

# BOSTON INDICATORS

MEASURING WHAT WE VALUE

## Overview of Boston Indicators + Examples of Recent Work

Luc Schuster  
Executive Director, Boston Indicators

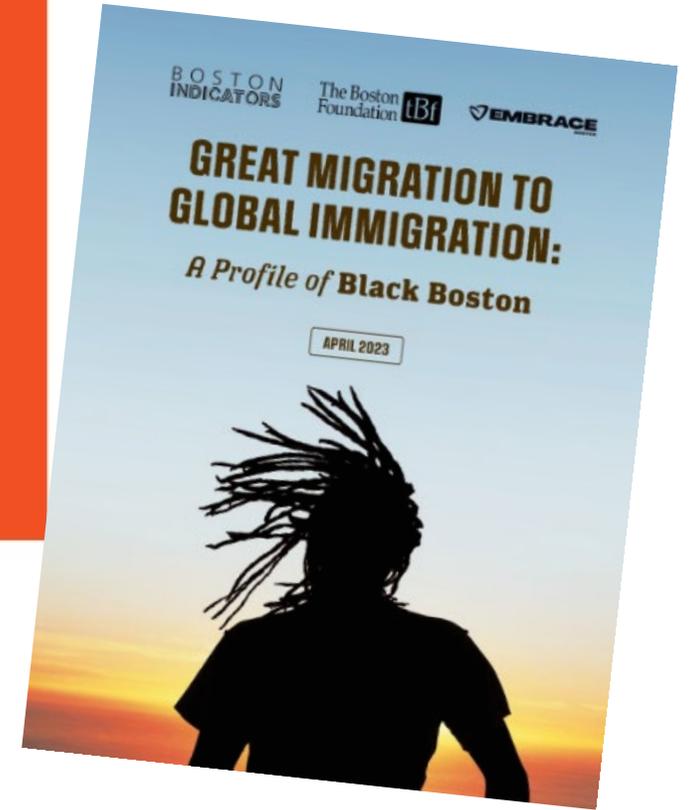
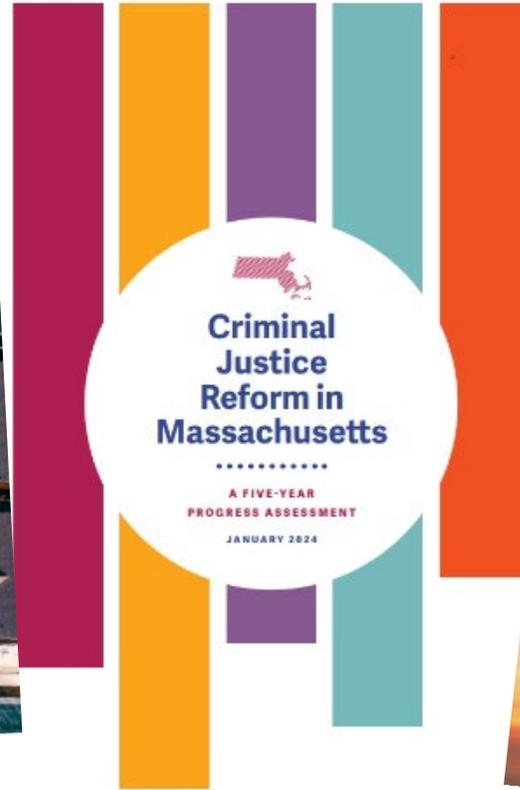
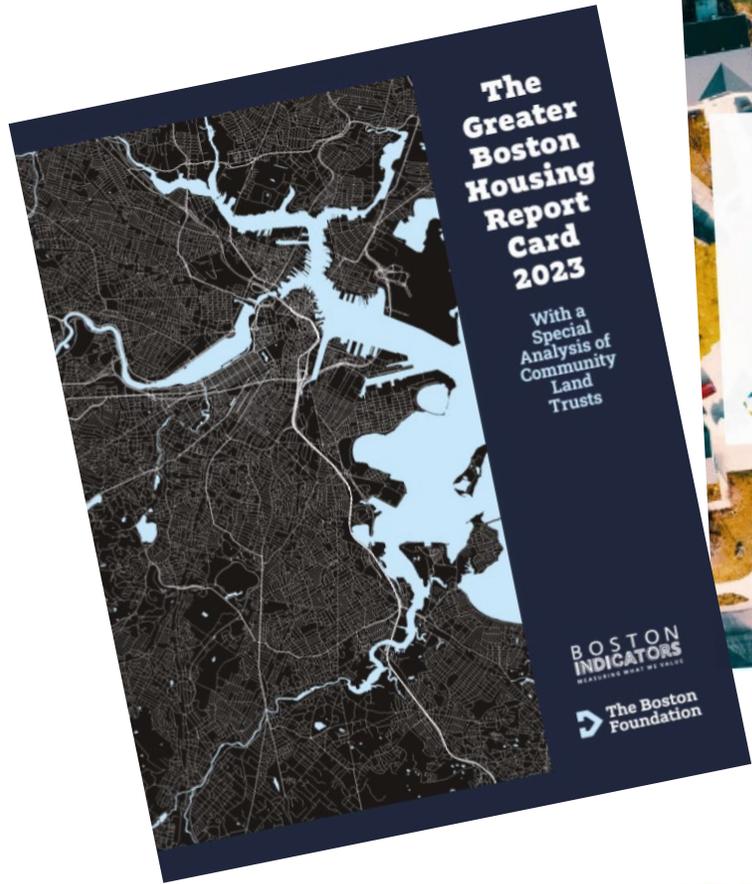
September 17, 2025

# **THE WHAT**

## **(the work we produce)**

### **I. Data-driven research tracking who we are as a region and analyzing our pressing challenges**

- Our central focus from the beginning
- More educational in nature
- Lead topics: population trends, especially by race/ethnicity; immigration; and income, poverty and wealth
- Other descriptive research on topics like housing, education, and transportation

