

imagine  
all the  
people

# Guatemalans

CITY OF BOSTON  
Martin J. Walsh  
Mayor

2016

## Guatemalans in Boston

"*imagine all the people*" is a series of publications produced by the Boston Redevelopment Authority for the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement. The series provides a comprehensive profile of Boston's diverse immigrant communities and their numerous contributions to the city's social, cultural and economic landscape. It is part of an ongoing effort to celebrate immigrants and gain insight into how they shape our city.



# Introduction

Guatemala endured a civil war from 1960 to 1996 that led to political instability and lack of economic opportunity which, along with natural disasters, increased emigration pressures. One population targeted for oppression during the civil war known as *La Violencia* (the violence) was the non-Spanish speaking indigenous Mayan population in the mountainous region of El Quiché. In response to this violence, the indigenous population migrated to Belize, Southern Mexico, and California.<sup>1</sup> This long civil war resulted in the “Lost Decade” of the 1980s, when economic stagnation and high unemployment caused many hardships for the population. Migration from all parts of the country increased significantly for a combination of political and economic reasons.

The end of the Guatemalan civil war did not stop emigration. Hurricane Stan in 2005 caused widespread damage in Guatemala, but the U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services did not grant Guatemalans Temporary Protected Status, even though El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua have this designation. Because increased Guatemalan migration came after the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and Guatemalans did not receive Temporary Protected Status after Hurricane Stan, Guatemalans have had few options for authorized migration to the United States and have higher rates of unauthorized status. The Department of Homeland Security in 2010 estimated that 67 percent of foreign-born Guatemalans in the United States were unauthorized.<sup>3</sup> An Immigration and Custom Enforcement Raid on the Michael Bianco Inc, a leather goods factory in New Bedford, MA in 2007 resulted in the detention of 362 workers. The majority of these workers were unauthorized Maya Quiché workers from Guatemala.<sup>2</sup>



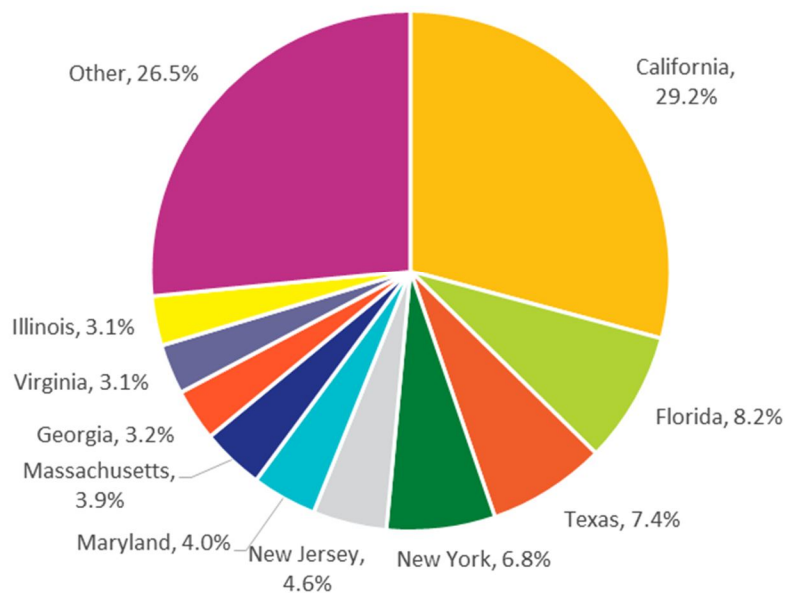
Casa Guatemala Family Festival, Cameros Fotografia



## Population Share

The United States and Mexico are the two countries with the largest number of Guatemalan emigrants.<sup>4</sup> Massachusetts had the seventh largest share of foreign-born Guatemalans living in the United States (4 percent) in 2014. States with the largest concentrations of Guatemalans include California (29 percent), Florida (8 percent), Texas (7 percent), and New York (7 percent).

### Share of Foreign-Born Guatemalan Population by State



U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division Analysis

Of the 35,382<sup>5</sup> foreign-born Guatemalans residing in Massachusetts, approximately 3,663<sup>6</sup> live in Boston. Guatemala is the 9<sup>th</sup> largest country of origin among Boston's foreign-born population. Overall, foreign-born Guatemalans in Boston constitute 2.1 percent of the city's total foreign-born residents.

