
Irish Ancestry in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts: *A Location-Based, Demographic Comparison*



*Prepared by the **Pennsylvania State Data Center***

*for the **Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Growth***

using the American Community Survey 2015 5-Year Estimates



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Introduction

Both Pennsylvania and Massachusetts have a high representation of persons reporting Irish ancestry. Pennsylvania ranks 3rd in the U.S. (not including D.C. or Puerto Rico) behind California and New York for the number of persons reporting Irish ancestry (2,137,575). Massachusetts ranks 8th in number of persons reporting Irish ancestry with a total of 1,447,795.

While Pennsylvania has approximately 1.5 times the Irish population as Massachusetts, the Keystone State also has nearly double the Bay State's total population who report their ancestries (12,779,559 vs. 6,705,586). When accounting for population size, Massachusetts ranks 1st in the nation for the percent of their population who claim Irish ancestry (21.6 percent) while Pennsylvania ranks 7th (16.7 percent).

From 2010 to 2015, both states saw a decline in their populations reporting Irish ancestry despite growth in their general populations. While Massachusetts' total population increased by over 210,000 persons from 2010 to 2015 (3.5 percent), their Irish population decreased by 68,410 persons (4.5 percent). Pennsylvania experienced a gain of approximately 166,854 persons (1.3 percent) during that time and also experienced a loss of its Irish population (113,693 persons or 5.1 percent).

Location of Irish Populations

To determine where populations with Irish ancestry were represented in high proportions for both states, a Location Quotient (LQ) was developed at the census tract level for each state using the national average of persons with Irish ancestry (10.6%). Location Quotients are ratios that allow the comparison of several smaller areas (Census Tracts) based on a regional area (the United States). Using the nation as a base area allowed for a direct comparison of the two states.

If an LQ is less than 1, the area has less of a share of persons reporting Irish ancestry than the United States as a whole. An LQ of 1 denotes a similar proportion of persons with Irish ancestry in the tract and nation, while an LQ greater than 1 identifies tracts with a greater proportion of Irish residents than the nation. For example, a census tract with an LQ of 2 or higher has at least twice the proportion of persons with Irish ancestry.

Pennsylvania is physically larger than Massachusetts and split into more tracts than the Bay State which results in a large proportion of the state scoring low ratings in the LQ analysis. South Central Pennsylvania typically has the lowest LQ scores in the state while with increasing scores outward to the east and west portions of the state (Figure 1). The highest-scoring portion of the state was the southeastern portion of the state in and surrounding Philadelphia County; in fact, the top 10 LQ values were all located in Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties (Table 1).

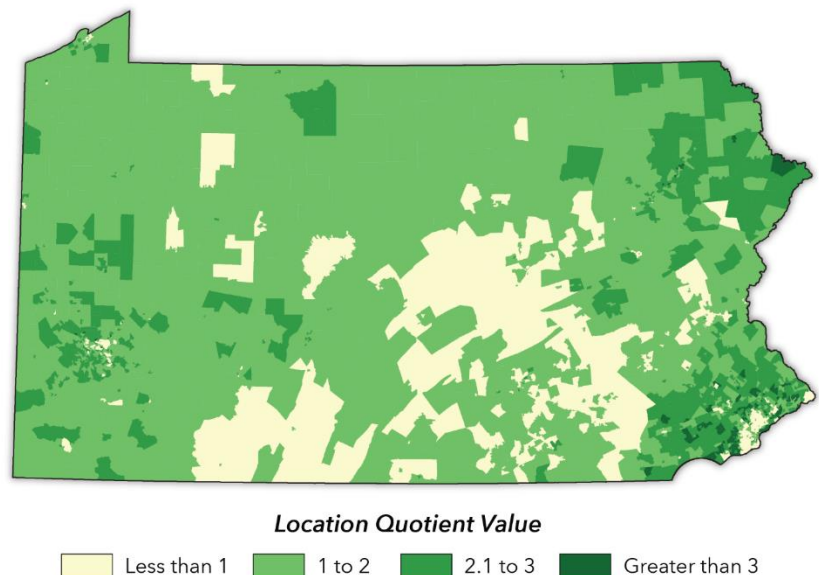


Figure 1. Location quotient for persons reporting Irish ancestry by census tract in Pennsylvania.

Table 1. Highest scoring tracts* in LQ analysis for Pennsylvania.

