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Profiles of Asian American Subgroups in Massachusetts: Vietnamese Americans in Massachusetts

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Vietnamese Americans *in Massachusetts*

PROFILES OF ASIAN AMERICAN SUBGROUPS IN MASSACHUSETTS

Demographic Characteristics¹

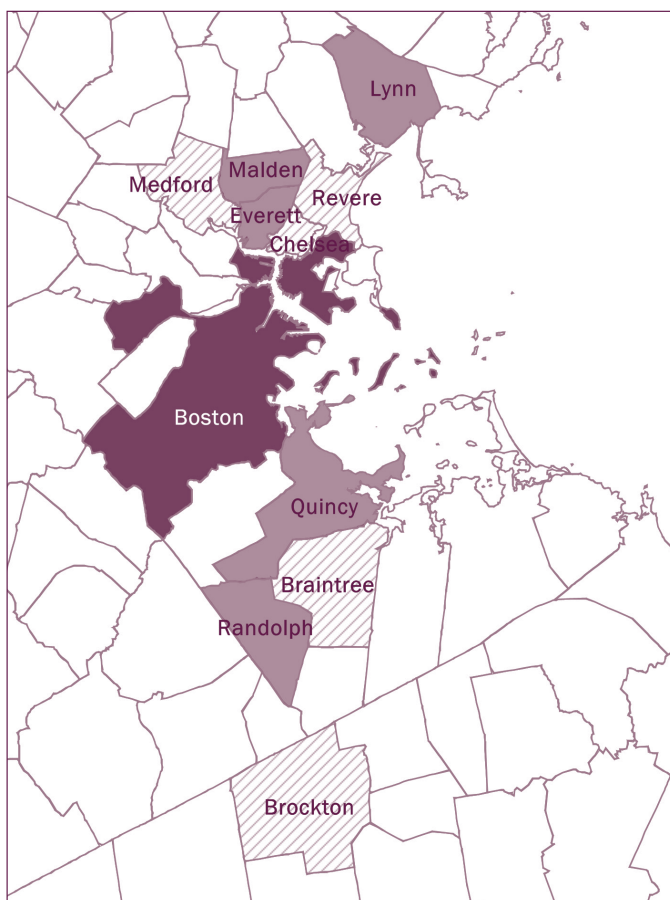
Vietnamese Americans are the third largest Asian American subgroup in Massachusetts. In the 2010 decennial census, the Vietnamese American population in the state numbered 47,636, an increase of nearly 30% since 2000.

The largest concentration of Vietnamese Americans is in the city of Boston, while Worcester also has a significant population. There are also sizable communities of Vietnamese Americans just to the north and south of Boston—to the north in Malden, Everett, Medford,

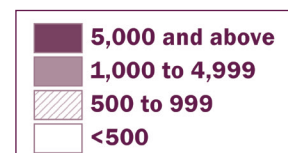
Revere, Chelsea, and Lynn, and to the south in Quincy, Randolph, and Braintree.

The greatest area of growth of Vietnamese Americans in the state is to the south of Boston in Quincy, Braintree, Randolph, and Weymouth. Cities in Plymouth and Bristol counties have also experienced significant growth: Brockton, Attleboro, and Fall River.

Along the state's New Hampshire border, the population of Vietnamese Americans in Methuen has almost doubled and has increased by over 40% in Haverhill since 2000.



**Vietnamese American Population
in Greater Boston, 2010**



¹ In this report, demographic data for Vietnamese Americans include those who identified as multi-racial and multi-ethnic unless otherwise noted.

Population and Growth of Vietnamese Americans in Selected Cities and Towns in Massachusetts, 2000 and 2010

	2000	2010	% change
Boston	11,376	11,670	2.6%
Worcester	5,061	5,759	13.8%
Quincy	1,850	3,297	78.2%
Randolph	762	2,150	182.2%
Lowell	1,769	2,057	16.3%
Springfield	1,601	1,997	24.7%
Malden	1,434	1,874	30.7%
Lynn	1,255	1,117	-11.0%
Everett	736	1,051	42.8%
Revere	437	750	71.6%
Lawrence	779	702	-9.9%
Brockton	387	598	54.5%
Methuen	292	573	96.2%
Medford	342	516	50.9%
Braintree	148	501	238.5%
Chelsea	901	501	-44.4%

Vietnamese Americans are considerably younger than the general population; the statewide median age for Vietnamese Americans is 32.3 years as compared to 39.1 years for the overall population. However, the median age of Vietnamese Americans rose considerably in the last decade, from 28.1 to 32.3. In 2010, 6.5% of the Vietnamese American population was over the age of 65, as opposed to only 3.4% in 2000.