Boston's foreign-born Guatemalans, though scattered throughout the city, live mostly in the neighborhoods of East Boston (31 percent), Dorchester (22 percent), Allston (11 percent), and Hyde Park (9 percent). Other neighborhoods with smaller shares are Brighton, Roxbury, and Mattapan.<sup>7</sup>

The U.S. Census Bureau's ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) allows for the detailed socio-economic analysis of specific populations. For smaller populations like foreign-born Guatemalans in Boston, a 5-year sample is required to limit variation due to sampling error. The analysis that follows uses 2009-2013 ACS PUMS data.

*There are 3,663 foreign-born Guatemalans in Boston, the majority of whom live in East Boston or Dorchester.*

## Demographics and Education

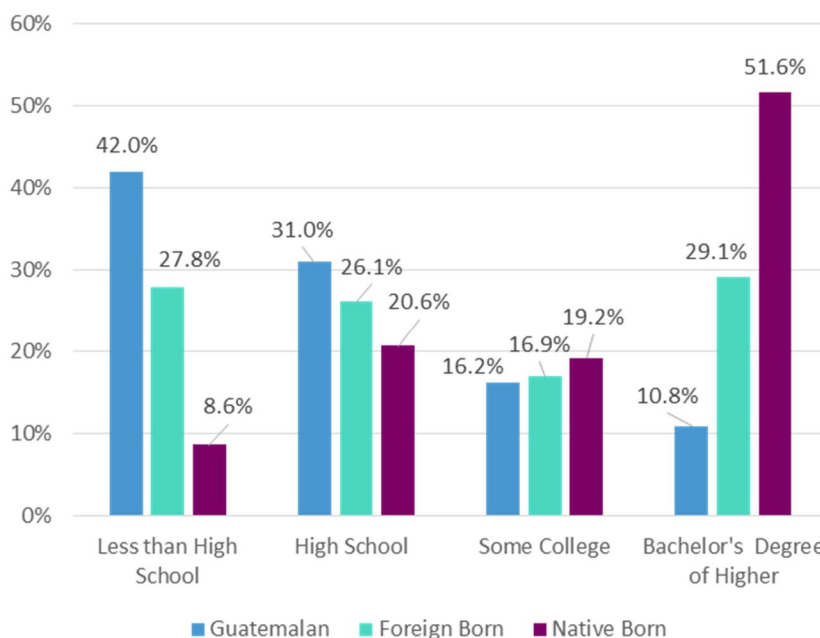
Guatemalan migration is disproportionately male, as 60 percent of foreign-born Guatemalans in Boston are male. Over half of foreign-born Guatemalans in Boston are either married (37 percent) or divorced, separated or widowed (14 percent). Approximately 48 percent of all foreign-born Guatemalans are between the ages of 35 and 64, and the median age of the population is 36 years. A smaller share of foreign-born Guatemalans in Boston entered the United States after 2000 (35 percent) compared to all foreign born (43 percent). The majority of foreign-born Guatemalans (72 percent) are not naturalized U.S. citizens.

Approximately 42 percent of foreign-born Guatemalans ages 25 years or older in Boston have not completed high school. This share is greater than for all foreign-born residents (28 percent) and over four times the share for the native-born population (9 percent). Approximately 31 percent of foreign-born Guatemalans have a high school diploma as their highest level of educational attainment.

While 27 percent of foreign-born Guatemalans 25 years or older have attended college, only 11 percent have completed at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 29 percent of the entire foreign-born population, and 52 percent of the native born. With respect to advanced degrees, less than 1 percent of foreign-born Guatemalans living in Boston hold a graduate or professional degree, compared with 14 percent of all foreign born and 22 percent of the native born.