Tract	County	General Population	with Irish Ancestry	LQ
2017.05	Montgomery County	4,633	2,488	5.1
4091	Delaware County	4,397	2,291	4.9
4039.02	Delaware County	3,707	1,862	4.7
2020	Montgomery County	2,542	1,269	4.7
4035.02	Delaware County	3,010	1,468	4.6
331.01	Philadelphia County	4,699	2,210	4.4
332	Philadelphia County	2,708	1,269	4.4
4041.03	Delaware County	3,363	1,562	4.4
42.01	Philadelphia County	5,625	2,596	4.4
4092	Delaware County	4,102	1,884	4.3

*For tracts with populations greater than 100 persons.

Massachusetts' ranking as the nation's largest percent Irish ancestry population is reflected in the LQ analysis with fewer tracts scoring less than the national average and more tracks exceeding three times the national average. While the city of Boston has generally low LQ scores, clusters of tracts surrounding the city, especially to the south and to some extent in the north, have very high LQ scores (Figure 2). The 10 highest tracts occur in the Boston area or counties surrounding the Boston area like Suffolk, Norfolk, and Plymouth Counties (Table 2).

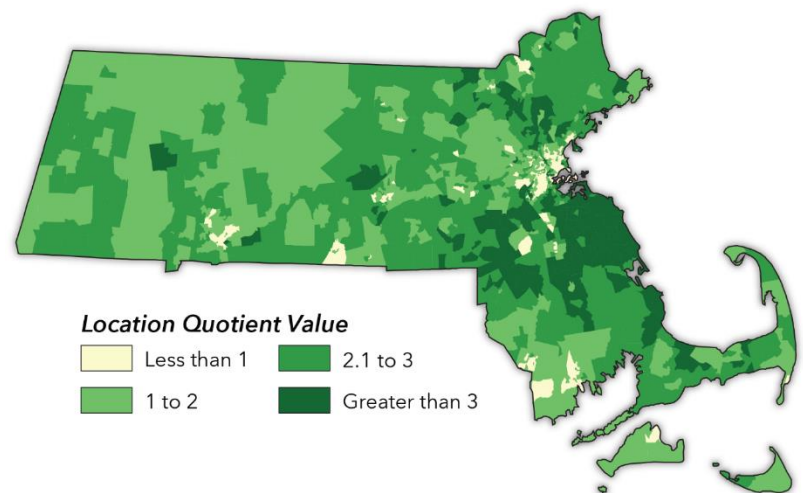


Figure 2. Location quotient for persons reporting Irish ancestry by census tract in Massachusetts.

Table 2. Highest scoring tracts in LQ analysis for Pennsylvania.

Tract	County	General Population	with Irish Ancestry	LQ
1007	Suffolk County	4,370	2,793	6.0
4223.01	Norfolk County	3,038	1,614	5.0
5212.01	Plymouth County	3,118	1,653	5.0
4178.01	Norfolk County	4,995	2,648	5.0
5052	Plymouth County	6,719	3,510	4.9
5061.01	Plymouth County	6,609	3,421	4.9
4164	Norfolk County	6,139	3,152	4.8
5062.04	Plymouth County	5,420	2,747	4.8
4194	Norfolk County	2,829	1,433	4.8
4134.01	Norfolk County	2,974	1,459	4.6

Local and Regional Irish Populations

The city of Boston, Massachusetts has a significant number of persons reporting Irish ancestry. Those reporting Irish ancestry account for 14.3 percent of the total Boston population. Philadelphia, on the other hand, has a higher number of persons reporting Irish ancestry overall, but they account for only 11.6 percent of its total population (Table 3 & Figure 3).

Table 3. General and Irish populations and percent of population reporting Irish ancestry for Boston, MA Metropolitan Division.

	General Population	with Irish Ancestry	Percent Irish
<i>Boston</i>	650,281	93,107	14.3%
<i>Philadelphia</i>	1,555,072	179,860	11.6%