Vietnamese Americans are a multi-faceted group with varied ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. They include members of ethnic groups such as Chinese,

Khmer, and Cham, and they may speak Cantonese, Mandarin, and Khmer as well as Vietnamese.² Cross-cultural influences are evident in areas such as Boston's Chinatown, where some business signs are in both Vietnamese and Chinese, and in Lowell, where some business owners and employees speak both Vietnamese and Khmer. There are also Amerasians, whose parents are American men—soldiers stationed in Vietnam during the war—and Vietnamese women.

Different waves of immigration also brought Vietnamese with particular characteristics to the U.S. For example, the

Vietnamese American Population by Age and Sex in Massachusetts, 2010

	Male	Female
0–4 years	1,886	1,851
5–17	4,928	4,666
18–24	2,572	2,829
25–34	3,036	3,914
35–44	4,196	4,472
45–54	2,956	2,689
55–64	2,102	2,441
65–74	1,148	1,090
75+	394	466
TOTAL	23,218	24,418

² Le, C.N. *Asian American Assimilation: Ethnicity, Immigration, and Socioeconomic Attainment*. New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2007. See chapter 3.

Vietnamese American Population in Massachusetts, 2010

Vietnamese alone (one race, one subgroup)	42,915
Vietnamese alone or in combination with one or more other Asian subgroups	45,380
Vietnamese alone or in any combination (one or more races and Asian subgroups)	47,636

first wave of Vietnamese Americans came immediately after the Vietnam War ended in 1975 and contained many high ranking governmental and military officials and their families. The second wave in the late 1970s and early 1980s was a diverse group generally of more modest socio-economic backgrounds, many of whom escaped Vietnam under harrowing circumstances.³

While earlier migration of Vietnamese to the U.S. included large numbers of refugees, immigration in the last decade has been primarily through family sponsorship by Vietnamese Americans.⁴ Population growth in Massachusetts has also occurred due to domestic migration as Vietnamese Americans have moved from other states to join established communities here and to seek economic opportunities.

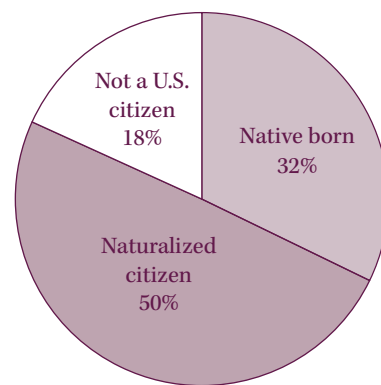
Socio-Economic Characteristics⁵

This section presents an overview of social and economic characteristics for Vietnamese Americans in the state using the 2008–2010 American Community Survey 3-year estimates. Currently, approximately 68% of Vietnamese Americans in Massachusetts are foreign born, a significantly smaller proportion than 2000, when over three-quarters were foreign-born. A much larger percentage of the Vietnamese American population are citizens now than ten years ago: eight in ten as compared to six in ten in 2000.

Nearly one in eight foreign-born Vietnamese Americans arrived in the U.S. twenty years ago or more. One in five arrived in the past decade.

English proficiency for immigrants has always been an important factor in their social and economic well-being in the United States. In Massachusetts, limited English-speaking ability is an issue for a significant number of Vietnamese Americans. Almost 58% of Vietnamese Americans aged five and older who speak a language other than English speak English “less

Vietnamese Americans in Massachusetts by Nativity and Citizenship, 2008–2010



Decade of Entry for Foreign-born Vietnamese Americans in Massachusetts, 2008–2010

Entered 2000 or later	20.4%
1990–1999	45.9%
Before 1990	33.7%

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 36 (see Table 2.1).

⁵ Socio-economic data are for Vietnamese Americans who indicated they are Vietnamese only, that is, of one racial group and one Asian subgroup.

than very well”. This is a moderate improvement from 2000 when 64% of the same cohort spoke English “less than very well.”