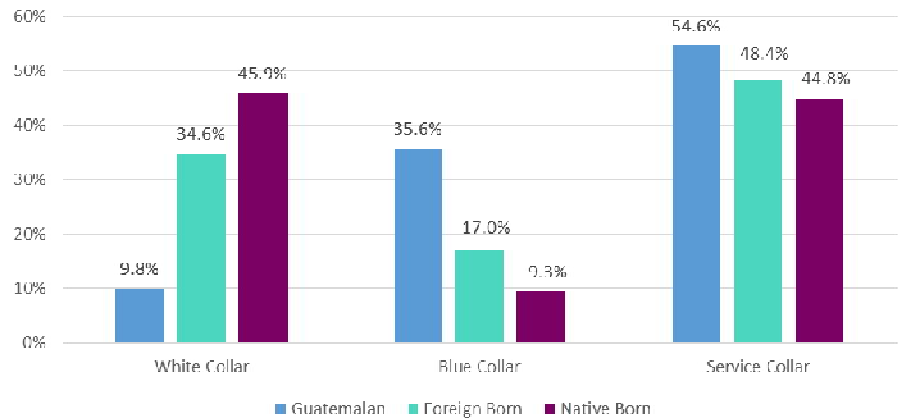
*The majority of foreign-born Guatemalans entered the U.S. before 2000, but most are not yet U.S. citizens.*

### Educational Attainment—Population 25 Years and Older



The labor force participation rate of Guatemalans is 85 percent compared to 68 percent for all foreign born and 69 percent for the native-born population. With their lower levels of educational attainment, the majority of foreign-born Guatemalans work in what are generally categorized as service occupations (55 percent). They are underrepresented in white-collar jobs, and overrepresented in blue-collar jobs when compared to all foreign born and the native born. The most common blue-collar occupation among Guatemalans is construction and freight and stock material movers.

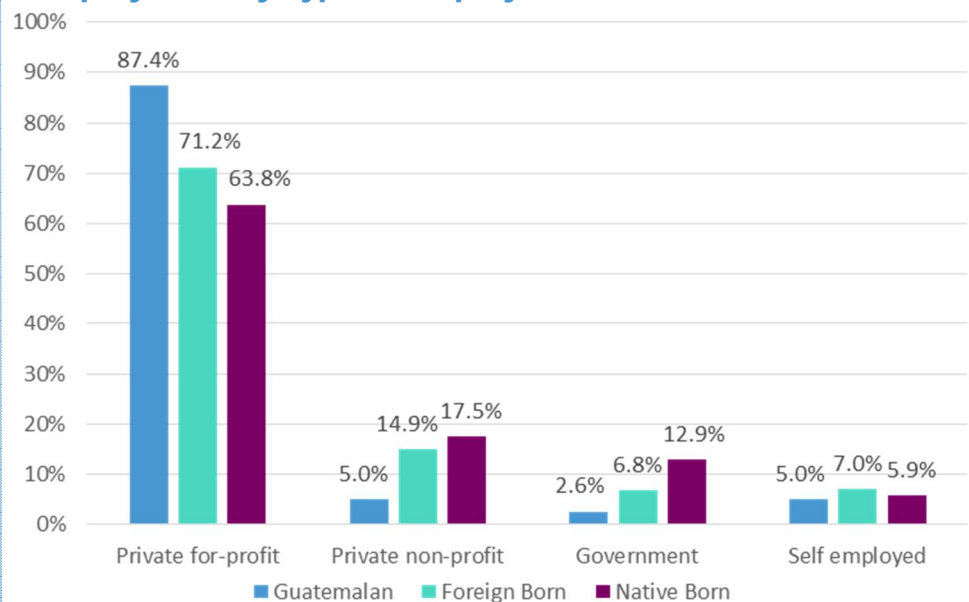
### Occupations by Nativity



U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division Analysis

The majority (87 percent) of foreign-born Guatemalan workers (excluding unpaid family workers) work for a private, for-profit company; 5 percent work for a private, non-profit organization, and 3 percent work in the public sector. A smaller share of foreign-born Guatemalans are self-employed (5 percent) than of all foreign born in Boston.

