

6-2023

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Recommended Citation

Paz, Rachel; Torres-Ardila, Fabián; and Kelleher, Christa, "Latino Political Leadership in Massachusetts (2023)" (2023). *Gastón Institute Publications*. 295.
https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston_pubs/295

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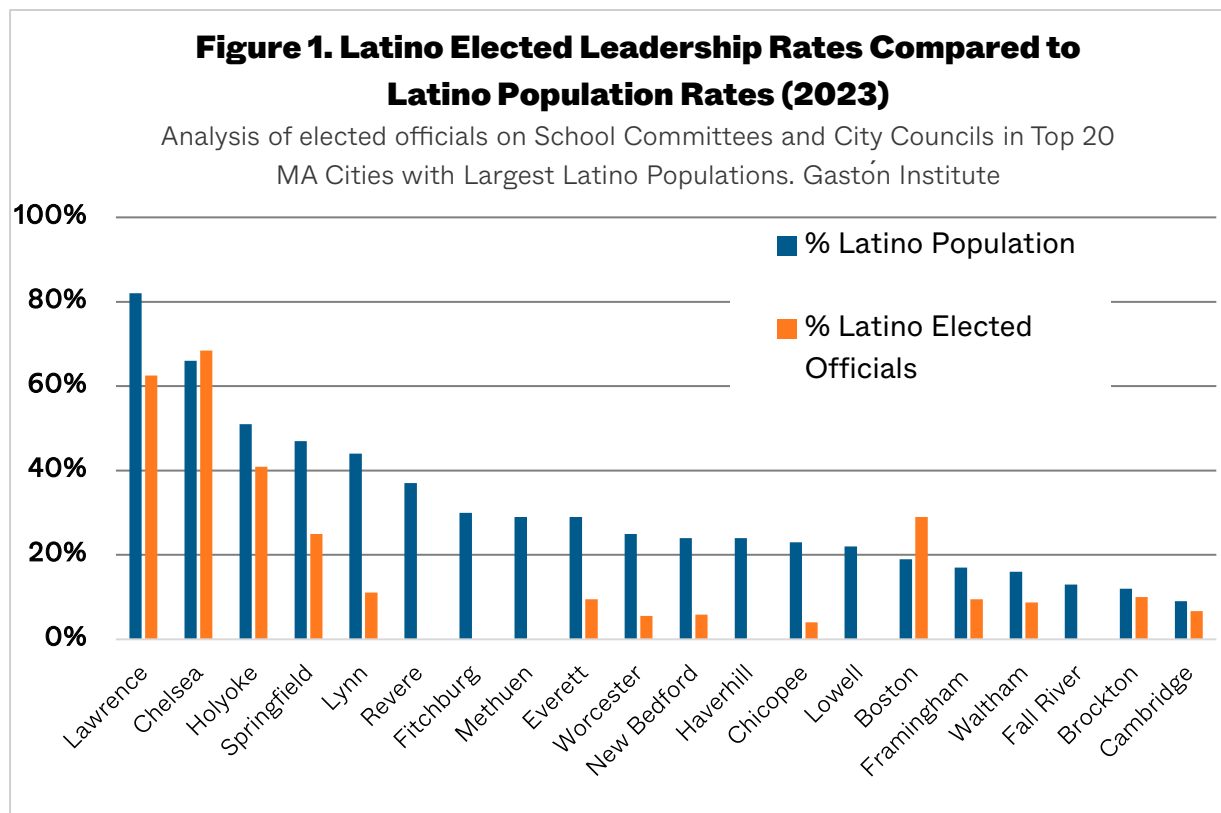
Latino Political Leadership in Massachusetts (2023)

Latinas and Latinos increasingly hold local and state legislative offices but proportional representation lags.

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Highlights

- Latinos and Latinas comprise an increasing share of eligible voters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, yet their political leadership at all levels of government is less than proportionate to Latino¹ populations across the state. 82 Latinos and Latinas hold seats in local elected governing bodies and offices and in the Massachusetts Legislature.² However, significant leadership gaps persist at the state level and in the state’s congressional delegation. In addition, leadership gaps at the local level remain a reality in most Latino communities across the state.



¹ Although the term “Latinx” (pronounced La-teen-ex, Latinks, or Latin-equis in Spanish) has emerged to refer to people of Latin American descent as a broad and more inclusive term for Hispanics, its use has remained controversial and rare among this population. Acknowledging the diversity of our community, in this report we use the terminology used by the U.S. Census Bureau to refer to the population of Latin American descent, i.e., Latino/Hispanic. Gender differences are signaled using the genderized Spanish terms Latina and Latino.