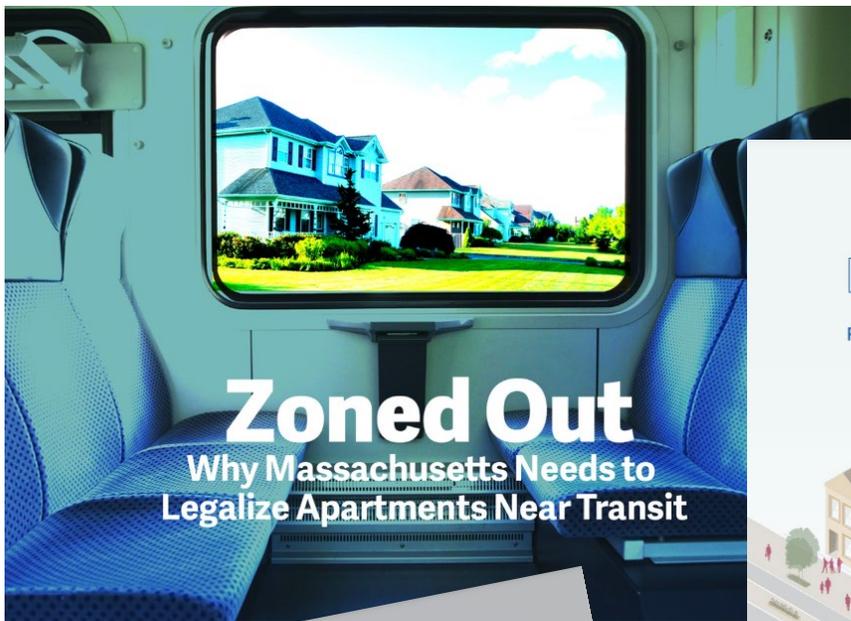


# THE WHAT

## (the work we produce)

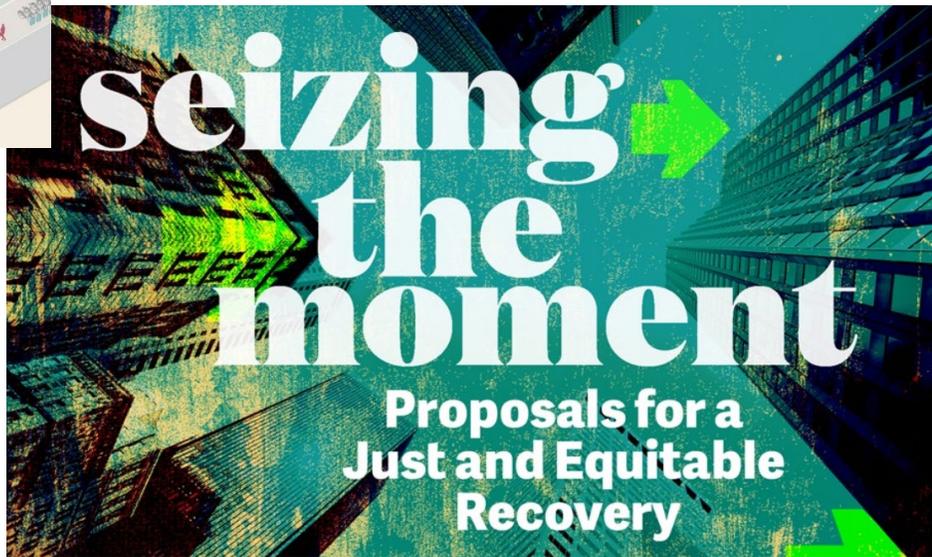
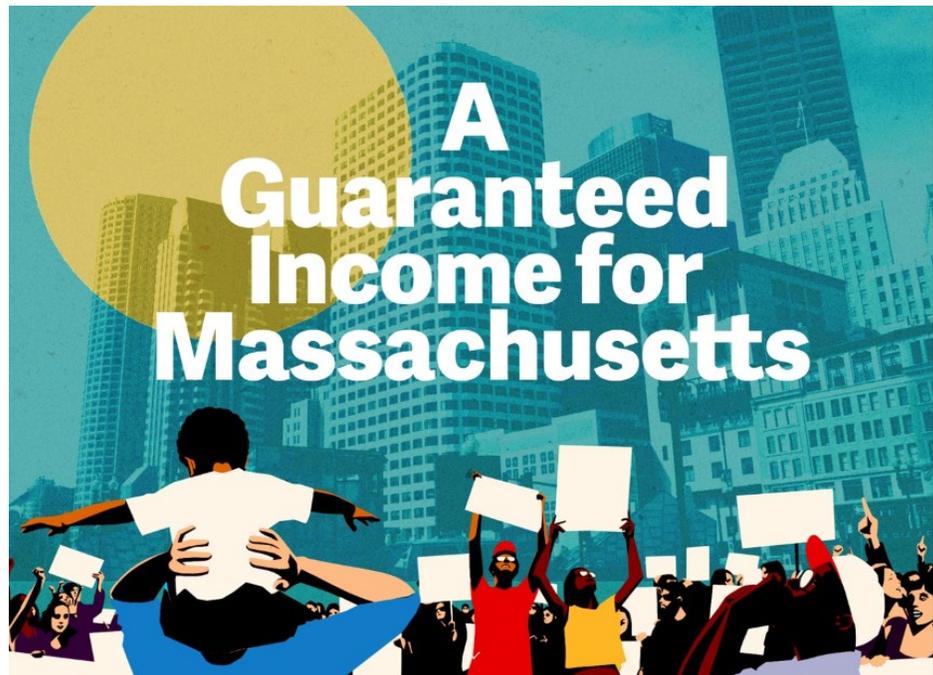
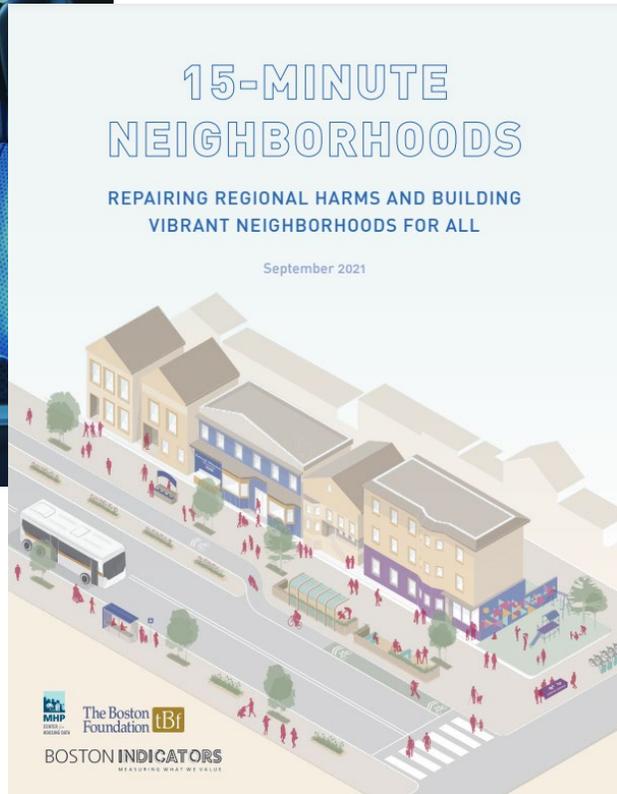
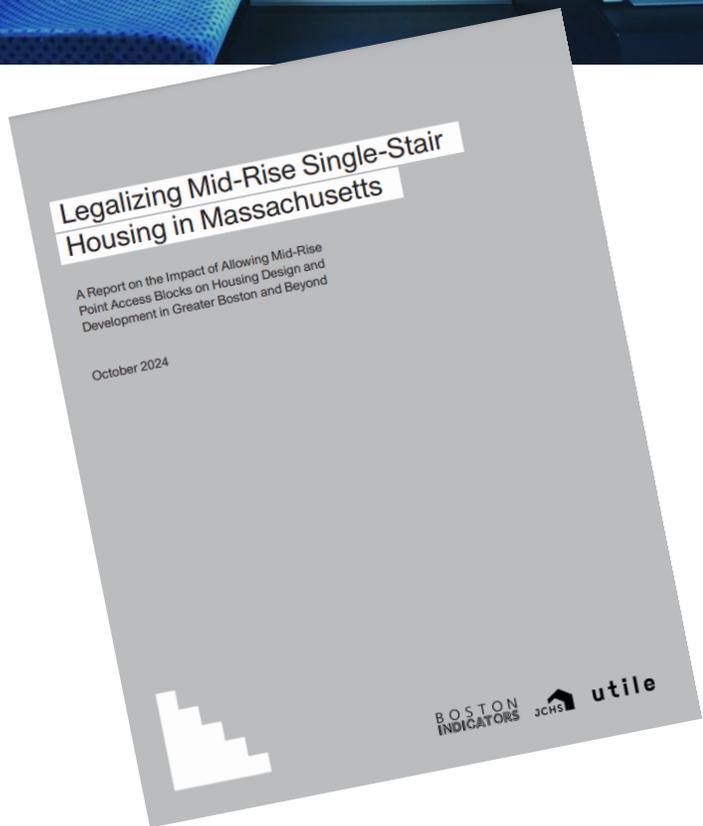
### 2. Policy analysis, design and modeling

- More recent addition over the past few years
- Big Ideas policy papers modeling promising state and local policy ideas for making change at scale
  - *The Color of the Capital Gap, A Guaranteed Income for Massachusetts, Zoned Out*
  - *Seizing the Moment* - A suite of 15 curated guest white paper submissions proposing ideas for building a just and equitable recovery from the pandemic.



# Zoned Out

Why Massachusetts Needs to Legalize Apartments Near Transit



# THE WHAT

## (the work we produce)

### 3. Racial wealth equity

- We're in the third year of this effort, with two main components:
  1. New research on topics like retirement security, homeownership support programs, and perceptions of wealth in Native American communities
  2. Online resource library summarizing best existing research on determinants of the racial wealth gap



BOSTON INDICATORS

**Racial Wealth Equity**  
resource center

[ABOUT US](#)

[OUR RESEARCH](#)

[RESOURCE HUB](#)

[SEARCH](#)



H INEQUALITY – CHECK OUT THE [FULL VIDEO AND EVENT RECAP](#) !