Economic status indicators for Vietnamese Americans as a group lag significantly behind those for the general population. For example, the median household income for Vietnamese Americans in the state is \$48,252, only 75% of the median household income for total population, \$63,961. Additionally, the per capita income for Vietnamese Americans is \$19,303, only 57% of the per capita income for the total population, \$33,969. The median earnings for males and females in the Vietnamese American population are \$40,539 and \$31,510 respectively—about 70% that of all males and all females.

The poverty rates for Vietnamese Americans are also higher than those of the total population: 16.4% of Vietnamese American families’ incomes fall below the poverty rate as compared to 7.5% for families in the total population. For all Vietnamese American people, the poverty rate is 17.5 % as compared to 10.8% in the total population. However, Vietnamese Americans experienced a large drop in poverty since 2000, when their poverty rates were 21.2% for families, and 24.2% for individuals. In contrast, poverty rates for the total population increased by about 1 percentage point since 2000.

The largest discrepancies in broad U.S. census occupational categories between Vietnamese Americans and the total population are in the management, business, science and arts category, where Vietnamese Americans are much less concentrated, and the production, transportation, and material moving category, where Vietnamese Americans are much more highly concentrated.

The management, business, science, and arts category used by the U.S. Census Bureau, it should be noted, is very broad and includes several subcategories such as computer, education, legal, social service, and entertainment occupations, as well as healthcare practitioners and technicians.

Vietnamese Americans are well represented in the service category, which includes healthcare support, food preparation and serving-related, and personal care occupations. It has been well documented that Vietnamese Americans are highly concentrated in nailcare services nationally. A nails industry magazine reported that 45% of nail technicians nationally are of Vietnamese descent.⁶ Massachusetts is not an exception: a search by New Ecology Inc. in 2006 found more than 4,000 licensed Vietnamese American nail technicians in “Boston and surrounding suburbs.”⁷ Nail salons are a viable source of employment for many Vietnamese

Broad Occupational Categories for Vietnamese Americans and Total Population in Massachusetts for Civilian Employed Persons Aged 16 Years and Over, 2008–2010

	Vietnamese American	Total Population
Management, business, science, and arts	27.4%	42.9%
Service	26.3%	16.9%
Sales and office	15.9%	24.0%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	6.7%	7.1%
Production, transportation, and material moving	23.6%	9.0%

⁶ *Nails Magazine*, 2011–2012 Industry Statistics, www.nailsmag.com.

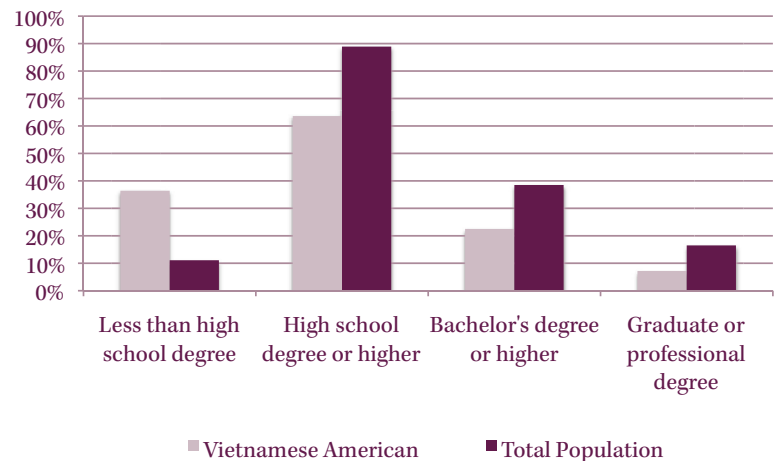
⁷ Doan, Tam. “Toxicity, Safety and Performance Evaluation of Alternative Nail Products.” Cambridge, MA: New Ecology Inc., January 2006.

Americans who are not fluent in English and do not have a high level of education.

In the area of educational attainment, a much larger portion of Vietnamese Americans aged 25 or older, 36%, have less than a high school education than the general population, 11%. On the other end of the spectrum, only 7% of Vietnamese Americans have advanced degrees, less than half the rate of the general population.

