



Historical Profiles of Boston's Neighborhoods

1950 to 2020

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Research Division

Prepared by the Boston Planning & Development Agency Research Division

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Notes on Data and Methodology

Data in this report are drawn from 1950-2020 Decennial Censuses and the 2006-2010 and 2016-2020 American Community Surveys.

The smallest available geography for some variables is the Census tract. Therefore, neighborhood boundaries are approximated using 2020 Census tract boundaries. Older data are crosswalked to the 2020 tracts to provide a consistent geography over the decades. See the back of this report for a description of the methodology.

Because they cannot be separately identified at the Census tract level, the Leather District is combined with Downtown and Bay Village is combined with the South End.

Census Tract 9815.02 is partially in East Boston and partially in Revere, but almost the entire population is in Revere so it is excluded from the East Boston approximation.

The Harbor Islands are excluded from the analyses because they do not currently have any residential population.

Note the following regarding the data:

- Columns may not sum to totals due to rounding in the crosswalking.
- 1950 educational attainment data has a “not reported” option, which is not shown.
- 1950 nativity data only includes the white population.
- 1970 nativity data is taken from a sample and therefore may not sum to the reported total population.



Boston	1950		1960		1970		1980		1990		2000		2010		2020	
Population	801,444		698,080		641,071		562,994		574,283		589,141		617,594		675,647	
Age																
0-9 years	128,860	16.1%	120,946	17.3%	101,634	15.9%	59,728	10.6%	66,685	11.6%	65,767	11.2%	59,243	9.6%	57,344	8.5%
10-19 years	103,132	12.9%	102,853	14.7%	112,122	17.5%	91,510	16.3%	67,383	11.7%	76,184	12.9%	76,349	12.4%	68,986	10.2%
20-34 years	197,007	24.6%	143,551	20.6%	156,497	24.4%	188,496	33.5%	208,577	36.3%	194,846	33.1%	216,213	35.0%	254,189	37.6%
35-54 years	212,928	26.6%	168,196	24.1%	126,208	19.7%	101,737	18.1%	125,075	21.8%	149,974	25.5%	147,501	23.9%	144,930	21.5%
55-64 years	81,883	10.2%	76,862	11.0%	62,851	9.8%	50,224	8.9%	40,613	7.1%	41,034	7.0%	56,051	9.1%	66,285	9.8%
65 years and over	77,634	9.7%	85,671	12.3%	81,759	12.8%	71,299	12.7%	65,950	11.5%	61,336	10.4%	62,237	10.1%	83,913	12.4%
Race/ Ethnicity																
White	758,700	94.7%	629,587	90.2%	511,082	79.7%	382,123	67.9%	338,734	59.0%	291,561	49.5%	290,312	47.0%	301,464	44.6%
Black/ African American	40,057	5.0%	63,165	9.0%	101,585	15.8%	122,203	21.7%	136,887	23.8%	140,305	23.8%	138,073	22.4%	129,264	19.1%
Hispanic					16,987	2.6%	36,068	6.4%	61,955	10.8%	85,089	14.4%	107,917	17.5%	126,113	18.7%
Asian/PI					8,443	1.3%	14,916	2.6%	29,640	5.2%	44,280	7.5%	55,028	8.9%	75,839	11.2%
Other	2,687	0.3%	5,328	0.8%	2,974	0.5%	7,684	1.4%	7,067	1.2%	27,906	4.7%	26,264	4.3%	42,967	6.4%
Total Housing Units	222,079		238,833		232,448		241,444		250,863		251,935		272,481		301,702	
Housing Tenure																
Occupied Housing Units	218,103	98.2%	224,704	94.1%	217,622	93.6%	218,457	90.5%	228,464	91.1%	239,528	95.1%	252,699	92.7%	279,495	92.6%
Owner-occupied	54,266	24.9%	61,243	27.3%	59,230	27.2%	59,504	27.2%	70,544	30.9%	77,226	32.2%	85,791	33.9%	89,445	32.0%
Renter-occupied	163,837	75.1%	163,461	72.7%	158,392	72.8%	158,953	72.8%	157,920	69.1%	162,302	67.8%	166,908	66.1%	190,050	68.0%
Vacant Housing Units	3,976	1.8%	14,129	5.9%	14,826	6.4%	22,987	9.5%	22,399	8.9%	12,407	4.9%	19,782	7.3%	22,207	7.4%
	1950		1960		1970		1980		1990		2000		2006-2010		2016-2020	
Educational Attainment (25+)																
Less than High School	269,560	56.3%	232,490	55.4%	163,093	46.5%	104,339	31.6%	88,875	24.3%	60,333	16.0%	60,466	15.7%	58,108	12.1%
High School or GED	144,540	30.2%	122,983	29.3%	120,350	34.3%	115,787	35.0%	97,233	26.6%	126,800	33.6%	90,757	23.6%	90,520	18.9%
Some College or Associate's Degree	32,970	6.9%	32,159	7.7%	30,876	8.8%	43,451	13.1%	69,889	19.1%	56,189	14.9%	70,204	18.2%	84,389	17.6%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	32,135	6.7%	32,001	7.6%	36,245	10.3%	67,073	20.3%	109,711	30.0%	134,252	35.6%	163,609	42.5%	245,847	51.3%
Nativity																
Native Born	614,608	81.0%	588,116	84.2%	557,068	86.9%	475,938	84.5%	459,686	80.0%	437,305	74.2%	438,984	72.8%	494,788	71.8%
Foreign Born	144,092	19.0%	109,964	15.8%	83,988	13.1%	87,056	15.5%	114,597	20.0%	151,836	25.8%	163,625	27.2%	194,538	28.2%
Labor Force by Sex																
Male	227,232	66.1%	191,373	61.3%	152,930	54.6%	145,508	52.8%	162,882	51.5%	155,485	50.4%	174,905	49.9%	204,044	49.4%
Female	116,785	33.9%	120,740	38.7%	127,087	45.4%	130,063	47.2%	153,280	48.5%	152,910	49.6%	175,738	50.1%	209,322	50.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1950-2020 Decennial Censuses, 2006-2010 and 2016-2020 American Community Survey, BPDA Research Division Analysis