[OUR MOST RECENT RESEARCH AND CONVERSATION SERIES](#)

# THE HOW

## (how we produce the work)

- Written publications ranging from short articles to white papers to long-form reports
- Convenings
- Presentations and briefings to community groups
- Close partnerships with TBF program leaders, outside researchers and advocates.  
Recent examples of outside partnerships:
  - UMass Boston and the four freestanding research institutes representing our region's Black, Asian American, Latino and Native American communities
  - The Brookings Institution
  - Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard
- Proactive research support for local advocacy coalitions
- Responsive data support for TBF staff
- Media engagement

# GLOBAL GREATER BOSTON

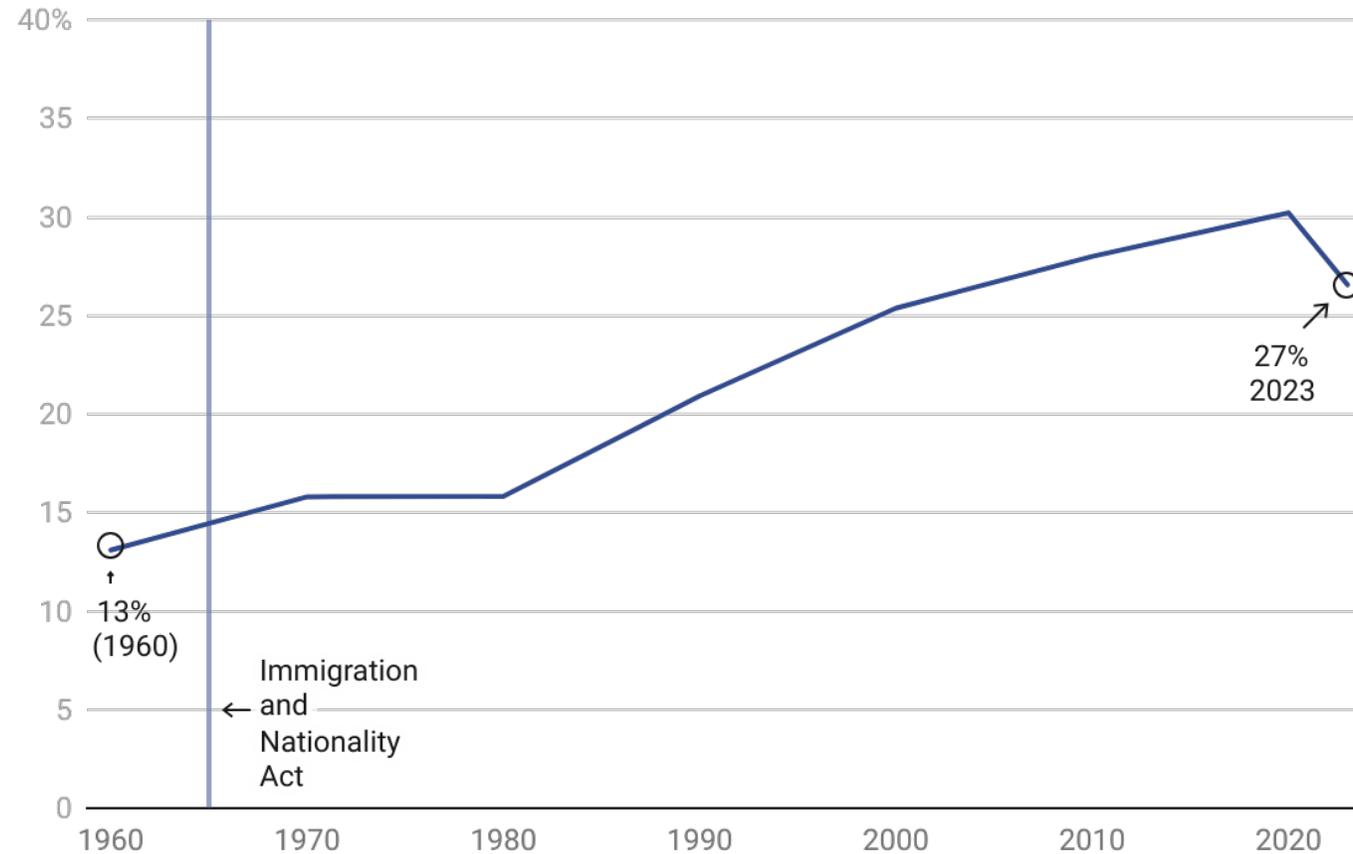
*Immigrants in a  
Changing Region*

BOSTON  
INDICATORS

IRI Immigration  
Research  
Initiative

FEBRUARY 2024

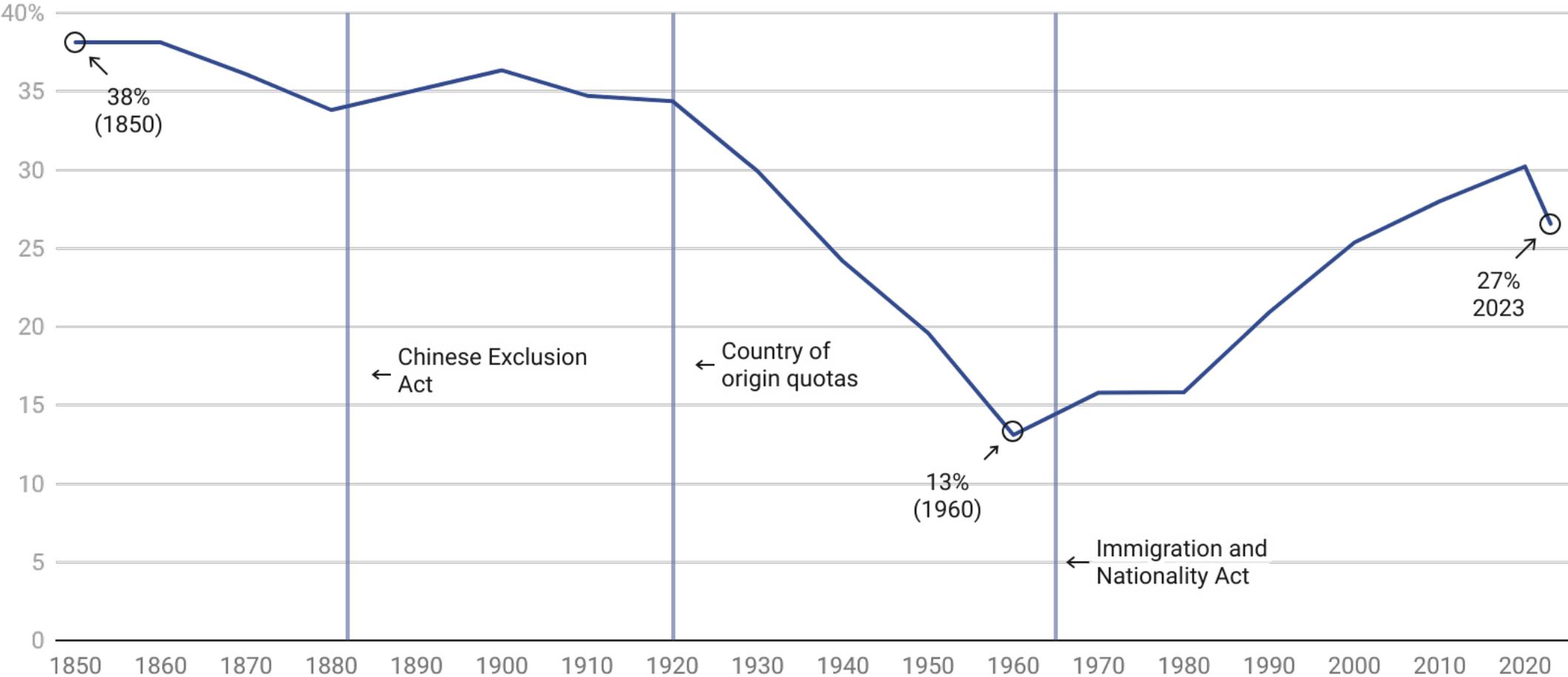
## Foreign-born share of Boston's population, 1960-2023.



*Note: We use Boston rather than Greater Boston here due to more consistent administrative boundaries though census years.*

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1850-2000 U.S. Decennial Census, IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org). 2001-2023 1-year American Community Survey; Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990" (Working Paper no. 29, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1999).