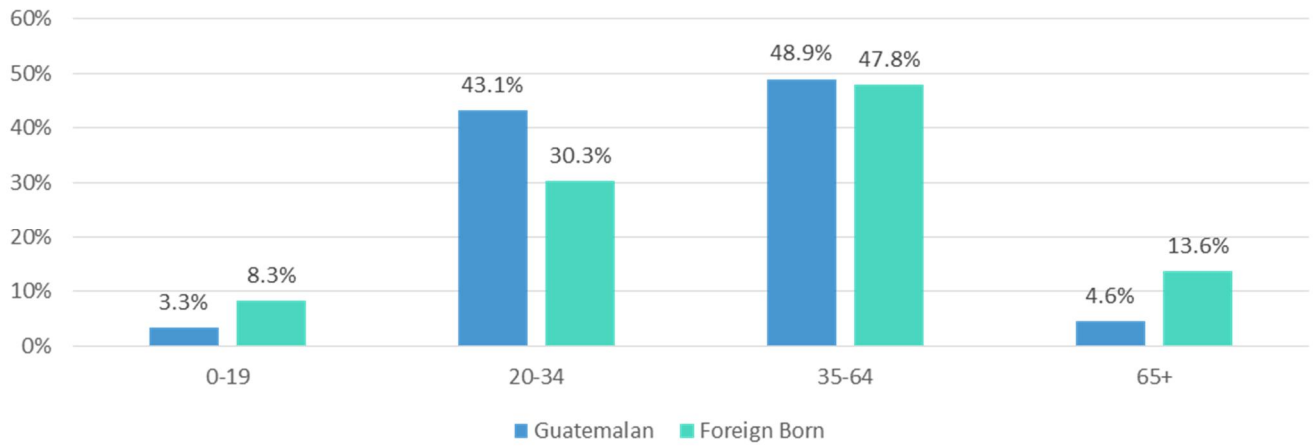
### Employment by Type of Employer



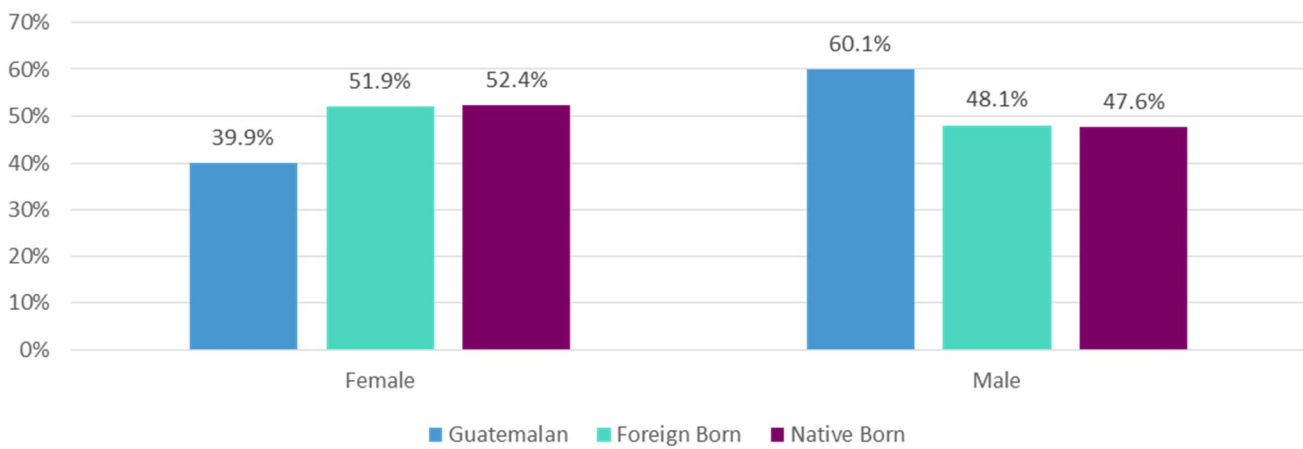
U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division Analysis

