

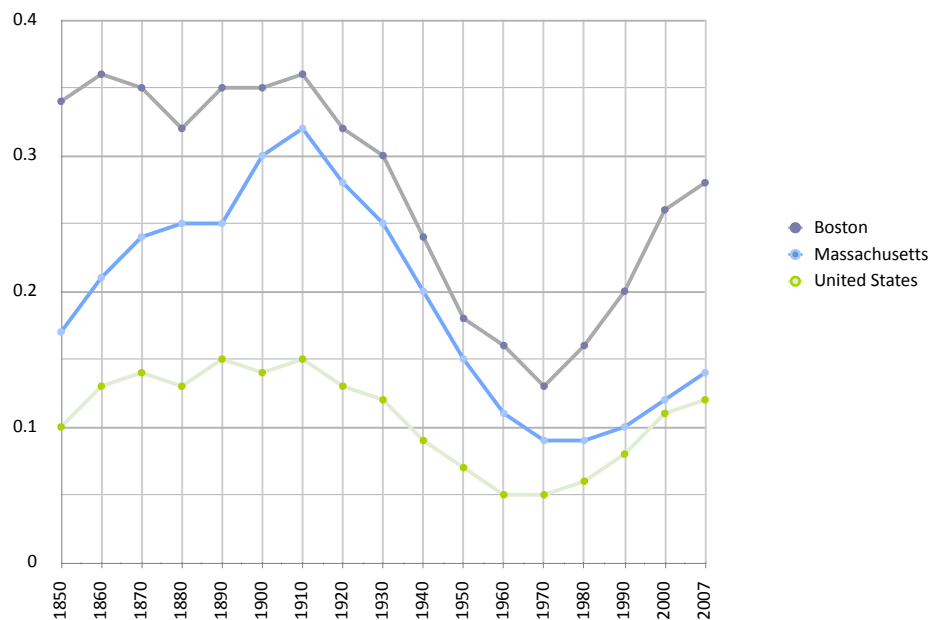
## Briefing Book: Demographic Profile of the Foreign-Born in Boston

### Brief History of Immigration Patterns- Boston, the State, and the Nation

The immigrant population has always played a significant role in American history. The experience of foreign-born residents in the United States is closely linked with major urban areas. Throughout U.S. history, immigrants tend to settle in urban areas in search of economic opportunities. Historically Boston has served as an example of such a city, acting as a gateway for newcomers to the United States.

Figure 1:

Share of Foreign-Born in Boston, MA & U.S. (1950-2007)



Source: American Community Survey, 2005-2007; BRA Research Analysis.

Over the years, the proportion of Boston's population that is foreign-born has been larger than that of the state of Massachusetts and the nation as a whole. In general, the city of Boston, the state of Massachusetts, and the nation have experienced similar patterns in terms of changes in the share of the foreign-born population. Specifically, the proportion of the foreign-born population peaked in the city, state, and nation around 1910. After that, changes in U.S. immigration policy played a significant role in limiting the number of immigrants admitted into the country.

Beginning in the 1920s, the United States instituted a series of legislative policies aimed at restricting immigration. This was done mainly due to concerns regarding competition for jobs between native-born and foreign-born labor. Most notably, the U.S. established a quota system for limiting the number of immigrants admitted into the country. The quota system permitted newcomers into the country based on the proportion of people of that nationality in the United States at that time. In addition, legislation during that time period banned immigration from China and Japan. In short, the number of immigrants allowed into the country was substantially reduced. Immigrants who were allowed into the country were of the same background as those people already in the United States<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Kleniewski, 2006, *Cities, Change, and Conflict: A Political Economy of Urban Life*.

In 1965, the United States made significant changes to their immigration policy. First, the nation increased the number of immigrants allowed into the country each year. In addition, the quota system was abandoned. Preference was given to immigrants with family members in the United States, people who had work skills that were in demand, and political refugees. The two main results of the change in policy was the dramatic increase in the proportion of foreign-born residents in the United States and the increased diversity in the places of origin for newcomers, particularly Asia and Latin America<sup>2</sup>.

As mentioned previously, and as **Figure 2** indicates, Boston serves as a gateway city for immigrants. The proportion of foreign-born residents in Boston has historically surpassed the state of Massachusetts, as well as the national averages. This is not surprising for a major urban area. That said, Boston stands out among the largest cities in the United States in terms of the proportion of its population that is foreign-born. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Boston is currently the 21<sup>st</sup> largest city in the United States with over 620,000 residents. However, among the 25 largest cities in the country, Boston has the sixth largest proportion of foreign-born residents.