# Foreign-born share of Boston's population, 1850-2023.

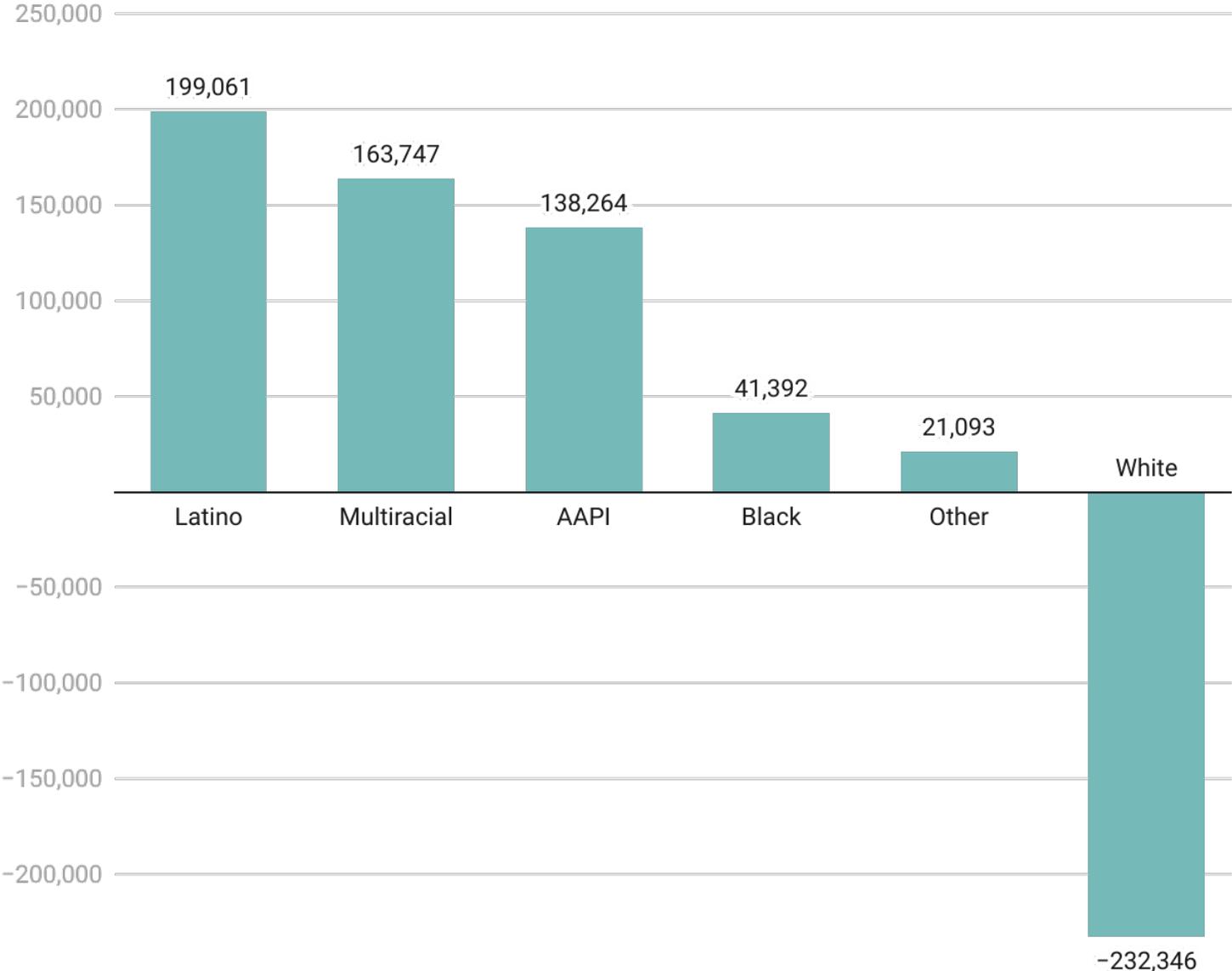


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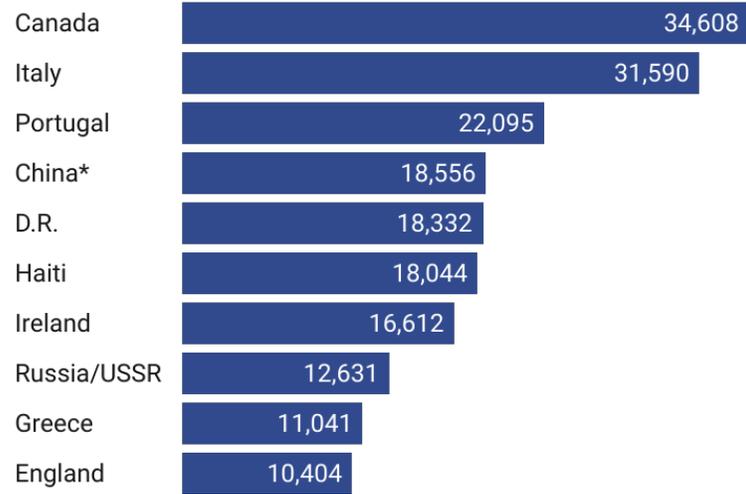
# Greater Boston's population growth is driven by immigrants of color.

Net population change, Greater Boston, 2010-2023.



Top ten countries of origin of Greater Boston's foreign-born population.

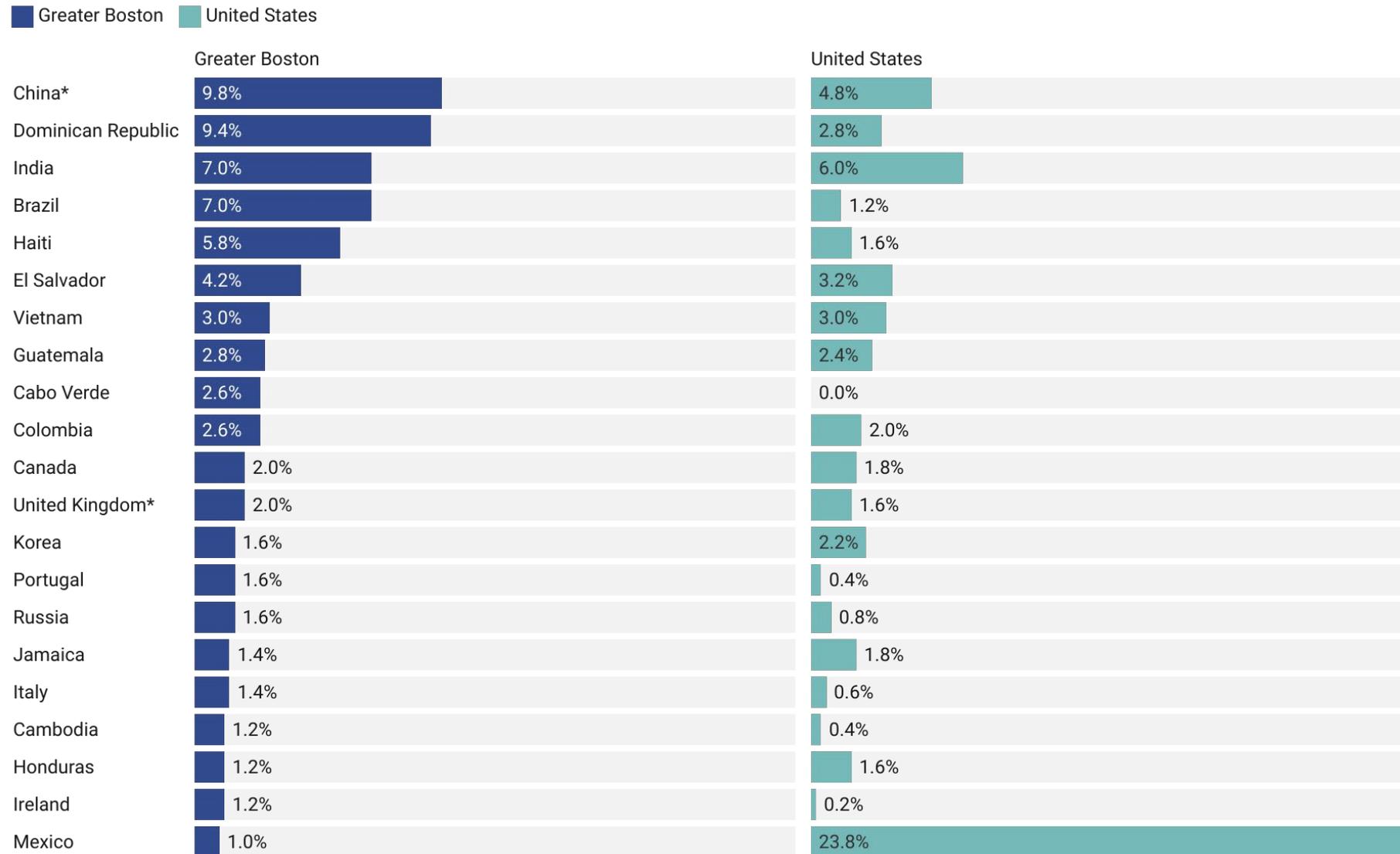
**1990**



**In 1990, six of the top 10 countries of origin were from Europe...**

# Greater Boston's largest immigrant groups are different from the largest immigrant groups to the U.S. overall.

Share of total foreign-born population for Greater Boston and U.S. of Greater Boston's top 21 countries of origin. 2022.



Note: China excludes Hong Kong and Taiwan and United Kingdom includes Crown Dependencies.

# New arrivals to Greater Boston by country of origin.

Five top countries of origin arrival estimates by decade preceding each U.S. census since 1980, plus 2020-2023 arrivals.