² This figure includes School Committee members in the city of Boston, despite being appointed and not elected. We will follow this practice in the report.

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- Currently, more Latinas than Latinos serve in local offices (city council and school committee), while more Latinos than Latinas serve in the legislature.
- Lawrence, Chelsea, Holyoke, Springfield, and Lynn³ are the cities with the highest concentration of Latinos in their communities. However, only Lawrence and Chelsea have a relatively high rate of Latino and Latino leadership, each reaching 60% of elected officials. Brockton and Holyoke follow with near-proportional Latino political representation compared to their share of Latino residents.

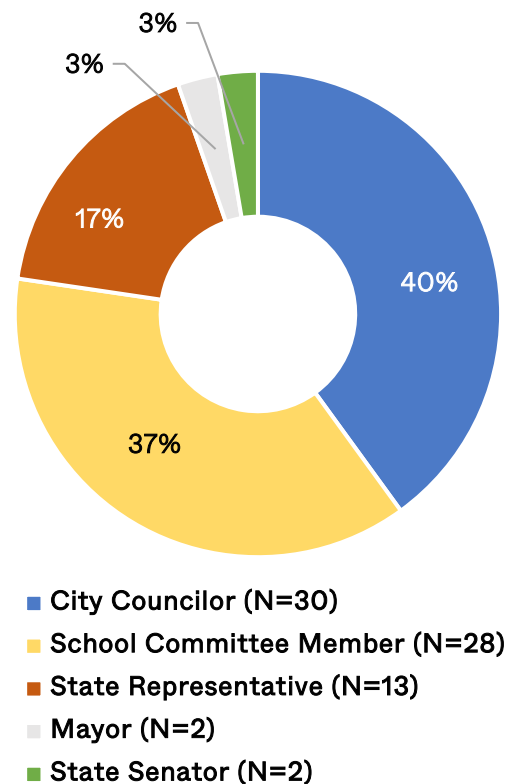
Current Officeholding

The top 20 cities and towns with the largest proportions of Latino and Latina residents in Massachusetts account for 70⁴ of the Latino population in the state. Among these cities and towns, half have at least one Latino and/or Latina elected official serving on the school committee or city council. Of the 379 key municipal elected position⁵ in these 20 cities and towns, Latino elected officials make up 19% of officeholders.

In only two cities (Lawrence and Holyoke) does a Latino serve as mayor.

Since 2021, there has been a 15% increase in Latino and Latina representation from 71 to 82 officeholders (at the local and state-level combined). Compared to their representation at the local level, Latinas

Figure 2. Latino Political Leadership in Top 20 Latinx Population Cities (N=75)



³ [2021 Latinos in Massachusetts Series: Top 11 Latino Cities](#), Phil Granberry, Vishakha Agarwal.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey, [American Community Survey \(ACS\) \(census.gov\)](#).

⁵ Including School Committee members and City Councilors.

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experienced a greater increase in representation in State Representative officeholding, making them the group with the largest gains at the state level.

Even with an increase in local officeholding resulting from the last municipal election cycle in 2021, Latinos remain under-represented in most governing bodies at all levels of government.

Everett, Boston, and Brockton now have Latinos and Latinas serving on city councils. Representation in Lawrence, Chelsea, Brockton, Framingham, and Salem decreased in both city councils and school committees due to the election of several local officeholders to the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Municipal elections held this fall will indicate whether Latino representation will return to previous levels in those cities. Latino representation increased between 2020 and 2021 in five other cities and towns not represented in the Top 20 Massachusetts Cities with Largest Latino Populations.

The Latino Population and Electorate

At about 888,000, the Latino population in Massachusetts is the 18th largest state population nationally.⁶ Latinos make up nearly 13% of the state's population. Compared to 2021, the Latino population has increased by 1%.⁷

The median age of Latinos is 29 years. Close to three out of ten (30.1%) Latinos are younger than 18 years.⁸

It is expected that by 2035, the Latino population will grow to over 1.15 million, representing 15.3% of the state's population.⁹

There are 482,000 Latino eligible voters in Massachusetts, representing the 11th largest Latino statewide eligible voter population nationally. From 2008 to 2020, the number of registered Latino voters increased by 163%, from 103,000 to

⁶ Brazilians not included in this figure.