# Imagine all the people: Guatemala

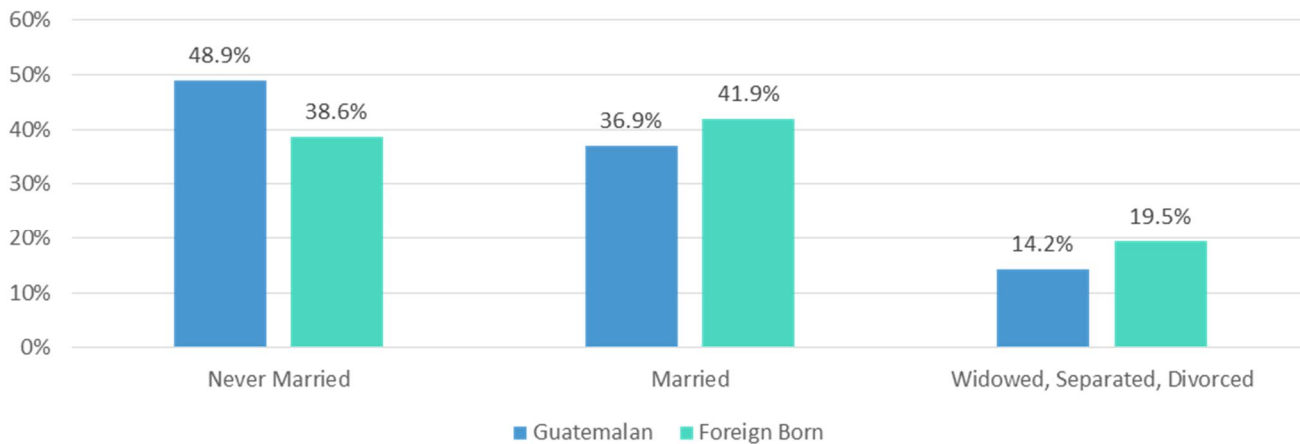
## Age



## Gender

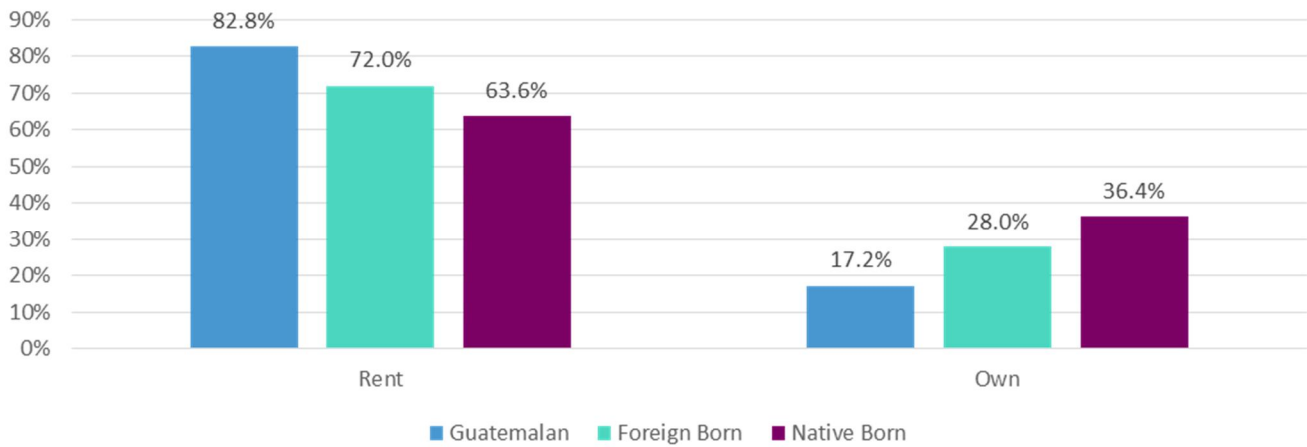


## Marital Status

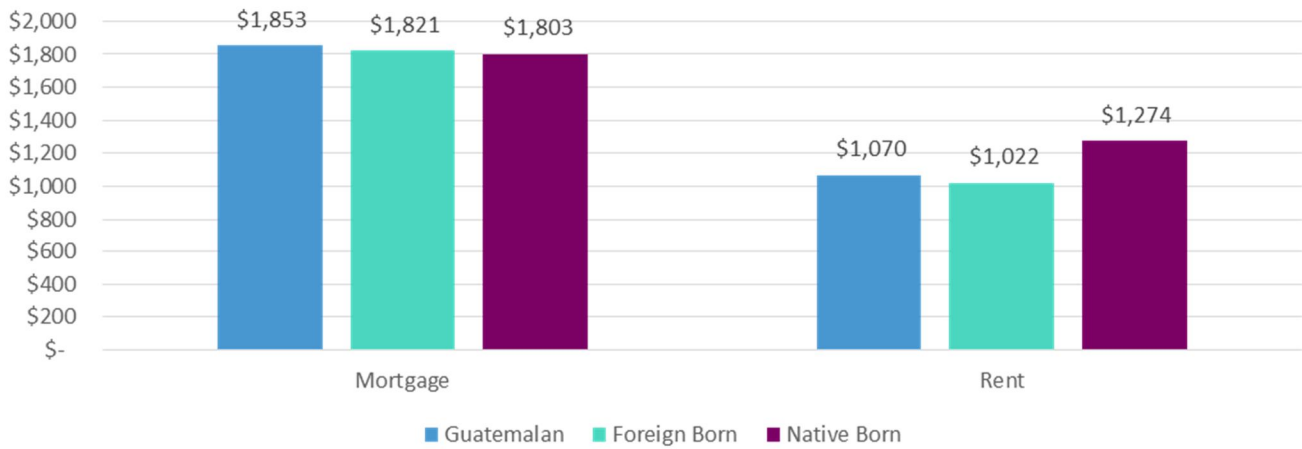


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division Analysis

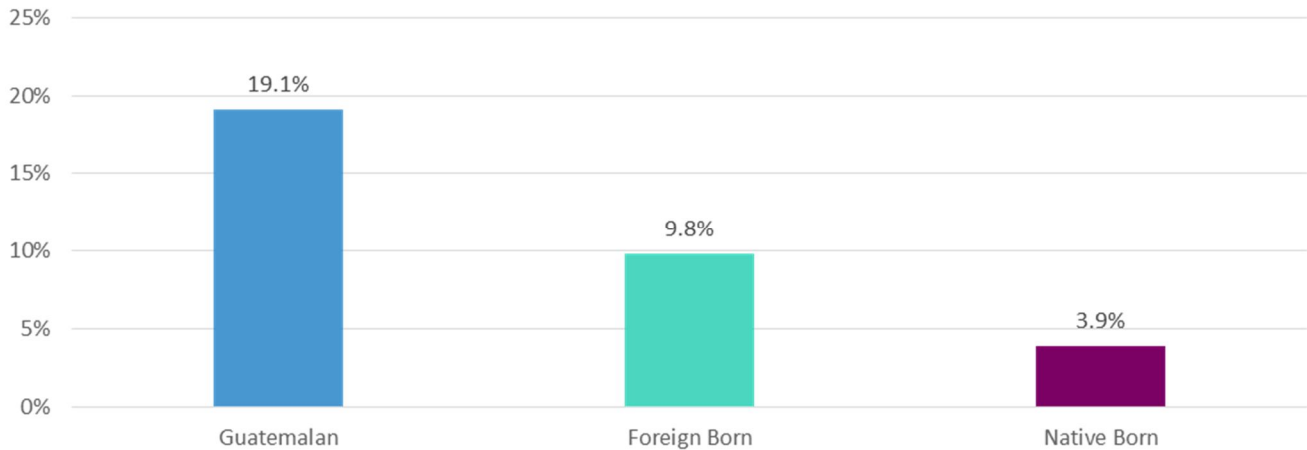
### Housing Tenure\*



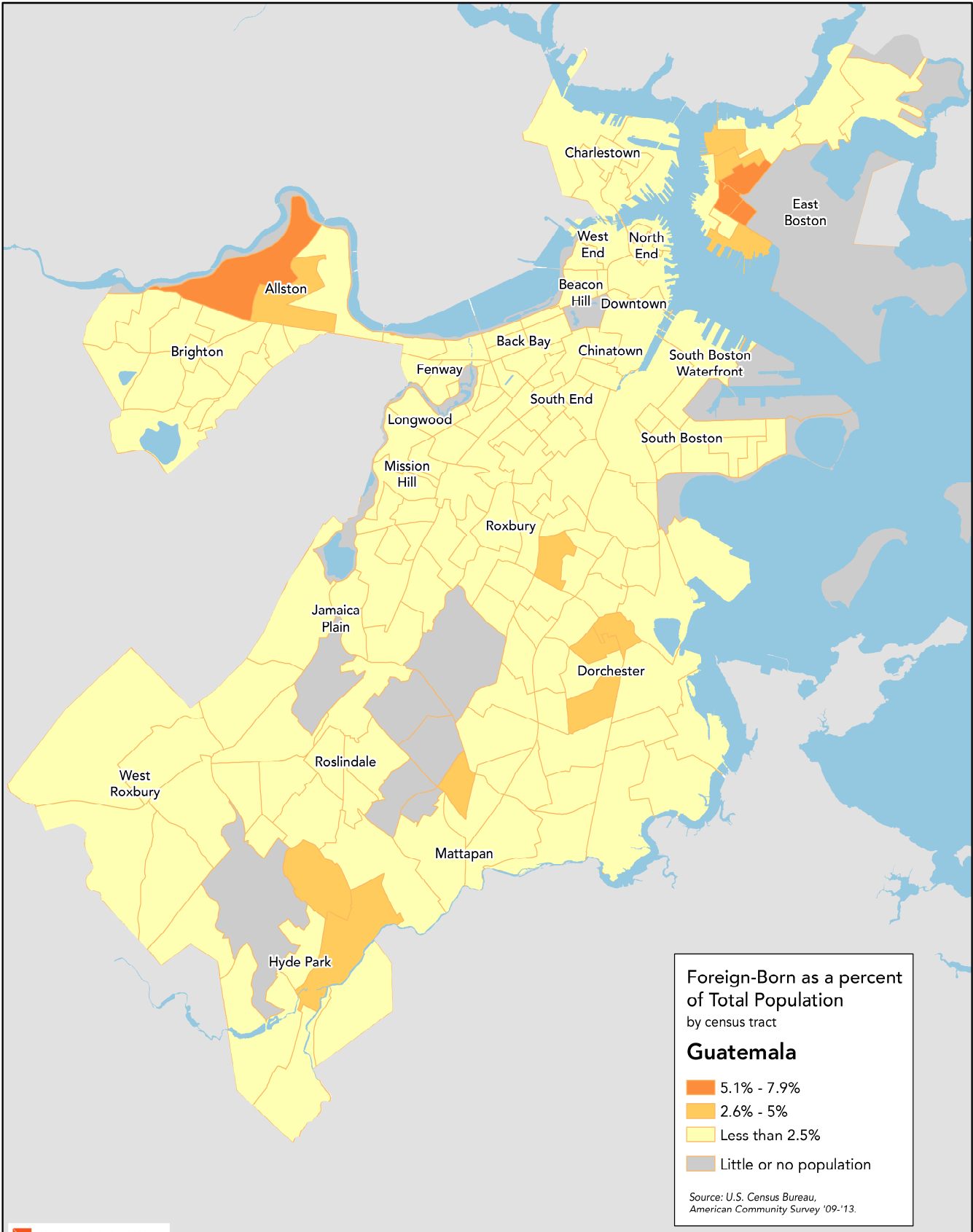
