

Civic Vitality

The civic vitality of Boston—the organizational infrastructure, civic engagement and trusting relationships that underpin a vibrant, open and informed city—has strengthened in some areas while declining in others. Voter participation and library usage increased—especially in traditionally underserved neighborhoods—and Bostonians logged more volunteer hours. However, as new technologies combine with the downturn to threaten the viability of major daily newspapers, the region faces the potential loss of civic glue.

Electoral Participation

The historic election of the nation’s first African American President, Barack Obama, along with the recent elections of Massachusetts’ first African American Governor, Deval Patrick, and first female Attorney General, Martha Coakley, as well as Boston’s first Asian City Councilor, Sam Yoon, spurred the largest increase in electoral engagement in Boston since the 1960s. However, significant gaps in participation remain.

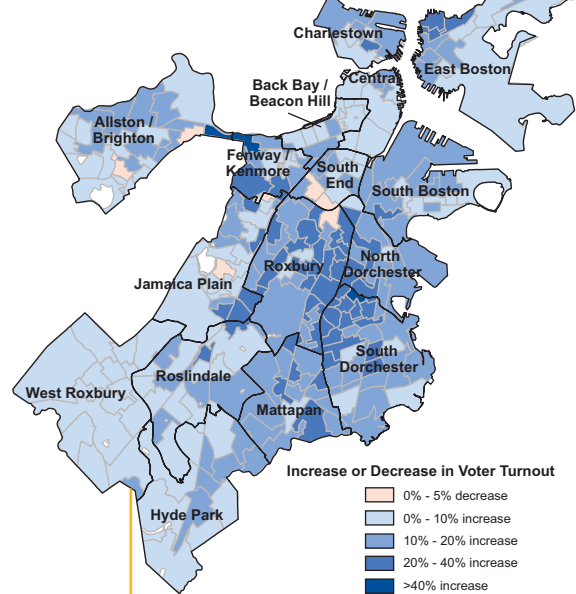
Voter Registration

Citywide: Between 2000 and 2008, the total number of registered voters in Boston increased by nearly 14%. According to MassVOTE, 56,979 Bostonians registered to vote for the first time between January 1, 2008 and the Massachusetts voter registration deadline of October 15th, 2008, amounting to 197 new registrations per day.

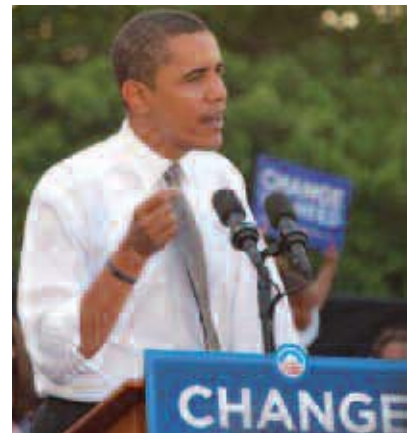
Boston’s Neighborhoods: Between 2000 and 2008, the greatest percentage increase in registered voters occurred in Chinatown (56%), Jamaica Plain/Roxbury (35%), Mission Hill (31%), the South End (27%), Grove Hall/Dudley (27%), Uphams Corner (23%) and Mattapan/Franklin Field (20%).

By Race & Ethnicity: Since 2000, Boston’s predominantly Asian precincts saw a 44% increase in voter registration—the highest of all racial and ethnic groups. Predominantly Latino precincts saw a 29% increase. And predominantly African American precincts saw a 22% increase. Precincts with a predominantly white population experienced just a 3.2% increase in voter registration, but have also had an historically higher rate of voter registration.

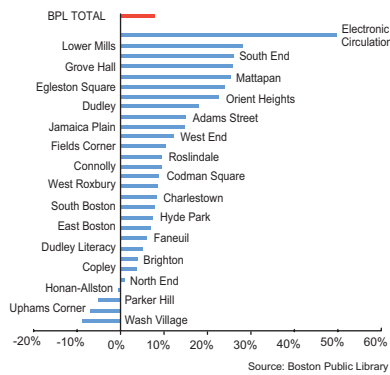
Change in Voter Turnout – 2008 Election, City of Boston



