FOREIGN BORN IN BOSTON: ASIAN INDIANS

City of Boston Planning Department Research Division

"Imagine all the people" is a series of publications produced by the City of Boston's Planning Department's Research Division for the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement. As the East Boston mural above depicts, Boston's foreign born communities make numerous contributions to the city's social, cultural and economic landscape. This series is part of an ongoing effort to celebrate Boston's foreign-born populations and gain insight into how they shape our city.

OVERVIEW OF INDIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

Migrants from India comprise the third largest foreign-born population in the United States today. Migration from India to the United States dates to the early 19th century when mainly unskilled agricultural workers arrived in California.[1] The 1924 National Origins Act curtailed Asian-Indian[2] migration, as well for other Asian populations. After implementation of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that prioritized migration based on migrants' skills and family reunification, the number of Indian professionals and students in the United States significantly increased. Unlike earlier Indian migrants, those arriving after 1965 were more likely to be

[1] https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/indian-immigrants-united-states-2019

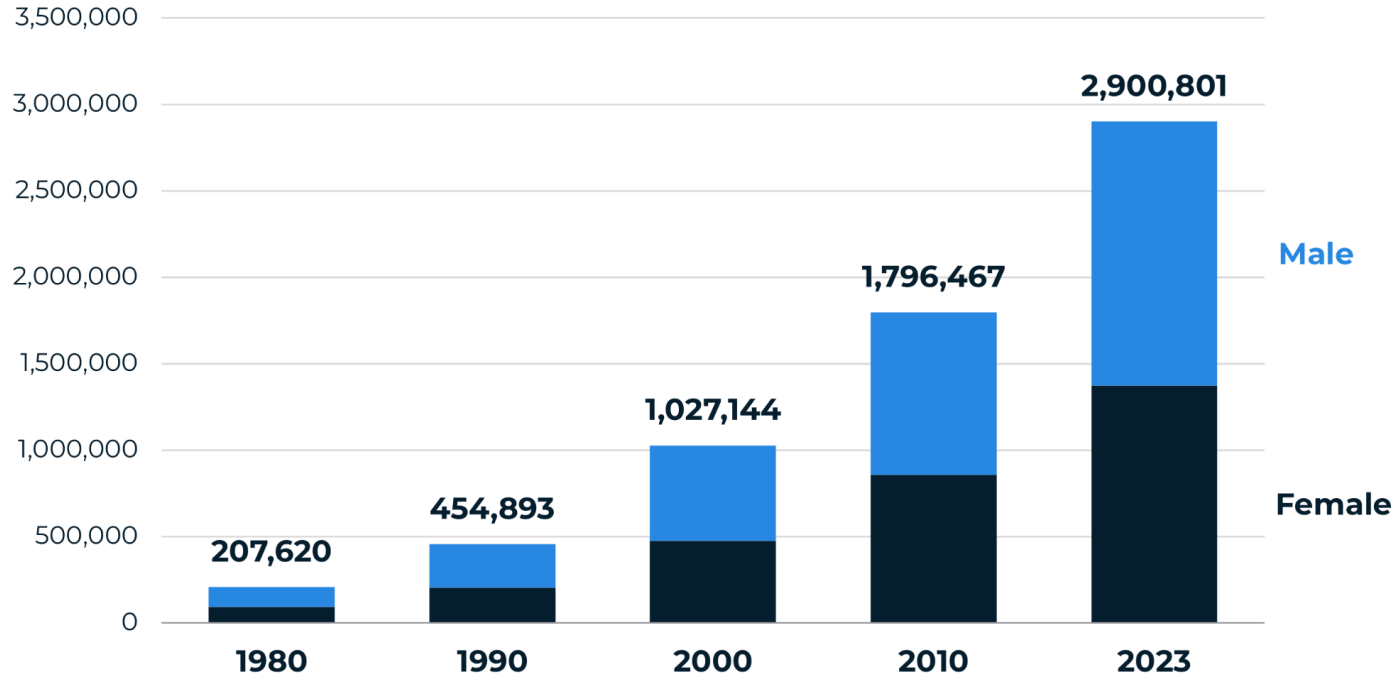
[2] This report details the Asian Indian population in Boston that is distinct from the American Indian population. For simplicity, the remainder of this report will refer to the Asian Indians as Indians.

younger, come from urban areas, and have higher educational attainment and strong English language skills. Today, Indian nationals receive the majority of H-1B visas for temporary employment in the United States.[3]

Estimates from the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) show that 2.9 million foreign-born Indians reside in the United States, forming the second largest foreign-born population behind Mexicans. The United States is the leading destination for Indian emigrants followed by the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Myanmar.[4]

FOREIGN-BORN INDIANS

Population growth in the U.S. from 1980 to 2023



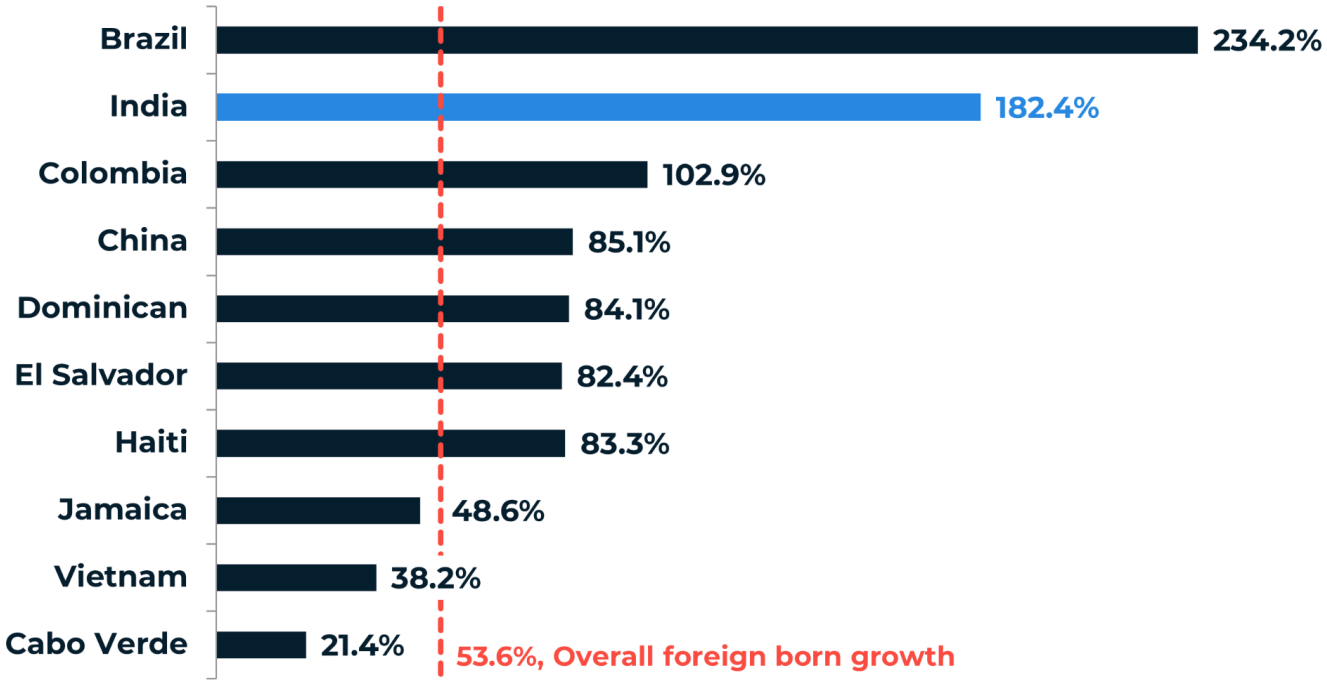
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980-2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2010 and 2023 1-Year American Community Survey (PUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

[3] Indian Diaspora in the United States. Migration Policy Institute 2014.
[4] https://www.mea.gov.in/images/attach/nris-and-pios_1.pdf

In 2023, Indian nationals received nearly two-thirds of the H-1B visas issued for temporary employment in the United States.[5] From 2000 to 2023, the foreign-born Indian population increased by 182 percent, faster than 53.6 percent for the overall foreign-born population.

