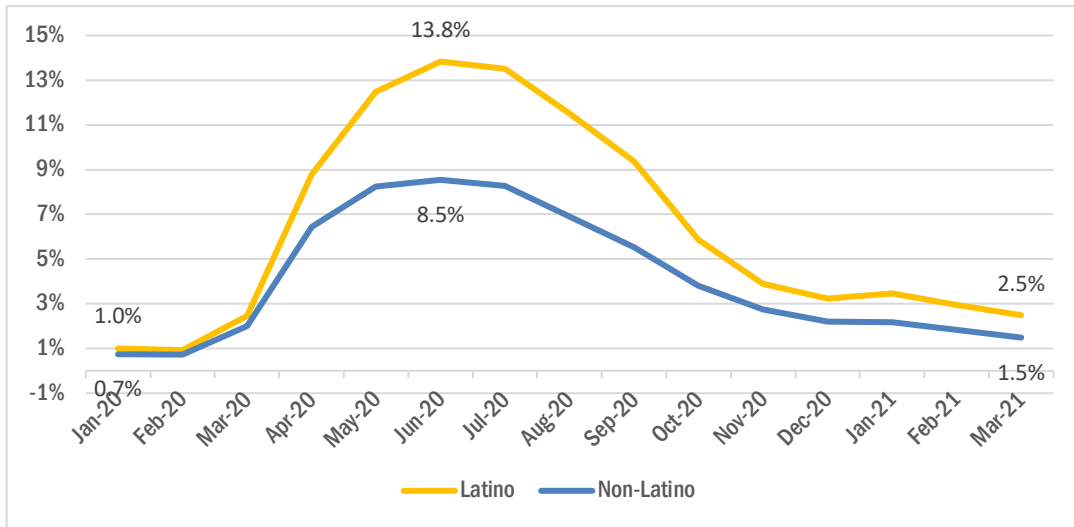
Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019

***Impact of COVID-19***

Starting in March 2020, when COVID-19 hit Boston, unemployment claims rapidly increased, starting at 1.0% for Latinos. In June 2020, both Latinos and non-Latinos filed high numbers of unemployment claims, their rates rising to 13.8% and 8.5%, respectively. (These percentages are calculated by dividing the number of reported claims by the population age 18 and older.) From that peak, there was a mostly steady decline in the unemployment claims among both groups, standing in March 2021 at 2.5% for Latinos and 1.5% for non-Latinos.



**Figure 17: Unemployment Claims (ages 18+)**

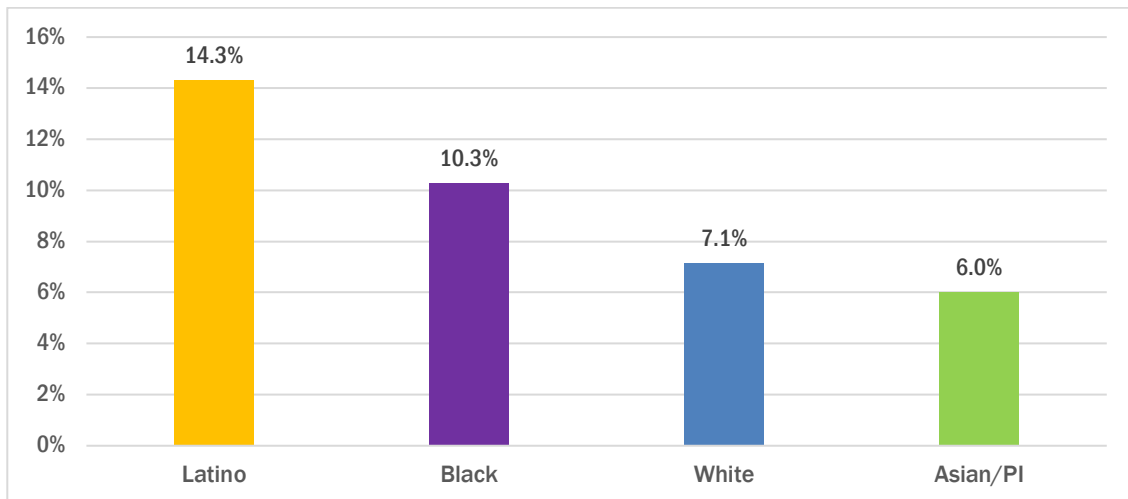


Source: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development

**COVID-19 positive cases**

As of June 2, 2021, the City of Boston reported 70,694 positive cases with 1,384 deaths due to COVID-19. Figure 18 shows the share of positive cases reported in Boston by ethno-racial groups. Latinos reported the highest share of positive COVID-19 cases in the city of Boston at 14.3%.

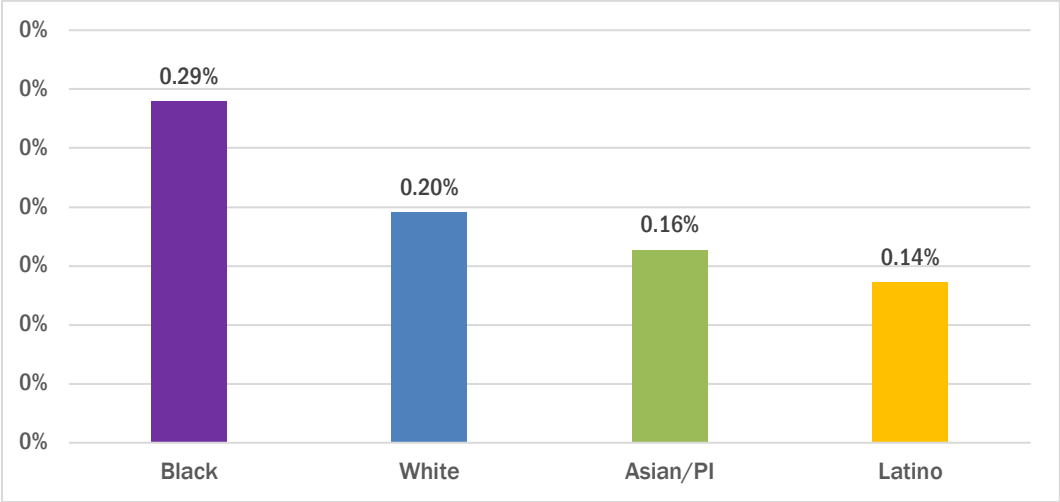
**Figure 18: COVID-19 Positive Cases by Ethno-Racial Groups (as of June 2, 2021)**



Source: Boston Public Health Commission

Even though Latinos had the highest rates of COVID-19 infections among the ethno-racial groups in the city, they had the lowest mortality. The mortality rates in Figure 19 represent the COVID-19 deaths as of June 2, 2021 divided by the population totals in Figure 1. This lower Latino mortality may be due to their youthfulness shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 19: COVID-19 Mortality by Ethno-Racial Groups (as of June 2, 2021)**



Source: Boston Public Health Commission

## 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 worked with various community-based organizations assisting recently arrived U.S. immigrants before earning a Ph.D. in Public Policy from UMass 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.

Vishakha Agarwal is a Ph.D. Candidate in Public Policy in the McCormack Graduate School at UMass Boston. Vishakha's research focuses on children's everyday classroom experiences, well-being, and education. Her dissertation examines how interactions between teachers and students and among students impact students' classroom experiences and, in turn, informs their subjectivity. She also holds a Bachelor's of Science (Research) in Economics from Shiv Nadar University, India, and a Master's of Science in Public Policy from UMass Boston.



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