**Figure 2:**

**25 Largest Cities in the United States, 2008**

Rank	City	Population
1	New York, NY	8,363,710
2	Los Angeles, CA	3,833,995
3	Chicago, IL	2,853,114
4	Houston, TX	2,242,193
5	Phoenix, AZ	1,567,924
6	Philadelphia, PA	1,447,395
7	San Antonio, TX	1,351,305
8	Dallas, TX	1,279,910
9	San Diego, CA	1,279,329
10	San Jose, CA	948,279
11	Detroit, MI	912,062
12	San Francisco, CA	808,976
13	Jacksonville, FL	807,815
14	Indianapolis, IN	798,382
15	Austin, TX	757,688
16	Columbus, OH	754,885
17	Fort Worth, TX	703,073
18	Charlotte, NC	687,456
19	Memphis, TN	669,651
20	Baltimore, MD	636,919
21	<b>Boston, MA</b>	<b>620,535</b>
22	El Paso, TX	613,190
23	Milwaukee, WI	604,477
24	Denver, CO	598,707
25	Seattle, WA	598,541

**25 Largest Cities in the United States, 2008: Percent Foreign-Born Population**

Rank	City	% Foreign-Born
1	Los Angeles, CA	39.71%
2	San Jose, CA	39.02%
3	New York, NY	36.70%
4	San Francisco, CA	35.58%
5	Houston, TX	28.02%
6	<b>Boston, MA</b>	<b>27.53%</b>
7	El Paso, TX	26.35%
8	Dallas, TX	26.19%
9	San Diego, CA	25.55%
10	Phoenix, AZ	23.96%
11	Chicago, IL	21.57%
12	Austin, TX	19.74%
13	Fort Worth, TX	18.52%
14	Denver, CO	18.01%
15	Seattle, WA	17.73%
16	Charlotte, NC	13.69%
17	San Antonio, TX	13.05%
18	Philadelphia, PA	10.81%
19	Milwaukee, WI	9.54%
20	Columbus, OH	9.44%
21	Jacksonville, FL	8.31%
22	Indianapolis, IN	6.77%
23	Baltimore, MD	5.99%
24	Memphis, TN	5.39%
25	Detroit, MI	4.79%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Kleniewski, 2006, *Cities, Change, and Conflict: A Political Economy of Urban Life*.

<sup>3</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau increased its 2008 estimate of Boston's population to 620,535 as a result of evidence provided by the Boston Redevelopment Authority's Research Division.

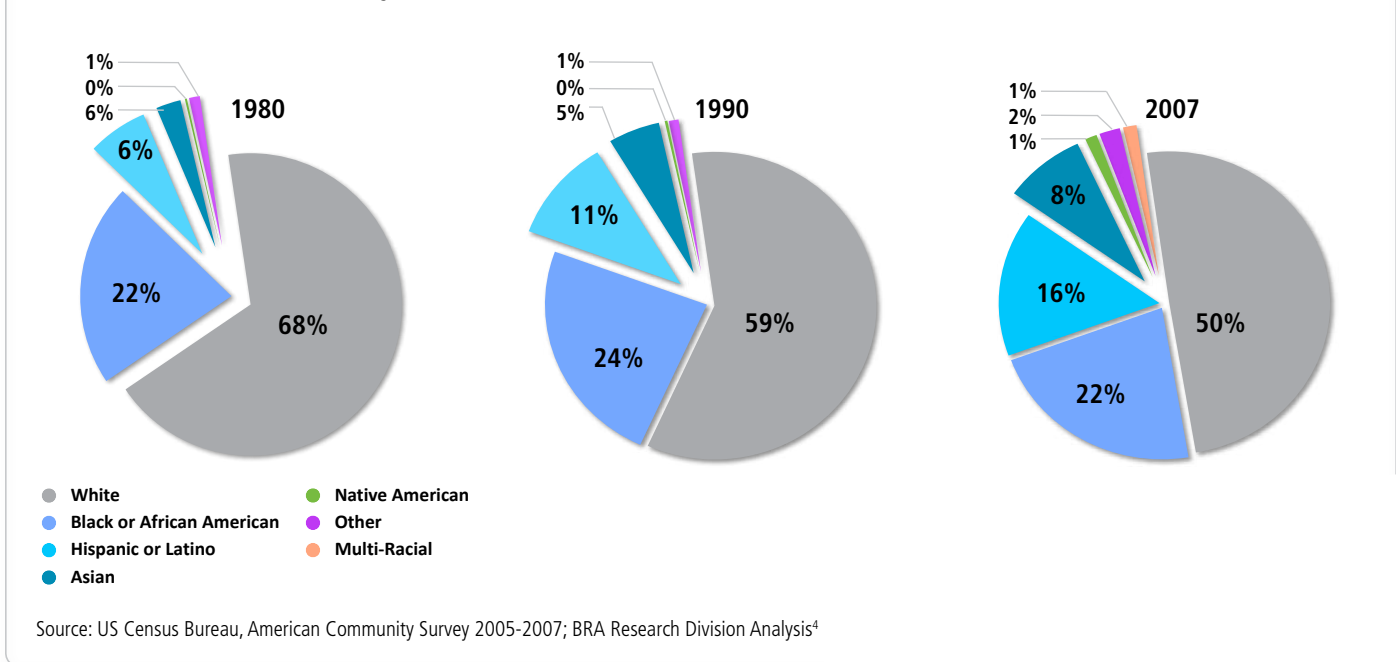
Of note too are the major cities with a larger proportion of foreign-born residents than Boston: Los Angeles, San Jose, New York, San Francisco, and Houston. Other than New York City; which is well-known for its diverse population, the major cities with a larger proportion of foreign-born residents than Boston are located in “border” states. In fact, of the ten cities with the largest proportion of foreign-born residents, only Boston and New York are not located in California, Texas, or Arizona. This underscores Boston’s role as a gateway city amongst the largest urban areas in the United States.