INCREASE IN FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION

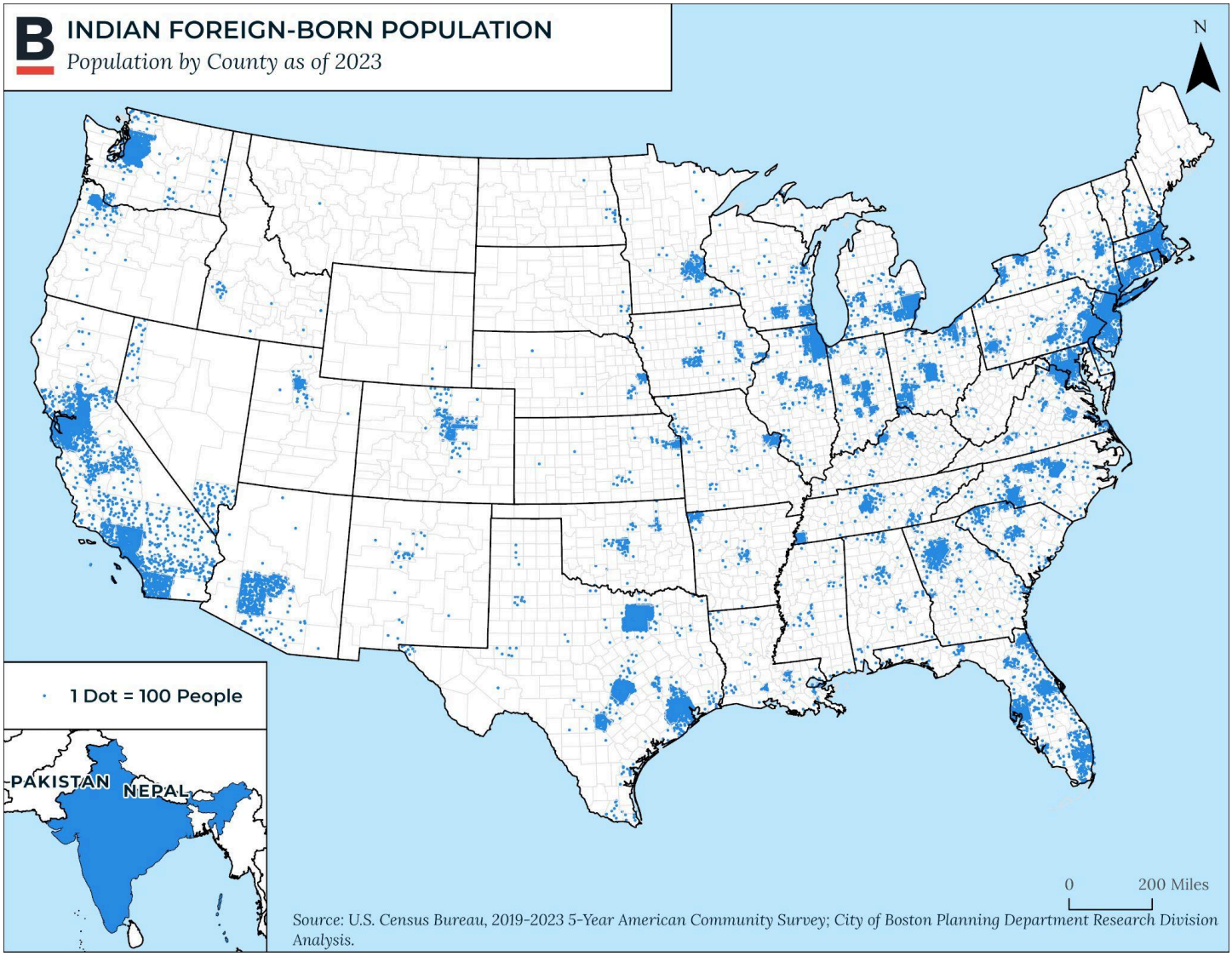
Percent increase in foreign born population in the U.S. from 2000 to 2023



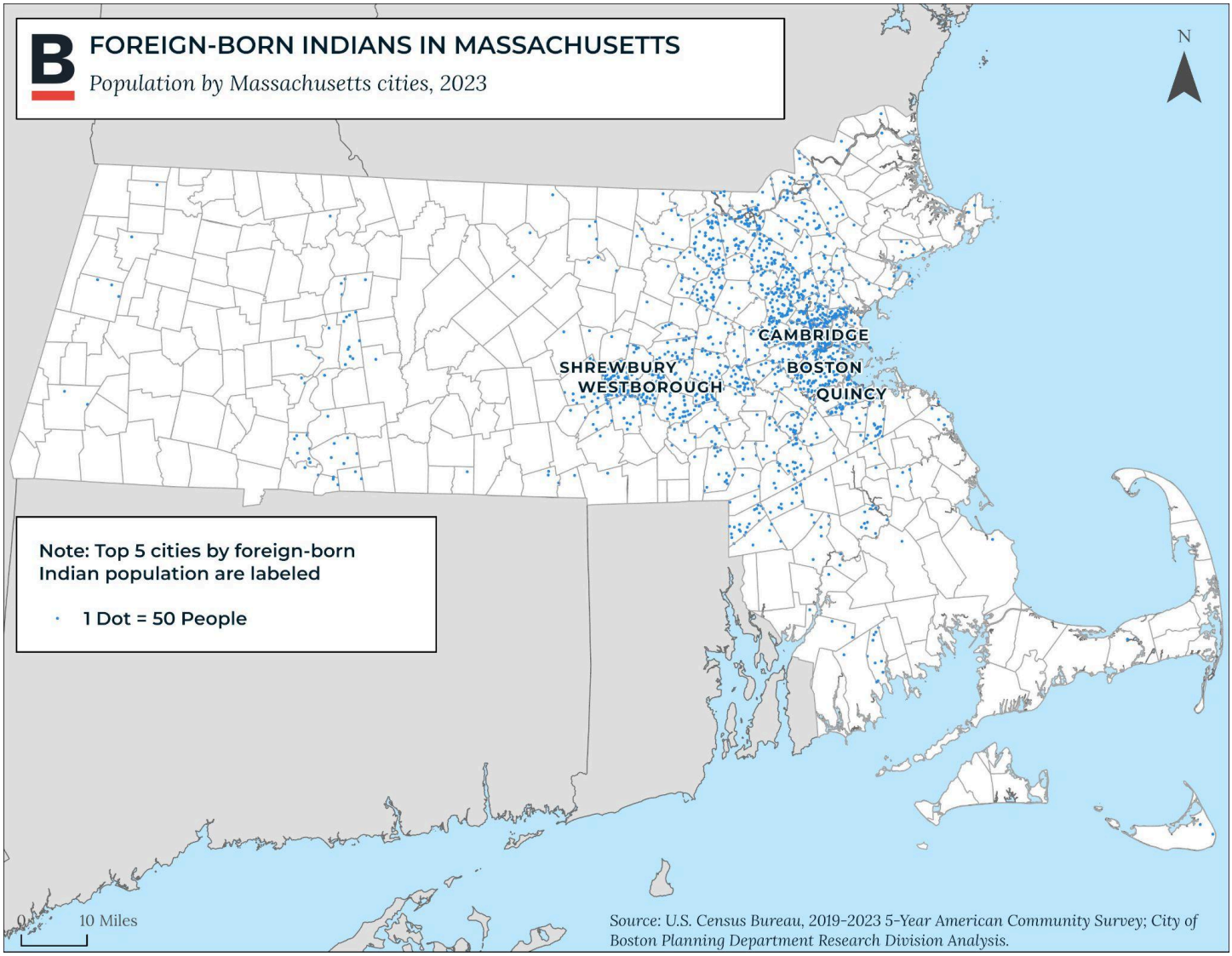
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1980-2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2023 1-Year American Community Survey (PUMS), City of Boston Research Division Analysis

[5]https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/h-1b-petitions-by-gender-country-of-birth-fy2019.pdf

Massachusetts has the 12th largest foreign-born Indian population in the United States behind California, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, New York, Florida, Washington, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina.



In Massachusetts, Boston (8 percent) has the largest foreign-born Indian population followed by Shrewsbury (6 percent), Cambridge (4 percent), Quincy (4 percent), and Westborough (3 percent).