### Housing Costs\*



### Medical Uninsurance



\*Housing data are based on the householder's nativity.





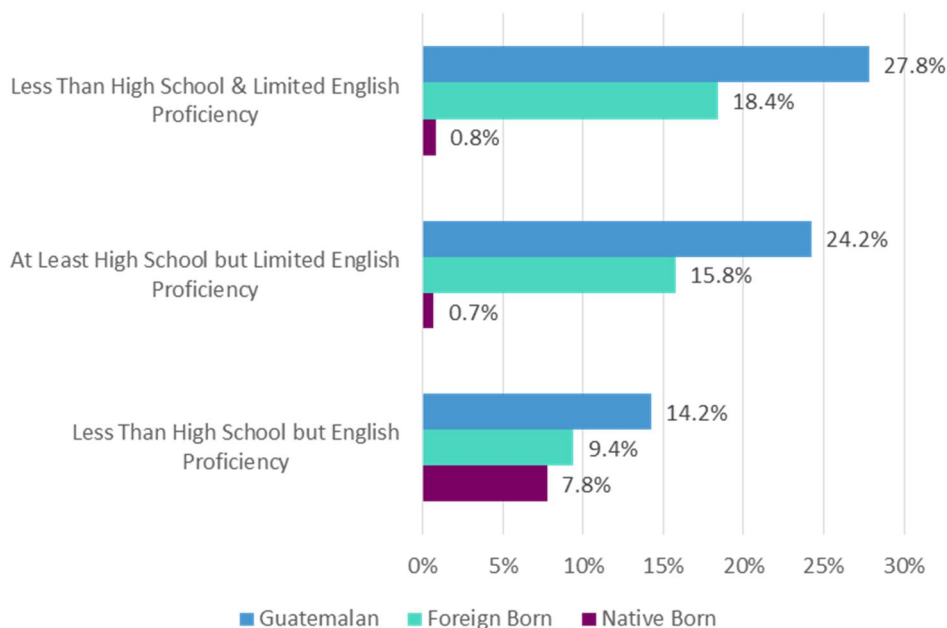
## Standard of Living

Approximately 21 percent of foreign-born Guatemalans have achieved a middle class standard of living, compared with 45 percent of Boston's native-born population, and 29 percent of all foreign born. A family income four times the poverty level 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 2014, a middle class income would be at least \$62,920. In contrast, nearly 21 percent of foreign-born Guatemalans live below the federal poverty level compared to 20 percent for the city's population.