### The Changing Face of Boston

Overall, the general demographic makeup of Boston has changed a great deal over the last three decades. In 1980, close to 70% of Boston identified themselves as white. By 1990, that number dropped to 59%, with a significant increase in the proportion of Latinos and Asians as compared to 1980. By 2007, Boston’s white population dropped to just half of the city’s total population.

Figure 3:

Race and Ethnicity in Boston (1980-2007)



In short, between 1980 and 2007, the proportion of Boston’s white population decreased almost 20 percentage points. During this time, the Black/African American share of the population stayed fairly consistent. The bulk of the change in the racial and ethnic composition of Boston happened in the Latino and Asian communities. Between 1980 and 2007, the proportion of Boston’s population that identified themselves as Latino more than doubled. The Asian population saw a similar type of increase, jumping from 3% of Boston’s population in 1980 to 8% in 2007.

We can also see the recent changes in the racial composition of Boston by examining the shifts in the regions of origin of Boston’s foreign-born population over the years.

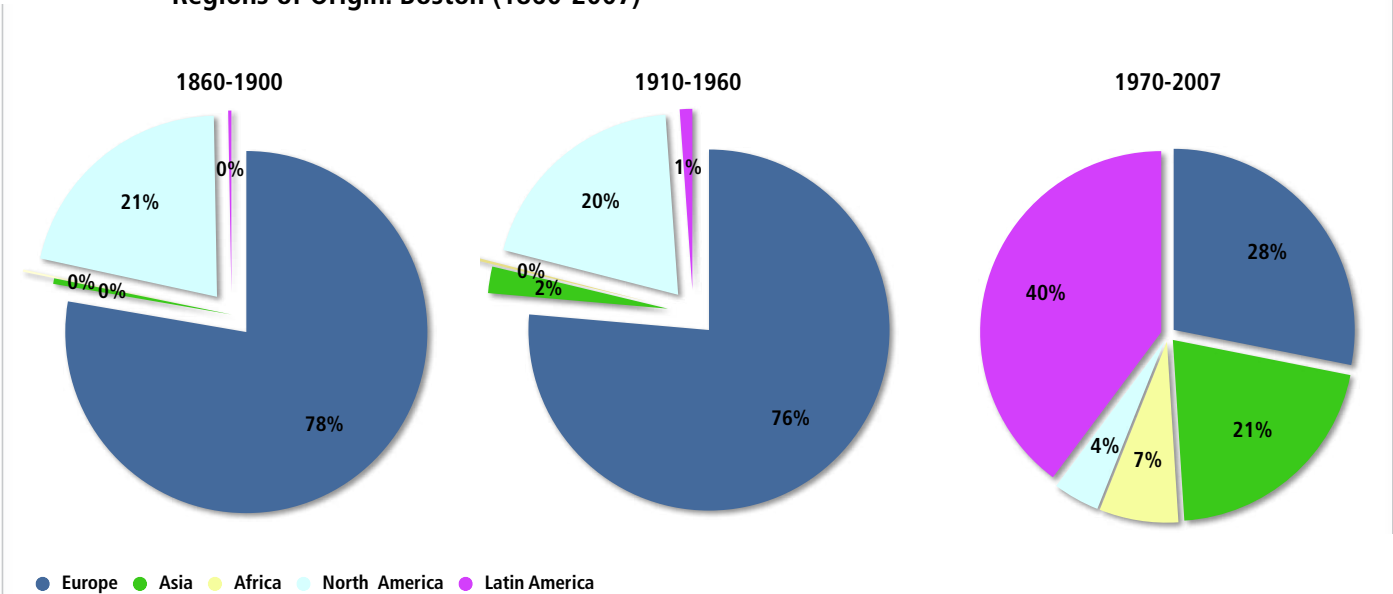
<sup>4</sup> 2000 was the first year that the Census included the category ‘Multi-Racial.’