Notes for the following pages: 1950 nativity data only includes the white population; 1950 educational data has a "not reported" option, which is not shown here; 1970 nativity data is taken from a sample and therefore may not sum to the reported total population; the 2020 Census undercounted Boston's population by at least 6,500 people; tenure shares from ACS applied to 2010 & 2020 Census housing stock

Back Bay	1950		1960		1970		1980		1990		2000		2010		2020	
Population	21,228		18,154		18,117		18,336		16,705		16,681		16,622		18,190	
Age																
0-9 years	1,040	4.9%	576	3.2%	462	2.6%	321	1.8%	441	2.6%	491	2.9%	713	4.3%	3,486	4.0%
10-19 years	1,422	6.7%	1,793	9.9%	2,799	15.4%	1,979	10.8%	1,218	7.3%	1,380	8.3%	1,149	6.9%	1,389	7.6%
20-34 years	6,696	31.5%	6,260	34.5%	8,329	46.0%	9,945	54.2%	8,706	52.1%	7,653	45.9%	7,501	45.1%	7,683	42.2%
35-54 years	6,038	28.4%	3,918	21.6%	2,704	14.9%	3,151	17.2%	3,879	23.2%	4,243	25.4%	3,593	21.6%	3,401	18.7%
55-64 years	2,661	12.5%	2,495	13.7%	1,575	8.7%	1,141	6.2%	1,071	6.4%	1,432	8.6%	1,689	10.2%	2,038	11.2%
65 years and over	3,371	15.9%	3,112	17.1%	2,248	12.4%	1,799	9.8%	1,390	8.3%	1,482	8.9%	1,977	11.9%	2,949	16.2%
Race/ Ethnicity																
White	20,627	97.2%	17,100	94.2%	16,345	90.2%	16,140	88.0%	14,507	86.8%	13,870	83.1%	13,096	78.8%	13,065	71.8%
Black/ African American	533	2.5%	837	4.6%	1,046	5.8%	1,048	5.7%	745	4.5%	614	3.7%	661	4.0%	690	3.8%
Hispanic					395	2.2%	621	3.4%	652	3.9%	730	4.4%	943	5.7%	1,208	6.6%
Asian/PI					233	1.3%	389	2.1%	746	4.5%	1,101	6.6%	1,564	9.4%	2,410	13.2%
Other	68	0.3%	217	1.2%	98	0.5%	138	0.8%	55	0.3%	366	2.2%	358	2.2%	817	4.5%
Total Housing Units	6,589		9,378		9,988		11,094		10,900		10,792		11,339		11,524	
Housing Tenure																
Occupied Housing Units	6,356	96.5%	8,741	93.2%	9,206	92.2%	10,043	90.5%	9,670	88.7%	10,053	93.2%	9,829	86.7%	10,006	86.8%
Owner-occupied	521	8.2%	569	6.5%	388	4.2%	1,812	18.0%	2,780	28.7%	3,097	30.8%	3,230	32.9%	3,100	31.0%
Renter-occupied	5,835	91.8%	8,172	93.5%	8,818	95.8%	8,231	82.0%	6,890	71.3%	6,956	69.2%	6,599	67.1%	6,906	69.0%
Vacant Housing Units	233	3.5%	637	6.8%	782	7.8%	1,051	9.5%	1,230	11.3%	739	6.8%	1,510	13.3%	1,518	13.2%
	1950		1960		1970		1980		1990		2000		2006-2010		2016-2020	
Educational Attainment (25+)																
Less than High School	4,735	32.9%	3,823	30.4%	1,649	16.8%	831	6.9%	407	3.5%	337	2.7%	203	1.6%	242	1.7%
High School or GED	4,445	30.9%	3,049	24.3%	2,630	26.8%	1,675	13.9%	751	6.4%	717	5.8%	522	4.2%	529	3.8%
Some College or Associate's Degree	2,355	16.3%	2,236	17.8%	1,914	19.5%	2,111	17.5%	1,788	15.4%	1,287	10.4%	1,174	9.4%	977	7.0%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	2,870	19.9%	3,450	27.5%	3,606	36.8%	7,420	61.6%	8,698	74.7%	10,051	81.1%	10,527	84.7%	12,248	87.5%