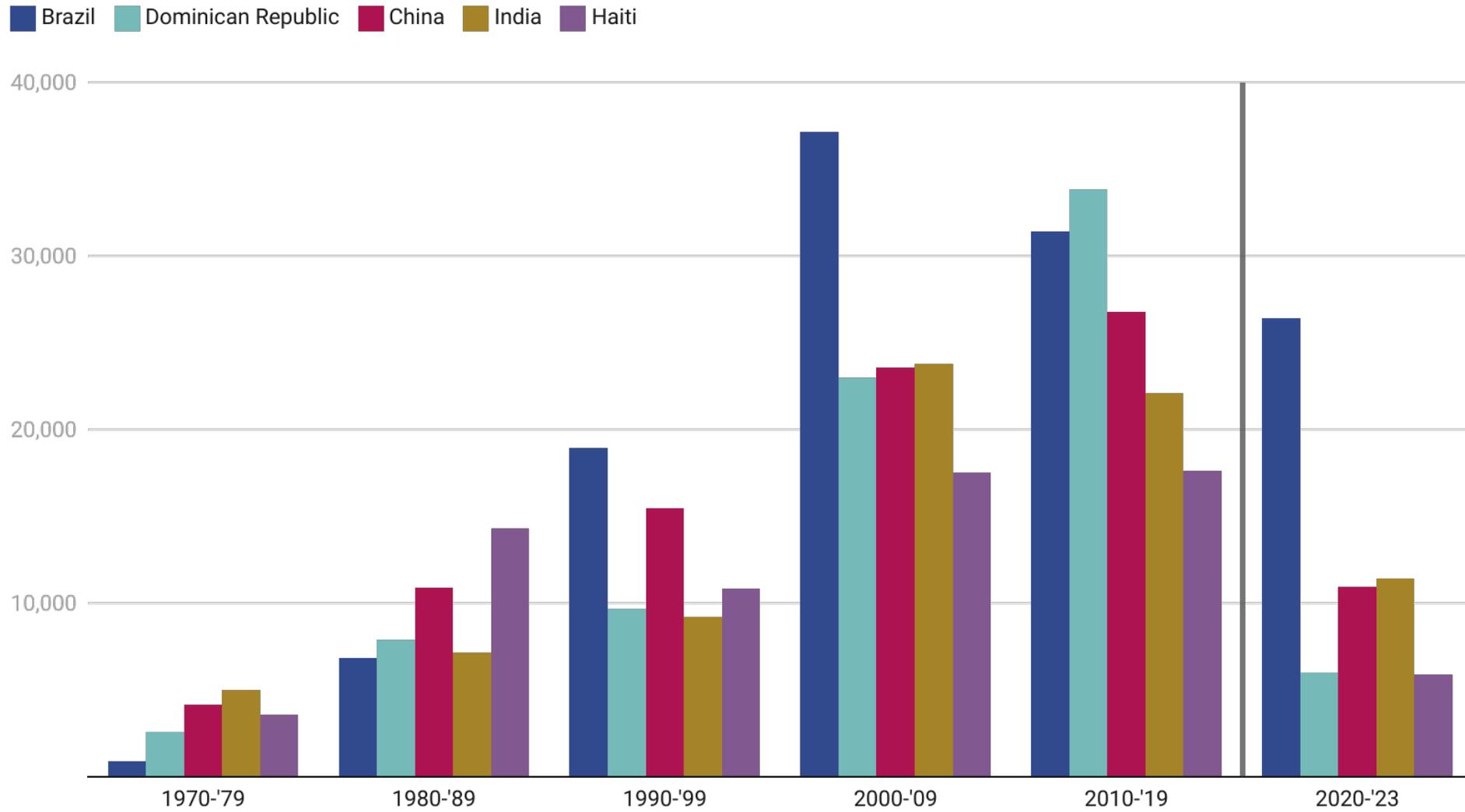
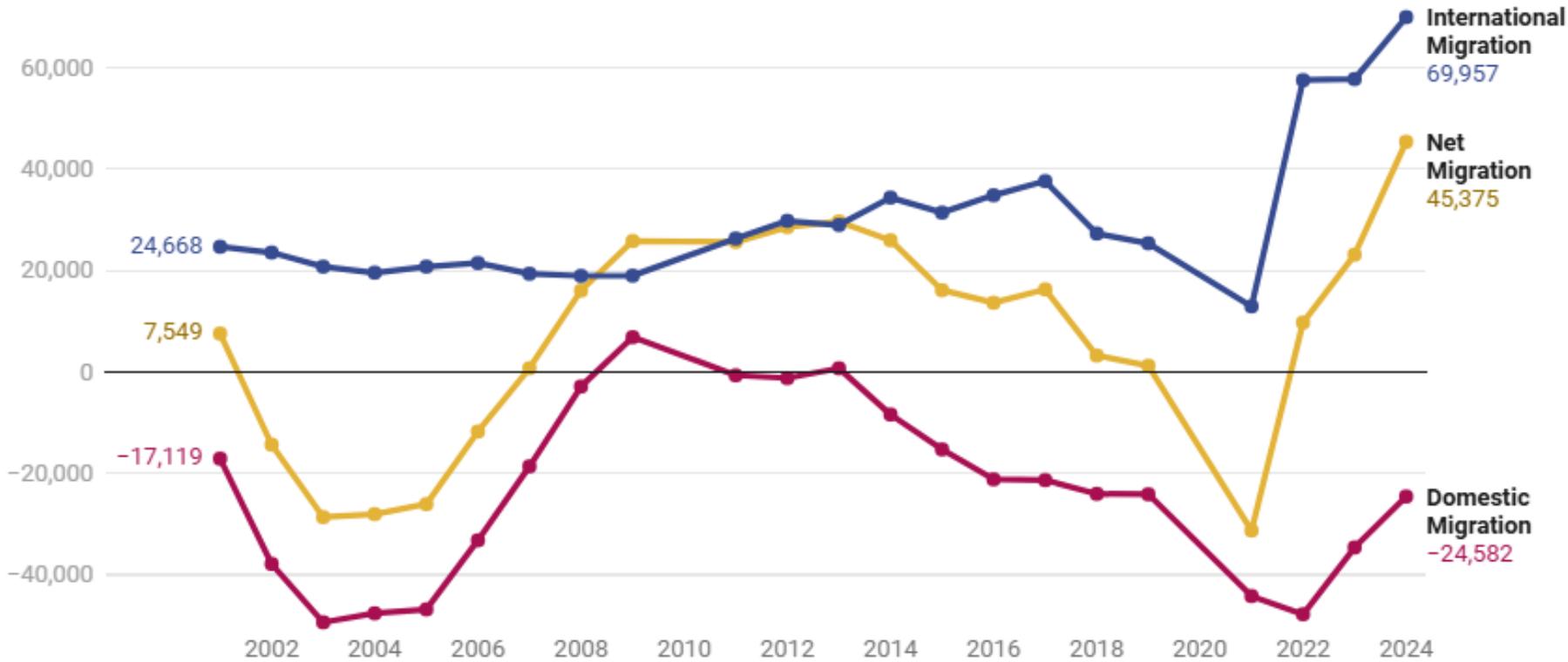


Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: 1980–2000 Census. 2010, 2022 5-Yr American Community Survey. IPUMS, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org). 2023 1-Yr American Community Survey.