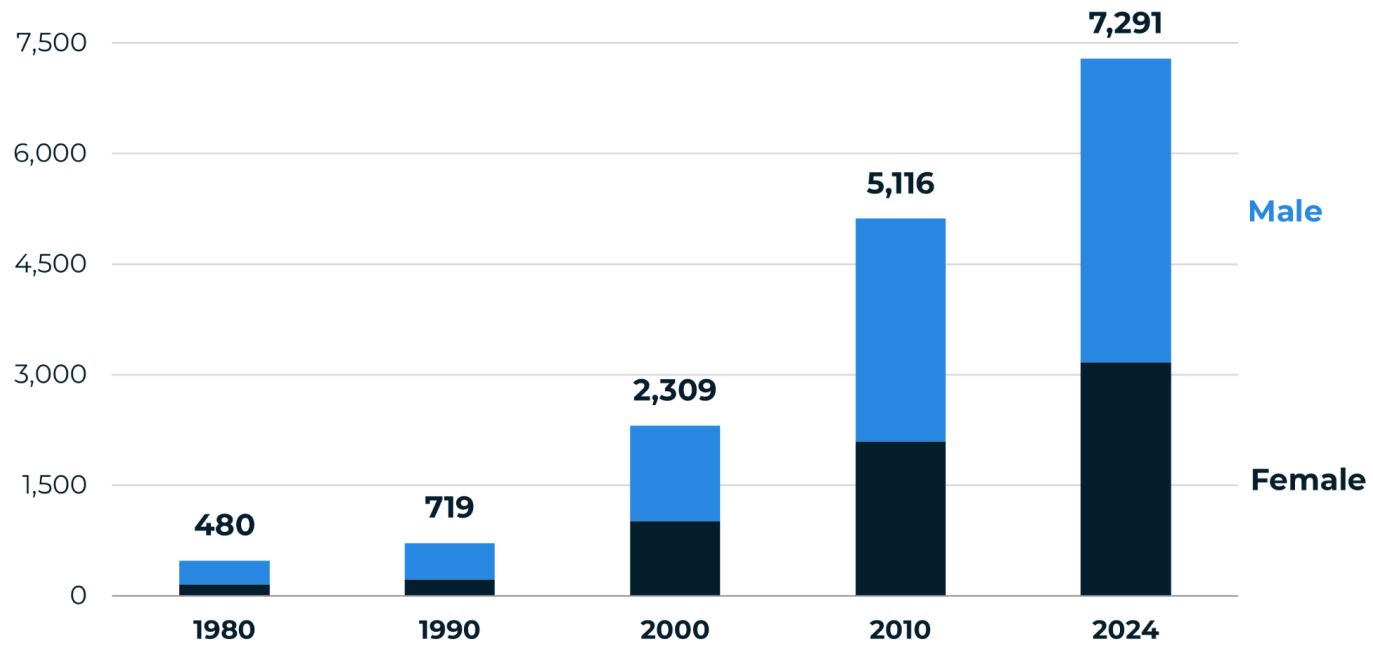
FOREIGN-BORN INDIANS IN BOSTON

DEMOGRAPHICS

The Indian foreign-born population grew exponentially since 1980. In 2024, Boston had 7,291 foreign-born Indian residents; 43.5 percent were female and 56.5 percent were male.

FOREIGN-BORN INDIANS

Population growth in Boston, from 1980 to 2024



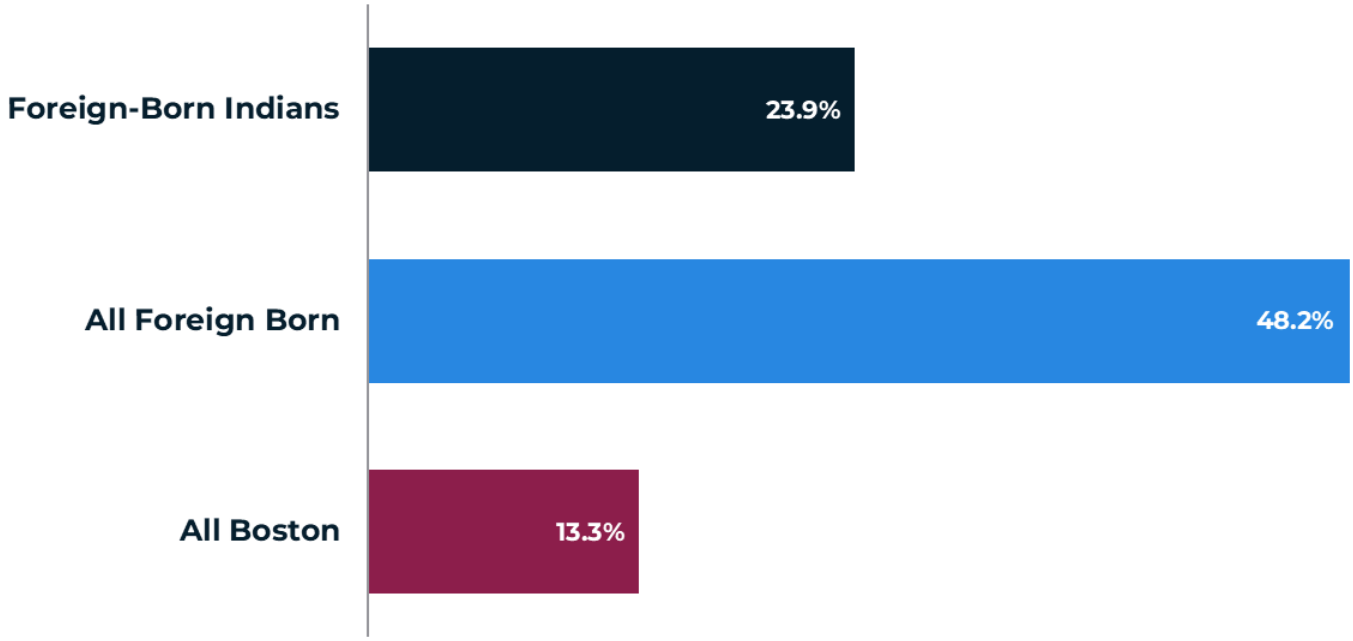
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1980-2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2010 1-Year American Community Survey (PUMS), 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

With the expansion of the H1-B employment visa program in 1990, technology companies recruited Indian computer programmers and engineers to fill these highly technical positions in the labor market. Though it is a difficult process, these workers have a pathway from employment-based visas to naturalization. However, Indians face potentially decades-long waits to gain permanent residence (a green card) due to a per-country limit and the low annual quota.

For this reason, a smaller share of foreign-born Indians in Boston are non-citizens (24 percent) compared to all foreign born (48 percent).