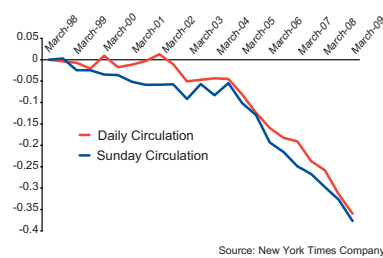
Data Source: MassVOTE, MassGIS; Map by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council



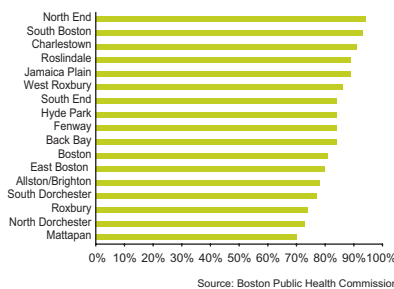
Boston Public Library Circulation
Percent Change by Branch, 2007-2008



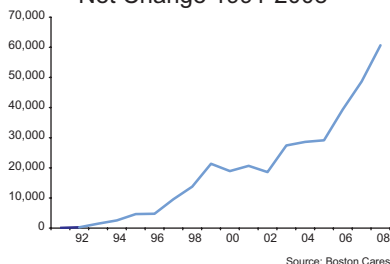
Boston Globe Circulation
Percent Change March 1998-March 2009



Bostonians Who Feel Their Neighbors are Willing to Help, Boston Neighborhoods, 2008



Boston Cares Volunteer Hours
Net Change 1991-2008



Voter Turnout

Citywide: In November of 2008, 234,514 Bostonians—81% of registered voters and 39% of the total population—turned out to vote in the presidential election, amounting to a 14% increase over the 2004 presidential election and a 24% increase over 2000. According to MassVOTE, this election drew the highest turnout in Boston since that of John F. Kennedy in 1960, when 42% of all Bostonians voted.

Boston Neighborhoods: Jamaica Plain (82%), West Roxbury (81%), Back Bay/Beacon Hill (81%) and Roslindale (77%) had the highest rates of turnout among registered voters. However, neighborhoods with the greatest increase over the 2000 election were Uphams Corner (26%), Grove Hall/Dudley (21%), Fields Corner (20%), and Mattapan/Franklin Field (18%).

By Race & Ethnicity: Boston’s predominantly white precincts had the highest turnout rate (85%). Turnout in Boston’s predominantly African American precincts was 82%—up 19% over 2000. Turnout in predominantly Latino precincts increased 17% to 79% and predominantly Asian precincts 4% to 70%.