# Immigration to Greater Boston has helped offset population losses from domestic moves to other parts of the US.

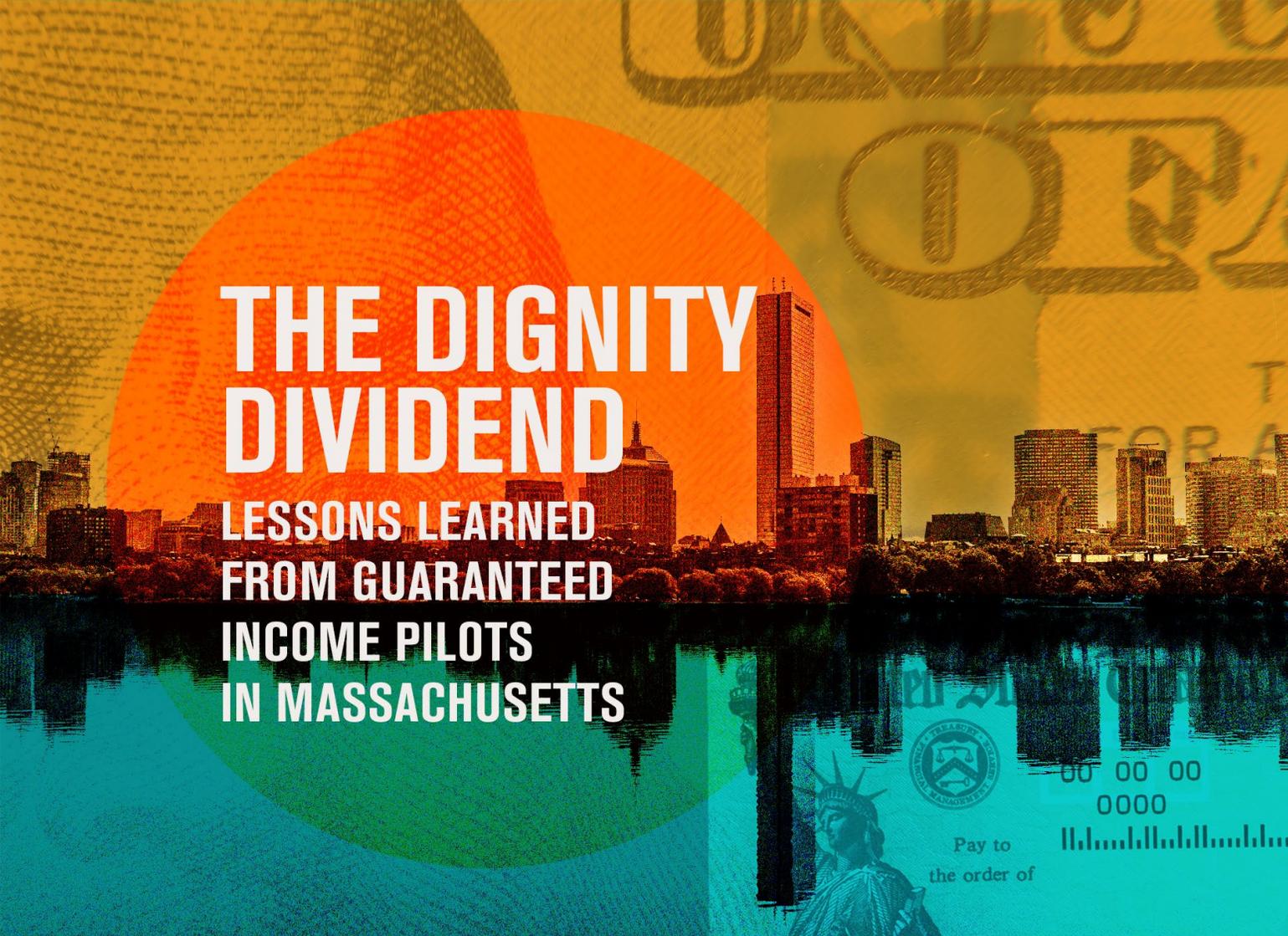
Net migration to Greater Boston.



Note: Population estimates restart each census year (in 2010 and 2020), and thus should not be viewed as a continuation of the previous 10 year estimates. Five-county definition of Greater Boston includes Essex, Middlesex, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Plymouth Counties.

Source: 2010 - 2024 U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program. • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)





# THE DIGNITY DIVIDEND

LESSONS LEARNED  
FROM GUARANTEED  
INCOME PILOTS  
IN MASSACHUSETTS



**STATE  
OF THE  
RESEARCH**

# Wide-Ranging Research Questions

- How do cash payments affect employment?
- How is the money spent?
- Does GI improve long-term career trajectories and financial security?
- Does GI improve physical or mental health?
- Does GI improve housing stability?
- What payment amounts and durations are most effective?
- How do administrative costs for GI compare to traditional programs?
- Do short-term gains persist after payments stop?
- How does GI compare to other anti-poverty interventions?
- If done at scale, does GI contribute to inflation?

# The Research Backdrop

## **COVID-19 context**

- Overlapping interventions and rapid macroeconomic rebound make isolating GI impact tricky.

## **Programs were time-limited**

- Participants knew payments would stop, affecting spending behavior (e.g., long-term leases).

## **Modest monthly payment levels**

- e.g., \$500/month for a household of 4 means only \$125/person

## **Flexibility of cash leads to diffuse benefits**

# The Unconditional Cash Study by OpenResearch

## Scale of Program

- Three-year duration, longer than most
- \$1,000/month, higher than most
- 3,000 low-income individuals across two states (Texas and Illinois)

## Evaluation Details

- Control group received \$50/month
- Very low attrition rate
- Paired survey responses with administrative data (credit reports, health metrics).
- Ongoing tracking of participants post program

NBER WORKING PAPER SERIES

THE EMPLOYMENT EFFECTS OF A GUARANTEED INCOME:  
EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FROM TWO U.S. STATES

Eva Vivalt  
Elizabeth Rhodes  
Alexander W. Bartik  
David E. Brookman  
Patrick Krause  
Sarah Miller

Working Paper 32719  
<http://www.nber.org/papers/w32719>

NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH  
1050 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
July 2024, Revised January 2025

We thank the non-profit organizations that implemented the program we study. We thank Leo Dai, Ethan Sansom, Jake Cosgrove, Kevin Didi, Taryn Eadie, Malek Hassouneh, Amy Huang, Joshua Lin, Anthony McCann, Oliver Scott Pankratz, Idalina Sachango, Sophia Scaglioni, Stephen Stapleton, Derek Thiele, Angela Wang-Lin, Isaac Ahuvia, Francisco Brady, Jill Adona, Oscar Alonso, Jack Bunge, Rashad Dixon, Marc-Andrea Fiorina and Ricardo Robles for excellent research assistance. Alex Nawar, Sam Manning, Elizabeth Proehl, Tess Cotter, Karina Dotson, and Arista Kinis provided invaluable support through their work at OpenResearch. We thank Carmelo Barbaro, Janelle Blackwood, Katie Buitrago, Melinda Croes, Crystal Godina, Kelly Hallberg, Kirsten Jacobson, Timi Koyejo, Misuzu Schexnider, and many others at the Inclusive Economy Lab at the University of Chicago for their pivotal role in supporting the project. This paper gratefully acknowledges funding from the NSF (#2149344) and private donors. This study received ethics approval from Advarra and the University of Toronto's Institutional Review Boards. The study was pre-registered on the American Economic Association RCT Registry (AEARCTR-0006750). The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Bureau of Economic Research.

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NBER WORKING PAPER SERIES

DOES INCOME AFFECT HEALTH?  
EVIDENCE FROM A RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL  
OF A GUARANTEED INCOME

Sarah Miller  
Elizabeth Rhodes  
Alexander W. Bartik  
David E. Brookman  
Patrick K. Krause  
Eva Vivalt

Working Paper 32711  
<http://www.nber.org/papers/w32711>

NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH  
1050 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
July 2024, Revised September 2024

Many people were instrumental in the success of this project. The program we study and the associated research were supported by generous private funding sources, and we thank the non-profit organizations that implemented the program. We are grateful to Jake Cosgrove, Leo Dai, Joshua Lin, Anthony McCann, Ethan Sansom, Kevin Didi, Sophia Scaglioni, Oliver Scott Pankratz, Angela Wang-Lin, Jill Adona, Oscar Alonso, Rashad Dixon, Marc-Andrea Fiorina, Ricardo Robles, Jack Bunge, Isaac Ahuvia, and Francisco Brady, all of whom provided excellent research assistance. Alex Nawar, Sam Manning, Elizabeth Proehl, Tess Cotter, Karina Dotson, and Arista Kinis were invaluable contributors through their work at OpenResearch. Carmelo Barbaro, Janelle Blackwood, Katie Buitrago, Melinda Croes, Crystal Godina, Kelly Hallberg, Kirsten Jacobson, Timi Koyejo, Misuzu Schexnider, and the staff of the Inclusive Economy Lab at the University of Chicago more broadly have provided key support throughout all stages of the project. Kirsten Herrick provided help with the nutrition diary data collection effort of this project. We are grateful for the feedback we received throughout the project from numerous researchers and from our advisory board, as well as useful feedback from seminar and conference participants. This study was approved by Advarra Institutional Review Board (IRB). We received funding for this paper from NIH grant 1R01HD108716-01A1. Any views expressed are those of the authors and not those of the U.S. Census Bureau. The Census Bureau has reviewed this data product to ensure appropriate access, use, and disclosure avoidance protection of the confidential source data used to produce this product. This research was performed at a Federal Statistical Research Data Center under FSRDC Project Number 3011 (CBDRB-FY24-P3011-R11537). The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Bureau of Economic Research.