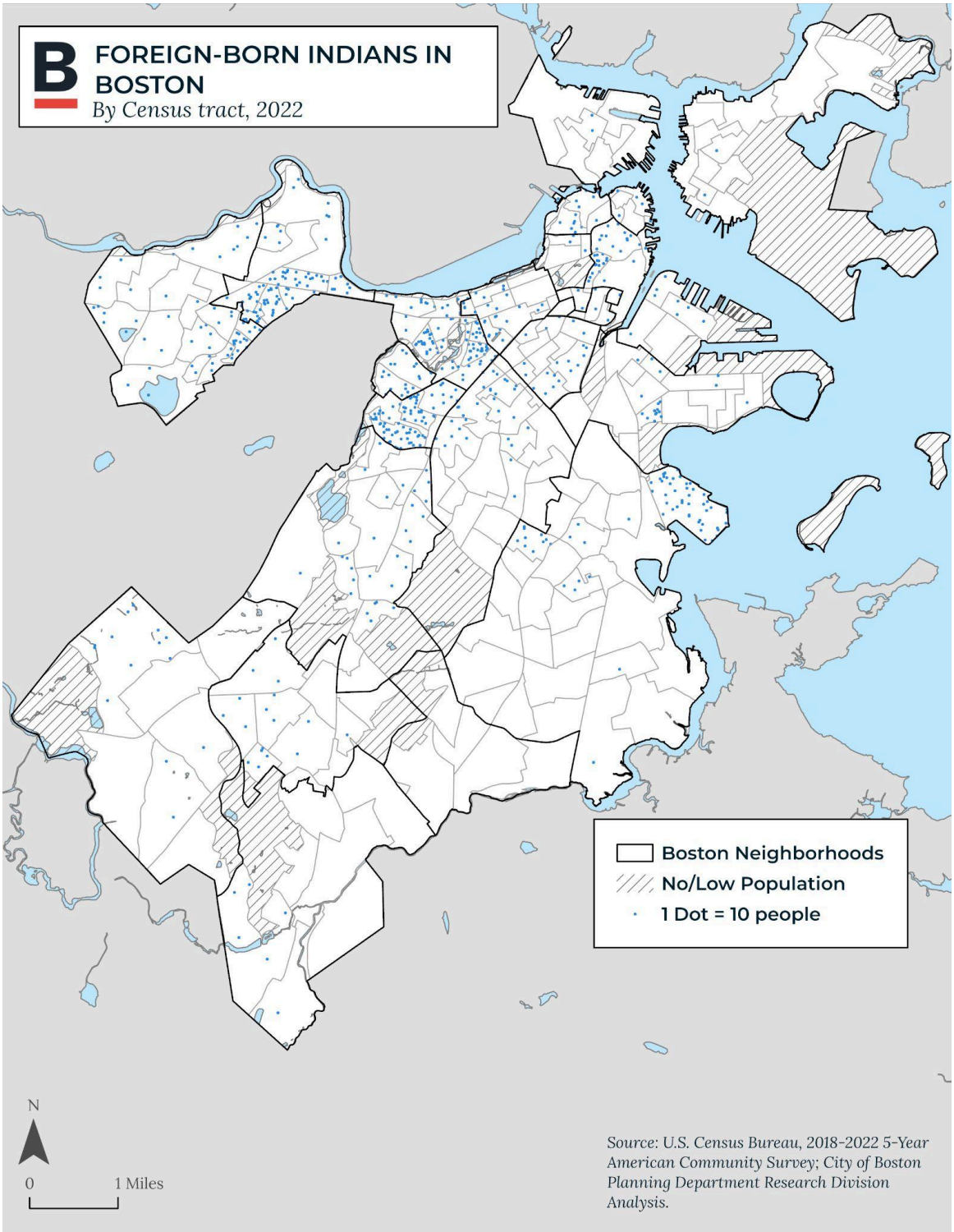
NON-U.S. CITIZENS

Share of non-U.S. citizens



Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

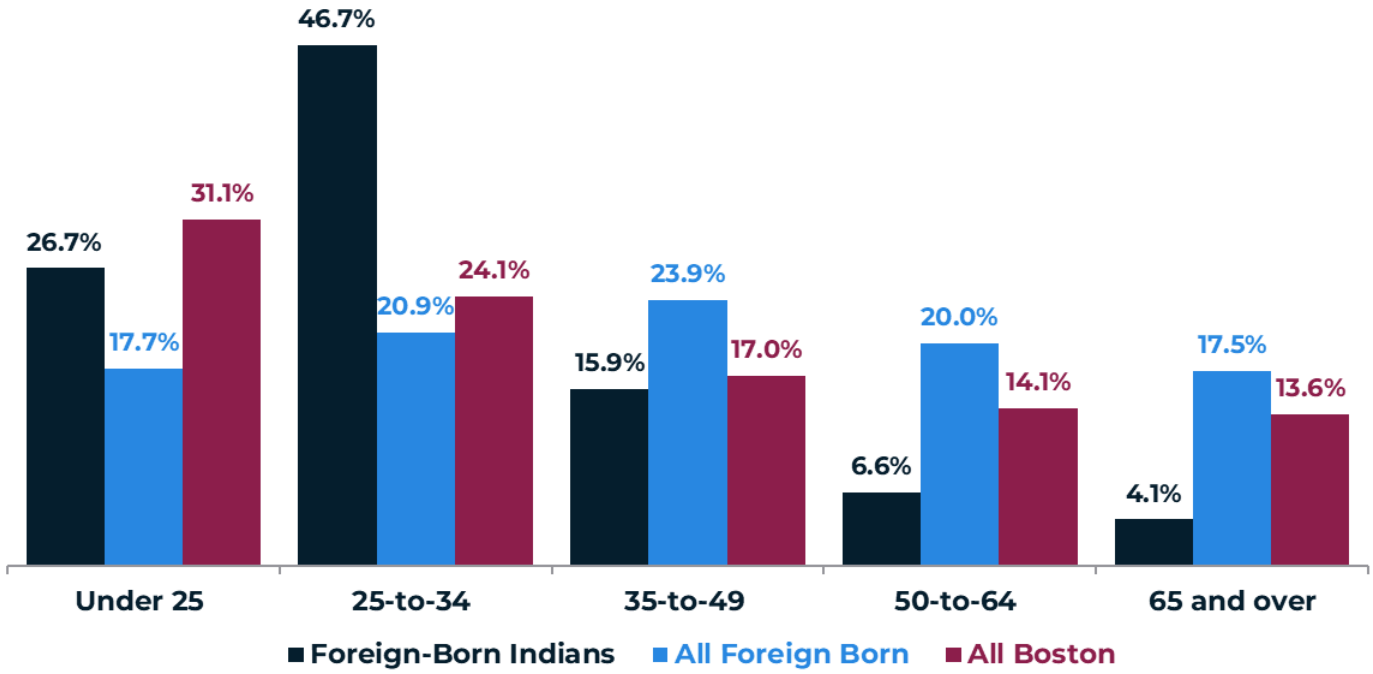
Boston's foreign-born Indians are scattered throughout the city, but the largest shares of their population are in Mission Hill (14 percent), Dorchester (13 percent), Fenway (13 percent), and Allston (12 percent), where college students live.



The foreign-born Indian population in Boston tends to be much younger than the overall population. Almost three quarters of foreign-born Indians are under 35 years old and only 4 percent are 65 years and older.

AGE DISTRIBUTION

Share of population by age group



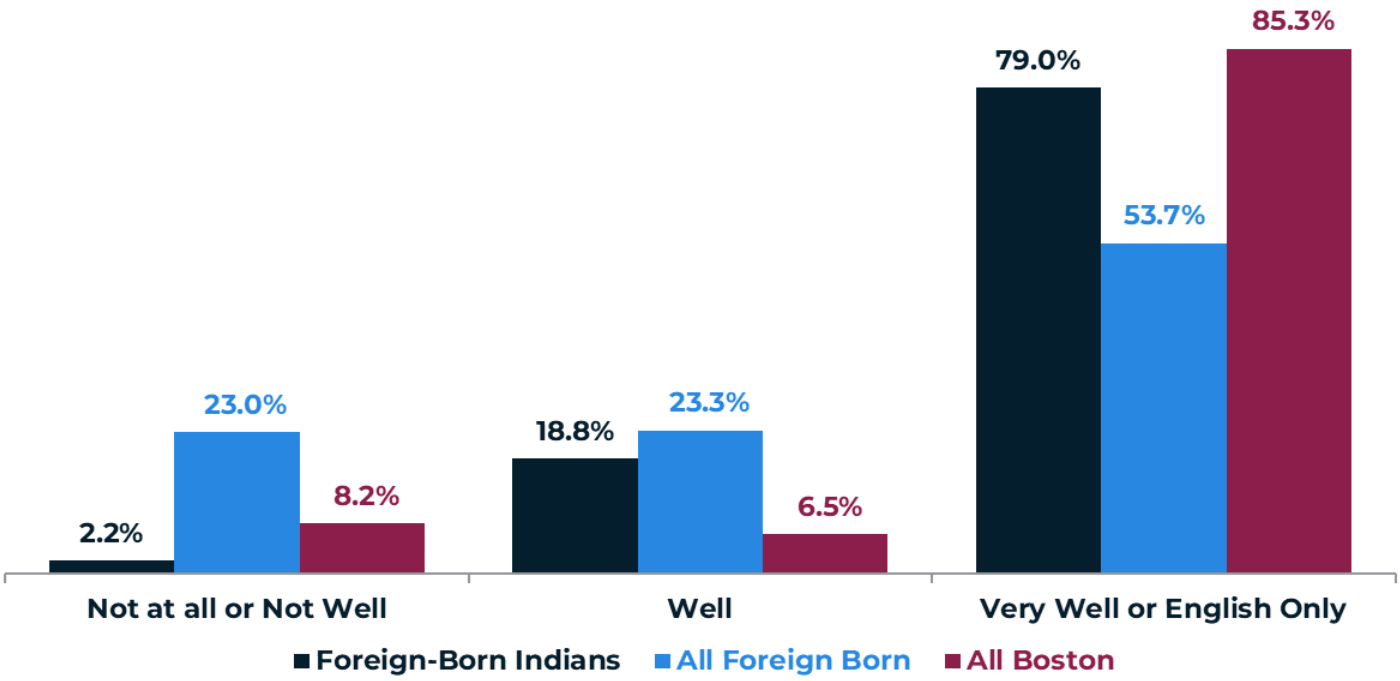
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

Foreign-born Indians in Boston are most likely to speak English only or very well (79 percent), higher than all foreign born (54 percent) and similar to the city as a whole. Only 2 percent of Boston's adult foreign-born Indian population has limited English proficiency compared to 23 percent for all foreign born. Of the foreign-born Indians, 13 percent speak only English at home, while 50 percent only speak Hindi at home, 10 percent only speak Gujarati at home, 7 percent only speak Tamil at home, 5 percent only speak Telugu at home, and 3 percent only speak Malayalam at home. [6]

ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH

Population shares of those aged 5 years and over



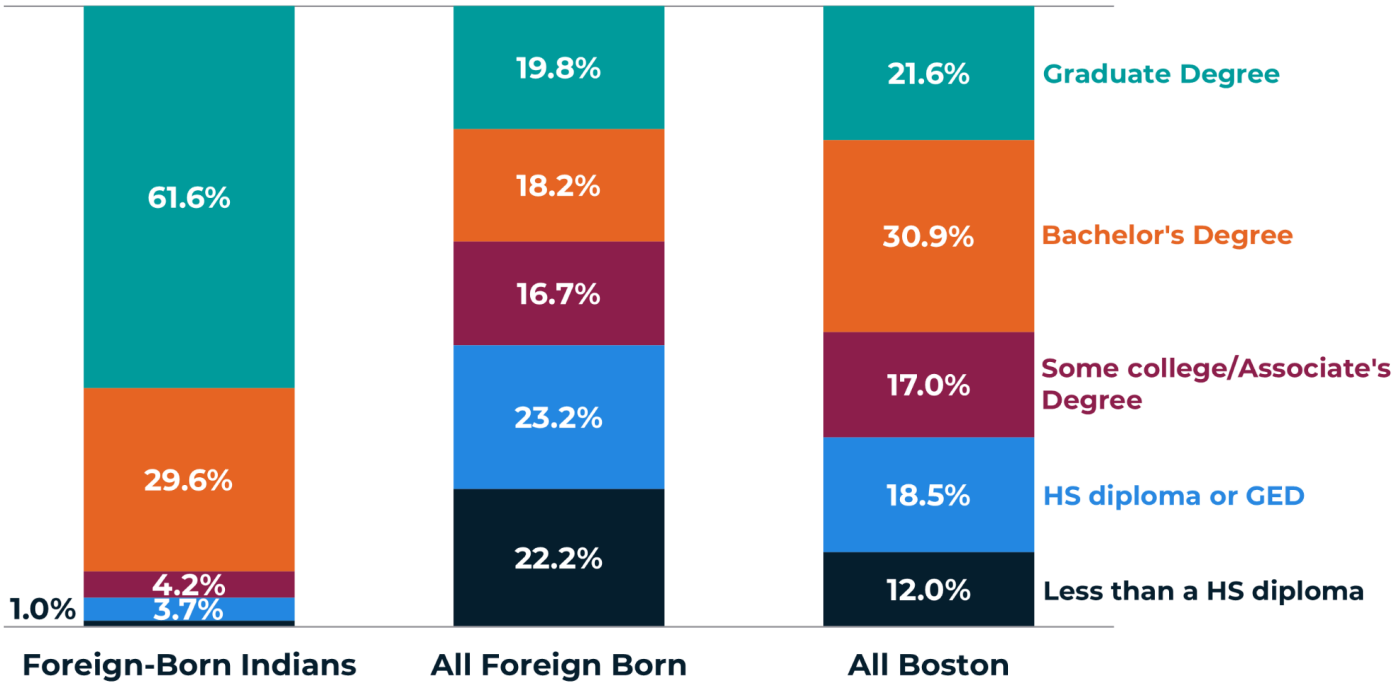
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