First, we see that between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of the foreign-born population came from Europe. We see a dramatic shift, though, between 1970 and 2007 when the proportion of the European foreign-born residents decreased significantly. During that period, Latin Americans made up the largest proportion of Boston's foreign-born. In addition, Boston experienced a large increase in the proportion of immigrants originating from Asia. Boston also saw a large increase in the proportion of foreign-born residents from Africa during the same time period. These trends are consistent with U.S. policy changes. As stated previous, the Immigration Reform Act removed quotas and increased the number of immigrants permitted to enter the country in a given year. As a result, it is not surprising to see a large change in the foreign-born composition starting with the 1970 Census.

Looking closer at 1970-2006, we see that the changing foreign-born composition is a much more recent phenomenon than it appears at first glance.

Figure 4:

Regions of Origin: Boston (1860-2007)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2005-2007; BRA Research Analysis<sup>5</sup>

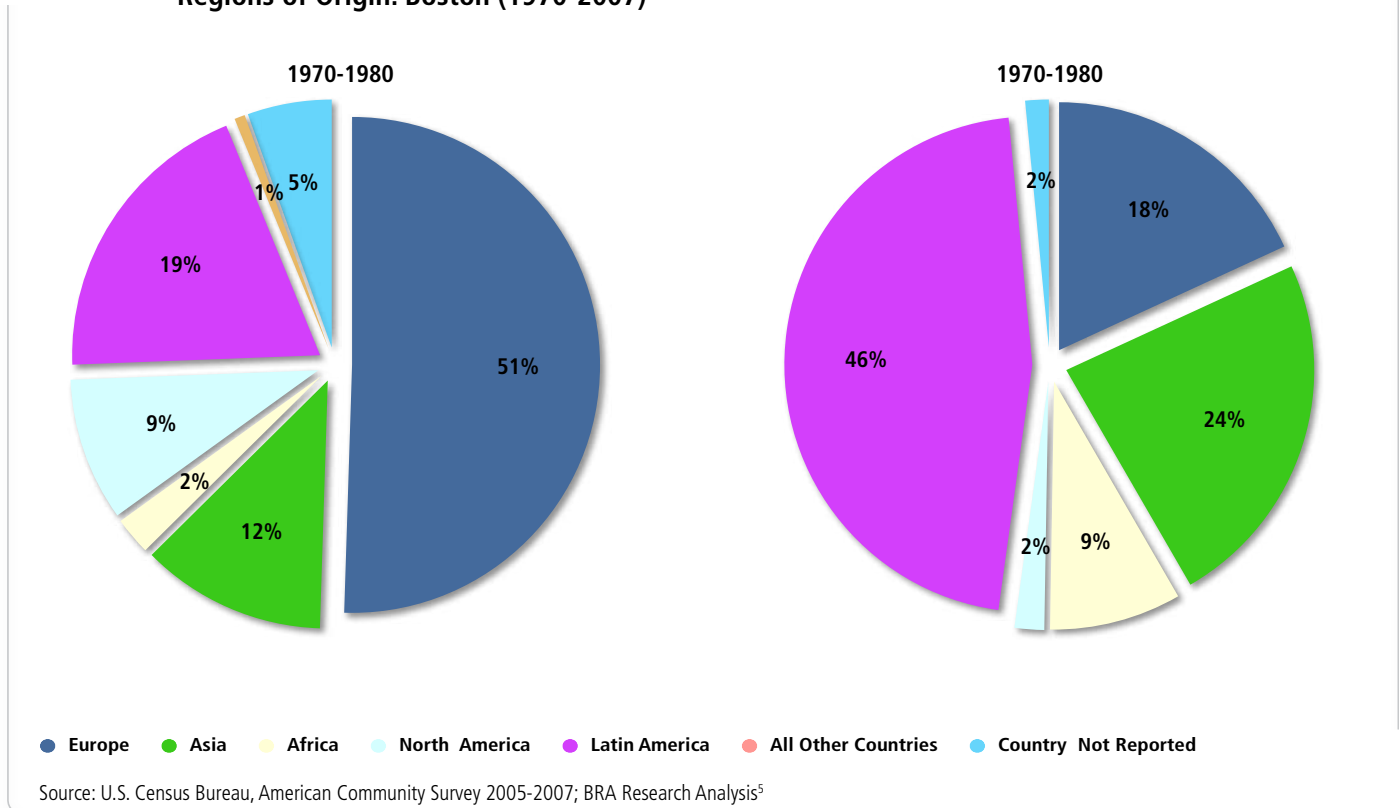
<sup>5</sup> 1860 is the earliest the Census recorded region of origin for the city of Boston.