Educational Attainment of Vietnamese Americans and Total Population in Massachusetts Aged 25 Years and Over, 2008–2010

	Vietnamese American	Total Population
Less than high school degree	36.4%	11.1%
High school degree or higher	63.6%	88.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher	22.5%	38.5%
Graduate or professional degree	7.2%	16.5%



Vietnamese Americans in Boston⁸

Home to Vietnamese American non-profit organizations, over 100 Vietnamese-owned businesses,⁹ numerous Vietnamese religious institutions, the first Vietnamese American community center in the country built from the ground up, and the first Vietnamese-language voting ballot on the East Coast, Boston has been the core of many Vietnamese American community building and entrepreneurial efforts in the Northeast.

More specifically, the Vietnamese American community in Boston is centered in the neighborhood of Dorchester, where seven out of ten Vietnamese Americans in Boston live. The Fields Corner area, located around the intersection of Dorchester Avenue and Adams Street, is the center for many Vietnamese American social and economic activities, but businesses and residents are also located beyond this area as well, with Vietnamese travel agencies, medical offices, supermarkets, and bakeries stretched along Dorchester Avenue from Columbia Road to Gallivan Boulevard. For nearly two decades, there have been two major Vietnamese American community organizations in Fields Corner, a social service agency and a community development corporation (CDC). The CDC, Viet-AID, was responsible for the construction of the first Vietnamese American community center in the country, which was built in 2002.

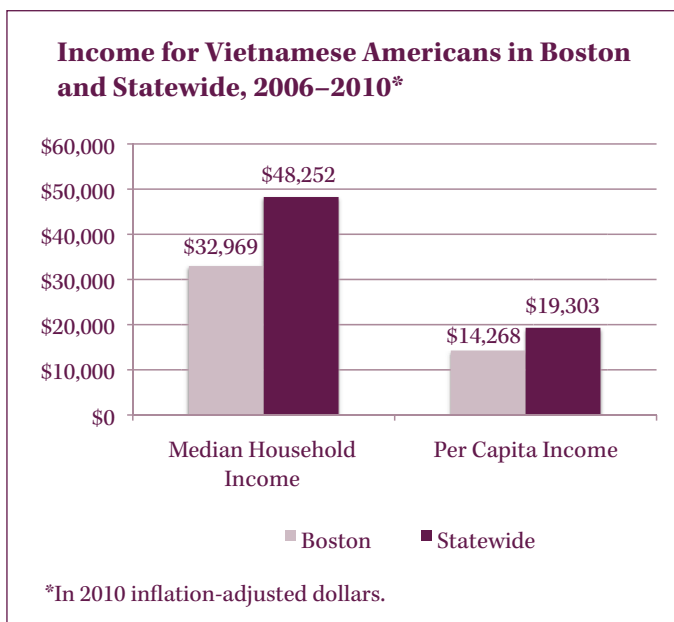
⁸ Census data for Vietnamese Americans in Boston and other cities and towns is from the 2006–2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

⁹ Borges-Mendez, Liu, and Watanabe. *Immigrant Entrepreneurs and Neighborhood Revitalization*. Malden, MA: Immigrant Learning Center, December 2005, p. 21.

Census data for the Vietnamese American population in Boston can be found in the 2006–2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates and is not directly comparable to the 3-year estimates used for the statewide data above. The 2006–2010 data set clearly includes information collected prior to the 2008 economic crisis—even so, the data shows that Vietnamese Americans in Boston are more economically disadvantaged than in the state overall.

A look at the social characteristics of this population indicates that Vietnamese Americans in Boston are slightly more likely to be foreign-born than statewide (70.4%) and are also more likely to have arrived in the U.S. in 2000 or later (27.6%). A higher percentage of those five years and older who speak a language other than English, 67.2%, speak English “less than very well.”

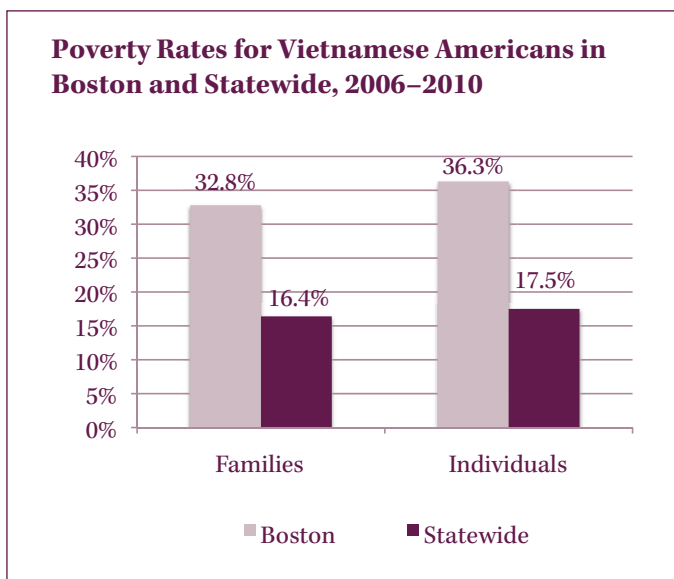
Economic status indicators show significant discrepancies between Boston and statewide data. The median household income for Vietnamese Americans in Boston is only \$32,969 and the per capita income only \$14,268.



The poverty rates for Vietnamese American families and individuals in Boston are double that of the statewide rates (see chart at bottom left).

In terms of educational attainment, Vietnamese Americans in Boston lag somewhat behind the statewide Vietnamese American population: 41.3% have less than a high school degree, and only 17.4% have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Not surprisingly, the percentage of Vietnamese American homeowners in Boston is significantly lower than statewide. Statewide, nearly half of Vietnamese-occupied housing units are owned (48.8%) while in Boston, only about a quarter are (27.3%).



Vietnamese Americans in Worcester

Worcester, Massachusetts’ second largest city, is also home to the second largest concentration of Vietnamese Americans in the state. The Vietnamese American population in the city numbers just over 5,700 with an increase of 14% since 2000. As in Boston, the Catholic community in Worcester was active in helping to resettle Vietnamese refugees after the Vietnam War ended in 1975. Vietnamese Americans have had a significant presence in Worcester, representing approximately 50% of the Asian American population in the city in the past

two decades.

Vietnamese American businesses are primarily clustered around Green Street, South Main Street and Park Avenue. Community-based organizing efforts in the city have often encompassed Southeast Asian Americans rather than only Vietnamese. There is currently only one social service organization that serves primarily Southeast Asian Americans in Central Massachusetts, the Southeast Asian Coalition which was established in 2001. It serves Cambodians and Lao as well as Vietnamese Americans and offers translation services, ESL classes, youth and civic engagement programs and cultural events.¹⁰

Like Vietnamese Americans in Boston, Vietnamese Americans in Worcester face significant social and economic challenges. One in seven who speak a language other than English speak English “less than very well.” While about the same percent have less than a high school education as Vietnamese Americans statewide, fewer Vietnamese Americans in Worcester have bachelor’s or graduate degrees. The median household income of Vietnamese Americans in Worcester is \$35,114, about 78% of that of the total population in the city. Per capita income is \$15,386, about 63% of that of the total population. Poverty rates for Vietnamese Americans in Worcester are also quite high—24.5% for families, and 27% for all people—although not as high as the poverty rates for Vietnamese Americans in Boston.

A noticeable difference of Vietnamese Americans in Worcester as compared to Boston or statewide is in occupational categories. There is a higher percentage of Vietnamese Americans working in service occupations, 34.7%, and in production, transportation, and material moving areas, 36.6%, than in Boston or statewide. One advantage to living in Worcester is that real estate is more affordable—nearly 4 in 10 (38.8%) housing units occupied by Vietnamese Americans are owned rather than rented, a considerably higher rate than in Boston.

Other Concentrations in Massachusetts

There are smaller but sizable Vietnamese American communities in Springfield and Lowell that date back over 30 years. But the greatest growth in the Vietnamese American population is not in these historic, urban communities but in the suburbs of Boston, particularly to the south. Data from the American Community Survey, although not highly reliable when sample sizes are small, indicates that Vietnamese Americans in Quincy and Randolph are relatively affluent. The median household income for Vietnamese Americans in Quincy is \$61,354, well above the statewide median of \$48,252. Vietnamese Americans in Quincy are also more concentrated in sales and office occupations (25.9%), less in production, transportation, and material moving occupations (16.3%), and less in service (19.4%) than Vietnamese Americans statewide.

Notable demographic, social and economic changes have occurred in the Vietnamese American population in Massachusetts since 2000. Continued study of developments in this population is needed—both to recognize their social and economic contributions to the state and to address ongoing challenges.

This report was written by Shauna Lo, Assistant Director at the Institute for Asian American Studies, and Thao Tran, former graduate assistant at the Institute for Asian American Studies.

¹⁰ Interview with Thuha Le by Shauna Lo, June 26, 2012.

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