Even though many foreign-born Guatemalans speak a native Mayan language, in Boston they predominately speak Spanish. Of the Guatemalan population five years or older, half do not speak English or do not speak it well. Thus, low educational attainment and lack of English proficiency appear to be hindering foreign-born Guatemalans' standard of living.<sup>10</sup> Approximately 28 percent of Boston's adult foreign-born Guatemalans lack a high school diploma and have limited English proficiency, compared to 18 percent for all foreign born.

*Half of Guatemalan adults in Boston lack English proficiency.*

## Educational Attainment and English Proficiency Population 25 Years or Older



## Economic Impact

Foreign-born Guatemalans contribute to the local economy through their labor and consumer spending. The total value of their economic contributions was estimated using a Regional Economic Model (REMI) that calculated the value of goods and services consumed on each dollar spent. Foreign-born Guatemalans in Boston generated total expenditures of nearly \$57 million in 2014.<sup>11</sup> These annual expenditures contributed slightly less than \$34 million to the regional product and generated \$1.9 million in state and local taxes.<sup>12</sup> In total, these expenditures supported 247 jobs in the Massachusetts economy.<sup>13</sup>



Jennifer De Leon, born in Jamaica Plain of Guatemalan parents, author of *Wise Latinas: Writers on Higher Education*

## Conclusion

Foreign-born Guatemalans actively contribute to the economic, cultural, and civic life of the city. They stand out for their high labor force participation and disproportionately fill construction jobs. This may be related to their lower levels of educational attainment that limits their labor market participation. Even though they do not have a high standard of living, they also do not have high shares of their population living in poverty.

<sup>1</sup> Jonas, S., Guatemalan Migration in the Times of Civil War and Post-War Challenges. Migration Policy Institute, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Kauer, L. "The Maya of New Bedford: Genesis and Evolution of a Community 1980 – 2010" in *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, Summer 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Naker, B & Rytina, N., Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population in the United States: January 2012, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> The Mexican Census in 2000 estimated that 23,975 foreign-born Guatemalans resided in the county. By 2010 the number increased to 35,322. "Conociendo...nos todo" Volume 1, Number 2, May 2011.

<sup>5</sup> American Factfinder website Table B05006 reports 35,382 Guatemalans in Massachusetts with a margin of error of +/- 5,059 in 2014. The 21,968 estimate reported for this analysis was tabulated from 2014 U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Sample data. Both estimates contain a margin of error due to sampling methodology. Lower survey response rates due to language or documentation issues may result in an undercount of the population. For more information on American Fact Finder please see: <http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html? lang=en>

<sup>6</sup> American Factfinder website Table B05006 reports 4,274 Guatemalans in Boston with a margin of error of +/- 1,410 in 2014. The 2014 U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Sample data estimates 3,633 foreign-born Guatemalans for Boston.

<sup>7</sup> 2009-2013 American Community Survey, American Factfinder, BRA Research Analysis.

<sup>8</sup> Defined as the share of the working-age population that is either currently employed or seeking work. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016).

<sup>9</sup> For a smaller population like foreign-born Guatemalan in Boston, occupations fall into three broad categories. White collar includes managerial & professional, health care, education, and arts, design entertainment, sports & media occupations. Service includes service, sales, office & administrative support, community & social service occupations. Blue collar includes construction, farming, fishing, and forestry, and production occupations. Military specific occupations and long-term unemployed are excluded from the analysis.

<sup>10</sup> The Limited English Proficient includes those who do not speak English at all or who do not speak it well.

<sup>11</sup> BRA Research Division Analysis, 2014, Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI.

<sup>12</sup> BRA Research Division Analysis, 2014, Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI.

<sup>13</sup> BRA Research Division Analysis, 2014, Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI.



CITY OF BOSTON  
Martin J. Walsh, Mayor



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FOR IMMIGRANT  
ADVANCEMENT

*Martin J. Walsh, Mayor of Boston*



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