We see that the composition of the foreign-born is quite different in 1970-1980 than in 1990-2007. In particular, the proportion of foreign-born residents originating from Europe drops dramatically between 1970-1980 and 1990-2007. In 1970-1980, Europeans made up over 50% of the foreign-born in Boston. Latin Americans and Asians made up 69% of the foreign-born in Boston in 1990-2007.

In examining this data we see the role immigration has played in Boston’s changing demographic makeup. In addition, we see that this trend particularly stands out in 1990-2007. The vast majority of foreign-born residents during that time period are from regions of the world where English is unlikely to be a primary language and where people are unlikely to be classified as “white”.

Figure 5:

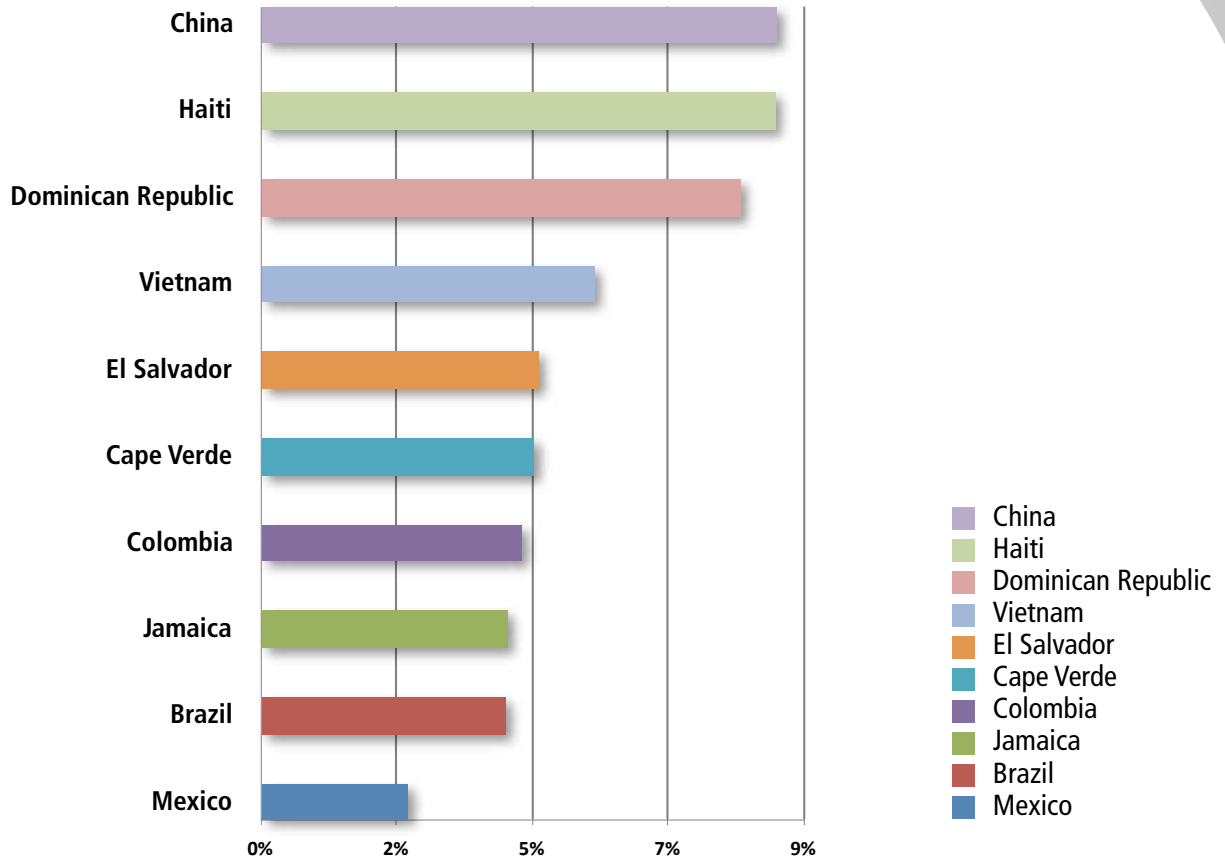
Regions of Origin: Boston (1970-2007)