Nativity																
Native Born	17,400	84.4%	15,791	87.0%	16,249	90.2%	16,342	89.1%	14,643	87.7%	13,867	83.1%	14,816	82.9%	13,829	76.3%
Foreign Born	3,227	15.6%	2,363	13.0%	1,756	9.8%	1,994	10.9%	2,062	12.3%	2,814	16.9%	3,063	17.1%	4,284	23.7%
Labor Force by Sex																
Male	5,275	48.3%	5,372	45.0%	5,304	45.7%	6,331	51.8%	5,846	49.7%	6,662	55.1%	6,313	55.0%	6,004	51.0%
Female	5,653	51.7%	6,564	55.0%	6,314	54.3%	5,897	48.2%	5,908	50.3%	5,433	44.9%	5,155	45.0%	5,758	49.0%

Methodology

To create neighborhood-level data, we use U.S. Census Tracts to define neighborhood boundaries. The Census Bureau, however, has changed the boundaries of its Census Tracts across the decades. We use the most recent map of Census Tracts (from the 2020 Census), then where necessary, we interpolate data from earlier years' Census Tracts to conform to the tracts from 2020.

When Census Tracts change, we use that year's population by Census Block, the smallest geographic unit available in the Census, to create population weights that are used to apportion populations from earlier years to 2020 Census Tracts. In cases where Census Blocks overlap the boundaries of 2020 Census Tracts, the share of block land area on either side of the 2020 tract boundary is incorporated into the weights. In earlier years, when Census Block boundaries are not available, we use a modified method that employs 1990 Census Block geography, the oldest year available.

While there were a fair number of tract boundary changes over the full time period we study, the majority of these boundary changes occur within the larger neighborhood geographies, rather than between them. In these cases, the boundary changes do not affect the numbers shown in this report, as both portions of the divided tract are aggregated into the same neighborhood.

The methods used here are similar to those used in the commercially available Neighborhood Change Database (NCDB), produced by the Urban Institute and Geolytics, and the public use Longitudinal Tract Database (LTDB) produced by the American Communities Project. Because our geographic scope is limited to Boston, we are able to extend our crosswalk back over a longer time period than either of these sources, and to cover a larger set of variables than is available from the NCDB. Our method also uses block-level population weighting for all years, whereas the LTDB uses area-based weighting for earlier years. Creation of our crosswalk was greatly aided by the availability of historic tract and block-level GIS shapefiles from the National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS) at the Minnesota Population Center.