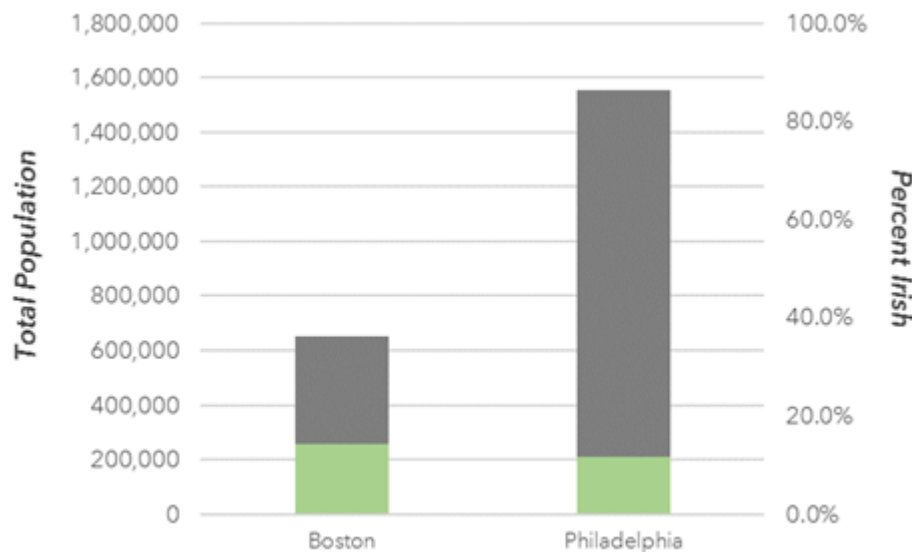


Figure 3. Total population and percent of population that reports Irish ancestry for Boston and Philadelphia.

Since the LQ analysis revealed that Boston and Philadelphia’s city centers scored lower than the tracts of surrounding areas, the analysis of the Irish population was expanded to include significant areas surrounding the city (Metropolitan Divisions). The Boston, MA Metropolitan Division consists of Suffolk (in which Boston is located), Norfolk, and Plymouth Counties. The counties outside of Boston (Norfolk and Plymouth) report higher proportions of Irish ancestry than Boston itself with nearly a third of Plymouth County reporting Irish ancestry (Table 4 & Figure 4).

Table 4. General and Irish populations and percent of population reporting Irish ancestry for Boston, MA Metropolitan Division.

	General Population	with Irish Ancestry	Percent Irish
<i>Suffolk</i>	758,979	106,133	14.0%
<i>Norfolk</i>	687,721	200,956	29.2%
<i>Plymouth</i>	503,681	162,098	32.2%
Total	1,950,381	469,187	24.1%

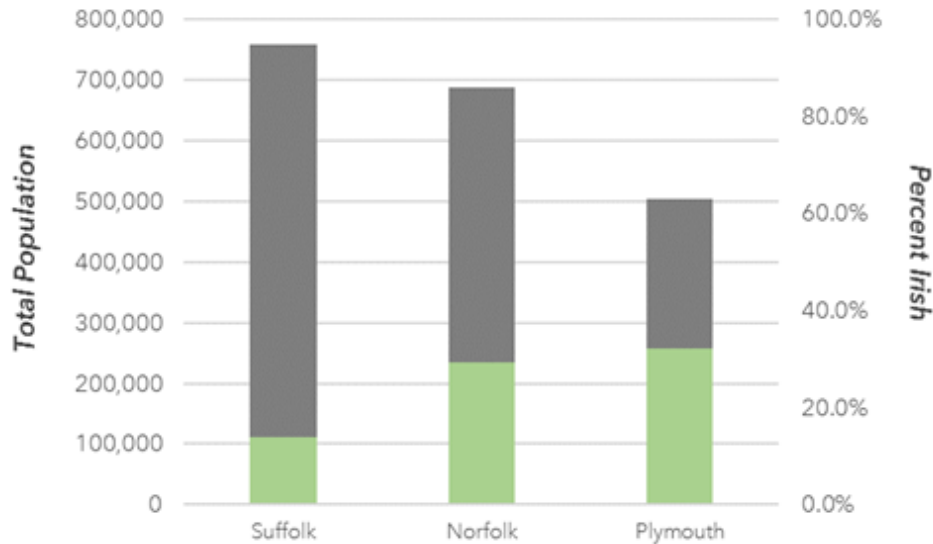


Figure 4. Total population and percent of population that reports Irish ancestry for Boston, MA Metropolitan Division.

The Philadelphia, PA Metropolitan Division is fairly large at five counties and includes Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties. This region has over double the total population as the Massachusetts, MA Metropolitan Division and over 300,000 more residents with Irish ancestry. The counties surrounding Philadelphia County all report higher proportions of residents with Irish ancestry (Table 5 & Figure 5). Delaware County has the highest proportion with just over a quarter of its residents (26.4 percent) followed closely by Bucks (24.8 percent) and Chester (23.9 percent).