<sup>6</sup> The ACS is a yearly survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau intended to allow communities to see how they are changing in the years between decennial censuses. All 2007 data in this report are from the 2005-2007 ACS. The ACS is based on a sample of the population. While the data in this document are reported as specific numbers and percentages, all results from the ACS are subject to sampling error. For more information on the ACS, please see: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/index.html>

Focusing on the 2005-2007 American Community Survey (ACS) data<sup>6</sup>, we see firsthand how the demographic makeup of the immigrant population has changed in Boston. Of the ten largest immigrant groups in the city today, none are from European countries.

**Figure 6:** Top Countries of Origin for Boston's Foreign-Born Population, 2007



Source: American Community Survey, 2005-2007; BRA Research Analysis.

### Key Characteristics of Boston's Population-Native-Born and Foreign-Born

An important part of understanding the demographic changes in Boston is knowing the ways in which the native-born and foreign-born populations are similar and different from one another. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the gender composition of the native-born and foreign-born is similar, with females making up approximately 52% of the population of native-born and about 50% of the population in the foreign-born. In terms of family structure, marriage appears to be more common among foreign-born residents. Approximately 41% of foreign-born residents are married, compared to only 24% of the native-born<sup>7</sup>. This may indicate that the foreign-born population in Boston comes here as families or to establish families.

The age breakdown of the foreign-born and native-born populations in Boston offer some interesting contrasts between the groups. One key difference in the age composition is the fact that 35-54 year olds make up a larger proportion of the foreign-born population than the native-born population. The most noticeable and striking difference, however, between these two groups is the large difference in the proportion that is under 18. As the figure below shows, 24% of the native-born population in Boston is between 0-17. Among the foreign-born, the 0-17 age group makes up only 6% of the population.

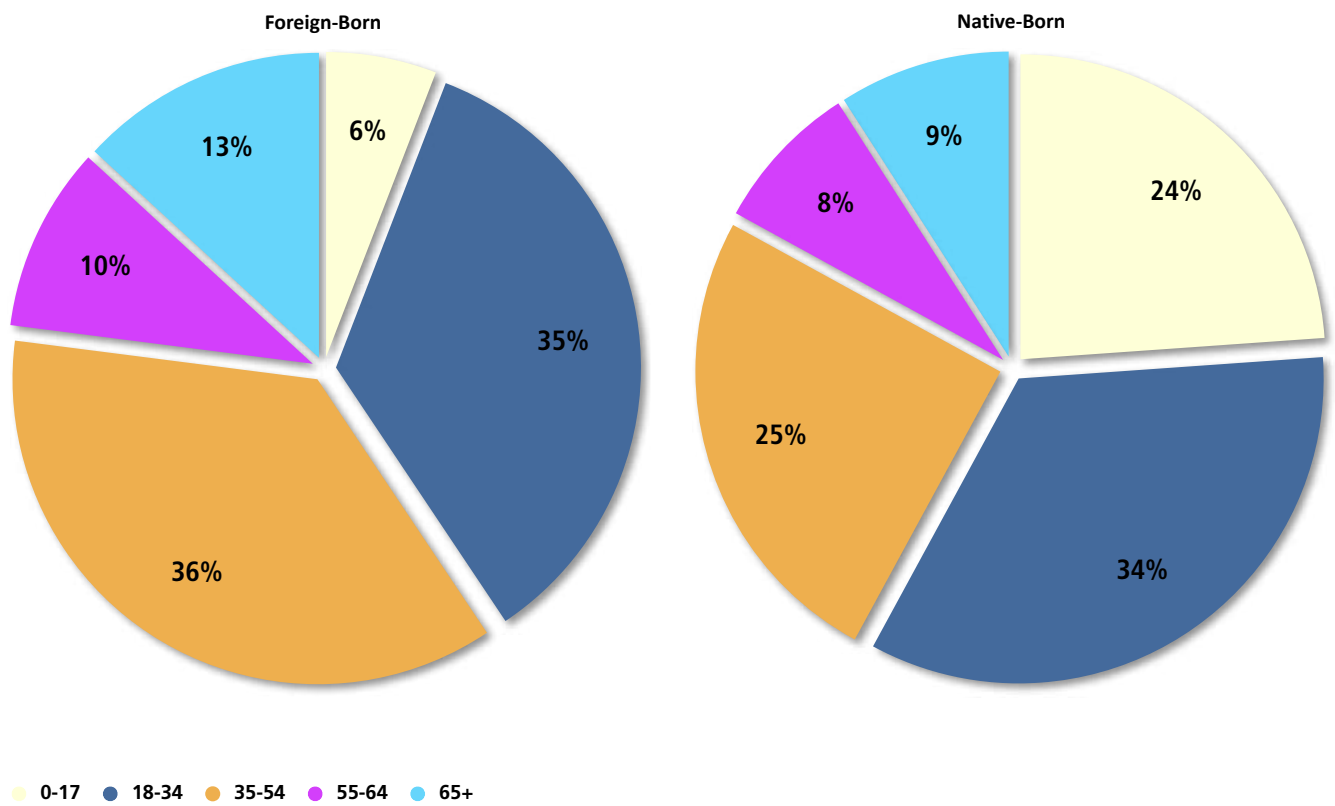
<sup>7</sup> Analysis limited to residents 15 years of age or older.