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population and Housing Data, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/data.html>.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey, [American Community Survey \(ACS\)](https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/) ([census.gov](https://www.census.gov/)).

⁹ Demographic growth projection data taken from The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy report "Massachusetts Latino Population 2010-2035," scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston_pubs/241.

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271,000. Notably, from 2008 to 2022, the number of registered Latinos who voted in a federal election increased by 195% from 77,000 to 227,000.¹⁰

Political Representation: Disparities and Advances in Key Leadership Roles

City councilors and members of school committees account for 81% of all Latino and Latina individuals serving in key elected leadership positions from the 20 communities with the largest Latino populations. These percentages are based on the total number of roles in each institution, not including vacant positions.

There is very limited Latino and Latina presence in the 40-member State Senate, with only two Latino State Senators in office; having five Latinos in the Senate would be proportionate to the statewide Latino population. Senator Liz Miranda is the first Cape Verdean woman in the Massachusetts Senate and Senator Adam Gomez became the first Puerto Rican elected to Massachusetts Senate in 2022. After the 2022 election, there was a net increase of five additional Latino State Representatives given the victories of City Councilors Judith Garcia (Chelsea), Estela Reyes (Lawrence), Rita Mendes (Brockton), Priscila Sousa (Framingham), Shirley Arriaga (Chicopee), Manny Cruz (Salem) and the loss of one Latino representative, Marcos Devers (Lawrence) who served from 2019 to 2023.

The first Latino elected to the State Senate was Sonia Chang-Díaz who served as a Senator for a total of 14 years, beginning in 2009.

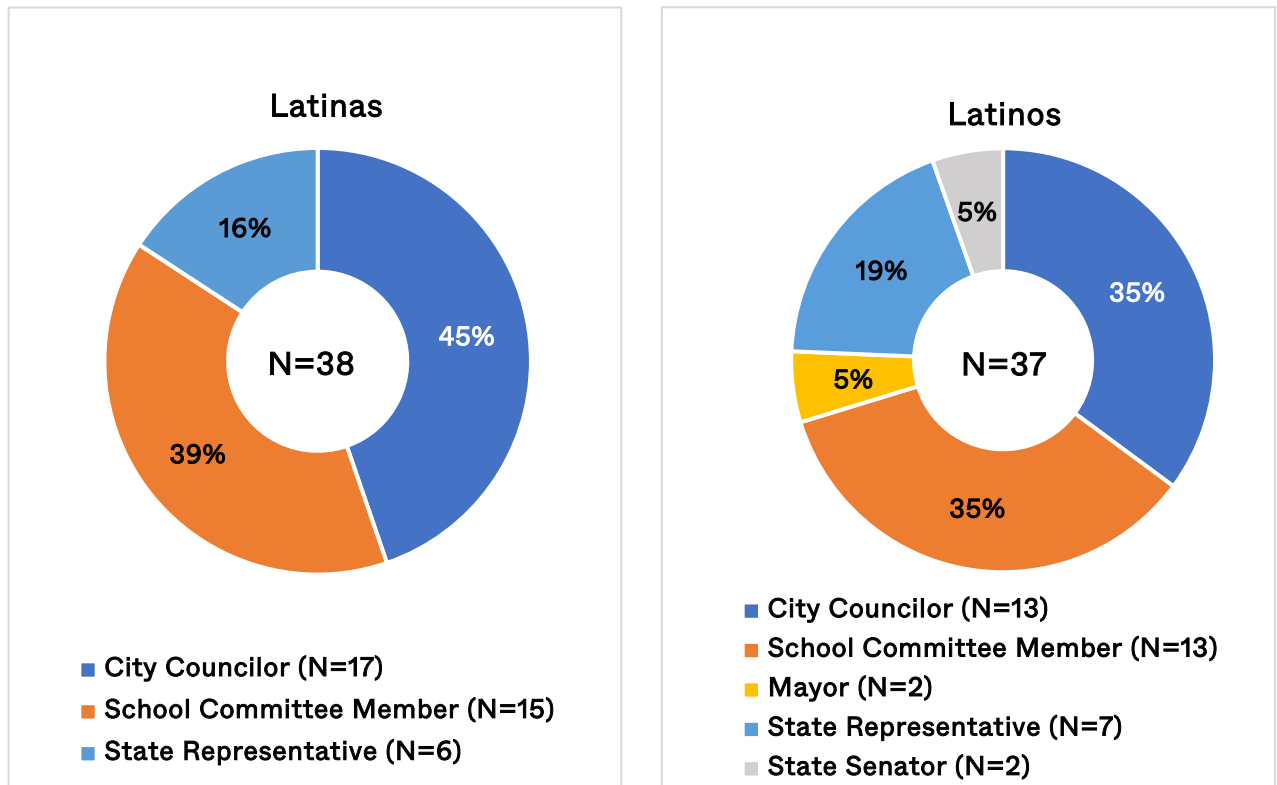
There are no Latinas or Latinos in the state's congressional delegation.