[6] 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 allowed for increased numbers of Indians with higher levels of educational attainment to come to the country. Locally, Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology networked with Indian research institutions and provided education and employment to Indian immigrants.[7] The Indian foreign-born population is highly educated: roughly 30 percent have a Bachelor's degree, 62 percent have a graduate degree, and less than 10 percent have not completed a Bachelor's degree.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Share of population aged 25 years and over



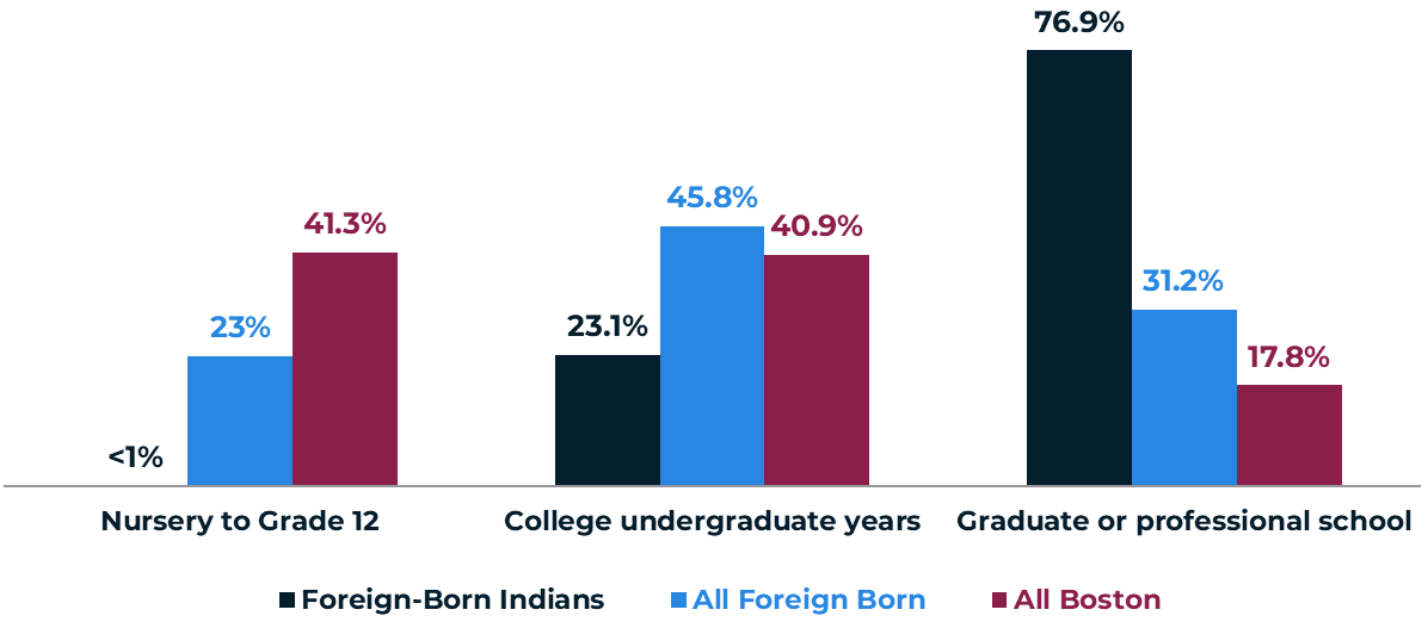
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

[7]https://globalboston.bc.edu/index.php/home/ethnic-groups/south-asians/#:~:text=Frompercent201965percent2D1980percent2Cpercent20Indianpercent20and,Bostonpercent2Dareapercent20hospitalspercent20andpercent20universities.

More than three quarters of foreign-born Indian residents who are enrolled in school are in graduate or professional school, a significantly higher share compared to all foreign born and Boston residents. This may be due to the fact that many foreign-born Indians immigrate for higher education.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

School enrolled population by level, aged 3 years and over

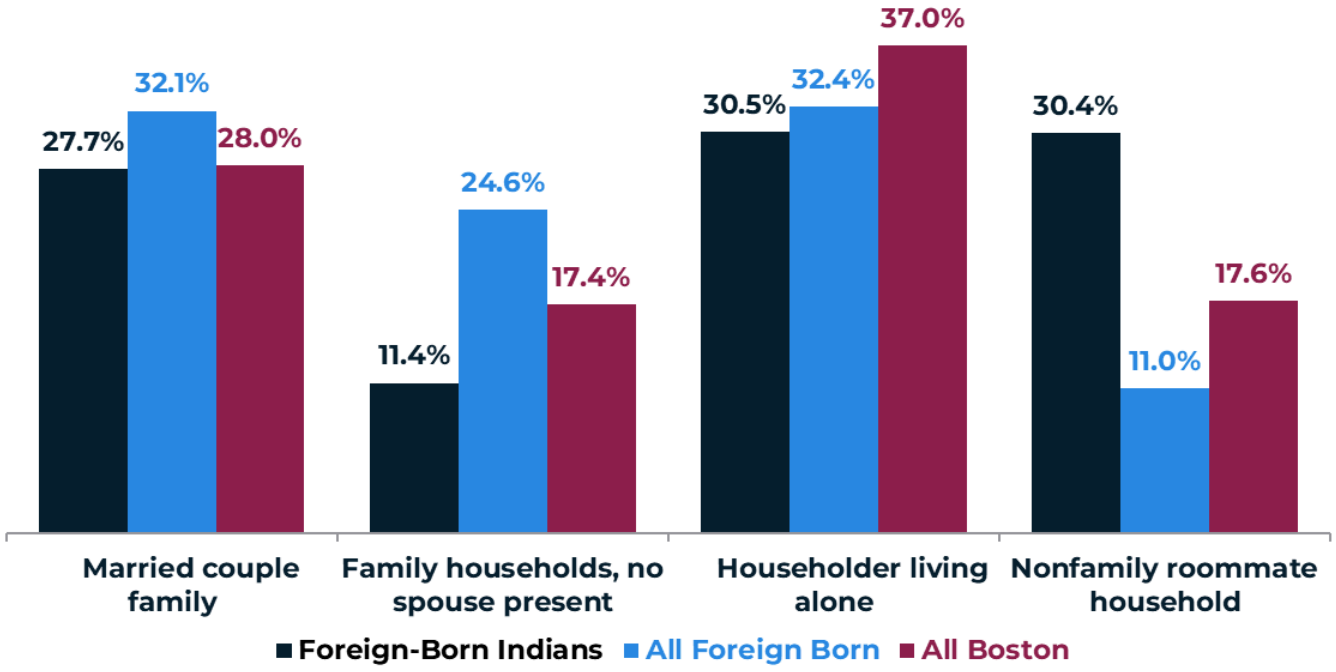


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Reflecting the high young adult population, foreign-born Indians have a higher share of the population in a non-family roommate household (30 percent) and householder living alone (31 percent).

TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD

Share of households



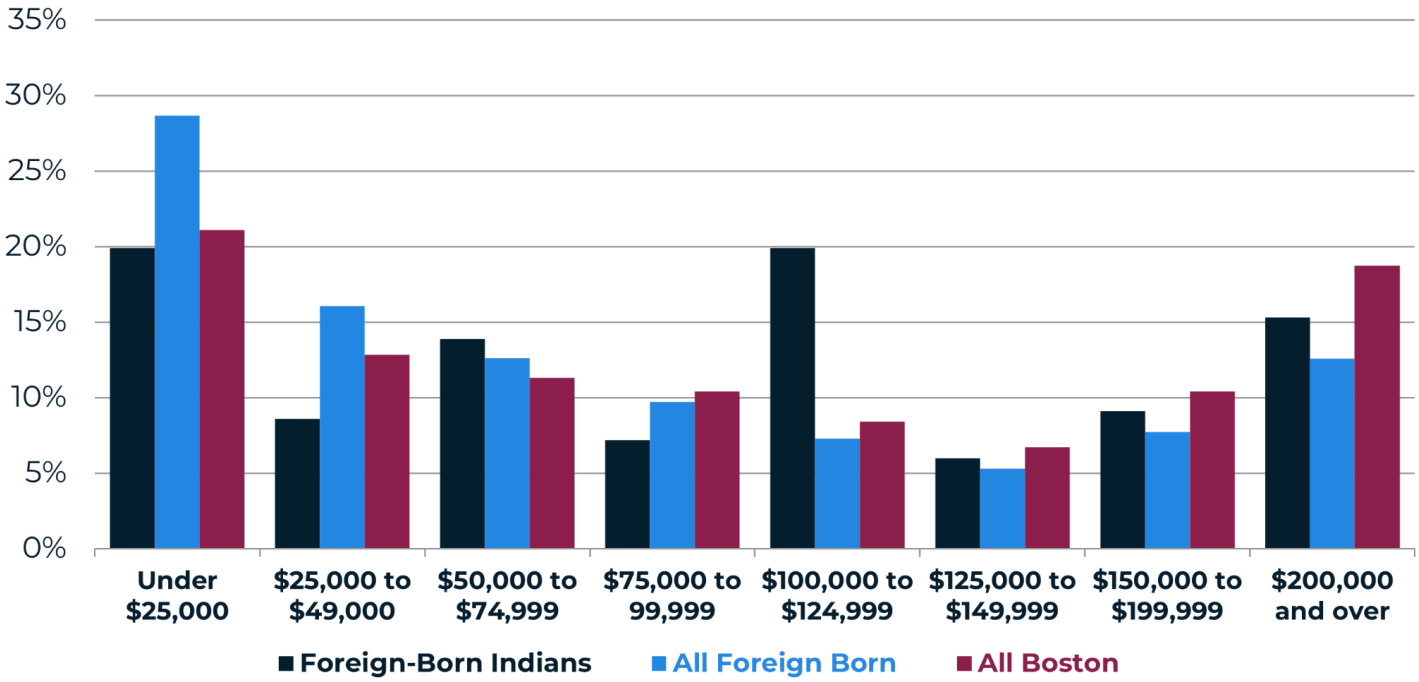
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Indian foreign-born households tend to have higher incomes, with half earning over $100,000 per year. However, 20 percent earn under $25,000. This distribution may be explained by the

individuals with higher income working in white collar jobs and the share of individuals with lower income being enrolled in school.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Share of households

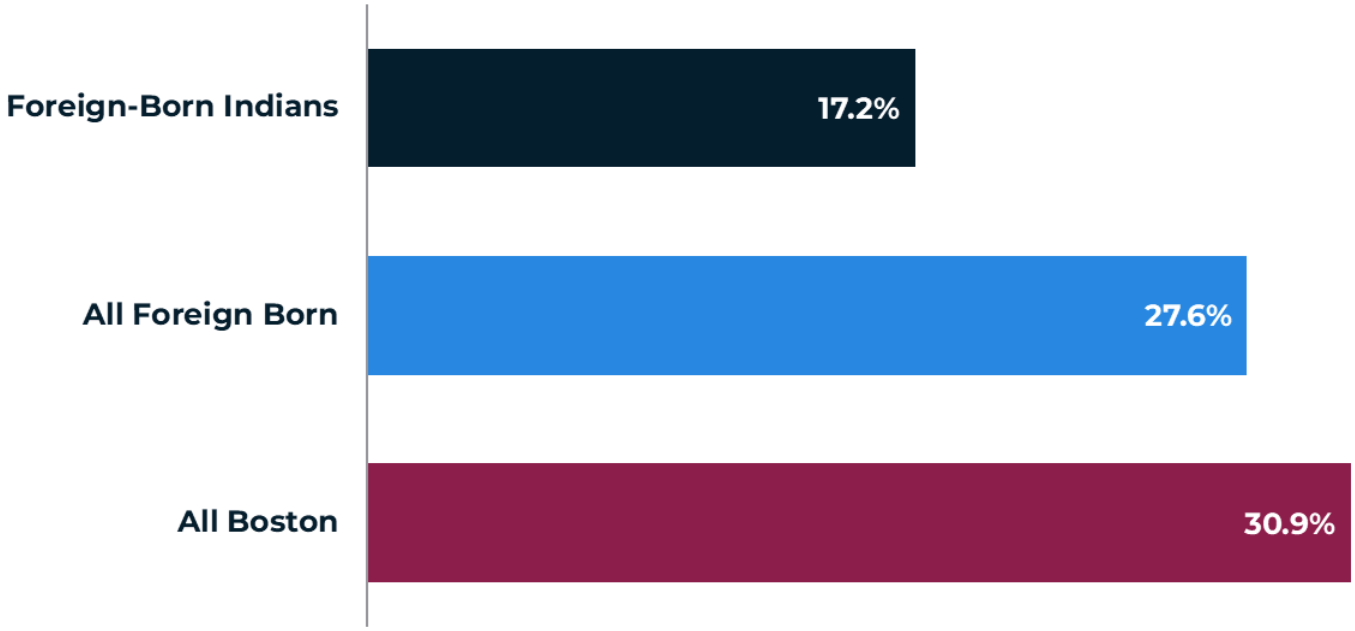


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

The foreign-born Indian population, with its higher shares of students and young adults, has a lower share of homeownership (17 percent) than for other foreign-born (28 percent) and all Boston households (31 percent).

OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSEHOLDS

Share of householders that own their residence

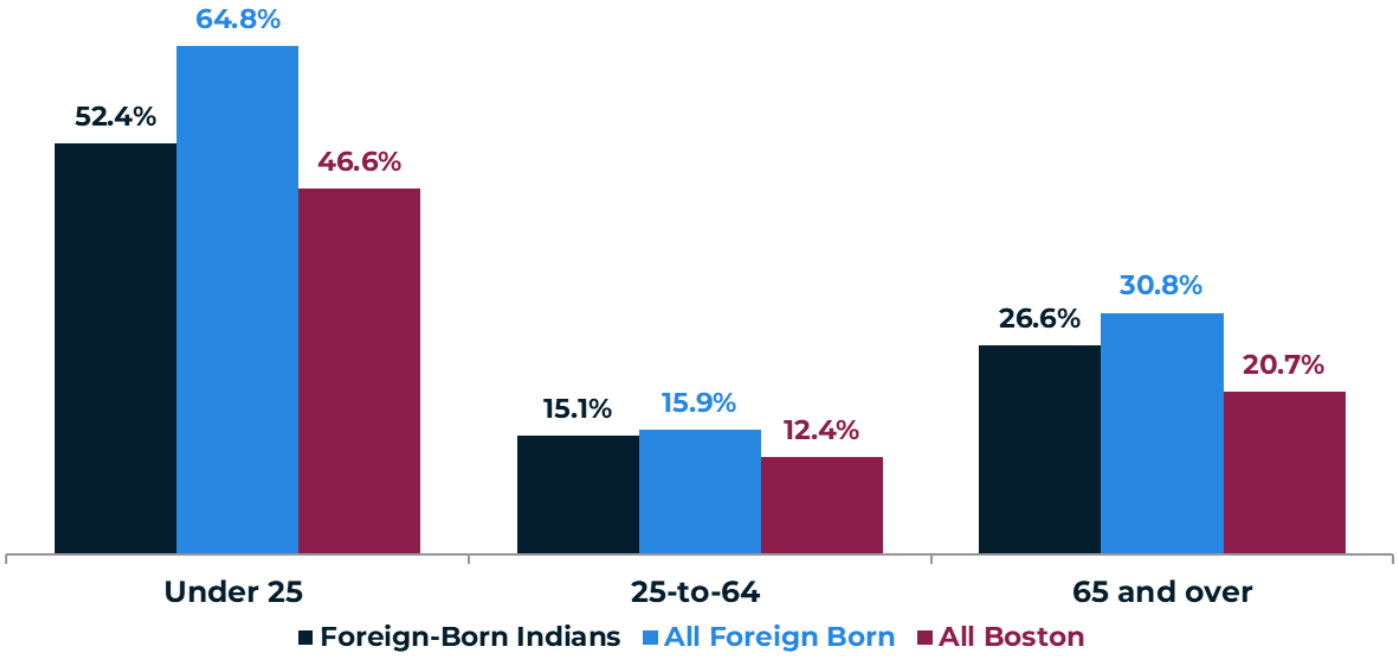


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Overall, the poverty rate among foreign-born Indians is 26 percent, compared to 22 percent for all foreign born and 17 percent for all Boston residents. Poverty rates are highest among young adults and seniors: 52 percent of those under 24 years and 27 percent of those aged 65 and older live below the poverty line. The fact that 87 percent of 18-to-24 year olds are enrolled in school, may explain this high poverty rate.