Access to Information

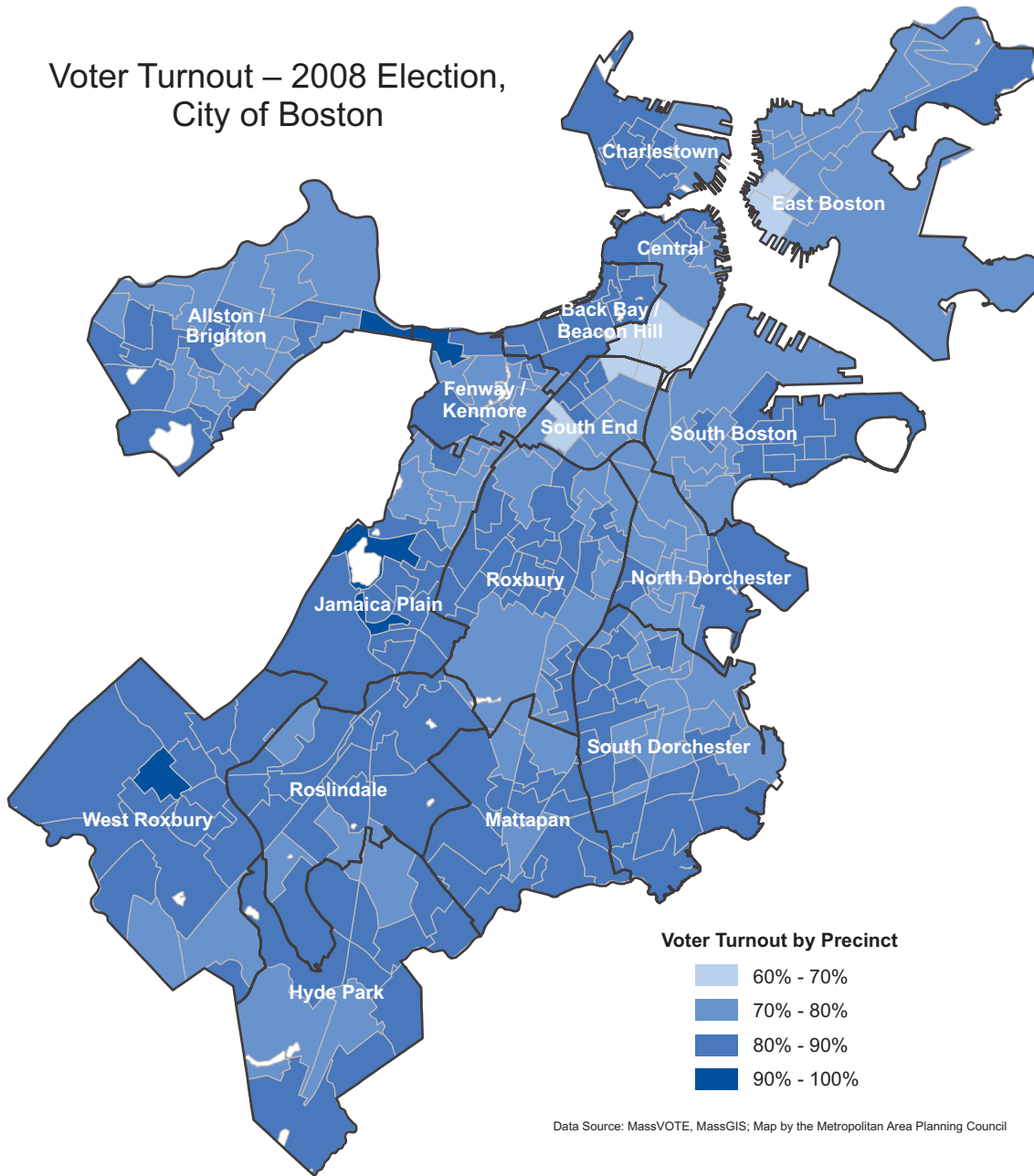
Library Circulation

Book circulation increased by 8% during the Boston Public Library’s (BPL) 2008 Fiscal Year, when compared to the previous year, with a total circulation of 3,116,540 books. The fastest growing branches were in neighborhoods with high concentrations of children and families. The branches with the greatest increase in circulation were Dorchester Lower Mills (28%), the South End (26%), Grove Hall 26%, Mattapan (25%), Egleston Square (24%) and Orient Heights (23%). With a total circulation of 62,352, the BPL’s “virtual” library of newspapers, scholarly journals and electronic books had a circulation increase of 50% in FY 2008. Circulation through March 2009 shows this trend continuing through the economic downturn, with circulation up 9% in all neighborhood branches and up 56% in Fields Corner. The new branch library in Mattapan is also attracting a large new constituency, with a circulation of nearly 8,500 in its inaugural month of March 2009.

Local News Outlets

Declining circulation continues to threaten the city’s largest newspaper. *The Boston Globe’s* daily circulation was down 36% and its Sunday circulation was down 38% between March 1998 and March 2009. The *Boston Herald’s* daily circulation was down 18% and its Sunday circulation was down 13% from September 2006 to September 2008. Boston ranked 6th among US media markets in Integrated Newspaper Audience, with 85% of adults reading either a print or online newspaper in March 2009, according to Scarborough Research. However, due to declining circulation, *The Boston Globe* was cited in early 2009 as the nation’s 5th most endangered newspaper.

Voter Turnout – 2008 Election, City of Boston



Data Source: MassVOTE, MassGIS; Map by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Neighborhoodly Trust and Volunteerism

According to the Boston Public Health Commission, 81% of Bostonians surveyed in 2008 felt that residents are willing to help their neighbors and at least 70% of residents felt this level of trust in their own neighbors. The North End (94%), South Boston (93%) and Charlestown (91%) had the highest rates of neighborhoodly trust while Roxbury (74%), North Dorchester (73%), and Mattapan (70%) had the lowest.

Volunteers in Greater Boston logged a total of 109,338 hours of service in 2007 and 2008, according to Boston Cares, the largest and broadest coordinator of volunteer activities in Greater Boston. In 2008, volunteers contributed 60,679 volunteer hours—a 125% increase over 2007 and a 212% increase since 2004.