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# Conflicting interpretations of the same study...

Noahpinion



BI Business Insider

## The basic income myth: cash discourages work

Guaranteed basic income critics often argue cash discourages work. Experts and participants say that's a myth.

Sep 28, 2024



### 3. More disappointing results for basic income

Three weeks ago, I [flagged some mildly disappointing results](#) from a basic income project in Denver. Now we have the results of a [far bigger and longer randomized controlled trial](#) of basic income in northern Illinois and central Texas, and the results are even more disappointing. This is from [a paper by Vivalt et al.](#) summarizing the main results:

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

## Research Note: With Stronger Income Support, Young Adults Shifted Focus From Work to School, Major Study Finds

A study in Texas and Illinois found that giving young adults in their 20s a sizable guaranteed income for three years increased the time they spent in...

Jan 29, 2025



BI Business Insider

## New findings from Sam Altman's basic-income study challenge one of the main arguments against the idea

New findings from Sam Altman's basic-income study show recipients valued work more after getting monthly payments.

Dec 2, 2024



John Arnold  
@JohnArnoldFndtn

Consensus among academics is that results of the OpenResearch UBI study were between mixed and disappointing. Yet most articles in the popular press (Forbes, Bloomberg, Vox, NPR, Quartz) characterize the results in a positive tone and ignore or bury the null/negative results.



The New York Times

## The Report Card on Guaranteed Income Is Still Incomplete

A three-year analysis of unconditional cash stipends concluded that the initiative has had some success, but not the transformational impact...

Aug 30, 2024

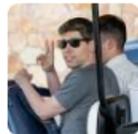


Fortune

## How a Sam Altman-backed study into guaranteed income was widely misinterpreted

The takeaway for many reporters and pundits from OpenResearch's Unconditional Cash Study was that guaranteed income makes people "less..."

Sep 4, 2024

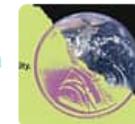


economicsecurityproject.org

<https://economicsecurityproject.org/news/new-open...>

## New OpenResearch Results Further Prove Guaranteed ...

OpenResearch's findings further underscore how guaranteed income can serve as a mechanism to help people plan for the future, to foster economic mobility, ...



# Chelsea Eats

- Launched at height of COVID in Chelsea
- Led by city and Shah Foundation to supplement food distribution efforts
- ~2,200 households (15% of city households)
- Monthly cash payments of \$200–\$400
- Relatively short 6-to-9-month duration
- RCT design with low attrition
- Paired survey responses with administrative data (e.g. Chelsea Public Schools)

## The Chelsea Eats Program: Experimental Impacts

Jeffrey Liebman<sup>a,b</sup>  
Kathryn Carlson<sup>a</sup>  
Eliza Novick<sup>c</sup>  
Pamela Portocarrero<sup>a</sup>

Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston Working Paper  
December 2022

### Abstract

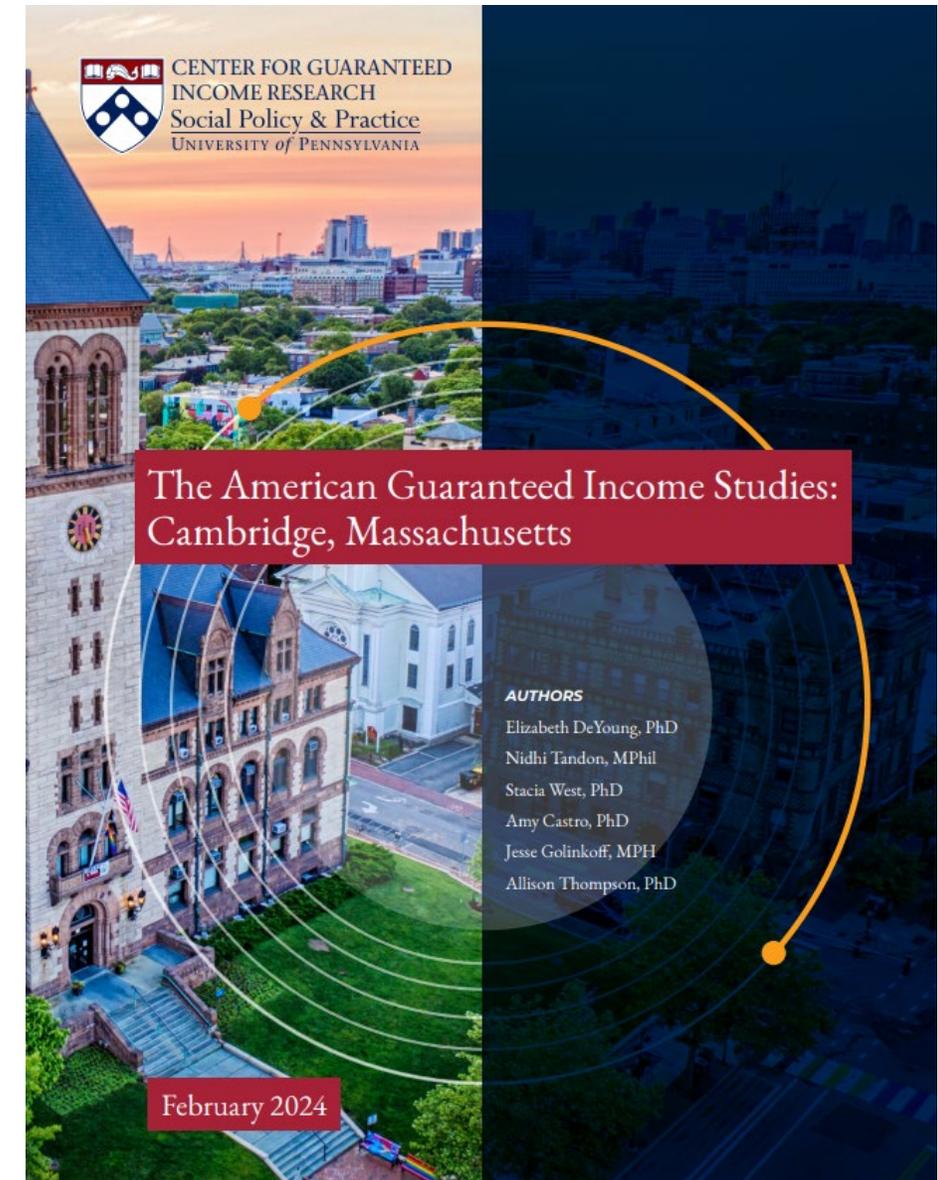
In the midst of the 2020 Covid economic shutdown, 2213 households from a highly food-insecure population in Chelsea, Massachusetts were selected by lottery to receive a cash card that was restocked with up to \$400 each month for nine months. This program, called Chelsea Eats, provides an opportunity to assess the causal effects of income on food consumption, financial well-being, and a variety of potential downstream impacts using a randomized controlled design. As 15 percent of Chelsea households received a cash card, it also offers the opportunity to assess some of the broader impacts of a basic income program operating at scale. We find that the treatment group had higher food expenditures, greater consumption of fish and fresh meat, and greater food satisfaction than the control group. The treatment group also had lower levels of financial distress. In early months of the program, we observed a decline in food insecurity for the treatment group compared with the control group, but that difference did not persist. There were no statistically significant treatment-control differences in the two pre-specified primary downstream outcomes: self-reported physical/mental health and child school attendance. Receiving the cash cards did not reduce employment or hours of work. Among secondary outcomes (results that should be seen as tentative because of the risk of type I error when many endpoints are examined), there was a reduction in residential moves and an increase in pregnancy.