At first glance, the large difference in the proportion of children between the native-born and the foreign-born populations is extremely surprising. Given the higher marriage rate in the foreign-born population, as well as the amount of attention foreign language issues in the public schools have received in the press, one might expect that the proportion of foreign-born children would be larger than that of the native-born. At the very least, one would not expect the proportion of native-born children to be four times larger than the foreign-born.

Keep in mind, however, that a child born in the United States of foreign-born parents is a native-born resident. As a result, it is important to not only consider the nativity status of people under the age of 18, but also the nativity status of parents in order to fully grasp the impact that immigration has on the youth population.

Figure 7:

Age Composition

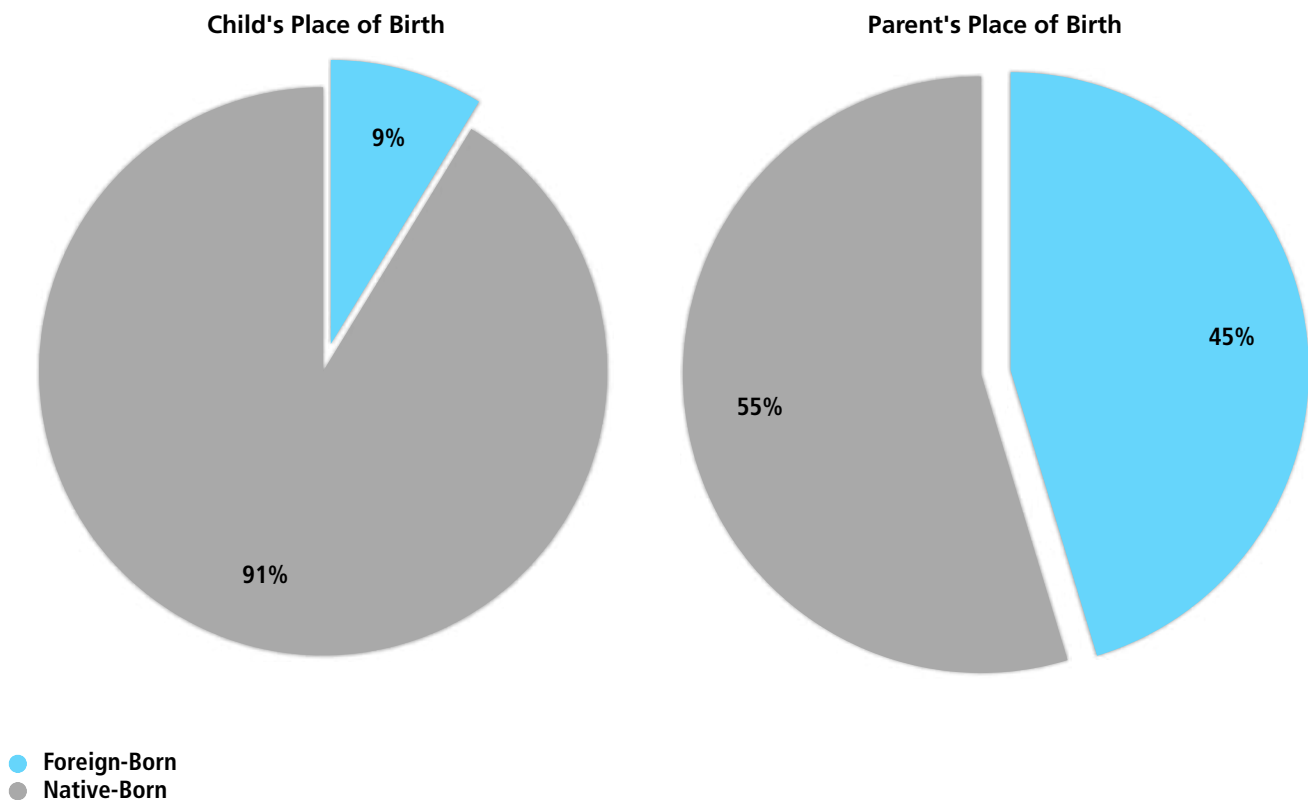


Source: American Community Survey, 2005-2007; BRA Research Analysis.

Interestingly, the distribution of nativity status of the heads of household is dramatically different than that of the children. While 91% of children living in the city of Boston are native-born, only 55% have parents who are native-born. Conversely, while only 9% of children in Boston are foreign-born, 45% of children have at least one parent who is foreign-born. Couple this information with the data on marriage rates in the foreign-born population; we can see that immigration in Boston is very much a family issue. Note that approximately 28% of Boston population is foreign-born. The above statistics demonstrate in more detail the role immigration plays with Boston's youth population. Superficially, the foreign-born youth population is somewhat small. However, there are a large number of children in Boston whose parents are foreign-born. These children could potentially face a unique set of challenges in school, but are not initially recognized in the foreign-born data. In part, these data indicate that households headed by people not born in United States are larger than those headed by native-born residents. In addition, the data suggests that the immigrant population in Boston is largely made up of families.

Figure 8:

Children Under 17 in Boston



Source: American Community Survey, 2005-2007; BRA Research Analysis



## Summary

In this briefing, we outline some of the general historical trends in immigration for the city of Boston, the state of Massachusetts, and the United States as a whole. We also discuss some of the recent changing demographic patterns in the city of Boston. Lastly, we examine the key ways in which Boston's native-born and foreign-born populations differ from one another.