Notably, more than double the number of Latinas are serving at state and local levels of government in 2023 (38) compared to 2014 (14).

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, [Current Population Survey \(CPS\) \(census.gov\)](https://www.census.gov/cps).

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Figure 3. Gender Breakdown in Local and State Legislative Offices: Top 20 Latino Cities



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Latinas in Elected Office in Massachusetts: Some Historical Context

The following selection of years offers a snapshot of several key historical advances but is not inclusive of all notable years or individuals whose election carries historical significance. Documentation of advances and a fuller historical record is under development.

- 1983** Grace Romero was the first Latina elected to office in Massachusetts, winning a seat on the Boston School Committee
- 1995** Leticia Ortiz was the first Latina elected City Councilor (Chelsea)
- 1998** Cheryl Coakley-Rivera was elected to the House of Representatives and the first LGBTQ Latina elected to the Massachusetts Legislature
- 2008** Sonia Chang-Díaz became the first Latina ever elected to the Massachusetts Senate
- 2016** Juana Matias became the first Latina immigrant elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives
- 2019** Julia Mejia became the first Afro-Latina elected to the Boston City Council
- 2022** Judith García became the first Honduran elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives

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Table 1. Latinos currently serving as mayor or in local governing bodies such as city councils and school committees, and in the Massachusetts Legislature

Elected Official*	Governing Body/Office
Alba, Joshua	Lawrence School Committee
Alfaro-Alvarez, Yessenia	Chelsea School Committee
Almeida-Barros, Marcony	Everett School Committee
Anderson-Burgos, Juan	Holyoke City Council
Arriaga, Shirley	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Chicopee)
Arroyo, Ricardo	Boston City Council
Avellaneda, Roy	Chelsea City Council
Bueno, Kyle	Fairhaven School Committee
Cabral, Katherine	Chelsea School Committee
Cardet- Hernandez, Brandon	Boston School Committee
Castellanos, Brian	Lynn School Committee
Coletta, Gabriela	Boston City Council
Costa, Melissa	New Bedford School Committee
Covas Caraballo, Claryangeliz	Chelsea School Committee
Cruz, Manny	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Salem)
Davila, Victor	Springfield City Council
De Jesus, Norieliz	Chelsea City Council
De La Cruz, Maria	Lawrence City Council
De Peña, Brian	Mayor of Lawrence
Dominguez, Domingo	Salem City Council
Feliciano-Sims, Irene	Holyoke School Committee
Garcia, Judith	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Chelsea)
Garcia, Kelly	Chelsea School Committee
Garcia Polanco, Rafaela	Boston School Committee
Garcia, Joshua A	Mayor of Holyoke
Garcia, Tanairi	Chelsea City Council
Gomez, Adam	Massachusetts State Senate
Gomez Mouakad, Beatriz	Somerville City Council
Gomez, Homar	Easthampton City Council
Gonzalez, Carlos	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Springfield)
Gonzalez, Joesiah	Springfield School Committee
Gordon, David	Framingham School Committee
Govan, Zaida	Springfield City Council
Guzman, Jonathan	Lawrence School Committee
Hernandez, Ana	Chelsea School Committee
Hurst, Denise	Springfield School Committee

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Jimenez-Rivera, Roberto	Chelsea School Committee
Lara, Kendra	Boston City Council
Lefebvre, Mildred	Holyoke School Committee
Levy, Ana	Lawrence City Council
Lopez, Delmarina	Chicopee City Council
Lopez, Enio	Chelsea City Council
Lopera, Lorena	Boston School Committee
Martins, Stephanie	Everett City Council
Mejia, Julia	Boston City Council
Mendes, Rita	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Brockton)
Montaño, Samantha	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Boston)
Moran, Frank	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Lawrence)
Neufeld Pineda, Judy	Somerville City Council
Payano, Pavel	Massachusetts State Senate
Paz, Jonathan	Waltham City Council
Peña, Brian A.	Lawrence School Committee
Peña, Lennin	Lynn School Committee
Polanco- Garcia, Rafaela	Boston School Committee
Ramos, Orlando	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Springfield)
Rand, Estelle	Beverly City Council
Reyes, Celina	Lawrence City Council
Reyes, Estela	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Lawrence)
Reyes, Santiago	Lawrence School Committee
Rivas-Mendes, Cynthia	Brockton School Committee
Rivera, Israel	Holyoke City Council
Rivera, Jenny	Holyoke City Council
Rivera, Sarai	Worcester City Council
Rivera- Colon, Yadilette	Holyoke School Committee
Rojas Villarreal, Jose Luis	Cambridge School Committee
Romero, Gustavo	Holyoke School Committee
Rosario, Gregory del	Lawrence City Council
Rodriguez, Jeovanny	Lawrence City Council
Santiago, Jon	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Boston)
Sena, Danillo	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Acton, Ayer, Boxborough, Harvard, Lunenburg, Shirley)
Sousa, Priscila	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Framingham)
Soto, Threicy	Lawrence School Committee

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Stewart-Morales, Cesar	Framingham City Council
Thompson, Jeffrey A.	Brockton City Council
Varela, Andrew W.	Salem City Council
Vargas, Andres	Massachusetts House of Representatives (Haverhill)
Vega Maldonado, Melinda	Chelsea City Council
Velez, Jeanette	Chelsea School Committee
Vidal, Carlos	Waltham City Council
Vidot, Damali	Chelsea City Council

*Not including other offices such as Register of Probate or other elected positions

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Data Sources and Methodology

Data from 20 cities and towns in Massachusetts with the largest Latino populations: Boston (19.82% Latino), Brockton (12.14%), Cambridge (8.78%), Chelsea (66.06%), Chicopee (22.42%), Everett (30.61%), Fall River (11.77%), Fitchburg (30%), Framingham (16.74%), Haverhill, (23.36%), Holyoke (53.29%), Lawrence (82.28%), Lowell (17.57%), Lynn (41.78%), Methuen (29.04%), New Bedford (23.12%), Revere (36.71%), Springfield (47.48%), Waltham (14.54%), Worcester (23.87%). Source: Census 2020.

Data collected from town and city clerk websites by researchers from the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy and the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy; additional data from the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), Women's Pipeline for Change, EMERGE MA, Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus, LIPPI at the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts, Massachusetts Secretary of State, <http://mariaslist.net/state.html>. In addition, *Latino Politics in Massachusetts: Struggles, Strategies and Prospects* by Carol Hardy-Fanta, Jeffrey Gerson (New York: Routledge, 2002).

Self-identified information on racial and ethnic backgrounds of elected officials provided through survey data from UMass Boston's Massachusetts Representation Project: Diverse Leadership for a Diverse Commonwealth. Please note that the Boston School Committee is appointed, not elected; however, members are included in the data analysis presented. Brazilians are counted in population data provided and included among electeds included here based on self-identified information provided through survey data from the UMass Boston Massachusetts Representation Project: Diverse Leadership for a Diverse Commonwealth.

2015 American Community Survey estimates provided by UMass Boston's Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy. Brazilians are included in the estimates.

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The Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy

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. For over 30 years, 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. Facebook & Twitter: @GastonInstitute.

Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy

The Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at the McCormack Graduate School works to advance women's public leadership and the public policies that make a difference in the lives of women, particularly low-income and women of color. Through its award-winning graduate certificate program, policy-relevant research, and public forums, it works to ensure that the voices, expertise, and experiences of women are valued and included in civic discourse and the policymaking process. Utilizing both an anti-racist and intersectional approach, addressing ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, immigrant status and other identities, the center works across sectors, including health, education, employment, among others, to increase access and opportunity for women and families and inform policy analysis to ensure economic, social, and political equity and justice for all. Visit: www.umb.edu/cwppp. Facebook: @CWPPP. Twitter: @CWPPP_UMB.

Amplify Latinx

Amplify Latinx is a non-partisan, collaborative movement whose mission is to build Latinx economic and political power by significantly increasing Latinx civic engagement and representation in leadership positions across sectors. Amplify Latinx was launched by the Latina Circle, a Boston-based, non-profit social venture that is advancing Latina leaders across industries into positions of power and influence. To learn more about Amplify Latinx, visit <https://amplifylatinx.co>. Facebook & Twitter: @AmplifyLatinx.