Table 5. General and Irish populations and percent of population reporting Irish ancestry for Philadelphia, PA Metropolitan Division.

	General Population	with Irish Ancestry	Percent Irish
<i>Bucks</i>	626,583	155,392	24.8%
<i>Chester</i>	509,797	121,736	23.9%
<i>Delaware</i>	561,683	148,258	26.4%
<i>Montgomery</i>	812,970	178,339	21.9%
<i>Philadelphia</i>	1,555,072	179,860	11.6%
Total	4,066,105	783,585	19.3%

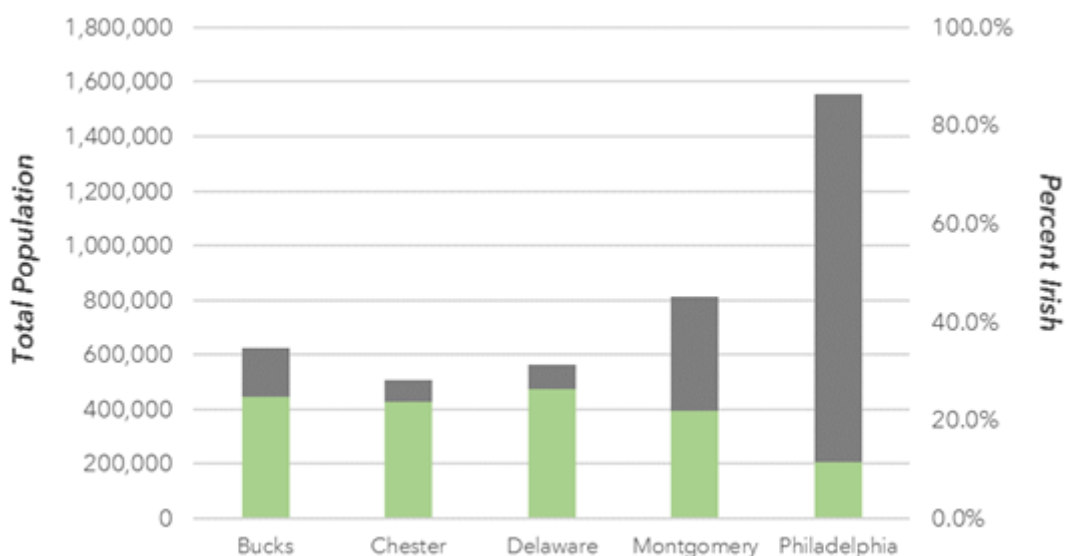


Figure 5. Total population and percent of population that reports Irish ancestry for Philadelphia, PA Metropolitan Division.

While the data shows that the Boston, MA Metropolitan Division and Massachusetts in general have some of the highest proportions of persons reporting Irish ancestry, there are a few caveats that need to be addressed that favor Pennsylvania. First, while Massachusetts has a higher proportion of Irish residents, Pennsylvania possesses a sheer magnitude of Irish persons (at 1.5 times Massachusetts’ Irish population) due to the state’s large population. Next, the regional data reveals that the Philadelphia, PA Metropolitan Division is an area of the state with a great representation of the Irish. The Philadelphia, PA Metropolitan Division’s Irish population is 1.7 times the size of the Boston, MA Metropolitan Division’s Irish population.

Additionally, the Philadelphia, PA Metropolitan Division has a denser representation of Irish persons (based on their state average) than the Boston, MA Metropolitan Division. Approximately 32.4 percent of the Boston, MA Metropolitan Division’s population report Irish ancestry (only 10.8 percent higher than the Massachusetts’s average of 21.6 percent) while 36.7 percent of the Philadelphia, PA Metropolitan Division’s population report Irish ancestry (20.0 percent higher than Pennsylvania’s average of 16.7 percent).

Conclusion

Both Pennsylvania and Massachusetts have very large Irish populations ranking high nationally in both the total number of persons who report Irish ancestry and also the percent of the total population that reports Irish ancestry. While Massachusetts has the highest percentage of its population that identifies as Irish, Pennsylvania possesses a substantially larger population of Irish residents, numerically. Furthermore, when accounting for the regions of the states with the most substantial proportions of Irish, the Philadelphia, PA Metropolitan Division stands out in terms of its numeric advantage and its role as the epicenter of the state’s Irish population.