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Author affiliations: a: Harvard University; b: National Bureau of Economic Research; c: Shah Family Foundation. Contact info: [jeffrey.liebman@harvard.edu](mailto:jeffrey.liebman@harvard.edu)

# Cambridge RISE

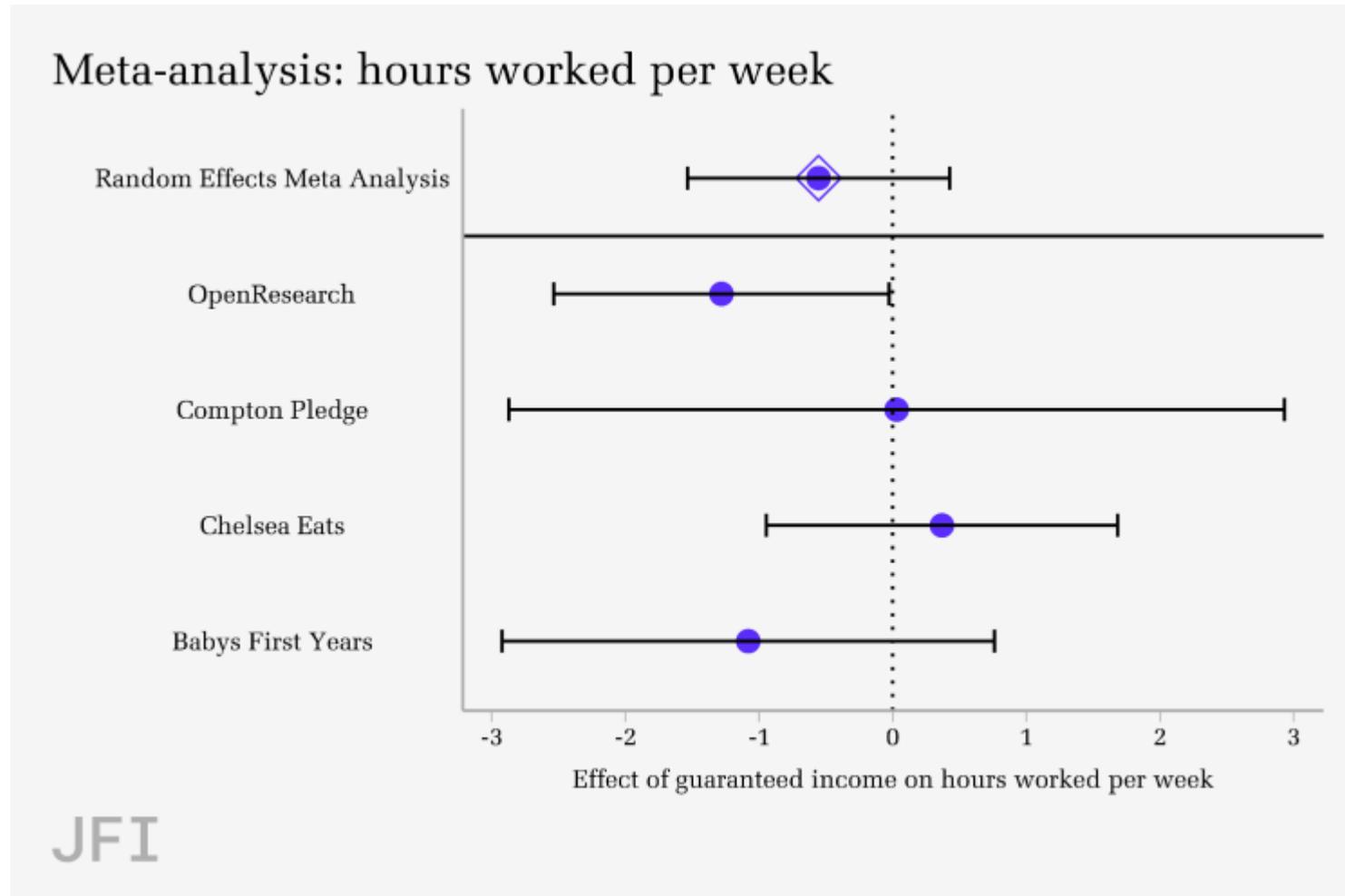
- City of Cambridge has emerged as a leader in GI, launching multiple efforts in recent years.
- Initial Cambridge RISE pilot (2021) used an RCT.
- Small program size (130) and somewhat high attrition rate (30%) over 18 months.
- Precursor to Rise Up Cambridge (June 2023-Feb 2025), which expanded program significantly with a universal approach covering ~2,000 households
  - Evaluation of Rise Up is underway.



# Labor Force Participation

- Chelsea Eats and Cambridge RISE showed no meaningful employment reductions.
  - Cambridge=most optimistic local results. Participants saw full-time employment rise from 36 percent to 40 percent, while control group's rate declined by 2 percentage points.
- OpenResearch found a small reduction: 2 percentage points less likely to be employed, 1.3 fewer hours per week. And earned income decline by about 5 percent.
  - This reduction was concentrated among participants under 30 who used some of the time for education or caregiving
  - Leisure time went up for all age groups.

# Labor Force Participation



Meta-analysis from *Guaranteed Income In The Wild: Summarizing Evidence From Pilot Studies and Implications for Policy*, Jain Family Institute

# Spending, Savings, and Debt

## Short-term spending

- Funds overwhelmingly used for essentials: food, housing, transportation.
- Helps participants reduce financial stress.
- No increase in spending on non-essentials or luxury goods.
- OpenResearch: Credit scores increased by an average of six points.

## Savings and Debt

- OpenResearch: Participants slightly more likely to pay down debt and build emergency savings.
- Other studies (Compton Pledge) found some people able to avoid new debt or pay off small balances.

# Education & Entrepreneurship

- Participants more likely to engage in job training or entrepreneurial activity, especially younger adults
- Cash allowed financial risk taking, reduced hours at low-wage jobs, paid for course fees/startup expenses
- Increased entrepreneurial intention, though no direct business creation during short pilots
- Cambridge RISE found modest improvements in children's academic outcomes and increased parents' expectations for their children's education.

# Health & Mental Health

## Health

- Chelsea Eats: 27% decrease in emergency room visits. Other studies don't find this reduction.
- Baby's First Years: Saw some faster brain development among infants in families receiving cash transfers.
- There are some new MA pilots focused on birth outcomes, child development, and disease management.

## Mental Health

- Qualitative research consistently finds strong appreciation for how unconditional cash provides flexibility, dignity and personal agency.
- Most find improvements with stress, depression, or self-reported mental health. Some effects fade.

# Housing & Food Security

## Housing:

- Participants feel better able to pay rent, cover utilities. And less likely to face eviction.
- But...rare to see statistically significant changes in housing stability or rent burden.
- Denver Basic Income Project (targeting homeless adults): Homelessness declined, but not statistically significant for treatment vs. control in long-term stability

## Food Security:

- Chelsea Eats and OpenResearch: Early improvements in food security. Some gains faded.
- Baby's First Years, Chelsea Eats, OpenResearch all found improvements in food quality – i.e. more fresh produce and higher satisfaction with meals
- Interestingly, use of food distribution in Chelsea actually increased among treatment group, suggesting trust building and complementarities

# Beyond Local Pilots: Lessons From Longer-Running Cash Programs

- Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend
- Eastern Cherokee Casino Revenue Payments
- Unconditional Cash Transfers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries
- COVID-19 Federal Stimulus Payments
- Expanded Child Tax Credit

## Catalog of Guaranteed Income Programs in Massachusetts

Page 1 of 3 &gt;

Program (Location)	Total Participants	Target Population	Duration of Payments/Timeframe	Payment Amount	Funding Source
BAY-CASH (Greater Boston)	60	18–24-year-olds experiencing homelessness	24 months (anticipated launch in fall 2025)	\$1,200/month + \$3,000 one-time payment	ARPA, philanthropic
Beautiful Seed Fund (Greater Boston)	35	Black community leaders	12 months (2024–2025)	\$500/month + \$2,000 lump sum at enrollment + two lump sum payments of \$1,000 at midpoints	Philanthropic
The Bridge Project (Boston)	TBD	Mothers with low incomes, pregnancy through first 1,000 days of baby's life	36 months (anticipated launch in 2025)	one-time prenatal stipend of \$1,125, followed by monthly payments of \$750 for the first 15 months, and \$375 for the final 21 months	Philanthropic
Bridge to Prosperity (Boston, Worcester, Springfield)	18	People participating in at least one DTA-administered benefit and self-identified as having and being committed to pursuing financial or career goals	24 months (2025–2027)	\$300, \$500, or \$700/month (based on projected benefit cliff), and \$10,000 at program completion	ARPA, state, philanthropic
Cambridge RISE (Cambridge)	130	Residents age 18+, below 80% AMI, single caregivers with at least one child under 18	18 months (2021–2022)	\$500/month	ARPA, philanthropic
Rise Up Cambridge (Cambridge)	1,900	Households with a child under the age of 21, at or below 250% FPL	18 months (2023–2025)	\$500/month	ARPA
Camp Harbor View Pilot, phase 1 (Boston)	50	Participants of Camp Harbor View Summer Camp and the Leadership Academy programs, income below \$70,500 and not receiving income-based housing assistance	24 months (2021–2023)	\$583/month	Philanthropic
Camp Harbor View Pilot, phase 2 (Boston)	38	Participants of Camp Harbor View's Leadership Academy, below 80% AMI and not receiving income-based housing assistance	28 months (2024–2026)	\$652.90/month	Philanthropic

# Thank you!

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