POVERTY RATES

Share of age group that is living below the poverty line



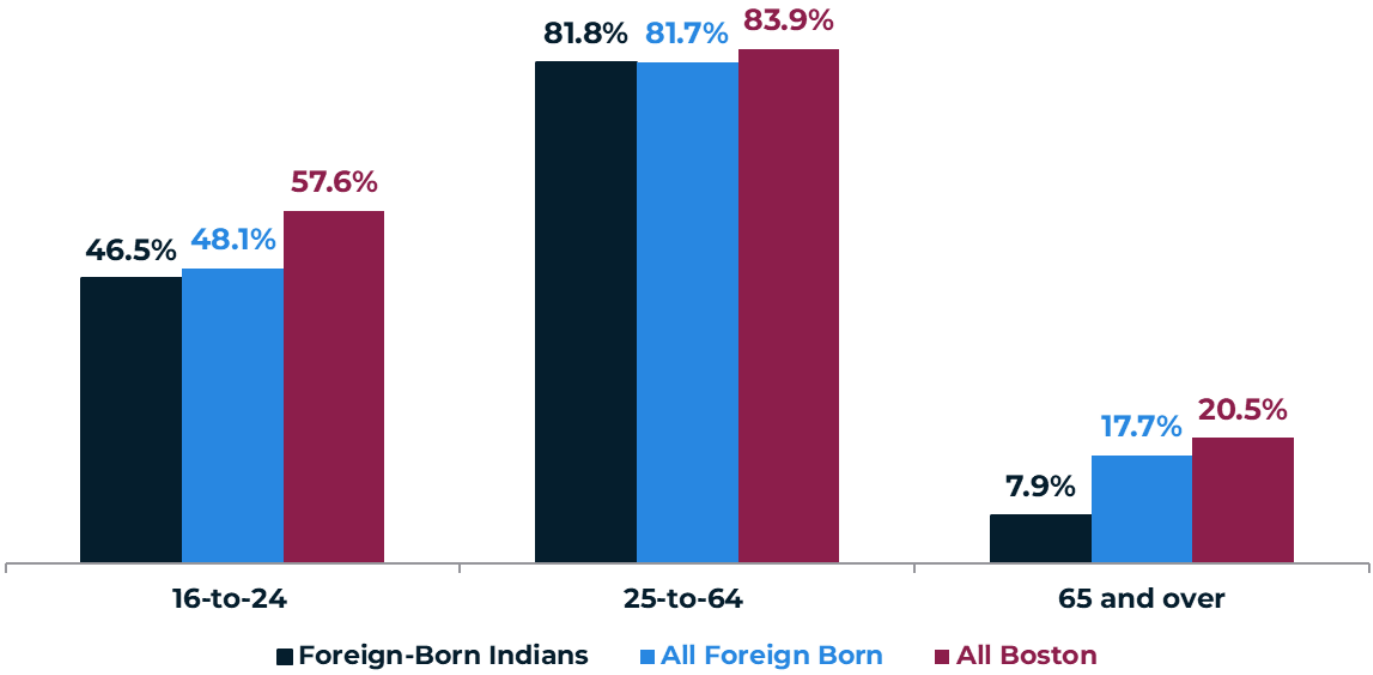
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

EMPLOYMENT

Approximately 82 percent of the 25-to-64 year old foreign-born Indian population participate in the labor force, a similar share to other populations. On the other hand, only 8 percent of foreign-born Indian population aged 65 and older participate in the labor force. Among young adults aged 16-to-24, only 47 percent of foreign-born Indians participate in the labor force, likely due to school enrollment and visa restrictions.

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES

Share of those participating in the labor force

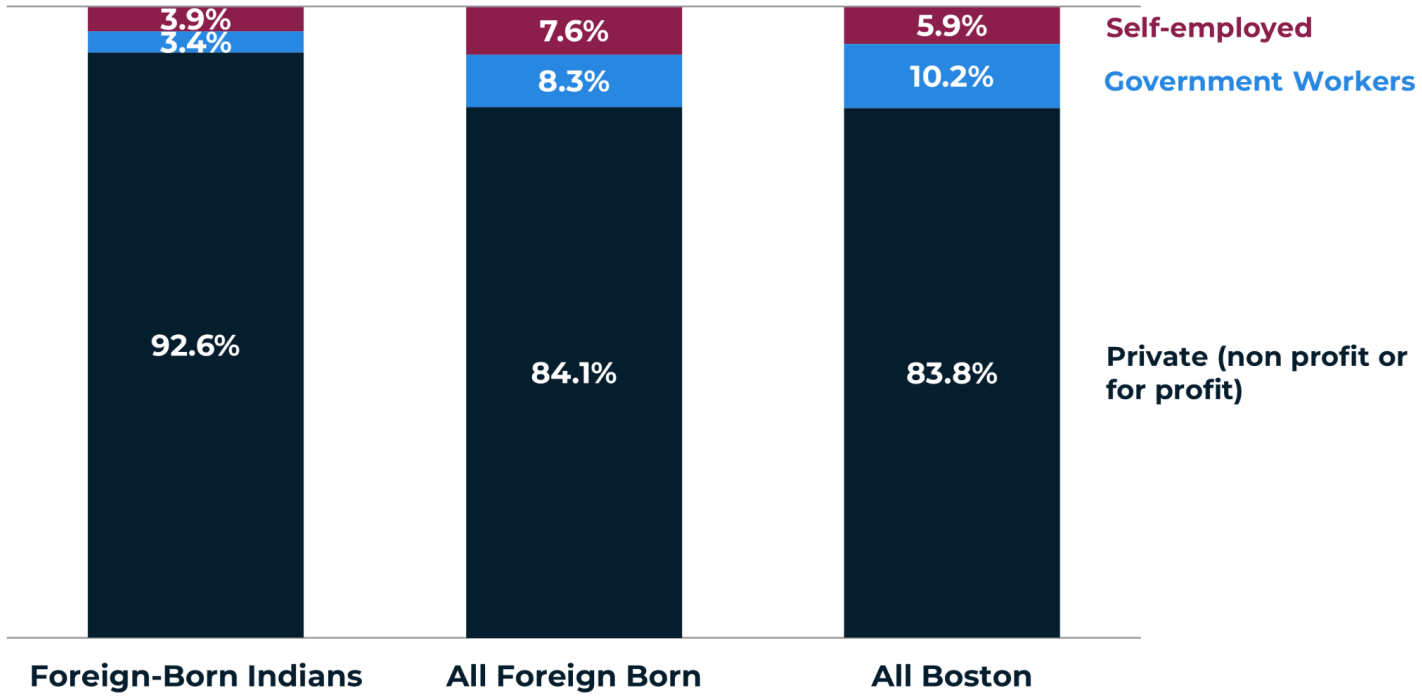


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

The foreign-born Indian population has a higher share of workers employed in the private sector (93 percent) and lower shares of the population working in the government sector or self-employed compared to the other populations.

CLASS OF WORKERS

Shares of those in the labor force, 16 years and over

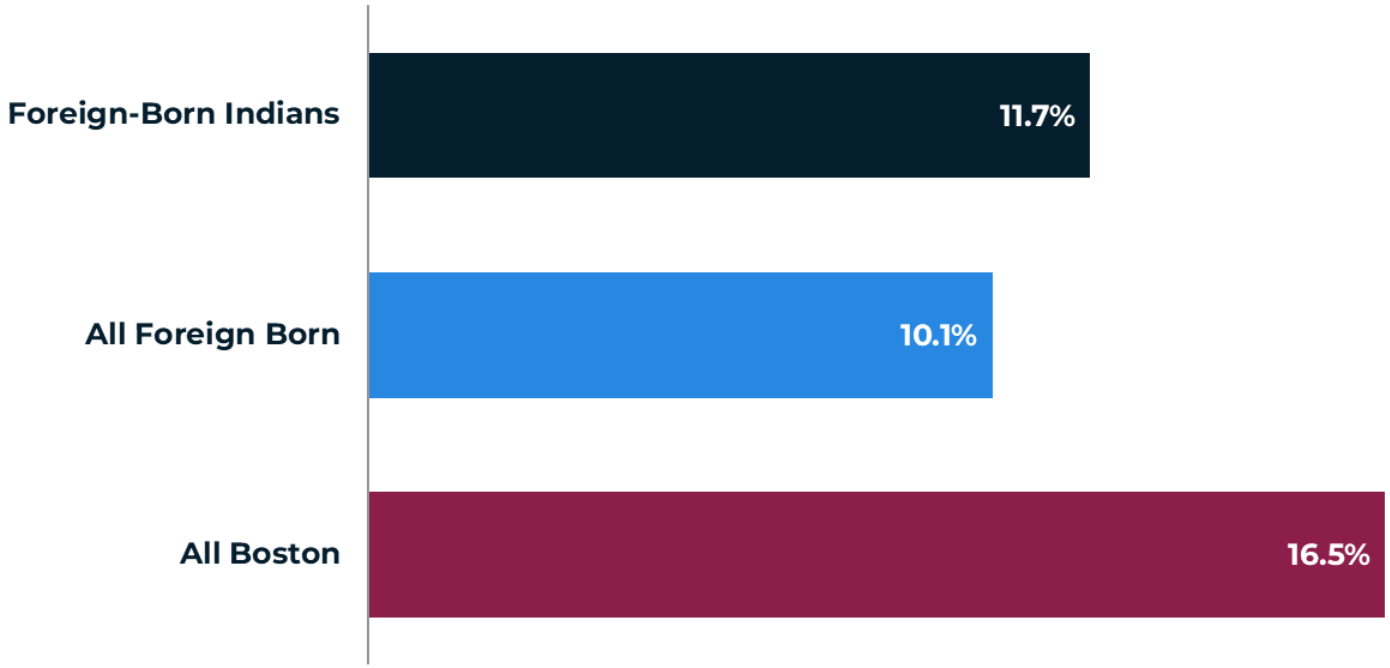


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Approximately 12 percent of the foreign-born Indian resident workers worked from home. This share is higher than all foreign-born workers but lower than all Boston resident workers. This may be related to their work in computer engineering and science that allows remote working but also as healthcare practitioner and technical which might require them to work on-site.

