Diversity among Latino Groups in Massachusetts: 1980-2019

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Diversity among Latino Groups in Massachusetts: 1980–2019

By: Vishakha Agarwal & Phillip Granberry

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Introduction

This report provides a descriptive snapshot of selected social, demographic, educational, and economic outcomes of the Latino population in Massachusetts from 1980–2019. It analyzes the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data from the 1980, 1990, and 2000 Decennial Censuses and the 2010, and 2019 American Community Surveys (ACS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. The descriptive analysis uses both household- and individual-level data to estimate population size and percentages, to explore the diversity among Latino groups in Massachusetts. We report the outcomes for the ten largest Latino populations in Massachusetts, in order of size in 2019, namely, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Mexicans, Colombians, Hondurans, Cubans, Ecuadorans, and Peruvians.¹ The sociodemographic, educational, and economic characteristics that we focus on include: age, nativity, labor force participation, employment, educational attainment, English proficiency, housing, median household income, and occupational sectors and categories.

This report is a follow-up investigation to the recent report by Mattos, Granberry, & Agarwal² which provides a comprehensive analysis of the unique backgrounds and economic struggles of the diverse Latino populations in MA. It presents data points to identify the persisting socioeconomic conditions and challenges faced by the diverse Latino groups in the state, and dives deeper into the issues highlighted in the report related to the composition of the Latino population in Massachusetts.

¹ In this report, we do not include Brazilians, who form a relatively large subpopulation in Massachusetts, as “Latino,” as we only use Latino origin to identify the Latino subpopulation in MA and US. For sociodemographic descriptive analysis for Brazilians in Massachusetts, see Granberry, P., & Valentino, K. “Latinos in Massachusetts: Brazilians” (April 2020). Gastón Institute Publications. 251. https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston_pubs/251/.
² Mattos, Trevor; Granberry, Phillip; and Agarwal, Vishakha, "¡AVANCEMOS YA!: Persistent Economic Challenges and Opportunities Facing Latinos in Massachusetts" (2022). Gastón Institute Publications. 281. https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston_pubs/281
Periods of economic downturns in the United States

The data used to identify these struggles captures two major economic downturns faced by the U.S. economy. First, in the 1970s, the United States faced a period of high inflation and low economic growth, known as stagflation. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the financial sector was affected the nation’s savings and loans industry. During this time, more specifically 1981-1982, the country faced the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Both the 1980 and 1981-82 recessions led to a sharp increase in the unemployment rates nationwide, which reached to nearly 11% in late 1982. Though unemployment was widespread, manufacturing, construction, and the auto industries were particularly affected. Nationwide, Blacks (20%) and Latinos (15%) faced a greater rate of unemployment than White workers (9.3%), in late 1982.

The second economic downturn in the US, in the 1980-2019 period, was the Great Recession that lasted the longest since World War II, from December 2007 to June 2009. The recovery from this recession focused on the banking system and neglected households. As a result, Latinos were disproportionately harmed by this recession. For example, Latino unemployment did not return to its pre-recession level until 2017. Because many Latinos became homeowners prior to this recession, the recession’s impact was greater. Before the recession, Latino homeownership was approaching 50% nationally, but by 2014, it had dropped to 45%.

Migration Patterns of Latino Populations in Massachusetts

Latino migration to Massachusetts began around the turn of the 20th century and largely resulted from various geopolitical events that transpired in the Caribbean.

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Following the Spanish-American war in 1898, the U.S. set the stage for migration from the Caribbean when it took control of Puerto Rico and Cuba and later intervened in the Dominican Republic. Subsequent destabilization during the post-war period (1940s–1960s) then drove large-scale migration of Puerto Rican agricultural workers to Massachusetts. Attempting to industrialize the Puerto Rican economy, Operation Bootstrap created tax incentives for American corporations to move to Puerto Rico. This economic policy led to a sharp decline in agricultural work (and a net decline in jobs on the island). As a result, more than half of the island’s workforce left in search of work elsewhere.7 Dominican migration to the United States came after the U.S.-backed assassination of the authoritarian ruler Rafael Trujillo in 1961, which led to political and economic instability. After the Trujillo assassination and the turmoil that followed, many Dominicans came to the United States on visas issued by the U.S. embassy or on family-sponsored visas (although some came undocumented).8

By the 1980s, longstanding exclusionary zoning practices helped facilitate cities like Lawrence, Springfield, and Holyoke to become destinations for newly arriving Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. Yet, these cities were experiencing downturn in their local economies due to deindustrialization.9 Having lost manufacturing jobs, these communities offered lower cost housing but limited employment opportunities. Ultimately, even though jobs weren’t the only draw for Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, the largest Latino populations in Massachusetts, the economic turmoil in these cities diminished the prospects of a better life for many these populations.

In the 1980s, Colombian and Salvadorans, and Guatemalans immigrants started arriving in Massachusetts as they were fleeing civil war and political violence in their countries. By the 1990’s the Central American civil wars had subsided but left behind

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7 Sanchez Korrol, V. History of Puerto Ricans in the U.S.: The Great Migration at Mid-Century. Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College.
8 Babich, R., & Batalova, J. Immigrants from the Dominican Republic in the United States, Migration Policy Institute, April 2021.
tremendous economic upheaval. These nations came under pressure to address the economic crisis through broad structural transformations that promoted privatization of resources and redefined the role of governments. With the living conditions deteriorating due to these economic transformations, larger segments of the population left and join the refugees who arrived a decade earlier.¹⁰

The combination of the economic transformations in Massachusetts and the instability in these Latino countries and Puerto Rico placed the Latino population in a precarious position. However, evidence suggest that second-generation Latino immigrants are integrating into the economic and social fabric in Massachusetts. However, second-generation Latino immigrants make up only 25% of the Latino population. (Forthcoming)

**Latino groups in Massachusetts in 1980**

In 1980, Massachusetts had a small Latino population of about 143,180 (5%) as compared to the nationwide Latino population of 14,775,080 (7%). The Latino population in MA in 1980 comprised mainly of Puerto Ricans (54%), Mexicans (6%), Cubans (4%), and Others (35%)¹¹. In the next few paragraphs, we discuss the sociodemographic and economic characteristics of Latinos and their diverse subgroups in Massachusetts in 1980.

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¹¹ In the 1980 American Community Survey (ACS), the question about Hispanic/Latino origin included the following listed groups: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Others. Others here includes people who identified themselves as Hispanic or Spanish origin.
About 59% of the Latinos in the state were under the age of 25 years, as compared to 39% of Non-Latinos, in 1980. Only about 7.5% of Latinos were 55 years or older in comparison to the 23.5% of Non-Latino population. One-third of the Latino population was in their prime working age of 25-54 years, which is slightly smaller share than the 37.4% of the Non-Latino working-age population. Among the three Latino subgroups, Cubans had the highest proportion of working age population at 42%, followed by Puerto Ricans (29%), and Mexicans (28%) in 1980.
In terms of nativity, about 26.5% of Latinos in Massachusetts were foreign-born in 1980. When examining the origins of Latinos, it is important to note that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens; they are not included in foreign-born estimates here. Cubans (71%) had a much larger share of foreign-born population than Mexicans (20%) in the state.

The educational attainment of Latinos has always been lower than Non-Latinos. This is evident from the high share of Latino workers aged 25 years or above with less than high school education (46%) as compared to Non-Latino workers (18%). Moreover, the share of Latino workers aged 25 years or above with Bachelor’s degree or higher (16%) was much lower than Non-Latino workers (26%). Puerto Ricans (55%) had the higher share of workers with less than high school education when compared to Mexican (32%) and Cuban (27%) workers.

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12 Puerto Ricans will distort the nativity of Latinos in Massachusetts compared to the nation. Other states will have more second-generation immigrants compared to Massachusetts.
Compared to Non-Latino workers, fewer Latino workers historically have been English proficient. The share of employed Latino workers aged 16 years or above with limited English proficiency was 44% in 1980 in the state. This share was high among Puerto Ricans (50%) and Cubans (42%) when compared to Mexicans (11%).

The labor force participation rates in 1980 among Latinos at 57% was slightly lower than Non-Latinos at 64%. Among the Latino subgroups, the labor force participation was highest among Puerto Ricans (72%) followed by Cubans (65%), and Mexicans (48%). In Massachusetts, unemployment among Latinos (8.8%) was higher than for Non-Latinos (4.9%). The unemployment rates among the various Latino subgroups in that period was highest amongst Puerto Ricans (14%), then Mexicans (8%), and lowest amongst Cubans (4%).
The occupational distribution of a population is related to the overall labor supply of a region. Latino workers are disproportionately found in a few occupational categories in the labor force in Massachusetts. In 1980, the employed Latinos worked disproportionately in the blue-collar sector (47%). Latinos were underrepresented in what are traditionally considered white-collar jobs with only 12% working in managerial and professional occupations, 8% in education and healthcare sector, and 14% in office and administrative support occupations. About 20% work in the sales and service sector. Employed workers in the three Latino subgroups, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans are overrepresented in the blue-collar sectors. Latino workers ($23,784) earned lower median real wage incomes than Non-Latinos ($30,489) in Massachusetts in 1980. The median wages for Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans were in the range of $21,000 and $28,000 in 1980.
Diversity among Latino groups: 1990-2019

In this section, we discuss the emerging trends and the changes in the top 5 Latino populations in Massachusetts from 1990 to 2019. We focus on the changes in the demographic and educational trends, and trends in the economic mobility among the diverse Latino groups in Massachusetts. We include the analysis for all other Latino populations in the below Appendix.

Change in the Latino Populations

Over the last fifty-three years, the composition of Latinos and the diversity of Latino groups has changed. By 2019, Massachusetts was home to 807,422 Latinos, making up approximately 12% of the total population with Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Mexicans comprising the largest share of the Latino population. Though the Latino population across the nation saw an increase from 7% in 1980 to 18% in 2019, this growth rate is dwarfed in comparison to Massachusetts. The growth rate of the Latino population in Massachusetts from 1980 to 2019 is about 1.6 times more than in the United States (Figure 1).
Moreover, the composition of Massachusetts’ Latino population differs markedly from that of the United States. Table 1 and Table 2 show the growth of all Latino subpopulations from 1990 to 2019 in Massachusetts and the United States. While Puerto Ricans remain the primary Latino subpopulation in the state across the years 1990–2019, the population among all other Latino groups, except Cubans, have increased at a faster rate during the past few decades.
Across the nation, Mexicans are the largest subpopulation followed by Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Over the decades, all Latino groups in the nation see an increase in their population.
The growth and diversity among Latinos in Massachusetts can be attributed to its access to employment, education, and healthcare. Furthermore, the diversity of Latino communities in Massachusetts is also influenced by the Latino migration, both international and domestic, and their increased fertility rates compared to Non-Latinos. The rest of this section discusses the trends in the age profiles and nativity of Latino groups in the state.

Age

Latino population in Massachusetts has seen a rapid increase since 1980. The fertility rates among Latinos have declined slightly between the years 2005 to 2022. CDC provides data...
on births from 2003 to 2020 which we use to calculate fertility rates among Latina and Non-Latina women.

**Fertility Rates among Latinas in Massachusetts, 2007-2020**

![Fertility Rates Chart](chart.png)

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

We see a decline in the Latino population under 25 years of age from 59.3% in 1980 to 43.6% in 2019. However, the decline for Non-Latinos under 25 years at 29% is slightly higher than Latinos at 26%. Among the diverse Latino subgroups in Massachusetts, Guatemalans (52%), Ecuadorans (51%), Salvadorans (45%), and Puerto Ricans (45%) had the highest shares of population aged under 25 years in 2019. This shows the young nature of the Latino population in the state. The share of Non-Latinos aged 55 years or above has always been higher in Massachusetts than Latinos. In 2019, 33% of Non-Latinos were aged 55 years or above as compared to 14% Latinos. About one-fifth of the Cuban and Peruvian population were aged 55 years or above in the state in 2019.

Over the years, from 1980 to 2019, Latinos have seen a 28% increase in their prime working-age population between 25-54 years. This increase is greater than the 5% increase in the prime working-age Non-Latino population. Colombians and Puerto Ricans
saw the largest increase in the working-age population in the state from 1990 to 2019 at 14% and 11%, respectively. While, Cubans (-13%), Guatemalans (-9%), Peruvians (-7%), Hondurans (-6%), and Dominicans (-1%) saw a decline their prime working age population from 1990 to 2019.

The increasing rate of Latino populations in their prime working-age (25-54 years) in Massachusetts, 1990-2019

Puerto Ricans experienced the highest growth in their prime working-age population in the state from 1990 to 2019 at 11.5%.

Labor force participation

In Massachusetts, the labor force participation rate among Non-Latinos aged 16 years or above from 1990 to 2019 has declined by -1.2%, while the Latino labor force participation rates has increased by 13.1%. The labor force participation rates among Puerto Ricans (20%) and Dominicans (7.1%) aged 16 years or higher have increased from 1990 to 2019. While, this rate has declined for Mexicans (-2.2%), Salvadorans (-6.1%), and Guatemalans (-12.8%). In 2019, Peruvians and Colombians aged 16 years or above had the highest labor force participation rates at 81% in Massachusetts.
Employment status

In 2019, the unemployment rates among the diverse Latino subgroups in Massachusetts ranged as low as 1.4% for Colombians to 7.6% for Guatemalans and Ecuadorians. Both, Latino (62.5%) and Non-Latino (43.6%) populations had a decline in the unemployment rates between 1990 during an recession and 2019 during a time of historically low unemployment rates in Massachusetts. The largest decline in unemployment rates among the Latino subgroups was experienced by Mexicans (−11.2%), followed by Guatemalans (−45.2%), Salvadorans (−57.6%), Puerto Ricans (−66%), and Dominicans (−69.6%).
Educational attainment

The educational attainment rates among employed Latino workers aged 25 years or above is much lower than their Non-Latino counterparts in the state. In 2019, the share of employed Latino populations aged 25 years or above with less than high school was about three times the share of Non-Latino workers in MA. Since 1990, the share of Latino and Non-Latino workers with less than high school education has reduced by -46% and -64%, respectively. This means that higher rates of Latinos and non-Latinos are attaining education at the high school level. However, this rate is much higher for Non-Latinos than Latinos.

Of the diverse Latino subgroups in Massachusetts, in 2019, the share of employed workers aged 25 year or higher with less than high school education was high among Guatemalans (49%), and Salvadorans (39%).
On the other end of the educational spectrum, the shares of Latino and Non-Latino workers aged 25 years or above with a Bachelor’s degree or higher have increased from 1990 to 2019. However, this increase was about two times more for employed Non-Latino workers than Latino workers in the state between 1990 to 2019. The shares of all other Latino subgroups with a Bachelor’s degree or higher have steadily increased over the years.

These educational trends for Latino workers in Massachusetts paint a positive picture as it shows that higher shares of Latinos are investing in gaining an education. This also shows that higher shares of Latino populations entering the labor force are educated.
The share of Massachusetts' Latino workers aged 25 years or above with a Bachelor's degree or higher increased by 27% from 1990-2019

In 2019, 1 in 2 Mexicans reported to have attained a Bachelor’s degree or higher in the state. 1 in 5 Puerto Ricans had a Bachelor’s degree or higher in MA in 2019.

English Proficiency

The share of employed Latino workers aged 16 years of above with limited English proficiency has declined from 46% in 1990 to 35% in 2019. Employed workers from Salvador (-22%), Dominican Republic (-24%), Mexico (-29%), and Puerto Rico (-55%) had a decline in populations shares with limited English proficiency from 1990 to 2019. The share of Guatemalans with limited English proficiency increased by 7% from 1990 to 2019. This is important because limited English proficiency affects employment opportunities.
Occupation

The occupational distribution of a population is related to the overall labor supply of a region. For a vibrant economy, the Massachusetts economy needs both higher- and lower-skilled workers. Latino workers are disproportionately found in a few occupational categories in the labor force in Massachusetts. In 2019, about 81% of the Latino workers were employed in sales and services (39%), blue collar (25%), and managerial and professional (16%) occupational sectors. From 1990 to 2019, there was a rapid decline in the share of Latino workers working in blue collar jobs. On the contrary, the share of Latino workers in the sales and services (52%) and managerial and professional (27%) occupational sectors increased rapidly in this period. Puerto Ricans (48%) had the highest increase in the share of workers employed in the sales and services sector.
Latino workers in Managerial and Professional Occupations in Massachusetts, 1990-2019

Chart: Gastón Institute • Source: 1990, and 2000 Decennial Censuses; 2010 and 2019 American Community Surveys (ACS) • Created with Datawrapper

Latino workers in Sales and Services sectors in Massachusetts, 1990-2019

Higher shares of Latino workers are in the sales and services sectors in the state.

Chart: Gastón Institute • Source: 1990, and 2000 Decennial Censuses; 2010 and 2019 American Community Surveys (ACS) • Created with Datawrapper
Median Wage Income

The median CPI-adjusted wages and salaries income for Latino workers aged 16-64 years is lower than for Non-Latinos, across the years. The median income for employed workers across the Latino subgroups ranged from $25,000 to $50,000, in 2019. Guatemalan workers earned the lowest incomes and Cubans earned the highest income, in 2019. Though the median income for Latinos have increased over the years, this increase was much smaller than the increase in the median income for Non-Latino workers in the state.
Median Income of Latino Subgroups in Massachusetts, 1990-2019

Median income for Latino workers between the ages of 16-64 years is lower than non-Latinos across the years.

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Table: Gastón Institute • Source: 1990 and 2000 Decennial Census & 2010 and 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) • Created with Datawrapper

Implications

This report on the changing composition of Latinos in Massachusetts shows that the Latino population differs in two main areas. First, Massachusetts has experienced a rapid increase in its Latino population. Since 1980 Latinos in Massachusetts have had more rapid population growth than the country. The Latino population growth is projected to
continue but at a slowing rate over the next ten years.[1] Second, Massachusetts also differs in that like only five other states (Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, and Rhode Island) Puerto Ricans not Mexicans are the largest Latino population. In many socioeconomic characteristics Massachusetts Latinos are improving. The Latino population has increased its educational attainment since 1980, similar to Non-Latinos, but the gap between the two groups persists. The lack of educational attainment does not hinder labor force participation, even though Latinos have slightly higher unemployment. Latinos appear to complement Non-Latinos in their occupations. They are less likely to work in managerial and professional positions and more likely to work in sales and service occupations. Even though their wage income has increased, a gap persists with non-Latino wages. Dominicans and Guatemalans are more likely to have limited English proficiency, and this could limit their labor force participation.
Appendix

Latino subgroups in their prime working age (25-54 years) in Massachusetts, 1990-2019

Labor force participation rates among Latino subgroups in Massachusetts, 1990-2019
Unemployment rates among Latino subgroups aged 16 years or above in Massachusetts, 1990-2019

The share of employed Latino subgroups (aged 25 years or above) with less than a high school education in Massachusetts, 1990-2019
The share of Massachusetts' Latino workers aged 25 years or above with a Bachelor's degree or higher, 1990-2019

Limited English proficiency among employed Latino workers aged 16 years or above in Massachusetts, 1990-2019
Latino workers in Managerial and Professional Occupations in Massachusetts, 1990-2019

Latino workers in Sales and Services sectors in Massachusetts, 1990-2019

Higher shares of Latino workers are in the sales and services sectors in the state.
About the 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 33rd 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.

About the Authors
Dr. Vishakha Agarwal works as an Education Research and Policy specialist at the Center for Education Policy & Practice at Massachusetts Teachers Association. She recently received her Ph.D. in Public Policy from the McCormack Graduate School at UMass Boston. Her research focuses on advancing equitable policies at preK-12 schools and in higher education. While at UMass Boston, she worked at the Gaston Institute researching the social, demographic, educational, and economic outcomes of the diverse Latino populations in Massachusetts (MA). In addition to that Vishakha worked with the Center for Social Policy on projects examining the effects of a small increase in earning on public assistance programs accessed by families.

Dr. Phillip Granberry is a social demographer specializing in immigration in the United States. He worked with various community-based organizations assisting recently arrived U.S. immigrants before earning a Ph.D. in Public Policy. His research focuses on the accumulation and use of social capital among Mexican migrants and the impact of welfare and immigration policy reform on Latinos in Massachusetts. He is currently a senior research associate for the Gastón Institute. He teaches in the Economics Department at the UMass Boston, where he teaches courses on international migration and metropolitan area economic development.