In general, we demonstrate that throughout its history, Boston has served as a gateway city for newcomers to the United States. Boston's population has always had a larger proportion of foreign-born residents than the state and national averages. This, of course, is not surprising for a major urban area. That said, with regard to the foreign-born population, Boston stands out today among the major cities in the United States. Boston is the 21<sup>st</sup> largest city in the U.S., but among those cities has the sixth largest proportion of foreign-born residents.

We see that since the 1970s, the proportion of Boston's population that is foreign-born has increased dramatically. Currently, the proportion of Boston's population that is foreign-born is at its highest level since the 1930s. The composition of the immigrant population is much different now than at any other point in Boston's history. For years, the bulk of immigrants were from Europe. Over the last 30 years, more and more immigrants are coming to Boston from Asia and Latin America. This trend is particularly salient since 1990. For 1990-2007, 69% of Boston's foreign-born residents are from either Latin America or Asia. The composition of Boston's foreign-born population has played a significant role in Boston becoming a majority-minority city at the time of the most recent decennial Census.

Lastly, we demonstrated that immigration in Boston is very much a family issue. Marriage rates are higher in Boston's foreign-born population. While a small percentage of the foreign-born are children (only 6%), it turns out that approximately 45% of children in Boston live in a home where there is at least one foreign-born parent. In short, this briefing shows that Boston's foreign-born population is not only an important part of the city's past and present, but also an important part of its future.



CITY OF BOSTON  
Thomas M. Menino  
*Mayor*



Boston  
Redevelopment  
Authority

### *Mayor's Office of* **NEW BOSTONIANS**



Boston City Hall, Room 803  
1 City Hall Square, Boston MA 02201-1165  
Phone: 617.635.1960 Fax: 617.635.4540  
Email: [agnes.chang@cityofboston.gov](mailto:agnes.chang@cityofboston.gov)  
[www.cityofboston.gov/newbostonians](http://www.cityofboston.gov/newbostonians)

**Produced for the Mayor's Office of New Bostonians  
By the Boston Redevelopment Authority's (BRA) Research Division  
Research Team:**

Alvaro Lima - Research Director, BRA

Mark Melnik - Deputy Director for Research, BRA

Professor Barry Bluestone, Founding Director, Director, Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy and  
Dean of the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs at Northeastern University