WORKED FROM HOME

Share of those in the labor force, 16 years and over

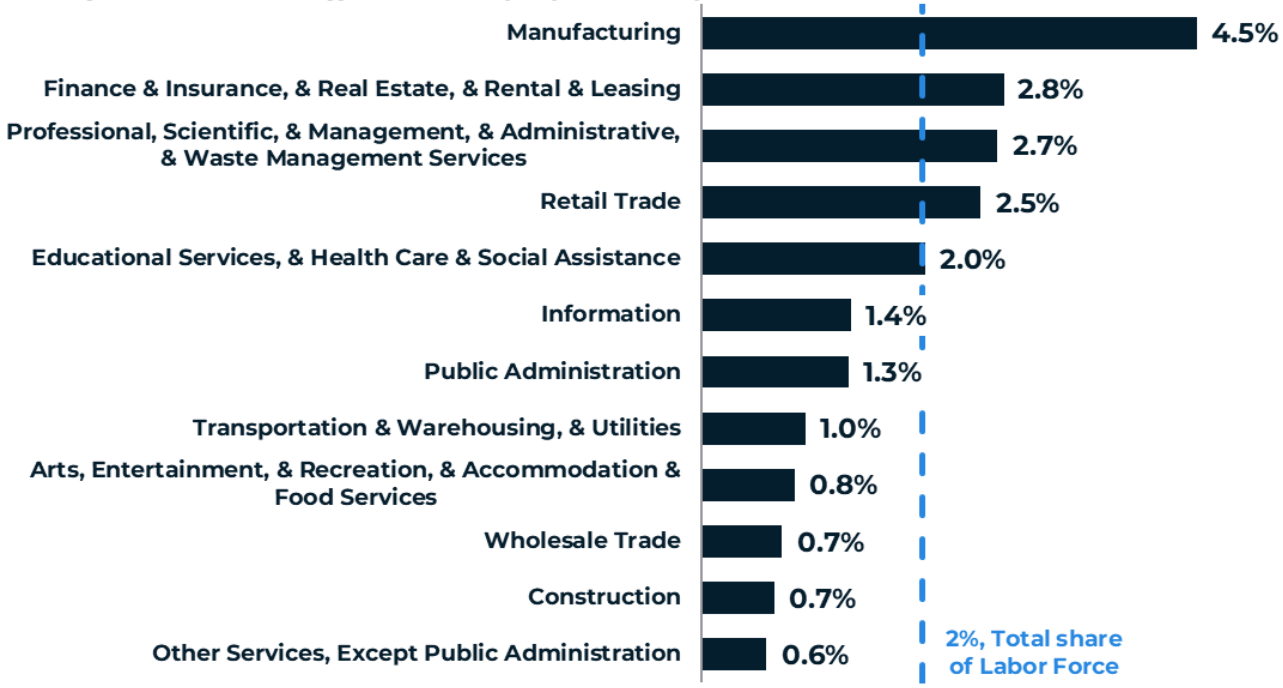


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

There 17,927 foreign-born Indians employed in Suffolk County, making up 2 percent of Suffolk County's workforce. Indian foreign-born workers in Suffolk County make up 4.5 percent of manufacturing, 2.8 percent of finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing industries, 2.7 percent of professional, scientific, and management, administrative, and waste management services, and 2.5 percent of retail trade industries. They are underrepresented in certain industries such as public administration (1.3 percent), wholesale trade (0.7 percent), and construction (0.7 percent).

EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

Share of workers in Suffolk County by industry, 2022

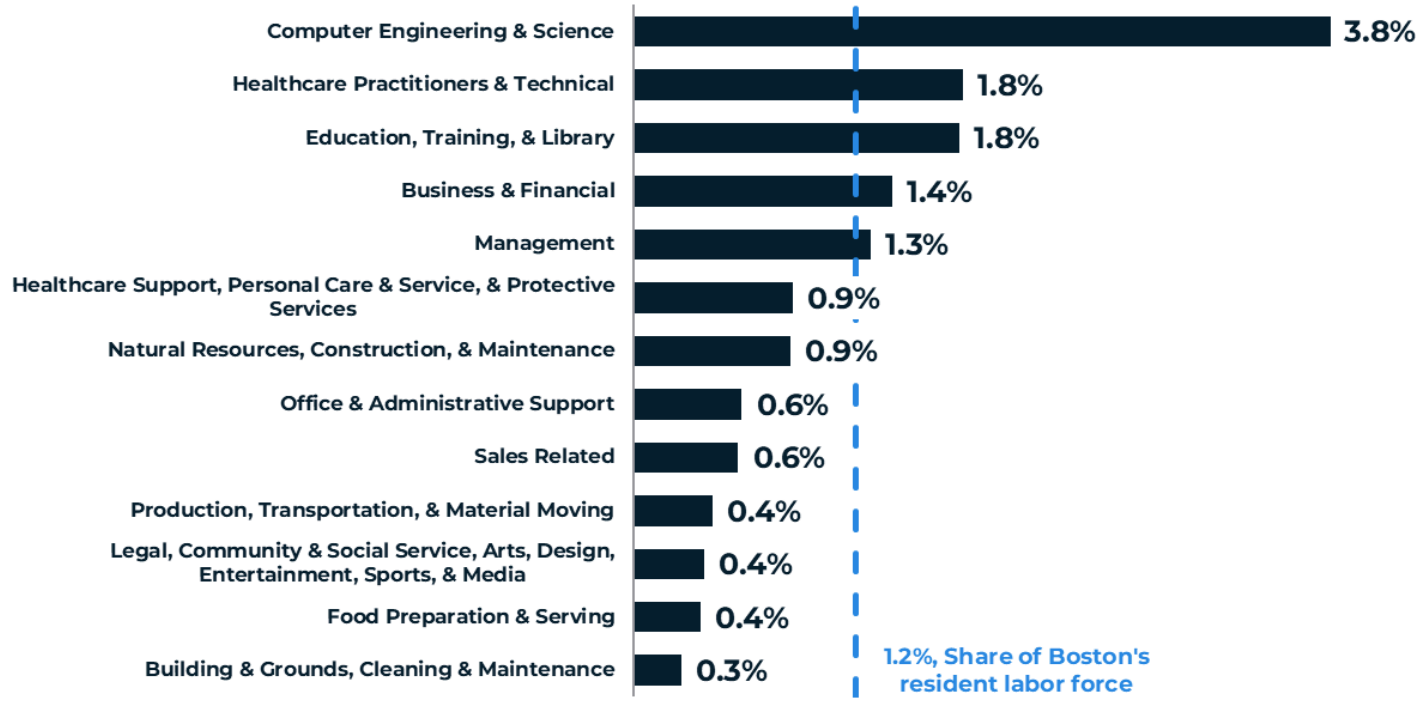


Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2018-2022 5-Year American Community Survey (IPUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Indian foreign-born workers make up 1.2 percent of Boston's resident labor force, but they are overrepresented in certain occupations. Indian foreign-born workers make up 3.8 percent of computer engineering and science, 1.8 percent of healthcare practitioners and technical, 1.8 percent of education, training and library, and 1.4 percent of business and financial occupations. They are underrepresented in other occupations such as food preparation and serving and building and grounds, cleaning and maintenance occupations.

FOREIGN-BORN INDIAN OCCUPATIONS

Share of Boston's resident labor force, by occupation



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STANDARD OF LIVING

Approximately 43 percent of foreign-born Indians have achieved a middle-class standard of living, compared with 44 percent of Boston's overall population, and 34 percent of all foreign born. A family income four times the poverty line is used as a proxy for a middle-class standard of living. The actual income needed to achieve this standard depends on the size and composition of the family. For a two-person family in 2022, a middle-class income would be at least $75,600.

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Indian foreign-born workers contribute to Boston's economy. Their labor generates an additional 7,557 indirect and induced jobs in Suffolk County. They contribute 3.2 billion dollars to Boston's GCP. Indian foreign-born workers employed in Suffolk County pay $175 million in federal income tax and $64 million in state income tax.[8]

CONCLUSION

Boston has the largest foreign-born Indian population in Massachusetts with 7,291 residents. Foreign-born Indians actively contribute to the economic, cultural, and civic life of the city. Comparatively, a greater share of the population are men and are young compared to all foreign born and the city as a whole. They stand out for their greater levels of educational attainment and work in white collar occupations. Making up 1.2 percent of the labor force, without the foreign-born Indians, Boston will lose 3.8 percent of computer engineering and science occupations. Because foreign-born Indians rely on H-1B visas at higher rates than other populations, changes in their residency are directly related to U.S. immigration policy.

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[8]Research Division estimates using Regional Economic Model, Inc., (REMI), PI+ Massachusetts Regions, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis