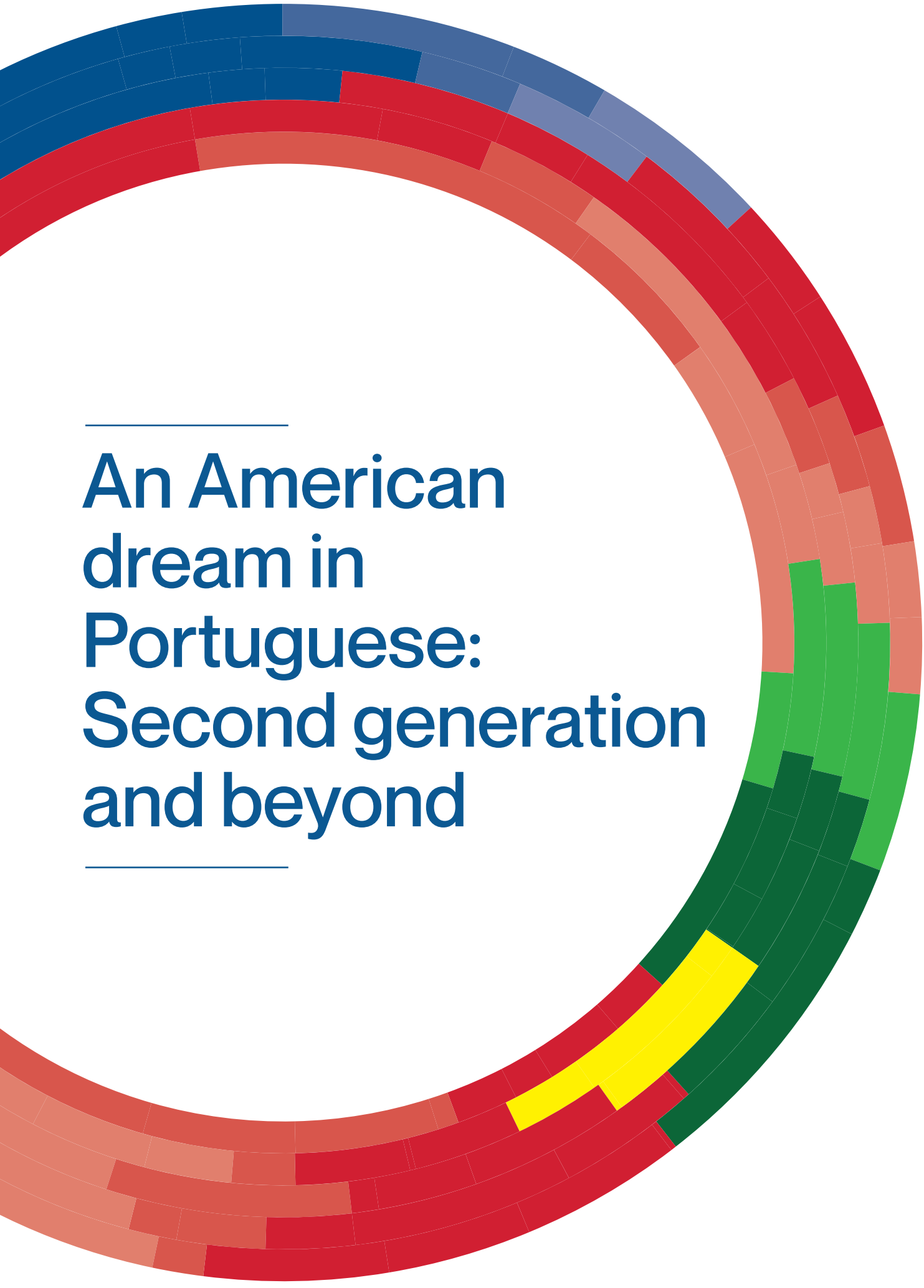

An American dream in Portuguese: Second generation and beyond

An American Dream in Portuguese: second generation and beyond

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Mapping change, strengthening roots

The Portuguese-American community is one of the most vibrant expressions of Portugal's presence in the world. For over four decades, FLAD, the Luso-American Development Foundation, has been committed to understanding, celebrating, and supporting this community. It is in this spirit that we present a new study focusing on the Portuguese-Americans from the second generation and beyond. They are those who, born far from Portugal, carry forward its heritage in their identities, their family traditions, and their communities.

This publication builds on *Portuguese Immigrants and Descendants in the USA in the 21st Century* (Azevedo et al., 2023), incorporating additional data and expanding the analysis, addressing questions raised by earlier findings, and adding a qualitative dimension based on the voices of experts and community leaders.

This study is part of FLAD's broader effort to work closely with the Portuguese diaspora in the United States. We do so, first of all, by being present. We engage directly with communities from Boston, Providence, Newark, San Diego, Fresno, Honolulu, and many other cities, celebrating Portugal and strengthening our shared bonds.

At the same time, we gather robust, trustworthy information that complements personal contact, adding human context and strengthening relationships. Together, experience and research allow us to see the full picture.

This study draws on American Community Survey (ACS) data from two five-year periods (2013–2017 and 2018–2022), combining a nationwide view with a focus on eight states in five major clusters where Portuguese-Americans have historically been present and where significant recent dynamics may be observed. It examines demographic trends, geographic shifts, language use, and socioeconomic conditions to offer a comprehensive picture of how the community is evolving.

As with the previous study, the data are based on self-identification: individuals who report Portuguese ancestry in the ACS. While this method may inevitability lead to underestimation in numbers, self-reported ancestry signals that those who do identify as Portuguese regard it as a meaningful element of their heritage and identity.

Because language is central to heritage, the study distinguishes between those who both identify as having Portuguese ancestry and speak Portuguese at home, and those who identify as Portuguese but do not speak the language (at least at home). Even though the numbers of those who speak Portuguese are most likely higher than reported, this distinction allows for an examination of how language use relates to the preservation of ancestral ties. While neither self-identification nor

home language use fully captures the complexity of cultural belonging, both remain key indicators of connection to heritage.

One of the most significant takeaways of such distinction is the increasing interest in the Portuguese language within the community overall, as well as its growing importance in sustaining links to ancestry in the country and particularly in certain areas, most notably New York-New Jersey and Florida. In these states, the share of Portuguese descendants who speak Portuguese at home has increased, strengthening their ties to Portuguese roots. The data also suggest that Portuguese is not only a vehicle for cultural continuity, but also a bridge to educational and professional opportunities, as well as a means of cohesion in a diaspora that is present all over the country.

The findings show that integration does not inevitably weaken ancestral ties, but sustaining both requires deliberate action. As younger generations grow further from the immigrant experience, language and community spirit serve as a cultural anchor, as a promise of renewal is brought by a new generation of Portuguese-Americans.

We are certain that with ongoing engagement, investment in education and cultural initiatives, and policies informed by solid research, the bonds that unite our communities across the Atlantic can grow even stronger.

We extend our sincere thanks to the research team whose dedication made this study possible. Their work represents a valuable step in a endeavour we share with so many people and organizations both in Portugal and the United States: to better understand and actively build bridges together with the Portuguese-American community in all its diversity and vitality.

Nuno Morais Sarmento
Lisbon, September 2025

1. Second Generation and Beyond: an American Dream in Portuguese?

Lara Patrício Tavares

The study *Portuguese Immigrants and Descendants in the USA in the 21st Century* (Azevedo et al., 2023), used microdata from the American Community Survey (ACS) for the period 2006-2020, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of this community. The analysis enabled the identification of disparities among groups based on their status of naturalization (for immigrants) and use of the Portuguese language (for Portuguese descendants). The results indicate that Portuguese immigrants and their descendants constitute distinct groups. For instance, between 2006 and 2010, while Portuguese immigrants were already at or beyond the prime working age (25-54), Portuguese descendants were still at the middle of the prime working age, along with other U.S. residents. This disparity is evident in their divergent educational attainment, which in turn impacts their subsequent earnings. The present study focuses on them.

The focus on the second-generation migrants (and beyond) derives from the observation that a substantial fraction of the future U.S. population/workforce will necessarily be composed of second-generation migrants. The foreign-born population under the age of 18 residing in the United States constituted approximately one in twenty of the total population (ACS 2022) and more than one in four individuals under the age of 18 have at least one foreign-born parent. It is imperative to comprehend the identity of these individuals in order to fully grasp the profound transformations that have been observed in U.S. society. A pressing question is thus how to ascertain the extent to which they are successfully integrating (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2015).

The contemporary world is undergoing significant and rapid change. The current situation is markedly different from that of the twentieth-century era, which offered the prospect of a more prosperous life to numerous immigrants seeking opportunities in Western countries, particularly the USA, in pursuit of the so-called 'American dream'. In present-day society, social mobility may be more challenging for immigrants, who may be compelled to establish distinct economic and social structures (Borjas 2006). Nevertheless, as posited by Anne-Marie Slaughter (2015), diversity endows society with a multifaceted and intricate character that, while complicating our ability to march in unison towards a shared objective, also guarantees an intrinsic resilience in the face of adversity.

If one is interested in the impact of immigration in the host society, currently a topic of great interest, it is paramount to consider the adjustment process not only of the immigrants but of their descendants as well. In Borjas' own words,

"The ultimate impact of immigration on the United States obviously depends not only on the economic, social, political, and cultural shifts that take place during the life cycle of the immigrant population, but also on the adjustment process experienced by the immigrant household across generations." (Borjas 2006)

In a broader perspective, this brings us to explore the theoretical insights on integration, assimilation, and social mobility as presented in the literature (Chapter 2).

As in *Portuguese Immigrants and Descendants in the USA in the 21st Century* (Azevedo et al., 2023), data from ACS were used in this study, specifically from two five-year samples: 2018–2022 and 2013–2017. The period 2018–2022 provides a more recent and accurate portrait of the Portuguese-Americans, whereas the 2013–2017 period is primarily utilized for the observation of trends. In this study, the term 'Portuguese-Americans' is employed to denote individuals who have been born in the United States and who self-identify as having Portuguese ancestry in the ACS, irrespective of their nationality or citizenship status. In consideration of our salient antecedent findings pertaining to use of the the Portuguese language, Portuguese-Americans can be categorized into two distinct groups: those who speak Portuguese and those who do not. Chapter 3 delineates the research design and data sources used in this study, while Chapter 4 presents a demographic profile of Portuguese-Americans – both Portuguese-speaking and non-speaking – focusing on population size, age structure, and sex composition between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022.

In addition to national-level trends, Chapter 4 places particular emphasis on regional clusters with significant Portuguese-American populations. Building on this, Chapter 5 examines the spatial distribution of Portuguese-Americans across states and Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs), analyzing patterns of concentration versus dispersion and mapping levels of residential segregation within the five major regional clusters.

The present study builds on our previous findings (Azevedo et al., 2023), with a view to exploring some of them more thoroughly. These relate to the geographical distribution of Portuguese descendants, as well as to their labor market outcomes.

The preceding study identified five primary clusters at the Public Use Microdata Area level, comprising eight states. The Massachusetts–Rhode Island–Connecticut cluster is the most substantial. A notable increase in the population of Portuguese descendants was observed in several states, including Texas, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and notably Florida. The hypothesis that this phenomenon could be attributed to a process of geographical dispersion based on internal mobility is then proposed, and this hypothesis will be explored further in this study (Chapter 5).

A further salient finding of the preceding study is that the wages or salaries of Portuguese-speaking descendants are, on average, 20% higher than those of other U.S. residents. It is important to note that Portuguese-speaking descendants are at an earlier stage in the prime working age (25-54), meaning that this result cannot be attributed to a favorable position in terms of the age-income profile. However, given the descriptive nature of the previous study, it was not designed to provide an explanation for the observed wage premium. The present study explores this issue further (see Chapter 6).

Although micro-data of a high quality, such as the American Community Survey, can provide unique and crucial insights into Portuguese-Americans in the USA, there are questions that cannot be answered through hard data. One of the objectives of this study is to explore how Portuguese-Americans navigate their relationship with the Portuguese language and cultural heritage while fully participating in American society. The role of language, gender, and intergenerational transmission in shaping the cultural continuity and transformation of Portuguese-American identities are subjects worthy of further investigation. In what ways have definitions of success and belonging evolved across generations within Portuguese-American communities? These are some of the questions that will be addressed in the qualitative section of the study (Chapter 7). Based on the overall results of the study, in the concluding chapter (Chapter 8) we will provide an answer to the question 'are Portuguese-Americans fulfilling the American dream?'

2. Setting the scene: conceptual approaches to the Portuguese-American experience

Martha Estrada-Rivera

The study of immigrant descendants is especially relevant in today's context, marked by growing cultural diversity and global mobility (Duncan & Trejo, 2018; Alba & Nee, 2003). While much of the existing research has traditionally centered on immigrants themselves—examining their arrival and paths to incorporation into the host society (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990, 2006; Duncan & Trejo, 2018; Scott, 2005)—a deeper understanding of integration processes emerges when we trace the longer-term trajectories of their descendants (Alba & Nee, 2003; Duncan & Trejo, 2018). This chapter lays the theoretical foundation for the study by offering a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge and introducing the conceptual tools used to understand the lived experiences and identity configurations of Portuguese-Americans.

One of the most influential frameworks in studies of immigrants and their descendants in the U.S. comes from the work of Portes and Rumbaut (1990, 2006) and Rumbaut (2004). Typically, the first generation refers to foreign-born immigrants (assumed to be adults), the second generation to their U.S.-born children, and the third generation to their U.S.-born grandchildren (Duncan & Trejo, 2015). Rumbaut (2004) expands this model by emphasizing the importance of age at arrival, arguing that immigration in early life stages—rather than adulthood—can significantly shape outcomes. Early arrival can influence access to education, language acquisition, and the formation of local social networks, all of which are crucial for long-term integration. These context-specific factors shape generational experiences in distinct ways.

Research also shows that migration experiences vary even within the same family (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990, 2006; Rumbaut, 2004; Duncan & Trejo, 2015). Because each generation is shaped by different social, legal, and economic structures, they should not be treated as directly comparable. Subsuming all individuals into a single generational category risks overlooking these critical structural differences (Wallace et al., 2023).

Studying the descendants of immigrants offers a unique lens to observe long-term incorporation into the host society. Unlike first-generation immigrants, whose experiences are shaped by the moment of migration, descendants' trajectories unfold across decades and are embedded in evolving legal, social, and economic environments. These processes are neither linear nor guaranteed to lead to successful integration. Outcomes depend on the analytical lens—whether considering public policy, labor market participation, or social cohesion (Alba & Nee, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Ultimately, the study of immigrant descendants expands the temporal and conceptual scope of migration research and calls for broader frameworks to understand how incorporation is mediated over time (Potochnick & Hall, 2021; Duncan & Trejo, 2018).

2.1. Theoretical perspectives on integration and segmented integration, assimilation, and social mobility

In many host societies, descendants outnumber immigrants themselves, making them central to understanding medium- and long-term social and demographic change (Fernandez et al., 2024). Understanding the degree to which ethnic groups are integrated, assimilated, or segregated within socio-spatial contexts is a core concern in migration studies, as it reveals patterns of inclusion and exclusion that persist over time (Alba & Nee, 2003). Traditional research on migration often focused on immigrants' initial adaptation to the host society, but contemporary studies now recognize that descendants' experiences—shaped by shifting legal, political, and economic structures—deserve equal analytical attention.

Two broad schools of thought dominate the theoretical landscape. One emphasizes a conventional, one-dimensional model of assimilation, suggesting that immigrants and their descendants gradually adopt the cultural norms of the host society while abandoning their original cultural identities. In contrast, the second school of thought embraces a multidimensional understanding of integration, highlighting not only cultural but also economic and social incorporation. This perspective stresses that integration is a two-way process (EESC, 1994): immigrants and their descendants adapt to the host society, while the host society also evolves in response to their presence.

Integration is a two-way process (EESC, 1994): immigrants and their descendants adapt to the host society, while the host society also evolves in response to their presence.

Classical assimilation theory (Gordon, 1964) offers a linear model in which immigrants progressively shed their cultural distinctiveness—such as language, religion, and customs—in favor of mainstream norms (Abramitzky et al., 2020). However, this model has been widely criticized for its simplicity and lack of attention to structural inequalities. Portes and Zhou's (1993) segmented assimilation theory proposes an alternative model that considers the influence of a range of factors on the trajectories of descendants. These factors include socioeconomic status, race, and institutional support, which can result in divergent outcomes, such as downward assimilation into poverty and exclusion (Morrison & James, 2009). Newer assimilation models refine these perspectives further by acknowledging generational acculturation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006), in which individuals selectively adopt aspects of the host culture while retaining elements of their ancestral identity. This nuanced approach reflects how identity and integration unfold differently across generations and contexts (Ermisch et al., 2012a).

Measuring integration across generations requires robust comparative analyses. Studies often assess intergenerational shifts in education attainment, language retention, and income (Duncan & Trejo, 2018; Ermisch et al., 2012). However, upward mobility in one domain does not guarantee full incorporation into the societal mainstream. Research may focus on a single dimension—such as economic integration compared to native-born populations (Scott, 2009)—or explore identity dynamics, including language proficiency, bilingualism, and cultural continuity (Zhou & Gonzalez, 2019).

Social networks and transnational ties also play important roles. Some studies emphasize the persistence of ethnic enclaves or social capital (Baganha, 1990), while others expose enduring discrimination and structural exclusion (Alba & Nee, 2003). Additional dimensions—such as marriage patterns and fertility behavior—offer further insights into how immigrant descendants integrate into the host society (Wilson, 2019).

Among the most comprehensive models is Harder et al.'s (2018) multidimensional integration framework, which incorporates psychological, economic, political, social, linguistic, and navigational dimensions into a composite index. While innovative, this survey-based model is difficult to replicate across different countries or communities due to its methodological complexity.

The experience of Portuguese-Americans provides a valuable case study. Like earlier groups such as Irish and Italian Americans, Portuguese immigrants arrived in the U.S. in significant numbers during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many of these groups eventually achieved upward mobility and full assimilation, losing their original language and cultural distinctiveness along the way. Roediger's (1991) analysis of how European immigrant groups "became white" by downplaying ethnic markers in exchange for racial inclusion offers a compelling lens for understanding these trajectories.

Still, the Portuguese-American experience reflects both convergence and divergence from these broader patterns. Cultural factors continue to influence generational outcomes, and ethnic identity can shape pathways to mobility (Sá, 2011). Unlike their peers in France or Canada, where multicultural policies have shaped distinct integration dynamics, Portuguese-Americans have navigated a U.S. context marked by racialized assimilation frameworks and segmented labor markets (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Newitt, 2015; Pereira & Azevedo, 2019).

These specificities reinforce the claim that integration is not linear or uniform but mediated by historical and structural conditions across generations (Duncan & Trejo, 2018). The Portuguese-American case highlights how social mobility, identity formation, and civic belonging are shaped not only by individual choices but also by national policies and labor market structures.

Finally, the historical legacy of Portuguese migration offers important lessons for contemporary migration policy. As shown by Abramitzky et al. (2021a), Portuguese descendants have experienced varying degrees of upward mobility over time, underscoring how both past and present contexts shape integration. In this light, the Portuguese-American trajectory serves as a sociological indicator of how effectively a society incorporates diversity—offering insight into both the promise and the limits of integration in the United States (Peña-Rodriguez, 2020).

2.2. Measures of success: defining and assessing economic and social integration

Understanding intergenerational transfers—particularly those passed from parents to children—is essential to analyzing how the offspring of immigrants become socially and economically integrated into host societies. As Ermisch et al. (2012b) highlight, the long-term outcomes of children are shaped by the socio-economic environments in which they grow up, with direct implications for both intergenerational mobility and equality of opportunity.

Although much of the literature on intergenerational transfers focuses on the general population, these frameworks are highly relevant for migration studies. Like other parents, immigrant parents transfer not only tangible resources such as wealth and education but also aspirations, values, social capital, and cultural scripts that shape their children's understanding of success and belonging (Roemer, 2012). As Roemer puts it, "parents pass on to their children at least the following: genes, wealth and material resources, knowledge, aspirations and preferences. They also use their social connections to help their children" (2012, p. 482). He defines aspirations as beliefs instilled by parents regarding what their children can achieve, and preferences as values and life choices that guide decision-making, such as occupational ambitions—both of which deeply influence integration trajectories.

In the case of Portuguese-Americans, classic integration indicators—such as educational attainment, income, or labor market participation—remain important but are not sufficient to fully capture the complexity of the integration process. Klimt (2009) and others have pointed to how these indicators also intersect with cultural dimensions, such as food habits and health practices, revealing enduring patterns of cultural retention (Alkerwi et al., 2012).

Baganha (1988) further argues that integration must be seen as a multidimensional process, shaped not only by individual or family-level transfers but also by broader institutional and structural conditions. Migration policies and labor market dynamics—such as exclusionary practices or segmented access to employment—have historically shaped the integration opportunities available to Portuguese immigrants and their descendants (Baganha, 1988; Telo, 1997; Borges, 2013; Bastos, 2023).

Therefore, the analysis of social and economic integration among Portuguese-Americans must consider both intergenerational transfers within families and the structural conditions under which migration occurred. Scholars such as Marques and Góis (2013) and Clarke (1995) have shown that the integration trajectories of descendants are strongly influenced by long-standing patterns of structural mobility—often originating in earlier migration waves—that continue to shape outcomes today.

2.3. The role of language in the success of the second generation and beyond

Assessing the integration of immigrant descendants solely through economic indicators—such as income or employment status—risks overlooking essential cultural and intergenerational dynamics (Borjas, 2000). In the Portuguese-American case, their ambiguous classification in racial and ethnic categories (often falling between "Hispanic" and "white") has historically contributed to their low visibility in public discourse and integration policy (Abramitzky et al., 2021b; Klimt, 2009). As a result, cultural markers such as language use, identity expression, and community involvement become critical for understanding how integration unfolds.

One key domain in this regard is heritage language retention. The transmission of Portuguese within families is often bolstered by community resources—ethnic media, cultural festivals, and community centers—but is increasingly expressed through forms of symbolic ethnicity (Gans, 1979; Pastina et al., 2017; Silva, 2023). In this framework, ethnicity is less about daily linguistic practice or traditional customs and more about emotional connection, expressed through occasional acts like cooking Portuguese food or attending cultural events. As Alba (1990) noted, white ethnic identities in the U.S. often persist symbolically rather than through lived cultural continuity.

Still, heritage language retention remains a significant indicator of integration, especially from the perspective of intergenerational transmission (Alba et al., 2002; Ermisch et al., 2012a). However, in contexts where English carries elevated social and economic value, Portuguese is often de-emphasized. Youth may come to see it as irrelevant to their upward mobility, contributing to its gradual abandonment (Brucher, 2008; Oliveira et al., 2020).

Research consistently identifies the home language environment as the strongest predictor of language retention (Hakuta and D'Andrea, 1992; Portes and Hao, 1998). Families where both parents speak Portuguese and maintain strong ethnic networks provide a setting in which the language is ritualized and regularly used, mirroring patterns long observed among Italian- and Polish-Americans (Fishman, 1991; Alba, 1990). Still, retention is not guaranteed. Factors like birth order, parental attitudes, and geographic dispersion significantly influences outcomes (Jarovinskij, 1995; King & Fogle, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

Language loss in the name of integration is not just linguistic; it reflects deeper shifts in cultural transmission, identity formation, and family cohesion. Children of immigrants frequently become English-dominant—or even monolingual—before adolescence (Wong Fillmore, 1991; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), especially when opportunities to use the heritage language outside the home are scarce (Fishman, 1991; Alba et al., 2002).

Portuguese-American family dynamics provide a valuable lens through which to examine the negotiation of cultural identity across generations. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) emphasize the importance of emotional bonds with elders—facilitated through storytelling, shared rituals, and intergenerational interactions—in reinforcing ethnic identity and supporting the intergenerational retention of heritage languages. Along similar lines, Morrison and James (2009), in their study of Portuguese families in Canada, demonstrate how cultural tensions are addressed through strategies that vary by generation and gender. Households function as dynamic spaces of identity negotiation, rather than simply as sites of cultural transmission. This perspective resonates with the work of Waters (1990) and Jiménez (2010), who argue that even as core cultural practices—such as language, religion, or dense co-ethnic networks—diminish, ethnic identity can endure through emotionally meaningful rituals and symbols.

English proficiency, while often seen as a driver of educational success, also illustrates another form of intergenerational transfer. Parents with high levels of English proficiency are better positioned to engage with educational institutions, which in turn positively affects their children's academic outcomes (Ermisch, 2012a; Hart & Risley, 1995; Farkas & Beron, 2001). Conversely, limited parental proficiency can restrict early access to quality education and increase the risk of academic disengagement (Bleakley & Chin, 2008; Ermisch et al., 2012a). Gender roles within immigrant households further influence these dynamics, as shown by Louie (2006) and Levitt & Schiller (2004), who emphasize how informal, home-based transmission often falls along gendered lines.

Studies have documented a consistent erosion of linguistic competence over generations, synthesized in Fishman's (1978, 1991) "three-generation model." The first generation typically maintains the heritage language, the second becomes bilingual with a tilt toward English, and the third often loses the language entirely—unless active preservation efforts are made. As Fillmore (1991) and Portes and Rumbaut (2001) caution, this language shift can reduce family cohesion and weaken the transmission of values.

Residential patterns also play a critical role. Research by Teixeira (2007) on Portuguese communities in Mississauga, Canada, shows that many families prioritize suburban settlement to achieve homeownership and ethnic proximity. While these neighborhoods can reinforce language retention and community solidarity, they may also limit interethnic contact and restrict access to broader structural integration. As Murdie (2003) suggests, residential decisions reflect not only economic factors but also identity aspirations and symbolic projects of belonging.

2.4. The role of social networks in the success of the second generation and beyond

Social networks are a central factor in understanding the economic, social, and cultural integration of second-generation and beyond descendants of immigrants. These networks—comprising family, peers, co-ethnics, institutions, and broader community affiliations—often function as essential support systems. They provide access to critical resources such as employment opportunities, educational support, and cultural capital. Conceptualized as social capital, this relational infrastructure embodies the trust, reciprocity, and mutual assistance embedded in social ties that individuals and groups can mobilize to improve their social standing (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). As Duncan

and Trejo (2018) argue, incorporation patterns across ethnic groups cannot be fully understood without accounting for differences in access to social capital.

A key component of this capital is family background. Research on second-generation immigrants in the U.S. shows a strong association between parental education and occupational status and the outcomes of their children (Ermisch et al., 2012a; Portes & MacLeod, 1999; Grogger & Trejo, 2002). Social networks thus function not only as external structures but as part of an intergenerational legacy that transmits aspirations, knowledge, and emotional resources, all of which shape educational paths and labor market success.

These connections are particularly relevant in economic integration. Studies show that immigrants often rely on familial and community ties to navigate the job market, and this reliance can carry over into the second generation (Potochnick & Hall, 2021; Abramitzky et al., 2021b). On one hand, expansive networks can broaden access to employment opportunities and increase the likelihood of entrepreneurship and economic stability (Sá, 2011). On the other, heavy dependence on co-ethnic networks may result in occupational clustering in lower-wage sectors. Lubotsky (2007), as cited by Duncan and Trejo (2018), finds that such patterns partly explain the slower earnings assimilation of Hispanic immigrants in comparison to other groups. This aligns with Michael B. Katz's (2001) notion of a "logic of security," where the pursuit of stability in a precarious labor market outweighs long-term aspirations for mobility.

In addition to economic outcomes, social networks significantly affect educational attainment. A study by Ermisch et al. (2012a) finds that strong social ties contribute positively to academic achievement, with students embedded in well-connected families and communities benefitting from greater emotional and academic support. When such networks emphasize educational attainment as a collective goal, they can bolster outcomes across generations.

Cultural preservation also relies heavily on the strength of social networks. These networks foster spaces where cultural practices, values, and heritage languages are transmitted. For second-generation youth, this cultural capital can enhance both identity formation and a sense of belonging (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). As Brubaker (2005) notes, identity is not merely inherited—it is continuously performed and redefined in relation to shifting cultural and social hierarchies. In many cases, practices that were once viewed as marginal or outdated become symbolic assets in contemporary expressions of ethnicity.

DaCosta & Klimt (2009) highlight how cultural engagement—through festivals, community events, and familial storytelling—can help counteract assimilation pressures and sustain intergenerational bonds. This insight is echoed in earlier studies of Portuguese-American communities by Galo (1977), Feldman-Bianco (2009), Batalhão (1995), and Almeida (1995), who emphasize how cultural reproduction often occurs outside formal institutions, particularly in smaller or less-visible communities.

Unlike larger immigrant groups such as Mexican-, Italian-, or Asian-Americans, Portuguese communities have historically lacked robust institutional infrastructure (Lamphere et al., 2009; Vesely et al., 2016).. As a result, they have relied more heavily on family-based networks (Gonzalez, 2021). This reliance can be both a strength and a limitation. On one hand, tight-knit familial ties offer vital cultural continuity and social support; on the other, the absence of strong bridging institutions can hinder broader forms of civic integration and visibility (Vesely, 2016).

Yet, even in the absence of institutional backing, Portuguese-American communities have developed culturally rich practices. Moniz (1997) identifies performative cultural elements—such as touradas (bullfights), forcados (bull-wrestling teams), and festas—as central to the diasporic experience. These cultural forms create spaces where heritage language and identity are actively performed and transmitted. Such dynamics contribute to the development of hybrid identities, especially among

younger generations who navigate multiple cultural worlds (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). This evolution aligns with broader findings by Levitt & Schiller (2004) and Fouron & Glick Schiller (2002), who describe how transnational identities are increasingly youth-driven, flexible, and mediated through digital platforms.

Ultimately, the role of social networks in the incorporation of Portuguese-American descendants is shaped by multiple factors: the strength of internal community ties, the availability of institutional supports, and the interaction between familial resources and societal opportunity structures. These networks can serve as ladders to mobility—or, when limited or overly insular, as ceilings that constrain it.

2.5. Educational attainment and labor market outcomes of the second generation and beyond

Educational attainment and labor market participation are widely recognized as key indicators of immigrant integration and intergenerational mobility. On average, second-generation individuals tend to attain higher levels of education and occupational status than their immigrant parents. However, these gains are not automatic; they are shaped by multiple factors including the initial conditions of migration, regional labor market dynamics, and the quality of intergenerational transmission of economic and cultural capital (Aydemir & Sweetman, 2006; Potochnick & Hall, 2021; Ermisch et al., 2012a).

On average, second-generation individuals tend to attain higher levels of education and occupational status than their parents. However, these gains are not automatic; they are shaped by multiple factors including the initial conditions of migration, regional labor market dynamics, and the quality of intergenerational transmission of economic and cultural capital.

Economists have long used earnings trajectories to assess integration. Chiswick's (1978) pioneering work suggested that immigrants initially earn less than native-born workers but eventually catch up as they acquire host-country human capital, such as language skills and job-specific knowledge. However, Borjas (1985, 1995) later challenged this linear view, emphasizing that cohort effects—particularly declining levels of education and work experience among more recent immigrants—can slow or hinder this convergence. These structural disadvantages are particularly relevant for some ethnic groups, including many from Latin America and Asia, who tend to face slower upward mobility than earlier European-origin migrants (Duncan and Trejo, 2018).

Portuguese immigrants occupy a distinct position within this landscape. Although European, they often worked in low-skilled or manual labor sectors. Their racial ambiguity and early migration waves, particularly to regions such as New England and California, allowed some families to access stable employment and housing, laying the groundwork for intergenerational advancement. However, these initial conditions also contributed to the uneven accumulation of capital across communities, which continues to influence educational and occupational outcomes today.

For Portuguese-American, the intersection of education and employment encapsulates both structural opportunities and the enduring influence of family and community contexts. Extensive research confirms that parental education and household income are among the strongest predictors

of children's academic success and long-term socioeconomic prospects (Card, et al. 1998; Grogger & Trejo, 2002; Portes & MacLeod, 1999; Ermisch et al., 2012a). Regional disparities in parental capital—shaped by the timing and geography of Portuguese settlement—help explain the heterogeneity in educational attainment within the community (Bleakley & Chin, 2008).

These findings align with segmented assimilation theory (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), which posits that immigrant descendants follow diverse pathways depending on the interplay between structural constraints, community support, and family resources. While some Portuguese-American youth experience upward mobility through education and professional employment, others may face stagnation, particularly where resources are scarce or discrimination persists.

Empirical evidence supports a generally positive trend for Portuguese-Americans. Abramitzky et al. (2021a, 2021b) find that the children of immigrants—including those from Portugal—tend to outperform the children of native-born Americans in terms of upward mobility, driven largely by stronger educational outcomes and more effective labor market navigation. This trajectory is often sustained by family narratives that frame education as the primary vehicle for success (Abramitzky et al., 2017).

Cultural expectations around academic achievement also play a role. Within many Portuguese-American families, education is seen not only as a means to economic advancement but also as a marker of personal and familial pride. This value system reinforces a collective identity oriented toward upward mobility.

The transition from labor-intensive employment to professional careers has been facilitated in part by the support of ethnic networks. As Park and Myers (2010) emphasize, established immigrant communities often serve as bridges, helping descendants access educational resources and navigate employment pathways. These networks—comprised of family, religious institutions, and community organizations—offer both material and symbolic resources that shape integration trajectories (Morrison & James, 2009; Duncan & Trejo, 2018; Ioannides, 2022).

However, focusing exclusively on quantitative indicators such as income or educational attainment risks obscuring the broader cultural and psychological dynamics that influence integration. For Portuguese-Americans, relative ethnic invisibility presents a paradox: while it may shield them from certain forms of overt racial discrimination (Klimt, 2009), it also results in limited visibility in public discourse and policy frameworks (Vicente, 1998). This lack of institutional recognition can restrict access to targeted support and shape experiences of belonging and participation in subtle but significant ways (Portes et al., 2005).

Despite these challenges, community-based networks often mitigate the effects of exclusion. The strength and effectiveness of such networks tend to depend on the historical depth of migration and the continuity of familial and communal support. Moniz (1997) and Newitt (2015) show that Portuguese cultural identity is sustained through performative practices—such as festivals, religious rituals, and language use—that serve as anchors for community cohesion. These practices foster hybrid forms of identity among younger generations, aligning with Levitt and Schiller (2004) and Fouron and Glick Schiller (2002), who emphasize that contemporary ethnic identities are increasingly flexible, youth-driven, and digitally mediated.

In sum, the integration experiences of Portuguese-American descendants cannot be fully understood without accounting for the layered interactions between structural conditions, familial resources, and ethnic networks. Educational and labor market outcomes are essential indicators, but they must be situated within broader social and historical contexts to grasp the complexity of intergenerational mobility.

Integration experiences of Portuguese-American descendants cannot be fully understood without accounting for the layered interactions between structural conditions, familial resources, and ethnic networks.

2.6. Internal migration patterns of the second generation and beyond in the U.S.

Internal migration—the movement of individuals and families within national borders—has long functioned as a mechanism of differentiation, opportunity, and social mobility in the United States. Yet, the motivations behind such movements vary significantly across generations and socio-political contexts.

For the first generation of Portuguese immigrants, settlement was closely tied to labor demand in specific regional economies. Historical examples include participation in the whaling industry in New England or agricultural work in California (Rodrigues, 2020). These early migration patterns were shaped by necessity, with individuals moving to where work was available. However, as Duncan and Trejo (2018) argue, the restructuring of the U.S. economy—especially the decline of traditional sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture—has shifted the geography of opportunity. As a result, the internal migration decisions of U.S.-born descendants of immigrants have been guided less by survival imperatives and more by access to opportunity structures, suburbanization, and processes of social integration.

Among second- and later-generation Portuguese-Americans, internal migration reflects a complex and dynamic demographic response to a variety of factors: economic prospects, educational aspirations, cultural integration, and the strength of social networks. For many within this group, geographic mobility represents a strategy to overcome spatial inequality, often involving moves toward metropolitan areas with stronger labor markets or more competitive educational institutions (Duncan and Trejo, 2018).

Educational attainment is particularly influential in shaping migration decisions. Numerous studies confirm that second-generation individuals often strive to surpass the educational and occupational achievements of their parents, which frequently requires geographic relocation (Aydemir and Sweetman, 2006; Park and Myers, 2010). This is consistent with broader findings that second-generation immigrants are overrepresented in high-skilled occupations, which tend to be concentrated in urban areas (Abramitzky et al., 2021b; Sá, 2011). The pursuit of upward mobility through education and employment thus fuels internal migration flows aligned with regional opportunity structures.

However, these patterns are not uniform. External barriers—including systemic discrimination and unequal access to educational resources—continue to shape and sometimes constrain these migration trajectories (Potochnick and Hall, 2021). While aspirations are generally high, the outcomes often reflect the broader structural inequalities embedded in U.S. society.

Cultural dynamics also play a central role. Moving away from dense co-ethnic communities can accelerate assimilation into the dominant culture, particularly in suburban or predominantly white areas. This form of spatial assimilation may enhance access to social capital and economic opportunities but often comes at the expense of linguistic retention and cultural practices, especially in the absence of formal mechanisms for heritage language support (Wong Fillmore, 1991; Portes

& Rumbaut, 2001). As Silva (2023) notes, internal migration is not only a response to opportunity but also a site of ethnic identity negotiation, where individuals must navigate the tension between integration and cultural continuity.

Importantly, decisions about internal migration are frequently embedded in collective strategies rather than individual choices alone. Families may move to access better schools for their children, remain close to kin networks, or maintain ties to culturally familiar environments (Vesely et al., 2016). These decisions reflect a broader logic of familial and community well-being, rather than individualistic goals.

For Portuguese-American communities, internal migration must therefore be understood through a multidimensional lens. It involves not only economic adaptation and educational pursuit but also intergenerational cultural transmission and community belonging. As Newitt (2015) and others have suggested, Portuguese-American internal migration reflects the intersection of segmented assimilation, labor market change, and the evolving meanings of ethnicity in the diaspora.

2.6.1. Spatial distribution of the second generation and beyond in the U.S.

The spatial distribution of Portuguese-descendant populations in the U.S. reflects both historical settlement patterns and more recent trends in internal migration and suburbanization. Historically, Portuguese migration was concentrated in regions where economic opportunities aligned with the skills of the early migrants. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the whaling industry in New England and the agricultural sector in California served as key pull factors (Williams, 1982; Williams, 2007).

The spatial distribution of Portuguese-descendant populations in the United States reflects both historical settlement patterns and more recent trends in internal migration and suburbanization.

Massachusetts emerged as a primary destination, particularly in the cities of Fall River and New Bedford, which developed dense Portuguese ethnic enclaves due to labor demand in maritime and textile industries (Anderson, 1981). These cities continue to have some of the highest concentrations of Portuguese ancestry in the country. Rhode Island, especially Providence and nearby communities, similarly became a hub, now boasting the highest proportion of Portuguese descendants among U.S. states. These areas became cultural and social strongholds that helped sustain Portuguese identity through institutions such as churches, social clubs, and Portuguese-language media.

On the West Coast, California attracted Portuguese immigrants to regions like the San Joaquin Valley and coastal cities such as San Jose, where their agrarian background facilitated integration into dairy farming and crop production. By the early 20th century, Portuguese-Americans were well established in California's agricultural economy (Machado, 2009). These regions remain home to large Portuguese-American populations, supported by community festivals and institutions that preserve cultural heritage.

Hawaii presents a distinct chapter in Portuguese-American settlement. Between 1878 and 1913, Portuguese migrants—primarily from Madeira and the Azores—were brought as contract laborers to work on sugarcane and pineapple plantations (Bastos, 2025). Unlike mainland communities, Hawaiian Portuguese have developed a distinct regional identity, reflecting generations of cultural blending and integration into local society (Bastos, 2025).

In the 20th century, Portuguese-Americans began migrating out of urban ethnic enclaves into surrounding suburban areas, mirroring national trends of white ethnic dispersal. For example, while

communities in Newark's Ironbound district and cities like New Bedford remain culturally vibrant, many families have moved to suburbs seeking improved housing, schools, and economic opportunities (Levy, 2010). This shift was also driven by the decline of traditional industries such as whaling, fishing, and manufacturing, which necessitated occupational diversification and increased geographic mobility.

Contemporary data from the ACS confirm that Portuguese-American populations remain heavily concentrated in traditional strongholds like Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and California, while smaller but growing communities are present in states such as Florida and Texas (Azevedo et al., 2023). In Florida, the south of the state in particular has seen an increase in Portuguese-identifying residents, attracted by climate, lifestyle, and economic factors (Da Ponte, 2015). Similarly, cities like San Antonio and Houston in Texas have experienced modest but notable growth in Portuguese-American populations.

In summary, the current body of literature regarding the integration of immigrants' descendants, particularly concerning Portuguese-Americans, demonstrates the intricate relationship between structural factors, cultural continuity, and intergenerational transmission. Although educational attainment and labor market participation persist as pivotal indicators of incorporation, they must be interpreted in conjunction with more intricate processes, including identity negotiation, language retention, community networks, and internal migration. The unique migratory histories and patterns of geographic dispersion experienced by Portuguese-Americans demonstrate the capacity of ethnic identity to persist and adapt across generations, even in the absence of robust institutional frameworks. The studies reviewed emphasize that integration is not a linear process, but rather a multidimensional and context-dependent trajectory, influenced by both opportunity structures and the agency of individuals, families, and communities. These works provides a foundational understanding of the contemporary experiences of the Portuguese-Americans in the United States, while offering a more expansive perspective on the evolving dynamics of ethnicity and mobility within the context of immigrant America.

3. Portuguese-Americans in the American Community Survey

Alda Botelho Azevedo and Nachatter Singh Garha

This study focuses on Portuguese-Americans living in the U.S. and adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of secondary data with qualitative insights from primary data collection.

For the quantitative component, we use microdata from the ACS five-year samples (2013–2017 and 2018–2022 for trend analysis), accessed via IPUMS USA for research purposes. We examine two groups of Portuguese-Americans: those who speak Portuguese and those who do not. These groups are defined based on responses to three ACS questions: (1) being born in the United States, (2) reporting Portuguese ancestry, and (3) speaking Portuguese at home (in addition to English). The analysis includes demographic, spatial, statistical and socio-economic dimensions.

It is important to acknowledge certain limitations in the ACS design that may lead to an underestimation of the Portuguese-American population. First, the language question only captures the language spoken at home; individuals who speak Portuguese but do not use it at home may not be identified as Portuguese-speaking. Second, the ancestry question is optional and allows for up to two responses. This may result in the omission of Portuguese ancestry among respondents with multiple backgrounds or those who choose not to answer. Additionally, since the ACS does not include data on respondents' parents' birthplaces, it is not possible to distinguish second-generation respondents from those of previous generations. Following Azevedo et al. (2023), children under the age of 5 are excluded from the study, as the ACS does not collect information on languages spoken at home for this age group. When relevant, all other U.S. residents serve as the reference group for comparison.

To complement and contextualize the quantitative findings, we conducted thirteen semi-structured interviews with participants selected for their expertise, professional roles, or lived experience in Portuguese-American communities. These interviews help us explore the underlying factors behind the trends observed in the data and provide a deeper understanding of identity, language use, and belonging.

Finally, Appendix A1 provides a detailed explanation of both the quantitative and qualitative methods used in the study. This methodological overview is essential for readers seeking to understand in more detail how some of the results were generated and interpreted.

4. Portuguese-Americans in the U.S.: demographic trends and patterns

Alda Botelho Azevedo and Nachatter Singh Garha

Based on population data from the American Community Survey (ACS) five-year samples (2013–2017 and 2018–2022), the total U.S. population increased by around 11 million, rising from 301.2 million to 312.1 million (3.64%). During this period, the Portuguese-American population increased by 9,021 people, from 1,129,096 to 1,138,117, which represents a growth rate of 0.80%.

The number of Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese declined by 12,533 individuals. Consequently, they accounted for a smaller proportion of the total U.S. population, decreasing from 0.33% to 0.31%. Conversely, the number of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese increased by 21,554, raising their proportion of the total U.S. population from 0.04% to 0.05%. (see Table 4.1.) Between 2018 and 2022, 13.74% of Portuguese-Americans spoke Portuguese at home alongside English. These trends suggest a gradual increase in Portuguese language use among the descendants of Portuguese immigrants.

Table 4.1: Size (No.) and Share (%) of the Portuguese-Americans in the U.S., 2013–2017 and 2018–2022

Population group	2013-2017 (No.)	2013-2017 (%)	2018-2022 (No.)	2018-2022 (%)	Population growth (No.)
2nd gen+ not speaking Portuguese	994,292	0.33	981,759	0.31	-12,533
2nd gen+ speaking Portuguese	134,804	0.04	156,358	0.05	21,554
All other U.S. residents	300,048,155	99.63	311,004,298	99.64	10,956,143
Total	301,177,251	100	312,142,415	100	10,965,164

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

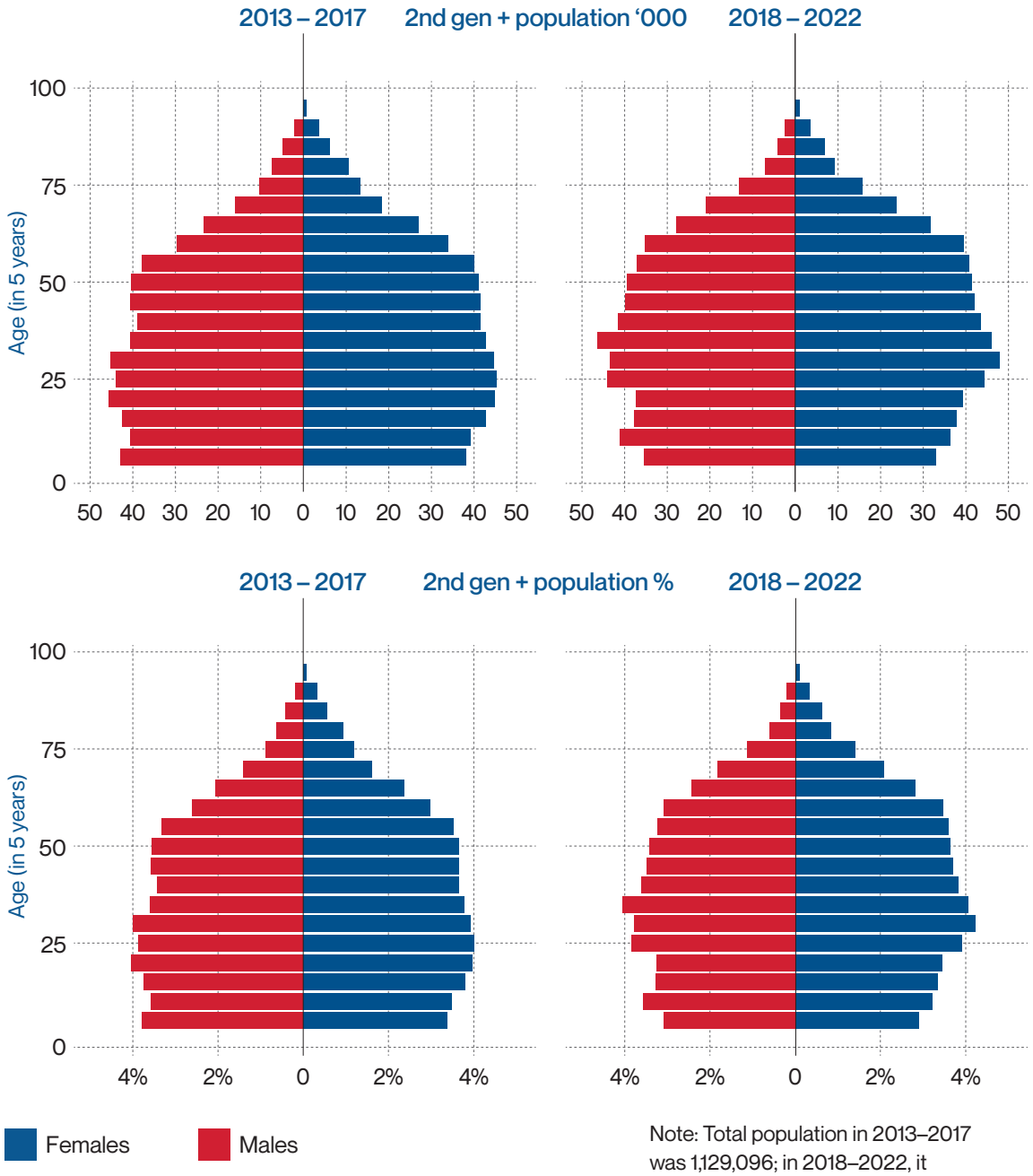
4.2. Demographic profile of Portuguese-Americans

The demographic profile of the Portuguese-American population mirrors the broader aging trend observed in the U.S. This trend is driven by increased survival rates at older ages and a declining share of children under 15, resulting from low fertility rates. This demographic change is also reflected in the rising average age of Portuguese-Americans. The average age among women increased from 41.86 years in 2013–2017 to 43.66 years in 2018–2022. Among men, the average age increased from 40.05 years to 42.11 years during the same period. Regarding population age structure, the proportion of

the population aged 15-64 remained relatively stable at 72.94% and 72.37% in the respective periods. The proportion of individuals aged 65 and over increased from 12.81% to 14.83%. Meanwhile, the proportion of children under 15 decreased from 14.26% to 12.79%.

This aging trend is further illustrated in the population pyramids of Portuguese-Americans for the periods 2013–2017 and 2018–2022 (Figure 4.1). These figures further underscore the well-documented age-specific disparities in male-to-female ratios. In younger age groups, the sex ratio is typically male-dominated, largely attributable to the natural sex ratio at birth, which is approximately 105 males for every 100 females. By contrast, in older age groups, a higher proportion of the population is female due to the higher life expectancy of women. However, the gender gap narrowed slightly between the two periods, likely due to faster gains in male life expectancy compared to female life expectancy, as observed in many Western societies.

Figure 4.1: Population structure of Portuguese-Americans (in thousands and as percentages of the total population), 2013–2017 and 2018–2022

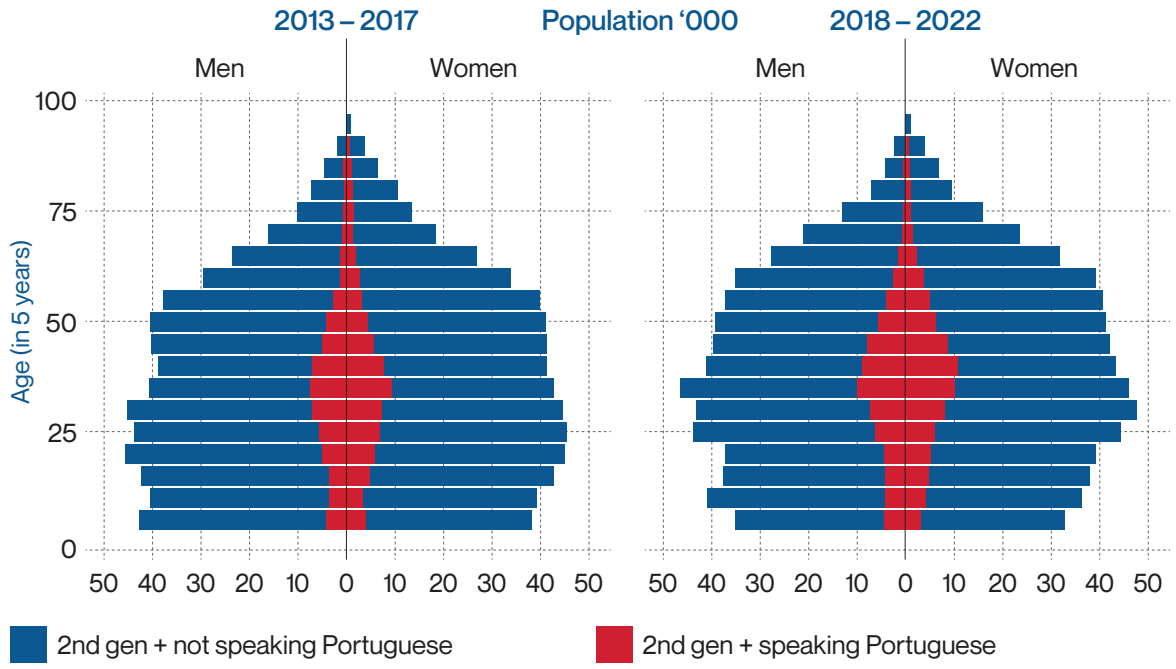


Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Note: Total population in 2013–2017 was 1,129,096; in 2018–2022, it increased to 1,138,177 (0.80%).

When examining the two sub-groups—2nd gen+ not speaking Portuguese and speaking Portuguese—the average age of non-speakers increased among females from 42.08 years in 2013–2017 to 43.94 years in 2018–2022, and among males from 40.34 to 42.52 years over the same period. The 2nd gen+ speaking Portuguese also exhibited an increase in the average age, though the figures were marginally younger overall. The average age of females in the Portuguese-speaking group increased from 40.32 years (2013–2017) to 41.90 years (2018–2022), while the average age of males increased from 37.73 to 39.10 years during the same period. Portuguese speakers are thus younger, as Azevedo et al. (2023) also note for the period 2006-2020. The population pyramids in Figure 4.2 reflect the observed trends and patterns.

Figure 4.2: Population structure of Portuguese-Americans (in thousands and as percentages of the total population), by language use, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Table 4.2: Portuguese descendant population by functional age groups, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022

Portuguese Descendants	Functional age groups	2013-2017			2018-2022		
		Females	Males	Sex ratio	Females	Males	Sex ratio
2nd gen+ not speaking Portuguese	Children	70,194	75,561	1.08	61,936	67,595	1.09
	Adult	360,684	355,592	0.99	354,052	340,532	0.96
	Elderly	72,712	59,549	0.82	85,283	72,361	0.85
2nd gen+ speaking Portuguese	Children	7,374	7,824	1.06	7,317	8,768	1.2
	Adult	57,632	49,607	0.86	67,936	61,186	0.9
	Elderly	7,772	4,595	0.59	7,115	4,036	0.57
Total		576,368	552,728	0.96	583,639	554,478	0.95

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Table 4.2 shows demographic change in the Portuguese-American population by functional age groups (under 15, 15–64, and 65 and over) and sex ratio according to Portuguese language use at home. Three key differences emerge when comparing these groups. First, among those who do not speak Portuguese, the number of individuals under the age of 65 declined by 37,916, while the number of individuals aged 65 and over increased by 25,383. Secondly, among the Portuguese-speaking population, there was a decline of 1,216 individuals aged 65 and over, both male and female. However, the group saw a 21,883-person increase in individuals aged 15 to 64. This suggests a combination of renewed interest in the Portuguese language and more recent descendants of Portuguese immigrants. Thirdly, the population aged 65 and over who speaks Portuguese is highly feminized compared to those in the same age group who do not speak the language. Given their age group, many of these individuals likely belong to the second generation, born to immigrant parents during the mid-20th century. This phenomenon may be attributed to language use patterns that exhibit greater resilience among older female populations. It may also reflect cultural roles in family and community life, in which women are more likely to preserve and transmit the heritage language. This topic will be further explored in Chapter 7.

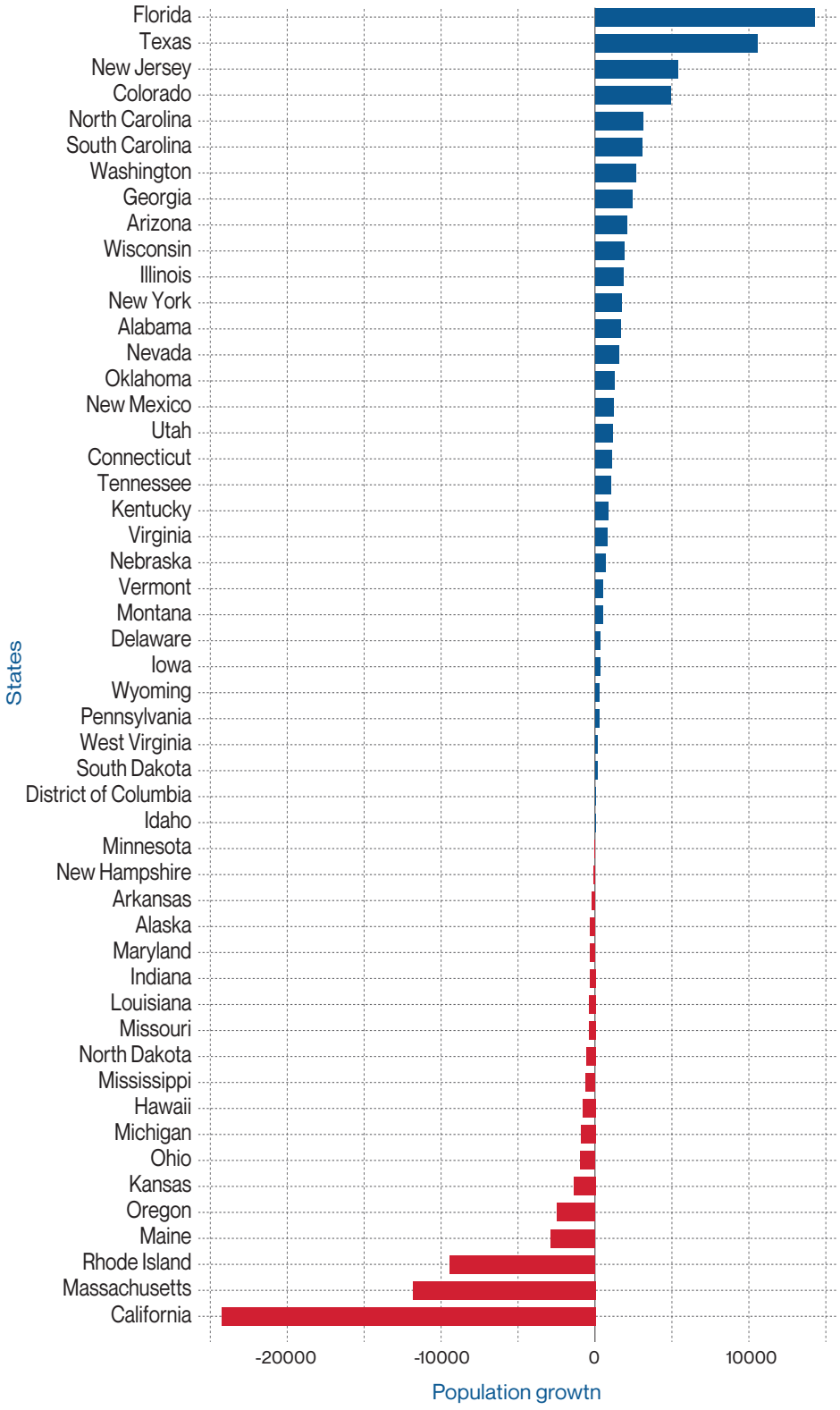
A final demographic observation pertains to the sex ratio among children who speak Portuguese. The ratio increased from 1.06 in the 2013–2017 period to 1.20 in the subsequent 2018–2022 period. This increase can be attributed to a more pronounced increase in the number of male children. Such imbalance may be indicative of the relatively small population size within this subgroup or it may be attributable to sampling variation in the ACS.

As the interest in acquiring proficiency in the Portuguese language has increased within the United States—and as Portugal has evolved into an increasingly popular tourist destination among Americans—it is plausible to hypothesize that the overall profile of individuals identifying as having Portuguese ancestry may also be undergoing a shift, particularly among those aged 65 and over who do not speak the language. This tendency may also be indicative of the impact of community-led efforts in recent years. Organizations such as Portuguese American Leadership Council of the United States (PALCUS) have actively promoted the self-identification of individuals of Portuguese descent in the U.S. Census, and their efforts may be exerting a lasting impact, extending into subsequent rounds of the ACS.

4.3. Age and sex composition of Portuguese-Americans in different states of high concentration

This section analyzes the age and sex composition of Portuguese descendants living in U.S. states with historically significant Portuguese-American populations. Before focusing on these specific geographic areas, however, it is essential to understand how this population evolved at the state level between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022. Figure 4.8 shows the growth of the Portuguese-American population across U.S. states, organized by areas of expansion and contraction. Some of the states at the top of the ranking, such as New Jersey, represent well-established Portuguese-American communities that are experiencing renewed growth. Others, such as Florida, Texas, and Colorado, reflect more recent settlement patterns and internal migration flows. In contrast, states with historically large Portuguese populations, such as California, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, recorded the sharpest declines. This points to the combined effects of demographic aging, out-migration, and weakening ancestral identification in those areas.

Figure 4.3: Population growth of Portuguese-Americans (n.º), by state, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



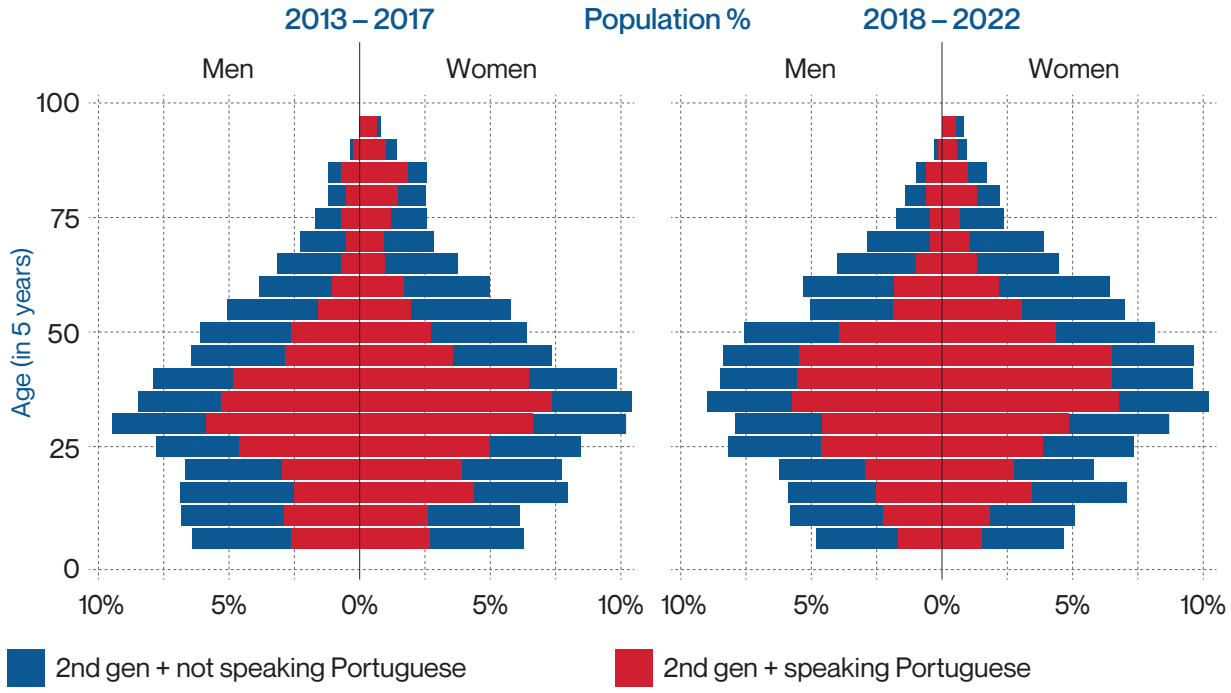
Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Data reveal distinct regional patterns of population size, growth, age structure, and language retention in the regional clusters with the highest absolute numbers of Portuguese-Americans during the period under consideration. These clusters include Massachusetts–Rhode Island–Connecticut; California; Florida; New York–New Jersey; and Hawaii. These differences indicate the temporal and geographical patterns of Portuguese migration to each region and the varying degrees of demographic change and renewal that have occurred. While certain clusters, such as Florida and New York–New Jersey, exhibit population growth, others, including California, Massachusetts–Rhode Island–Connecticut, and Hawaii, show a decline.

Massachusetts-Rhode Island-Connecticut Cluster

The tri-state area has a historically significant population of Portuguese immigrants. This has resulted in a declining and aging Portuguese-American demographic profile. From 2013–2017 to 2018–2022, the Portuguese-American population decreased by 6.10%. The decline was more pronounced among non-speakers (-6.74%) than among Portuguese speakers (-2.58%) and was concentrated mostly in age groups below 60 (Figure 4.4). These findings may be explained, at least in part, by weaker ancestral identification. During this period, the proportion of children declined, contributing to an even older population structure. The population pyramid for 2018–2022 reflects a mature community, in which Portuguese speakers made up 16.05% of the total. The sex ratio remained relatively balanced at 0.97, shaped largely by higher female survival rates at older ages.

Figure 4.4: Population structure of Portuguese-Americans in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, by language use (% of the total population), 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



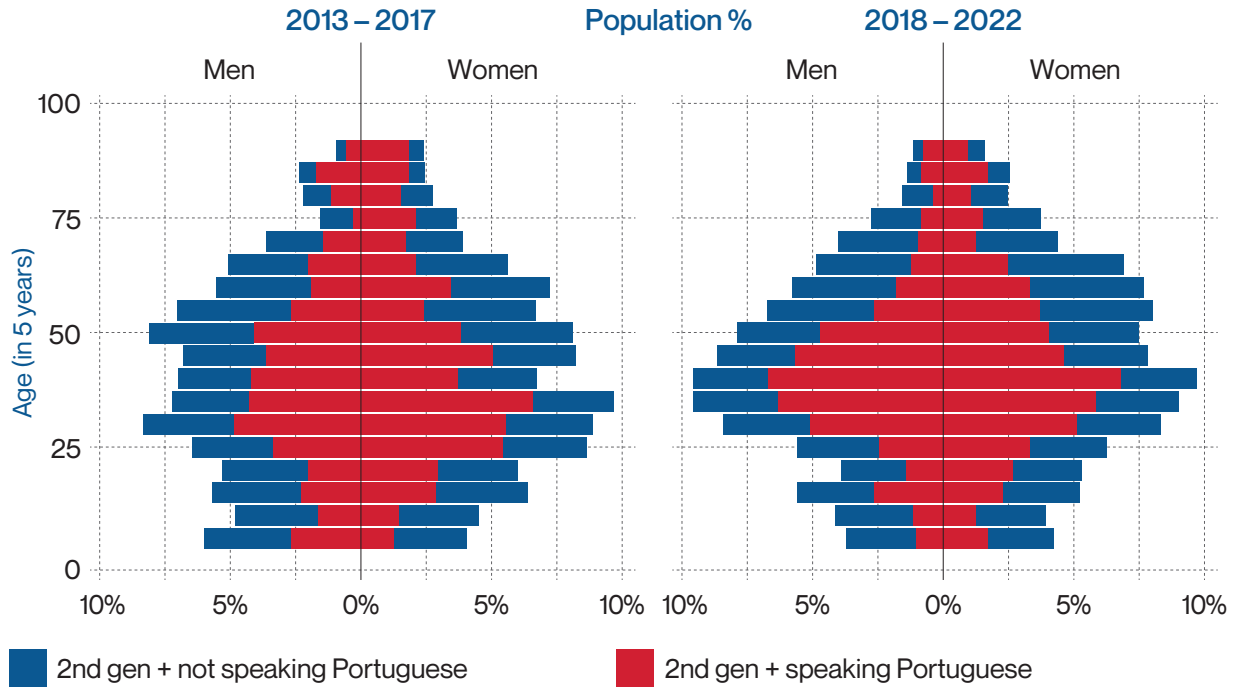
Note: Between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022, the total number of U.S.-born individuals reporting Portuguese ancestry decreased from 332,017 to 311,780, representing a decline of 6.10%.

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

California Cluster

California's state-level cluster has a balanced population structure with consistent representation in each age group (see Figure 4.5). Between the two periods, the total Portuguese-American population decreased by 8.04%. However, this overall decrease conceals contrasting trends. First, the number of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese at home increased by 7.29%, primarily among those aged 35 to 60. By 2018–2022, Portuguese speakers constituted 7.82% of the community. Conversely, the number of non-speakers decreased by 9.14%, primarily in age groups under 60. The population sex ratio is 1.06 males per female, predominantly driven by working-age groups. This indicates a recent influx of male migrants and suggests ongoing internal migration patterns in California, likely due to employment opportunities in the state. Cohorts under 25 years old declined, suggesting long-term low birth rates and the outmigration of young families. This shift has resulted in an increased reliance on internal migration to maintain demographic balance.

Figure 4.5: Population structure of Portuguese-Americans in California, by language use (% of the total population), 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Note: Between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022, the total number of U.S.-born individuals reporting Portuguese ancestry decreased from 302,339 to 278,041, representing a decline of 8.04%.

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

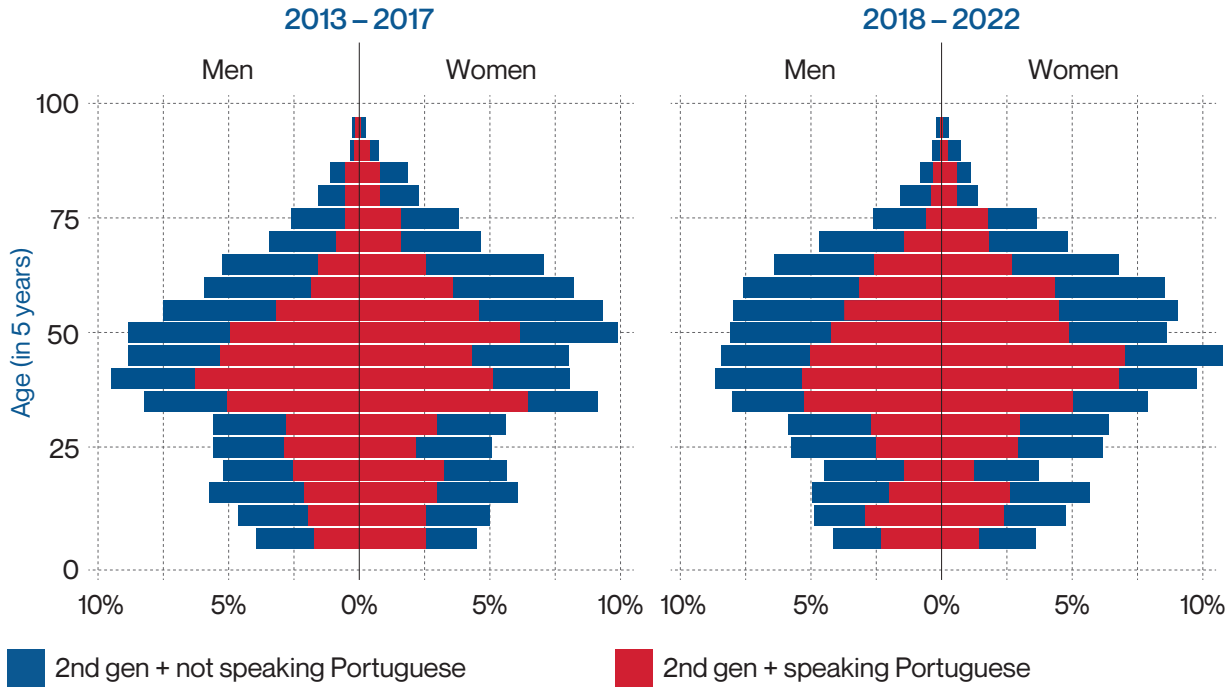
Florida Cluster

In Florida, the number of individuals reporting Portuguese ancestry increased by an extraordinary 23.14% during the period, highlighting an expanding population that is not replacing itself, either linguistically or generationally, due to the low proportion of children. The number of non-speakers grew by 17.94%, while Portuguese speakers increased by 39.87%. By 2018-2022, they accounted for 26.96% of the total Portuguese-American population in the state.

During the period under consideration, Florida's Portuguese-American population shifted towards higher ages, with an increase in individuals belonging to older age groups. This transition was influenced by the influx of older adults and, to a lesser extent, the aging of existing residents (Figure 4.6). These findings suggest that population growth is more influenced by individual or couple migration in later life stages than by family settlement, which is consistent with a community predominantly shaped by internal retirement migration from other regions of the United States. Despite the community's age profile, the proportion of individuals aged 85 and older is comparable to that of other states, suggesting that the recent migration of retirees to Florida may be a contributing factor.

The overall sex ratio from 2018 to 2022 is close to parity (0.97), but significant age-related patterns are evident. The preponderance of women compared to men is not limited to older age groups as one might anticipate given women's increased longevity. This phenomenon is also evident across various working-age groups and may indicate the gendered composition of internal migration flows of working-age people into Florida, particularly in caregiving and service-related occupations, where women are overrepresented.

Figure 4.6: Population structure of Portuguese-Americans in Florida, by language use (% of the total population), 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Note: Between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022, the total number of U.S.-born individuals reporting Portuguese ancestry increased from 61,717 to 76,000, representing a growth of 23.14%.

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

New York and New Jersey Cluster

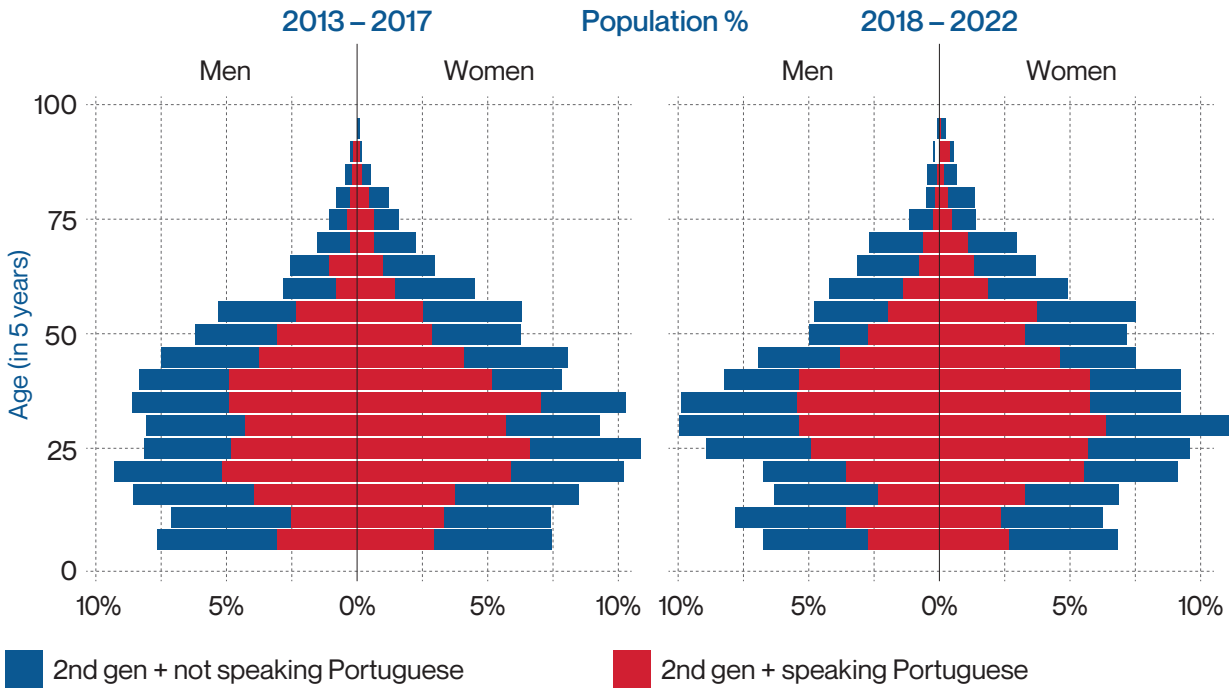
The Portuguese-American demographic profile in the New York-New Jersey region reveals a more balanced age structure compared to other regions. The population is evenly distributed across all age groups and has grown by 8.88% between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022. While the base of the population pyramid narrows, it still signals a degree of generational renewal (see Figure 4.7).

The most notable characteristic of the region is the significant increase in the number of Portuguese speakers, which grew by 32.14% during the period in question. The group of non-speakers has remained stable. Consequently, Portuguese speakers now make up 33.53% of the community, the highest proportion among the five regions examined.

This two-state area also have a higher proportion of Portuguese-Americans holding a bachelor's degree, which may help explain the renewed interest in Portuguese language and culture that has found a particularly strong foothold in this region. The population structure lends credence to this interpretation, as it reveals a notable presence of working-age individuals among the Portuguese-speaking population, in contrast to regions with more pronounced demographic aging. This distribution, when considered in conjunction with the growth of the Portuguese-speaking population, suggests that the region is experiencing both linguistic and demographic renewal.

The overall sex ratio (0.97) is balanced and consistent with the ratios observed in Florida and Massachusetts–Rhode Island–Connecticut clusters. A female majority emerges in the older age cohorts, reflecting broader longevity trends.

Figure 4.7: Population structure of Portuguese-Americans in New York and New Jersey, by language use (% of the total population), 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Note: Between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022, the total number of U.S.-born individuals reporting Portuguese ancestry increased from 80,149 to 87,263, representing a growth of 8.88%.

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

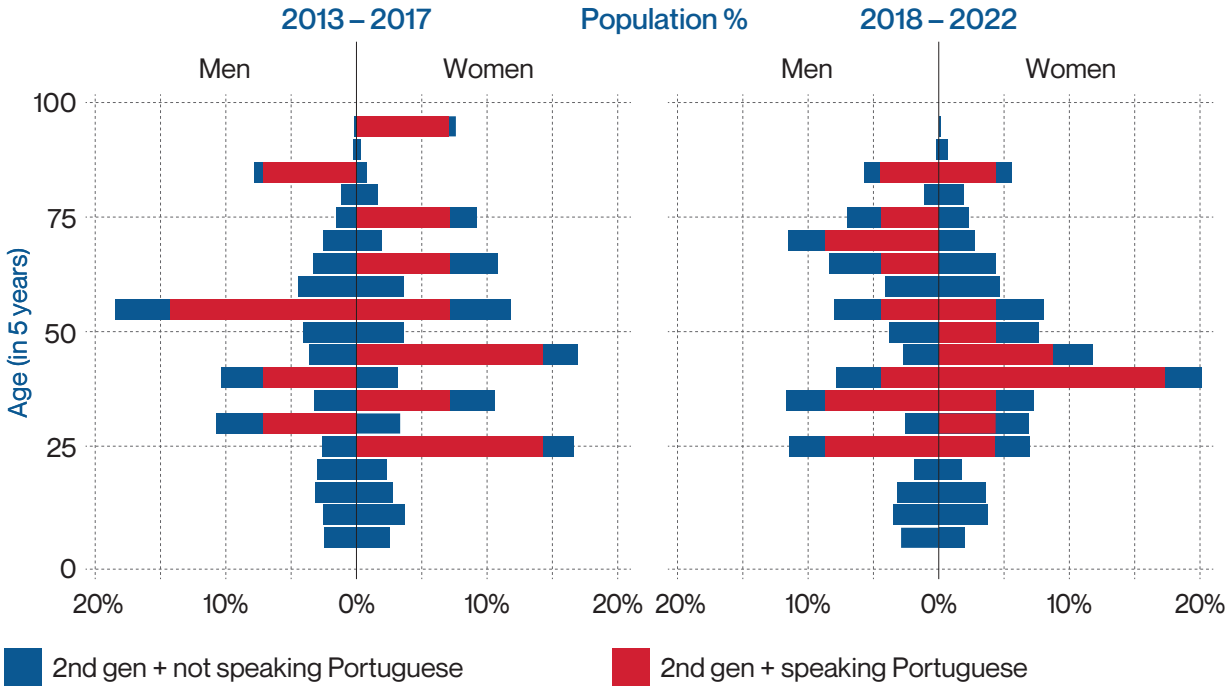
Hawaii Cluster

Hawaii's Portuguese-American population is the smallest of the regions examined. This contributes to misshapen population pyramids and an imbalanced sex ratio of 1.15. The population's overall age structure is compressed and top-heavy, with limited representation of children and young adults (Figure 4.8).

From 2013–2017 to 2018–2022, the number of Portuguese speakers increased by 48.75%; however, they still represent only 1.43% of the total Portuguese-American population in the state. The number of non-Portuguese speakers decreased by 2.25%.

Despite a total demographic decline of 1.77%, Hawaii's Portuguese-American community persists—a phenomenon all the more remarkable when considering its origins in the late 19th-century arrival of Portuguese labor migrants. In a state distinguished by its multiethnic composition and high rates of intermarriage, particularly among the Portuguese, Native Hawaiian, Japanese, and Filipino populations, ethnic identities frequently blend and redefine across generations.

Figure 4.8: Population structure of Portuguese-Americans in Hawaii, by language use (% of the total population), 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Note: Between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022, the total number of U.S.-born individuals reporting Portuguese ancestry decreased from 46,435 to 45,613, representing a decline of 1.77%.

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Collectively, the regional population pyramids and growth data illustrate the significant variations in the Portuguese-American experience in the U.S. by location. While all five regions show signs of demographic aging, the rates and characteristics of these changes differ. Long-established communities in California, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Hawaii are characterized by aging populations with limited generational renewal. Conversely, Florida's growth appears to be driven by older Portuguese-Americans, suggesting that internal migration patterns are linked to retirement and follow the broader trends in American internal migration flows. Notably, New York and New Jersey have experienced a significant increase in Portuguese speakers and relatively high rates of language maintenance. These contrasts reflect how migration history, community cohesion, and local cultural dynamics shape population structures and the prospects for preserving linguistic and cultural heritage across generations.

5. Spatial distribution of Portuguese-Americans in the U.S.

5.1. Spatial distribution of Portuguese-Americans in U.S. States

Nachatter Singh Garha and Alda Botelho Azevedo

The spatial distribution of Portuguese-Americans in the U.S. has evolved in accordance with historical migration waves, economic adaptation, and regional settlement patterns. An examination of Figures 5.1 and 5.2 reveals that, during both the 2013–2017 and 2018–2022 periods, the majority of the population is still concentrated in a few key states. However, a closer look at the data reveals noteworthy shifts in population sizes and ranking, suggesting the emergence of significant trends.

California consistently hosted the largest number of Portuguese-Americans, with 302,339 individuals in 2013–2017, decreasing to 278,041 in 2018–2022 (-8.03%). Despite the decrease, California remains the dominant center for Portuguese-Americans, especially in regions such as San Joaquin Valley and San Jose. Massachusetts continued to be another major hub, showing a decrease from 223,952 Portuguese-Americans in 2013–2017 to 212,093 in 2018–2022 (-5.29%), Rhode Island, distinguished by its high proportion of Portuguese ancestry within the total population, experienced a decrease from 72,318 in 2013–2017 to 62,862 in 2018–2022 (-13.08%), although it remains a significant cultural center.

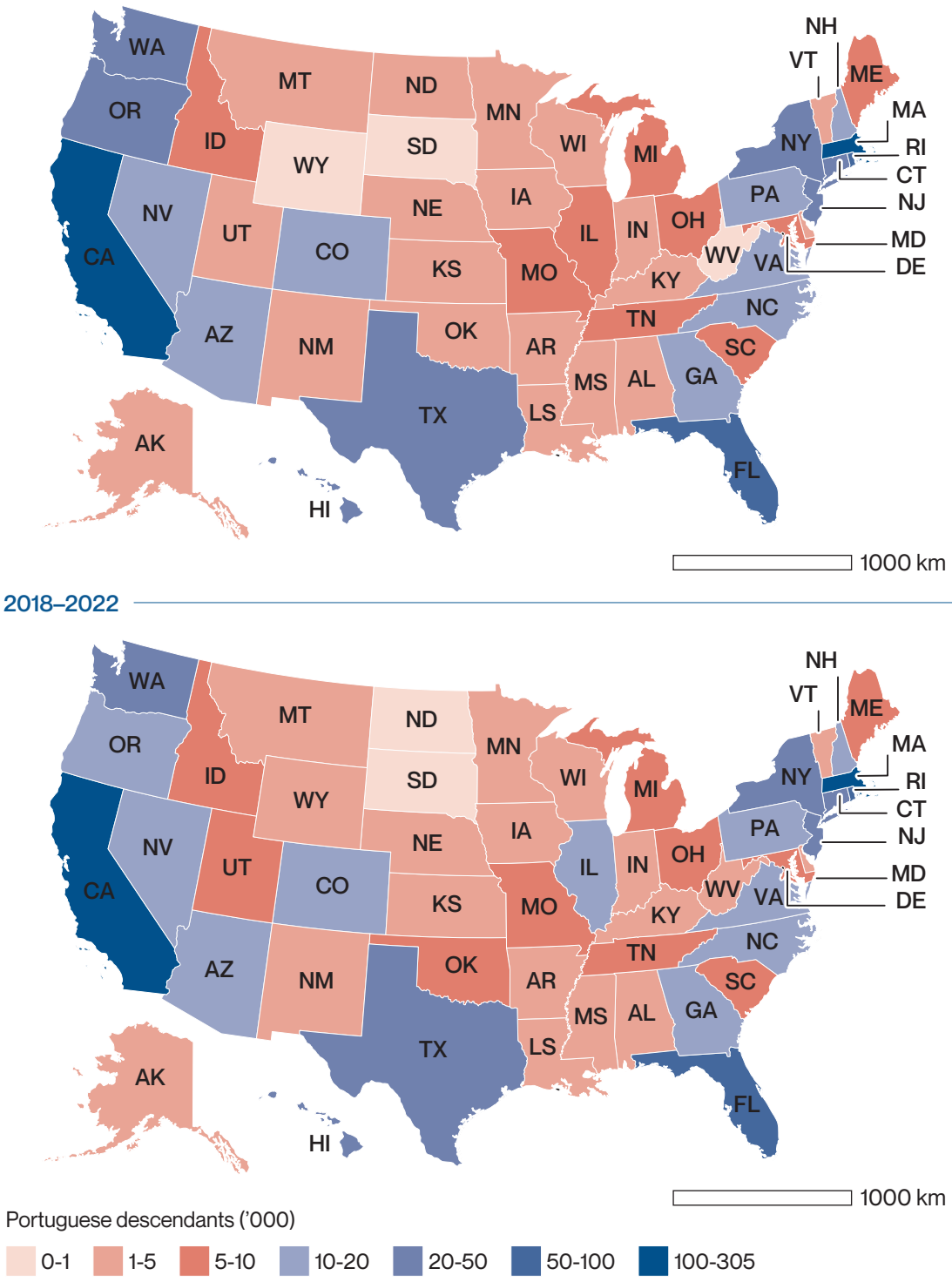
Florida, however, demonstrated substantial growth, from 61,717 in 2013–2017 to 76,000 in 2018–2022 (23.14%), indicating a trend of secondary migration, possibly due to retirees and related economic opportunities in the South. Also Texas showed remarkable growth from 29,033 to 39,575 (36.31%), reflecting the broader trend of population growth in southern states. New Jersey and New York, two traditional North-eastern hubs, maintained large communities, with New Jersey growing from 43,274 to 48,648 (12.42%) and New York increasing from 36,875 to 38,615 (4.72%). Meanwhile, the Portuguese descendant population in Hawaii remained relatively stable, dropping slightly from 46,435 to 45,613 (-1.77%).

In several emerging states, discernible shifts have also been observed. The Portuguese-American population in Colorado experienced a 47.57% increase, rising from 10,298 to 15,197 cases. North Carolina also exhibited an increase of 23.04%, with a rise from 13,604 to 16,739 individuals. Washington experienced a more modest increase of 11.95%, rising from 22,322 to 24,990 residents. This geographic dispersal of Portuguese-Americans aligns with broader demographic trends in the U.S., where populations are migrating to suburban and exurban areas that offer more affordable living and job opportunities than overly population densed states.

A substantial increase in the Portuguese-American population was also observed in the states of South Carolina, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. Conversely, some Midwestern states, including Ohio (from 9,340 to 8,363, representing a decrease of 10.46%) and Michigan (from 6,686 to 5,756, representing a decrease of 13.91%), exhibited declines, indicative of the broader out-migration patterns observed within Rust Belt regions.

The geographic dispersal of Portuguese-Americans aligns with broader demographic trends in the U.S., where populations are migrating to suburban and exurban areas that offer affordable living and job opportunities.

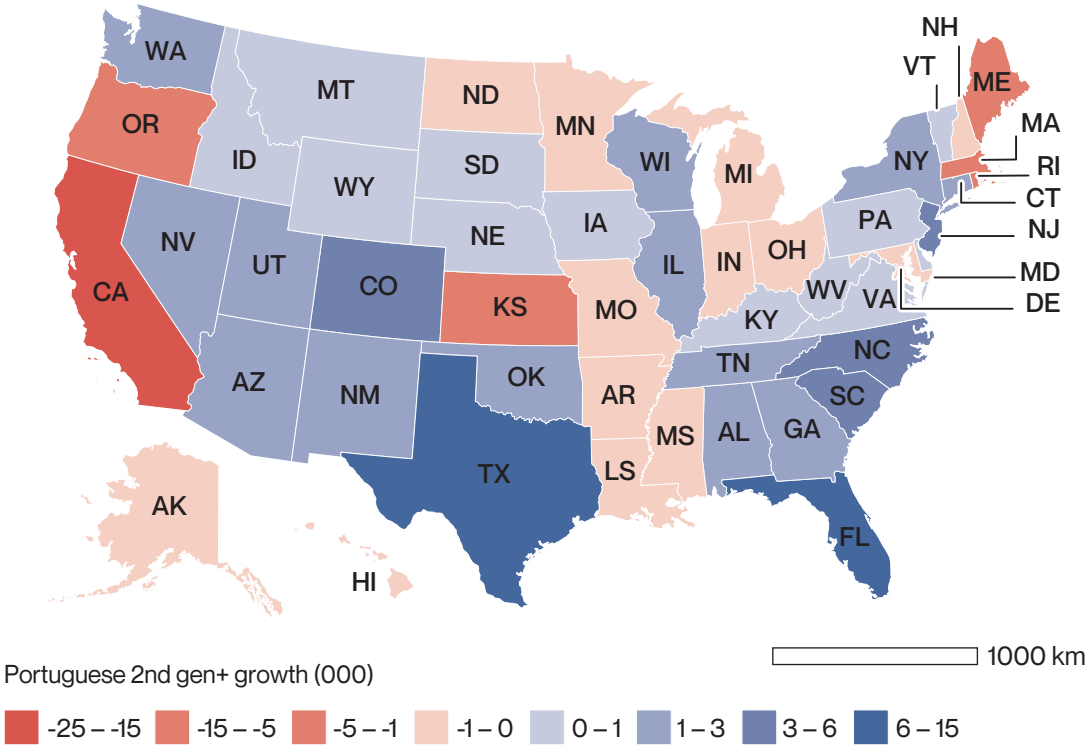
Figure 5.1: Distribution of the Portuguese-American population, by states, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



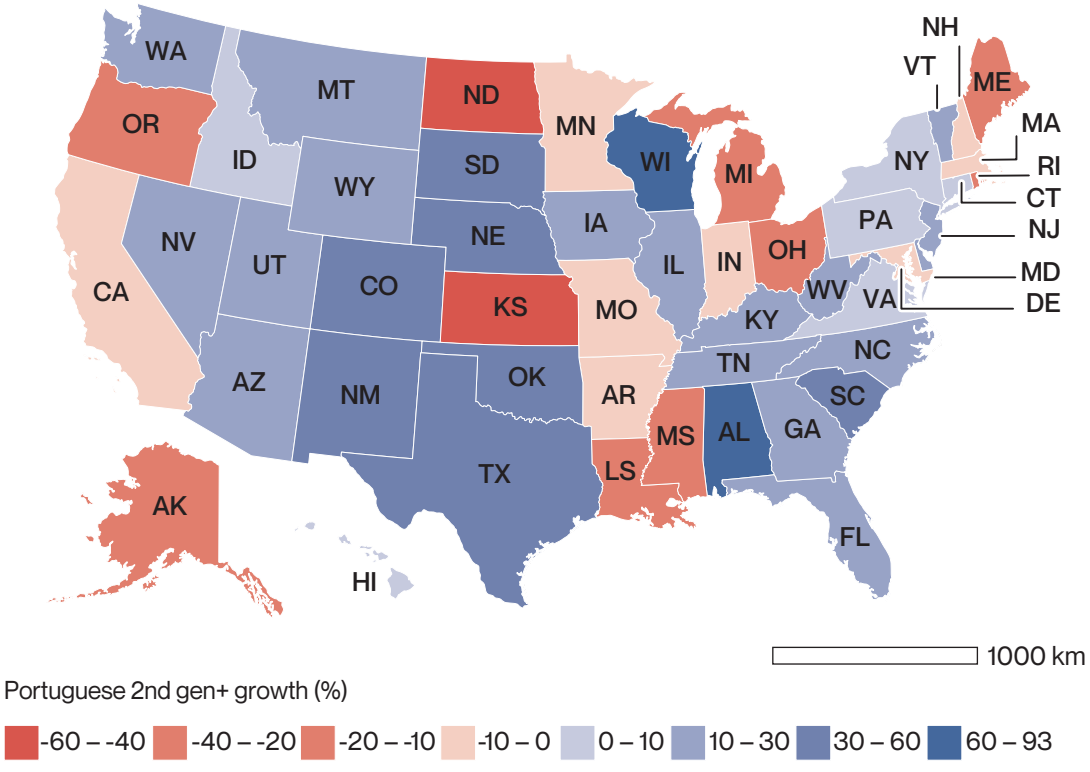
Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Figure 5.2: Growth of the Portuguese-American population, by state, in absolute (No.) and relative terms (%), 2013–2017 and 2018–2022

2013–2017



2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

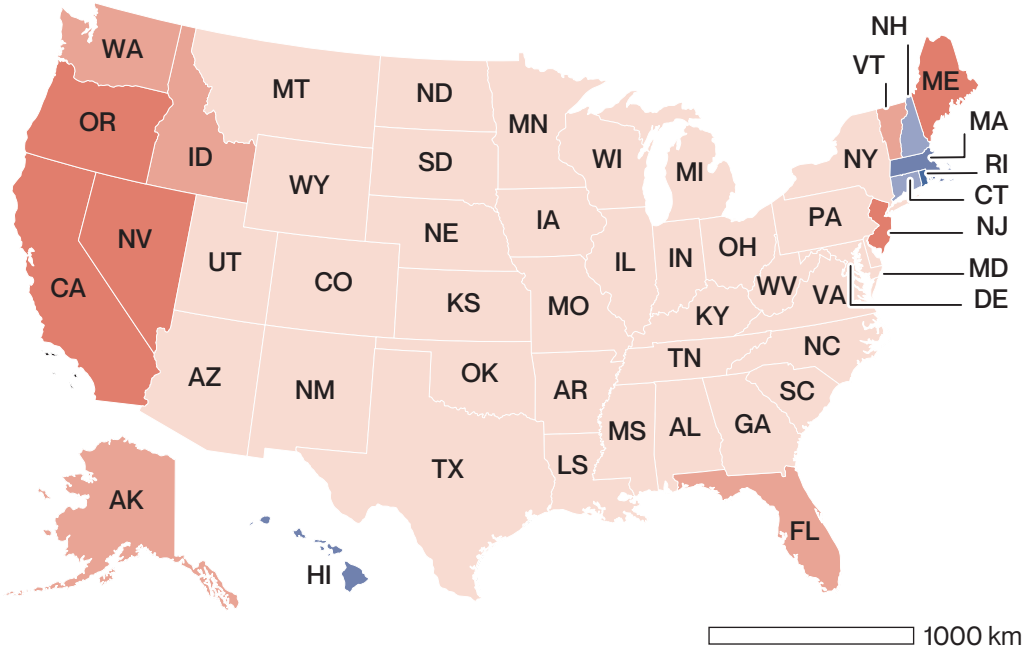
Some of the most impressive relative growth rates occurred in smaller states. Wisconsin demonstrated a remarkable increase of 92.76%, while Nebraska exhibited growth of 56.82%. However, it should be noted that both states initially possessed relatively modest populations, with Wisconsin's population ranging from approximately 2.1 thousand to 3.9 thousand and Nebraska's from 1.1 thousand to 1.8 thousand. These figures underscore the increasing dispersal of Portuguese descendants to non-traditional destinations, a phenomenon that may be attributable to new employment patterns, more affordable housing costs, and suburbanization. Conversely, North Dakota, Kansas, and Mississippi exhibited pronounced relative declines of 58.05%, 44.86%, and 31.85%, respectively, suggesting either net out-migration or demographic aging without sufficient younger population influx. Concurrently, New Mexico and Oklahoma exhibited substantial relative increases of 43.63% and 33.13%, respectively, indicating the emergence of Portuguese-American communities in regions distant from coastal areas.

The overall evidence indicates that while the demographic landscape of major historical Portuguese-American strongholds is undergoing a modest decrease, the population is concurrently undergoing redistribution within novel, frequently rapidly expanding states—an occurrence that aligns with broader trends in U.S. domestic migration patterns.

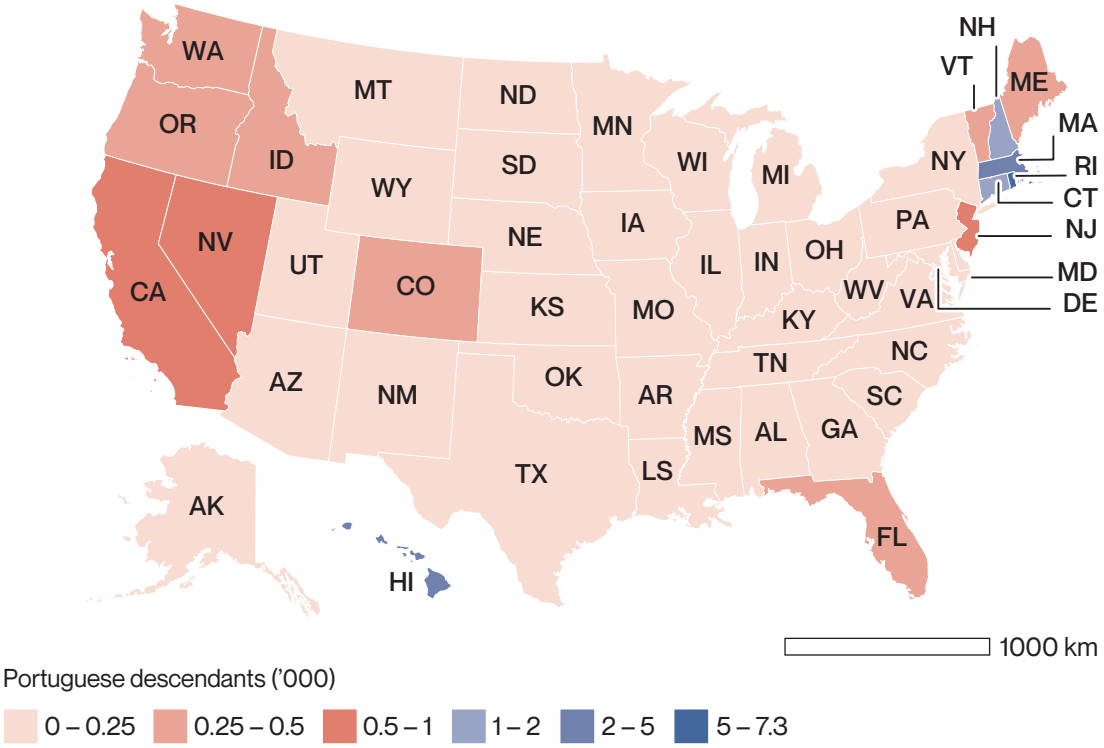
This phenomenon is particularly noteworthy also in relation to cultural retention. While the literature emphasizes the role of spatial concentration in preserving language, culture, and identity (Fishman, 1991; Alba et al., 2002), the observed mobility of descendants away from traditional Portuguese-American communities suggest a potential decoupling of geographic proximity and cultural maintenance. As Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argue, the household remains a vital space for sustaining cultural ties and intergenerational continuity, even in the absence of cohesive ethnic neighborhoods. In this context, the increased use of Portuguese at the home highlights the enduring importance of domestic language practices in nurturing ethnic identity.

Figure 5.3: Portuguese-Americans in the total U.S. population (%), by state, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022

2013–2017



2013–2022



The increased use of Portuguese within the home highlights the enduring importance of domestic language practices in nurturing ethnic identity.

Examining the relative size of the Portuguese-American population within the broader context of the total population reveals that states with a historically significant Portuguese presence continue to be relevant in broader population demographics. Rhode Island continues to have the highest proportion of Portuguese-Americans. However, there has been a decline, from 7.22% in 2013–2017 to 6.04% in 2018–2022. A similar trend occurred in Massachusetts, where the proportion decreased from 3.48% to 3.20%. Hawaii also exhibited a modest decline, from 3.49% to 3.34% (Figure 5.3).

Concurrently, states with emerging Portuguese-American populations, notably in the South and Mountain West, exhibited significant proportional increases. That is to say, the growth rate of Portuguese-Americans exceeds that of the overall state population. For instance, Colorado's proportion increased from 0.20% to 0.28%, New Mexico's from 0.14% to 0.20%, and South Carolina's from 0.14% to 0.19%. While these absolute numbers remain relatively small compared to New England, the relative growth indicates a geographic diffusion of Portuguese-Americans away from traditional centers. This geographic dispersion may be influenced by economic factors such as housing affordability, employment opportunities, and lifestyle preferences (Johnson, 2019).

Furthermore, the decline in the proportion of Portuguese-Americans in states such as California, from 0.83% to 0.75%, corresponds to broader patterns of out-migration from high-cost coastal states to more affordable inland areas.

While states such as Wisconsin and Wyoming host very small Portuguese-American populations, they exhibited proportionally significant growth. Wisconsin, for instance, nearly doubled its share from

0.04% to 0.07%. Such findings suggest that Portuguese-Americans are contributing, albeit modestly, to the broader demographic shifts reshaping the American landscape (Gonzalez, 2021).

It is also important to consider the interplay between absolute and relative growth. For example, states like Florida, Texas, and Nevada reported substantial absolute increases in their Portuguese-American populations, which were matched by corresponding proportional growth. This indicates that these populations are growing at a similar pace to the total population. Conversely, some states, such as Oregon and Ohio, experienced declines or stagnations in proportional representation, signalling demographic stability or contraction within those regions. Overall, while the Portuguese-American population continues to be highly concentrated in a few key states, there is clear evidence of gradual dispersion and new community formation across a wider array of states.

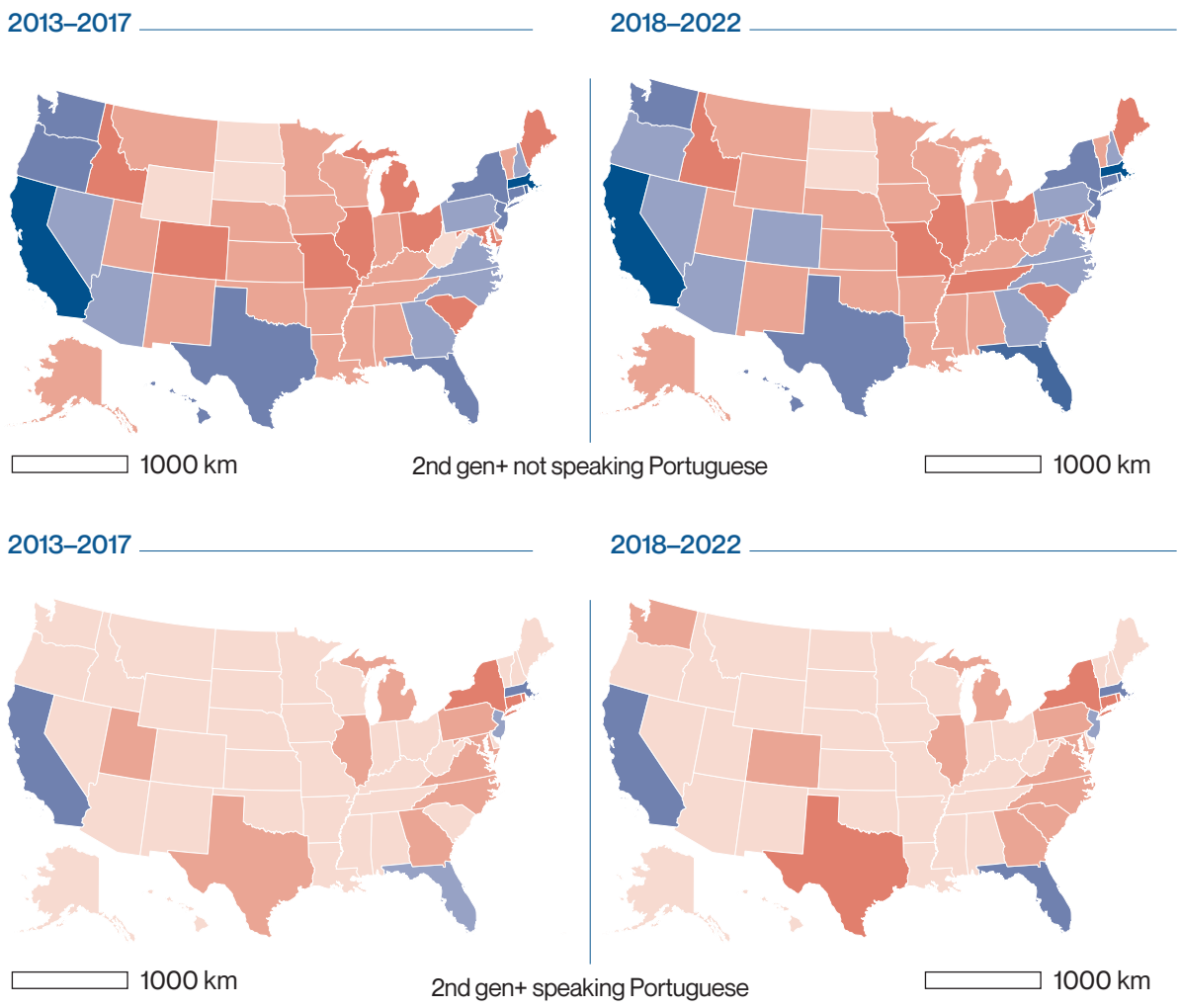
Figure 5.4 shows language use among Portuguese-Americans across the U.S. between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022. For example, California has a large Portuguese-American population (282,068 non-Portuguese speakers versus 20,271 Portuguese speakers from 2013 to 2017). Notably, the number of Portuguese speakers slightly increased in 2018–2022 (from 20,271 to 21,749), even as the number of non-Portuguese speakers declined. A similar pattern emerges in traditional hubs like Massachusetts. Although Massachusetts has a high number of Portuguese speakers (36,066 from 2018 to 2022), this figure has declined compared to the total Portuguese-American population. This indicates a gradual shift away from the Portuguese language.

Meanwhile, in states with smaller Portuguese-American populations, language use tends to be weaker. For instance, in Wyoming in 2018–2022, there were 1,225 Portuguese-Americans, but none reported speaking Portuguese at home. In South Dakota, despite growth in the overall Portuguese-American population, only 30 individuals reported speaking Portuguese in the 2018–2022 ACS sample. Thus, at least in some areas, Portuguese language use seems to be contingent on the size and strength of ethnic enclaves.

However, there are signs of resistance to complete assimilation in some other areas. In places like Texas, the number of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese increased notably (from 3,115 in 2013–2017 to 5,320 in 2018–2022), suggesting either recent influxes of Portuguese speakers or a renewed cultural interest among descendants (Pereira, 2021). In Utah, a state with a relatively small Portuguese-American population, the number of Portuguese-speaking descendants remained around 888 from 2018 to 2022. Such cases suggest that language retention may depend more on community-driven efforts and family dynamics that prioritize heritage language use than on population size.

In summary, the data demonstrate a complex picture of cultural persistence and linguistic assimilation among Portuguese-Americans. Although most Portuguese-Americans no longer speak Portuguese at home, certain pockets of resilience exist. As younger generations navigate their identities, the role of language as a cultural anchor remains significant but challenged. Factors such as community size, regional history, educational opportunities, and intergenerational transmission practices likely play critical roles in shaping these outcomes.

Figure 5.4: Portuguese-Americans in the total U.S. population (No.), by language use and state, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

As younger generations navigate their identities, the role of language as a cultural anchor remains significant but challenged. Factors such as community size, regional history, educational opportunities, and intergenerational transmission practices likely play critical roles in shaping these outcomes.

Table 5.1: Population size and growth of Portuguese-Americans population in different clusters of states in the U.S., 2013-2017 and 2018-2022

Major Clusters	2nd gen+ not speaking Portuguese		2nd gen+ speaking Portuguese		2nd gen+ Portuguese	
	2013-2017					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Massachusetts-Rhode Island-Connecticut	280,662	28.2	51,355	38.1	332,017	29.4
California	282,068	28.4	20,271	15.0	302,339	26.8
Florida	47,067	4.7	14,650	10.9	61,717	5.5
New York - New Jersey	58,010	5.8	22,139	16.4	80,149	7.1
Hawaii	45,996	4.6	439	0.3	46,435	4.1
Rest of U.S.	280,489	28.2	25,950	19.3	306,439	27.1
Total	994,292	100.0	134,804	100.0	1 129,096	100.0
	2018-2022					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Massachusetts-Rhode Island-Connecticut	261,749	26.7	50,031	32.0	311,780	27.4
California	256,292	26.1	21,749	13.9	278,041	24.4
Florida	55,509	5.7	20,491	13.1	76,000	6.7
New York - New Jersey	58,008	5.9	29,255	18.7	87,263	7.7
Hawaii	44,960	4.6	653	0.4	45,613	4.0
Rest of U.S.	305,241	31.1	34,179	21.9	339,420	29.8
Total	981,759	100.0	156,358	100.0	1,138,117	100.0
	Population Growth					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Rhode Island-Massachusetts-Connecticut	-18,913	-6.7	-1,324	-2.6	-20,237	-6.1
California	-25,776	-9.1	1,478	7.3	-24,298	-8.0
Florida	8,442	17.9	5,841	39.9	14,283	23.1
New York - New Jersey	-2	-0.0	7,116	32.1	7,114	8.9
Hawaii	-1,036	-2.3	214	48.7	-822	-1.8
Rest of U.S.	24,752	8.8	8,229	31.7	32,981	10.8
Total	-12,533	-1.3	21,554	16.0	9,021	0.8

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

5.2. Spatial distribution of Portuguese-Americans in the U.S. at Public Use Microdata Area level

Nachatter Singh Garha

To examine where Portuguese-Americans are most concentrated, this study uses detailed geographic data called PUMAs (Public Use Microdata Areas) from the U.S. Census. Each PUMA represents at least 100,000 people and helps reveal population patterns within states while protecting privacy. This approach allows the identification of local trends and differences that broader state-level data may overlook.

5.2.1. Spatial distribution of Portuguese-Americans in Massachusetts-Rhode Island-Connecticut cluster

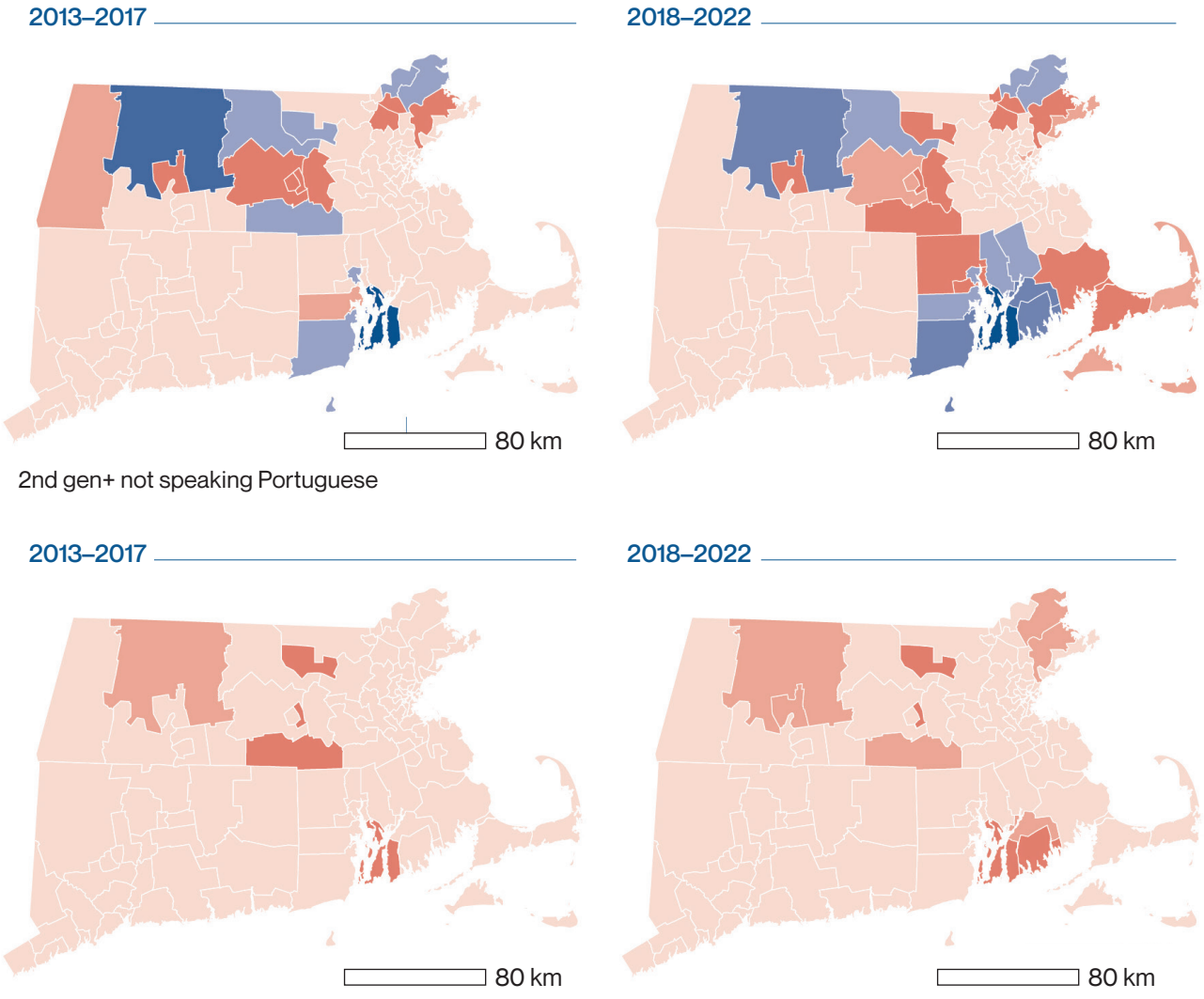
In New England, particularly in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, the number of Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese varies across Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022 (Figure 5.5). A significant trend is the decline in non-Portuguese-speaking populations in areas traditionally characterized by large Portuguese-speaking communities. For example, in Southeast Rhode Island (Newport and Bristol Counties), the number of individuals not speaking Portuguese decreases from 18,890 in 2013–2017 to 16,948 in 2018–2022. This reduction may indicate a shift toward more linguistically diverse communities as individuals from varied backgrounds settle in the region. Conversely, other areas, such as South Rhode Island (Washington County), experience an increase in non-Portuguese speakers, rising from 4,882 to 6,285 over the same period, likely due to a combination of regional population growth and the migration of individuals who do not speak Portuguese. In Massachusetts, similar mixed trends emerge. For instance, in Bristol County (South)—which includes New Bedford, Dartmouth, and Westport—the number of non-Portuguese speakers grows significantly, rising from virtually none in 2013–2017 to 6,203 in 2018–2022. Meanwhile, some historically Portuguese-speaking areas, such as Central Rhode Island (Kent County—Warwick City), see a drop in Portuguese speakers even as non-Portuguese-speaking populations increase (from 909 to 2,837), suggesting a changing community profile. Urban centers such as Middlesex County (East)—Somerville and Everett—see an increase in non-Portuguese speakers from virtually zero to 580, likely due to diverse immigrant inflows common in metropolitan areas. A modest increase is also noted in Essex County (South Coastline)—Salem, Beverly, and Gloucester—rising to 587 in 2018–2022. Collectively, these patterns reflect the demographic and migratory shifts occurring in the region, highlighting both population growth and linguistic change.

In terms of Portuguese-speaking descendants, the data also show significant variation between both periods. Southeast Rhode Island (Newport and Bristol Counties) experiences a decline in Portuguese speakers from 1,830 to 1,488, potentially reflecting population aging, linguistic assimilation and out-migration. A similar trend is observed in Franklin and Hampshire Counties (Massachusetts), where Portuguese speakers decrease from 966 to 634. In contrast, some areas experience increases. South Rhode Island (Washington County) sees an uptick from 338 to 490 speakers, while Bristol County (South) records a surge from zero in 2013–2017 to 1,298 in 2018–2022, reflecting a resurgence in Portuguese-speaking populations in historically immigrant-rich locations like New Bedford. Other regions, such as Essex County (North)—including Newburyport, Amesbury, and North Andover—also experience notable growth in Portuguese-speaking descendant populations, rising from 147 in 2013–2017 to 795 in 2018–2022. This growth may be linked to economic opportunities and new migration patterns. However, declines are evident in areas like Essex County (West)—Lawrence

and Andover—where Portuguese speakers drop sharply from 177 to 10. In Providence City PUMA, the number of Portuguese speakers remains relatively stable, suggesting a steady community amid broader demographic shifts. Worcester County (South) experiences a notable decline, with Portuguese speakers decreasing from 1,377 to 763.

> In Providence, the number of Portuguese speakers remains relatively stable, suggesting a steady community amid broader demographic shifts.

Figure 5.5. Distribution of Portuguese-Americans in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut (**No.**), at PUMA level, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

5.2.2. Spatial distribution of Portuguese-Americans in California cluster

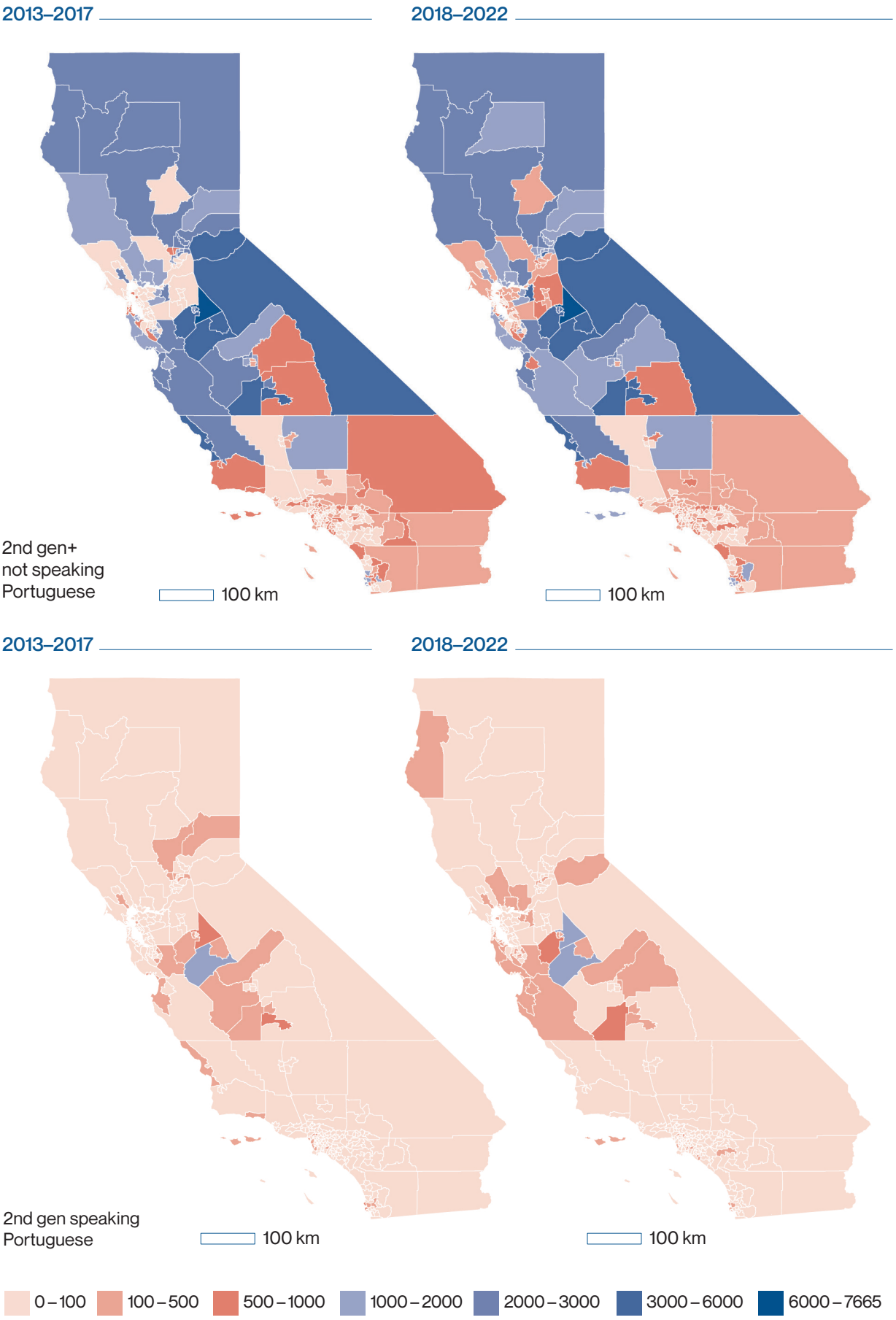
Figure 5.6 illustrates the changing linguistic patterns among Portuguese-Americans in various Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) of California between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022. In regions like Stanislaus County (Northeast)—Turlock, Riverbank, Oakdale & Waterford Cities, the number of Portuguese-Americans speaking Portuguese increases from 931 in 2013–2017 to 1,302 in 2018–2022, signaling a positive trend in the use of the Portuguese language. However, this is accompanied by a substantial decline in the number of individuals who do not speak Portuguese, which drops from 7,663 to 6,501 in the same period. This suggests the coexistence of two opposing trends regarding the use of Portuguese in California: on one hand, a broader pattern of language retention, with subsequent generations gradually increasing the use of their ancestral language; on the other hand, a decline in the number of non-Portuguese speakers.

On one hand, a broader pattern of language retention, with subsequent generations gradually increasing the use of their ancestral language; on the other hand, a decline in the number of non-Portuguese speakers.

In Kings County—Hanford City PUMA, there is a marked increase in Portuguese speakers, from 395 in 2013–2017 to 647 in 2018–2022. This region also experiences a small increase in non-Portuguese speakers, from 4,963 to 5,066 over the same period. Merced County (West & South)—Los Banos & Livingston Cities PUMA also shows slight increases in both Portuguese speakers (from 1,103 to 1,155) and non-Portuguese speakers (from 4,666 to 4,728). Other regions, like Merced County (Northeast)—Merced & Atwater Cities PUMA, show a similar language shift, with Portuguese speakers increasing from 266 in 2013–2017 to 389 in 2018–2022. Meanwhile, the number of those who do not speak Portuguese also grows from 3,854 to 4,460.

A few areas exhibit notable changes that could indicate weaker community ties or factors that accelerate language loss. For example, San Luis Obispo County (West)—Coastal Region PUMA experiences a notable decline in Portuguese speakers, from 117 in 2013–2017 to 46 in 2018–2022, which may relate to the natural decline of the elderly population. At the same time, the number of non-Portuguese speakers grows from 3,273 to 3,846, marking a decline in the language use rate in the region.

Figure 5.6: Distribution of Portuguese-Americans in California (**No.**), at PUMA level, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

In contrast, some rural areas like Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, and Tuolumne Counties PUMA show less drastic changes in language use. The Portuguese-speaking population drops from 65 in 2013–2017 to 34 in 2018–2022, and the number of individuals who do not speak Portuguese decreases from 4,901 to 3,817. This decline may be attributed to the lack of new immigration flows and the natural aging of the Portuguese-speaking community in these PUMA regions. Lastly, in Fresno County (North Central)—Fresno City (North) PUMA the number of Portuguese speakers falls from 108 in 2013–2017 to 37 in 2018–2022, and the number of non-Portuguese speakers decreases from 2,993 to 2,675.

The patterns in California suggest a nationwide trend in Portuguese-Americans, where language loss often correlates with greater integration into English-speaking society, though some regions exhibit more resilience in language retention due to specific local dynamics.

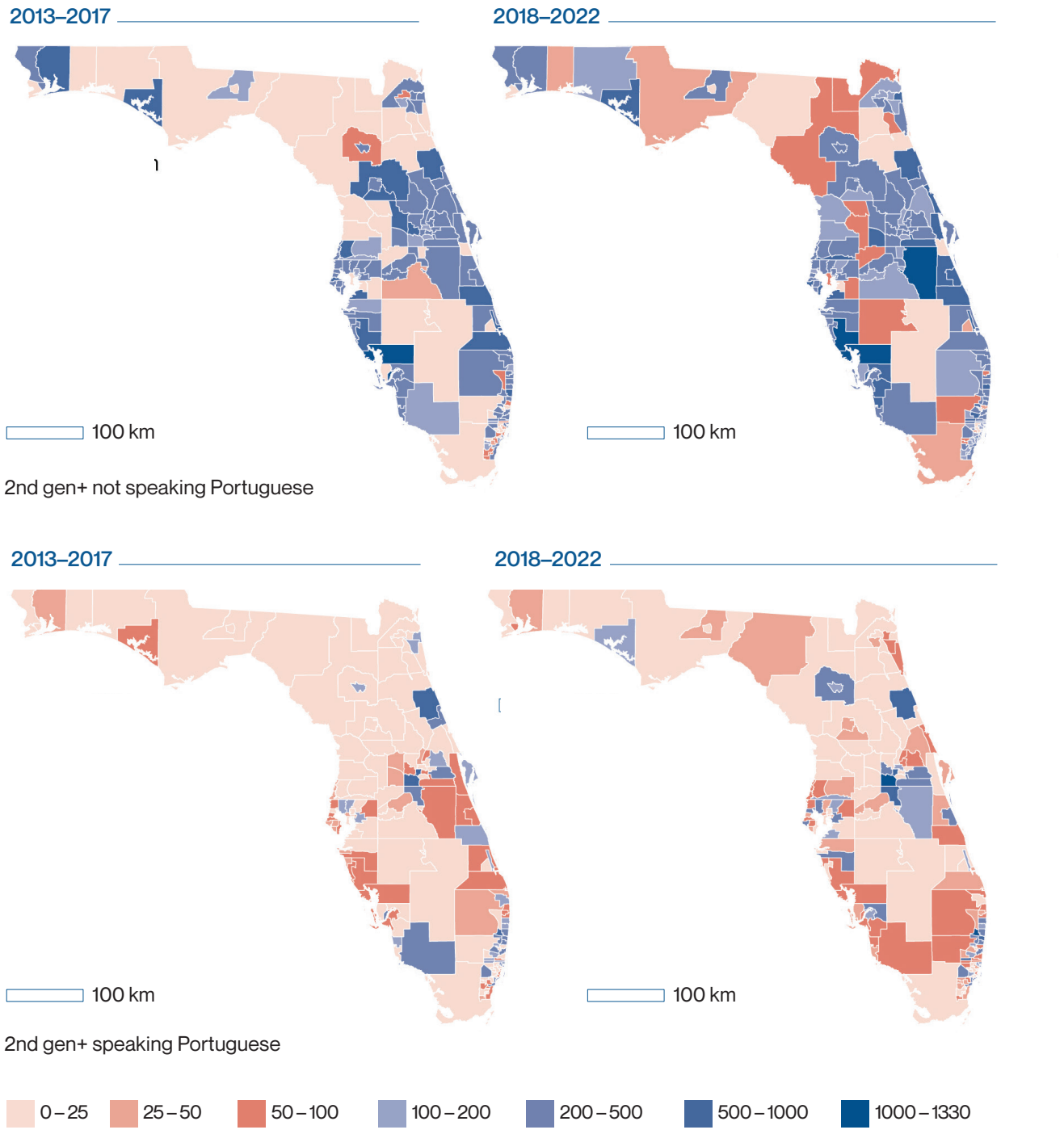
5.2.3. Spatial distribution of Portuguese-Americans in Florida cluster

In Florida's Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022, several notable trends emerge. Overall, there is considerable fluctuation in the number of Portuguese-speaking individuals, with some regions experiencing significant increases and others notable declines (Figure 5.7). For instance, Osceola County (West) shows one of the largest increases, rising from 368 in 2013–2017 to 668 in 2018–2022, and Orange County (Southwest), home to the Disney–International Drive region, grows from 692 to 1,219. Similar upward trends occur in PUMAs such as Hillsborough County (Central), which increases from 106 to 440, and Palm Beach County (East Central)—Boynton Beach, which rises from 133 to 330. These shifts may reflect growing Portuguese-speaking communities, potentially driven by internal migration patterns or local economic development attracting diverse populations.

Conversely, some areas witness sharp declines in the number of Portuguese-speaking individuals. For example, Orange County (Central)—Orlando City (West Downtown) drops from 898 to 766, while Indian River County falls from 185 to 97. Certain urban areas such as Broward County (West Central)—Plantation and Sunrise experience steep decreases (from 347 to 34), possibly indicating relocation or assimilation patterns. While many rural PUMAs, such as those in Holmes, Walton, and Washington counties, had no Portuguese-speaking individuals in either year, some previously unreported areas, such as Alachua County (Outer), showed new Portuguese-speaking populations, increasing from 0 to 250 individuals. This suggests the emergence of new communities. Hyperlocal demographic differences are also reflected in the data across PUMAs within the same counties. In Miami-Dade County, some regions like the East (Coral Gables, Kendall) rise from 263 to 372, while others like the Central (Kendale Lakes and Kendall West) increase only slightly or even decline. Overall, the data suggest a growing yet uneven presence of Portuguese-speaking populations in Florida, with concentrations rising particularly in urban and economically dynamic areas.

As for the number of Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese, the data show relative consistency in the regions reporting the highest numbers of non-Portuguese speakers, particularly in densely populated and urbanized counties. For instance, Osceola County experiences a notable increase from 327 individuals in 2013–2017 to 1,275 in 2018–2022, suggesting either population growth or changes in linguistic demographics driven by internal migration or evolving settlement patterns. Similarly, Pinellas County (Southeast) increases from 423 to 743, likely reflecting continued urban development and rising linguistic diversity. Broward County (Southwest) reports a substantial rise from 298 in 2013–2017 to 916 in 2018–2022, and Orange County (Southeast) increases from 328 to 912, indicating expanding multicultural populations in these metropolitan areas.

Figure 5.7.: Distribution of Portuguese-Americans in Florida (**No.**), at PUMA level, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

In contrast, rural or less populated regions demonstrate minimal change. For example, St. Johns County (Northeast) and Holmes, Walton, and Washington Counties report no individuals who do not speak Portuguese in either period, suggesting limited demographic shifts and stable language distributions in these areas. Other counties, such as Pinellas County (West Central), show moderate increases—from 411 in 2013–2017 to 573 in 2018–2022—indicating steady development and population diversification. Miami-Dade County (East) also records a rise from 260 to 526, reflecting possible shifts in the linguistic composition of long-established communities. Interestingly, Hillsborough County (Southwest), which includes parts of Tampa, shows a slight decrease from 590 in 2013–2017 to 548 in 2018–2022. Volusia County (Port Orange, Edgewater, New Smyrna Beach) similarly experiences an increase from 335 to 582, further supporting the notion of evolving demographic patterns in mid-sized urban areas.

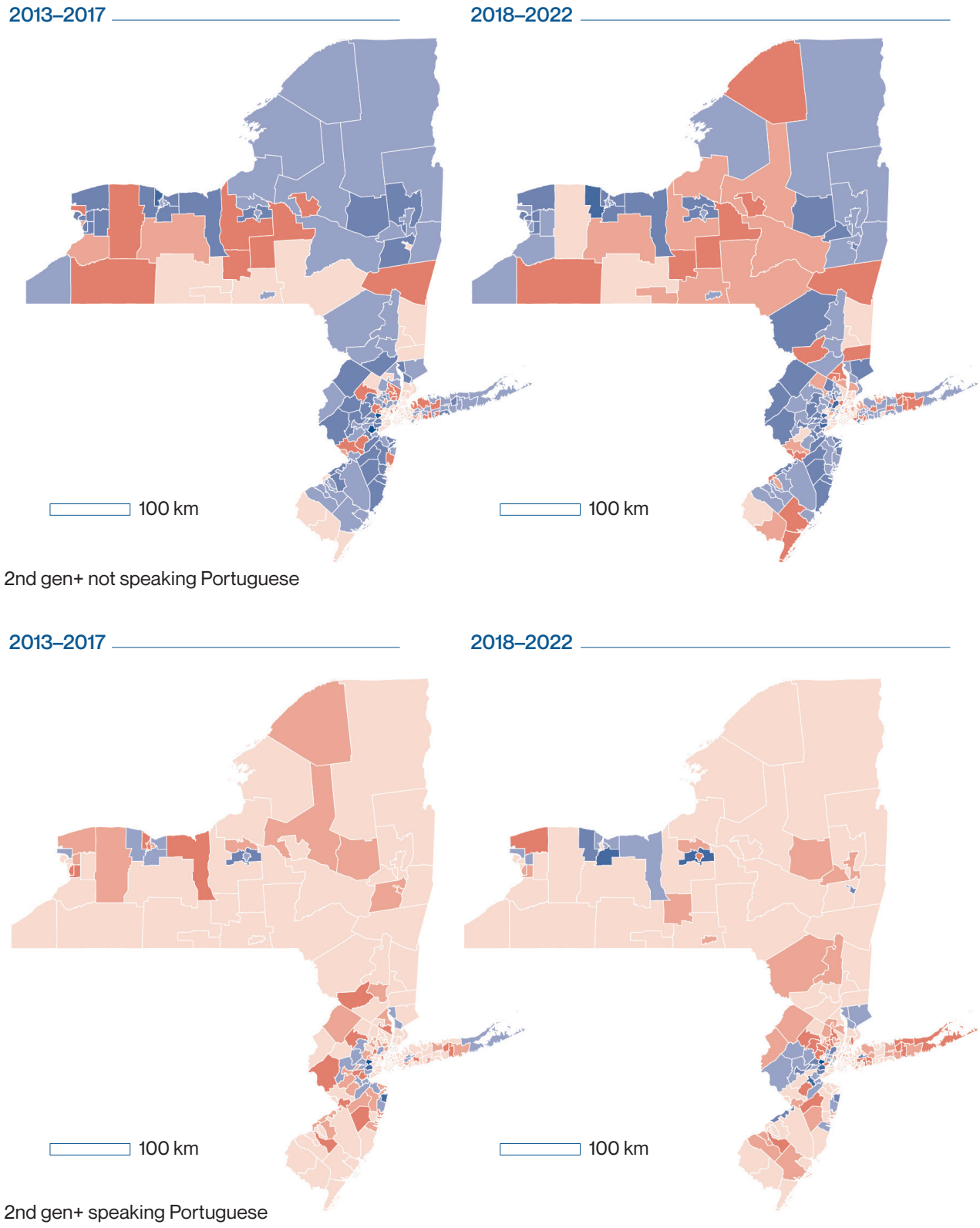
5.2.4. Spatial distribution of Portuguese-Americans in New Jersey-New York Cluster

In the New Jersey-New York cluster, between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022, some areas record significant growth in the Portuguese-descendant population who do not speak Portuguese, while others experience declines (Figure 5.8). In New Jersey, Bergen County (Southwest)—including Rutherford, North Arlington, and Hasbrouck Heights PUMA—witnesses a substantial increase, from 484 individuals in 2013–2017 to 1,456 in 2018–2022. Similarly, Union County (North Central), covering Union Township and Roselle Park, grows from 1,281 to 1,448. Middlesex County (Northeast) also increases, rising from 890 to 1,034. In New York, Monroe County (North & West) PUMA sees its non–Portuguese-speaking Portuguese-descendant population grow from 890 in 2013–2017 to 1,034 in 2018–2022.

Conversely, some regions show a decline in non–Portuguese-speaking individuals. In New Jersey, Ocean County (Central)—including Toms River and Berkeley—decreases from 998 to 810. Middlesex County (North Central) drops from 1,009 to 860. Essex County (Northeast) also declines slightly, from 635 to 588. In New York, Monroe County (Central) mirrors these trends with a decrease from 1,009 to 860, and Erie County (North Central) drops from 998 to 810.

Some regions experience relatively modest or opposing shifts. Camden County (Central)—including Lindenwold and Collingswood Boroughs—reports a slight increase from 284 to 340. Similarly, Broome County (West Central)—encompassing Greater Binghamton and Johnson City—rises from 284 to 340. These fluctuations reflect broader demographic dynamics, including migration, aging populations, urban development, and patterns of cultural assimilation, highlighting a shifting linguistic landscape.

Figure 5.8.: Distribution of Portuguese-Americans in New York and New Jersey (**No.**), at PUMA level, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

In contrast, the number of Portuguese speakers among second-generation and beyond individuals shows significant regional variation in both states. In New Jersey, Union County (North Central) increases from 1,874 Portuguese speakers in 2013–2017 to 2,063 in 2018–2022. Middlesex County (Central)—including New Brunswick and Highland Park—sees a dramatic rise from 250 to 1,244, reflecting either language retention or new migration flows. Union County (Southeast)—covering Linden, Rahway, and Roselle—also experiences steady growth, increasing from 736 to 1,029. In New York, Monroe County (South) mirrors this pattern, with the number of speakers growing from 250 to 1,244. Onondaga County (Central)—including the outer areas of Syracuse—rises from 973 to 1,212, suggesting a consolidation or expansion of Portuguese-speaking communities.

Other areas show more gradual increases. Bergen County (Southwest) rises modestly from 484 to 579, while Morris County (South)—including Morristown, Madison, and Florham Park—grows from 249 to 317. Essex County (Northeast)—including Bloomfield—experiences a more noticeable jump, from 143 to 398. Notably, Hudson County (South & West)—covering Bayonne, Kearney, and Harrison—records the emergence of Portuguese speakers where there had been none in 2013–2017, rising to 227 in 2018–2022. However, some regions experience declines. Monmouth County (Southeast)—covering Long Branch, Asbury Park, and Eatontown—sees a significant drop from 858 to 586, possibly indicating assimilation trends or migration out of the region.

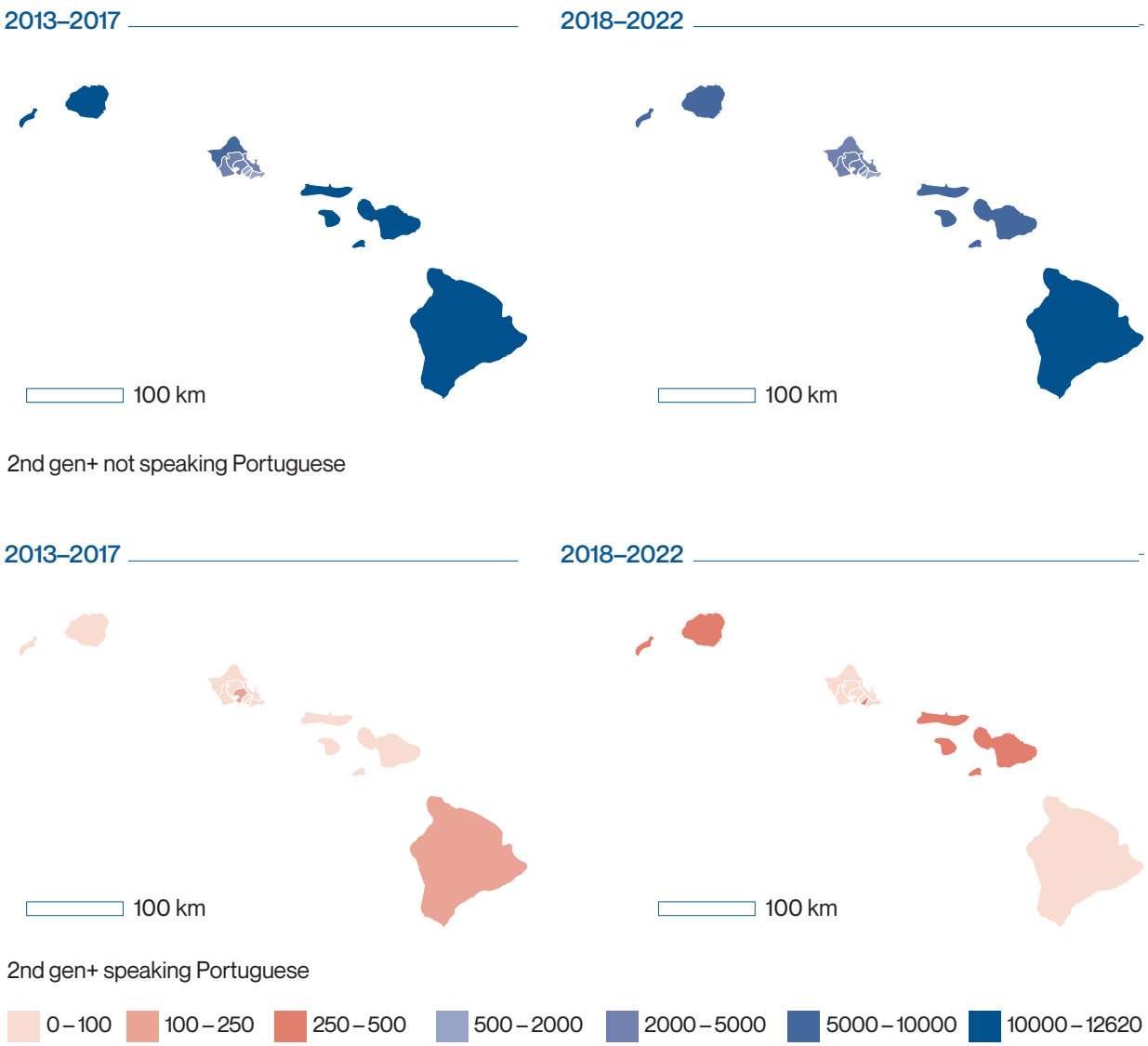
5.2.5. Spatial distribution of Portuguese-Americans in Hawaii cluster

The data from various counties and regions in Hawaii reveal notable fluctuations in the number of Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022. In the combined Maui, Kalawao, and Kauai Counties PUMA, the number declines from 10,232 in 2013–2017 to 9,115 in 2018–2022, suggesting a modest demographic contraction or possible out-migration. In contrast, Hawaii County PUMA sees an increase, with the number of individuals of Portuguese descent rising from 10,258 in 2013–2017 to 12,617 in 2018–2022. This growth may reflect an expanding non–Portuguese-speaking population or a renewed interest in identifying as having Portuguese ancestry. Honolulu County displays mixed trends across its various PUMAs. The Rural Oahu PUMA shows a notable decline from 5,047 to 3,273. Similarly, the Koolaupoko PUMA declines from 4,801 to 4,499, and the Moanalua to Pearl City PUMA decreases from 3,273 to 2,392. Central Oahu PUMA shows a more modest reduction, from 3,813 to 3,643. Conversely, the Ewa PUMA registers an increase from 3,438 in 2013–2017 to 3,780 in 2018–2022. The Tantalus to Waikiki PUMA sees a slight increase, from 1,305 to 1,503, while the Nuuanu to Kalihi PUMA grows from 1,959 to 2,312. These changes illustrate a dynamic landscape in the linguistic patterns of Hawaii's Portuguese-descendant population, with some areas experiencing growth and others a decline in non–Portuguese-speaking individuals.

In terms of Portuguese language use among Portuguese-Americans, significant changes occur across Hawaii's counties and PUMAs between the two periods. In Maui, Kalawao, and Kauai Counties PUMA, the number of Portuguese speakers rises to 283 in 2018–2022, indicating a potential resurgence or arrival of Portuguese-speaking individuals. Conversely, Hawaii County PUMA shows a decline from 178 to 94 speakers, suggesting a weakening in language maintenance. Honolulu County exhibits both gains and losses. The Rural Oahu PUMA, which had no Portuguese speakers in 2013–2017, records six speakers in 2018–2022. East Honolulu to Kapahulu PUMA shows an increase, reaching 89 Portuguese speakers. Tantalus to Waikiki PUMA nearly doubles its count, from 63 to 149 speakers. In contrast, Koolaupoko PUMA drops from 14 to virtually zero speakers, and Moanalua to Pearl City PUMA declines sharply from 167 to 24. Central Oahu PUMA records a minor increase from zero to eight speakers. The Ewa PUMA, however, experiences a complete decline, from 17 speakers

to none in 2018–2022. Notably, the Nuuanu to Kalihi PUMA has no reported Portuguese speakers in either period. These regional trends highlight a complex and uneven trajectory of Portuguese language retention in Hawaii. Some areas, particularly urban zones like Tantalus to Waikiki and East Honolulu to Kapahulu, show growth in Portuguese-speaking communities, potentially reflecting new migration patterns or stronger cultural preservation efforts. Meanwhile, other areas reflect continued linguistic assimilation and language loss among long-settled Portuguese-descendant populations (Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9: Distribution of Portuguese-Americans in Hawaii (**No.**), at PUMA level, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

The spatial distribution of second-generation and beyond Portuguese-Americans across U.S. PUMAs reveals complex and regionally varied demographic and linguistic patterns. While some areas—particularly urban centers in California, Florida, New Jersey, and Hawaii—exhibit notable growth in Portuguese-speaking populations, others show clear signs of linguistic assimilation or decline, especially in historically Portuguese enclaves in New England and rural parts of Hawaii. In many regions, the number of Portuguese descendants who no longer speak the language continues to rise, reflecting broader integration into English-speaking society, internal migration, and generational language loss. However, exceptions to this trend emerge in specific urban or economically dynamic areas where language retention appears stronger, possibly driven by renewed cultural engagement or recent migration flows. These findings highlight the importance of localized analysis in understanding the evolving linguistic and cultural landscape of Portuguese-American communities, which is shaped by a combination of historical settlement patterns, socioeconomic factors, and regional migration dynamics.

5.3. Geographical dispersion vs. concentration patterns

Nachatter Singh Garha

5.3.1. Massachusetts-Rhode Island-Connecticut cluster

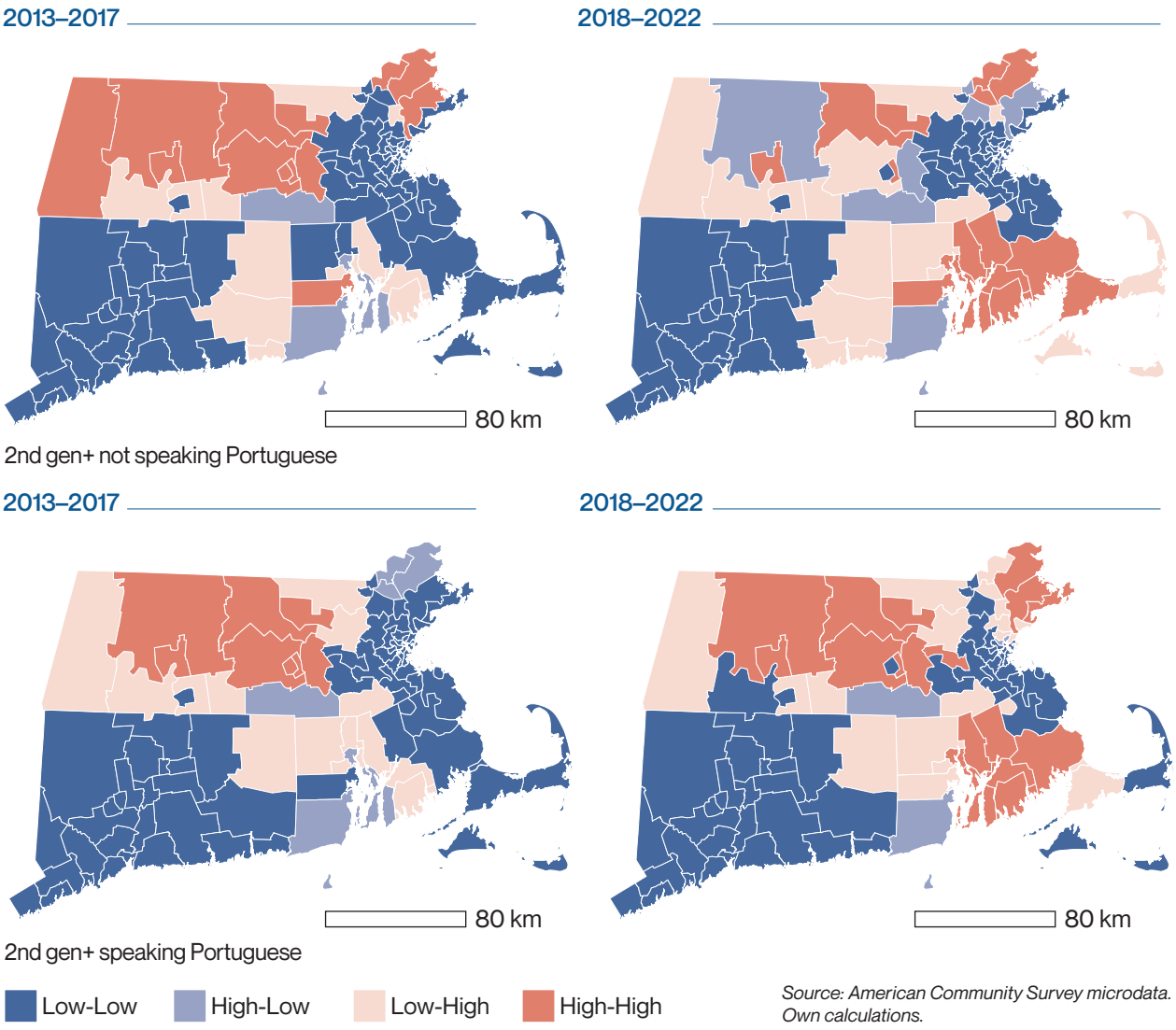
The Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut cluster reveals the most significant change in spatial clustering among all the regions analyzed. In 2013–2017, both non-Portuguese (0.02) and Portuguese speakers (0.08) exhibited low Moran's I values[1], indicating near-random spatial distribution. This can be related to the high number of Portuguese-Americans in all PUMAs. However, by 2013–2017, with a decreasing population and increasing concentration in some PUMA regions, both groups showed substantial increases in clustering, with non-speakers reaching 0.31 and Portuguese speakers rising to 0.38 (Figure 5.10). These increases suggest a shift toward more geographically defined communities for both groups. For Portuguese speakers, in particular, this change may reflect renewed community consolidation within traditional Portuguese enclaves, historically significant in New England.

Massachusetts, Franklin & Hampshire Counties show a consistent presence of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese over time, with specific mention to regions like Northampton in Hampshire County and towns in Worcester County (e.g., Gardner, Fitchburg, and Leominster). These areas indicate a strong retention of the Portuguese language across multiple generations. Similarly, Middlesex County, specifically Framingham and Marlborough, sees continued use of Portuguese language. Other counties in Essex (e.g., Peabody, Danvers, and Salem) and Bristol County (e.g., Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton) also show concentration of Portuguese-speaking descendants. This is consistent in both urban and suburban settings, suggesting robust cultural retention. Patterns in Rhode Island, Providence City and areas in Pawtucket, Central Falls, and East Providence reflect Portuguese language retention. Moreover, Newport City on the South Coast of Rhode Island shows Portuguese-Americans who continue to speak the language, reinforcing this trend of linguistic retention in urban and coastal areas. Overall, these counties and cities, spanning across Massachusetts and Rhode Island, indicate a vibrant Portuguese-speaking community where cultural and linguistic traditions have been preserved over multiple generations, particularly in areas with strong historical ties to Portuguese immigration.

[1] To identify spatial patterns and clusters within the Portuguese-American population, this chapter applies Local Indicators of Spatial Association (LISA), specifically the Local Moran's I statistic, which ranges from –1 (dispersion) to +1 (clustering), with values near 0 indicating randomness. Methodological details are provided in Annex 1. Due to a high number of missing or suppressed values in the ACS microdata at the PUMA level—likely stemming from small population sizes and confidentiality thresholds—LISA could not be applied to Hawaii.

As per the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese the pattern reflects the gradual decline in the use of Portuguese within these communities over the years. In Massachusetts, many areas in Berkshire County, Franklin & Hampshire Counties, and Worcester County show a consistent trend of Portuguese-Americans who do not speak the language from 2013–2017 to 2018–2022. For instance, Northampton in Hampshire County and Gardner in Worcester County, which were once known for Portuguese-speaking populations, are now marked by a lack of language retention among the descendants. Similarly, areas in Essex County (e.g., Haverhill, Methuen, Lawrence, and Andover) reflect this trend. While regions like Fall River and New Bedford in Bristol County, traditionally recognized for their Portuguese-speaking communities, still have descendants of Portuguese origin, the figure 5.10 highlights that these descendants no longer speak Portuguese as their primary language. In Rhode Island, Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and East Providence cities, once home to large Portuguese-speaking communities, also show a similar pattern of language loss. Newport City on the coast is another area that no longer maintains Portuguese as a commonly spoken language among its descendants. Overall, the data suggests that while these areas still house Portuguese-Americans, language retention is decreasing over time, likely due to assimilation, intermarriage, and other factors that contribute to the fading of heritage languages in immigrant descendants communities.

Figure 5.10: Concentration of Portuguese-Americans in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, PUMA level, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



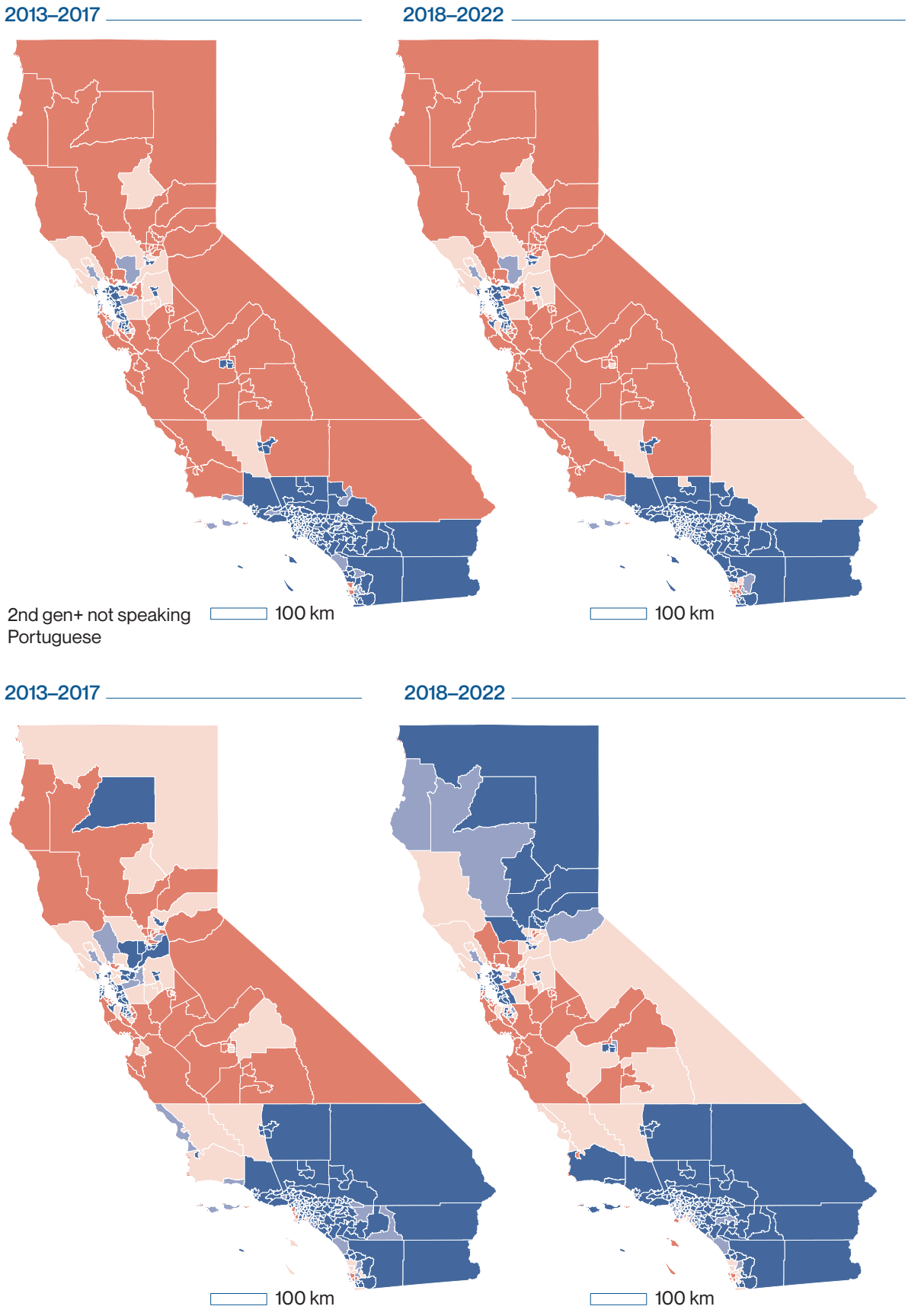
Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

5.3.2. California cluster

In the California cluster, the Global Moran's I index indicates consistently spatial clustering among non–Portuguese speakers, with values rising slightly from 0.62 (2013–2017) to 0.63 (2018–2022). These figures suggest that non–Portuguese speakers are concentrated in specific geographic areas, likely due to long-standing residential patterns or socioeconomic factors, such as employment opportunities, and family-run businesses. In contrast, Portuguese speakers exhibited an increase in spatial clustering, with Moran's I increasing from 0.27 to 0.36 during the same periods (Figure 5.11). Although this value remains lower than that of non-speakers, the upward trend indicates a growing consolidation of Portuguese-speaking communities in California in recent years, possibly reflecting cultural retention or revival.

In 2013–2017, Portuguese-speaking descendants were concentrated in several regions, notably in Santa Clara County—especially within five distinct areas of San Jose and its surrounding cities—and Los Angeles County, spanning four areas from Torrance to the Westside. Sacramento County also demonstrated a strong presence, with clusters in North Highlands, Natomas, and Folsom. Other counties with multiple clusters included San Mateo, San Diego, Fresno, Stanislaus, Monterey, Merced, Tulare, and Santa Cruz. These distributions indicate the presence of both urban (e.g., San Jose, Los Angeles, San Diego) and rural (e.g., Merced, Tulare, Stanislaus) Portuguese-American communities, reflecting a historically rooted and geographically diverse heritage across both coastal and inland areas. In 2018–2022, many California counties continued to show clusters of Portuguese-speaking descendants, suggesting sustained or growing heritage communities. San Diego, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Stanislaus counties each contained four distinct PUMAs, indicating well-established populations. Monterey and Solano counties followed with three PUMAs each, while Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Merced, Sacramento, Santa Cruz, and Tulare counties showed more localized concentrations, with two PUMAs each. These clusters spanned coastal and inland regions, encompassing urban centers such as Los Angeles and San Jose and agricultural hubs like Merced and Tulare—reinforcing the broad geographic distribution of Portuguese-American communities.

Figure 5.11: Concentration of Portuguese-Americans in California, PUMA level, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

In 2013–2017, Portuguese-Americans who no longer speak Portuguese are widely dispersed across the state, with notable concentrations in both urban and rural areas. Santa Clara County, especially several neighborhoods in San Jose; Sacramento County, with six identified zones; and Fresno County, including Fresno, Clovis, and Sanger, all showed large clusters. Additional concentrations were found in Stanislaus, Tulare, Merced, Monterey, and San Mateo counties. These patterns suggest an early wave of Portuguese migration followed by generational language shift, with communities maintaining cultural identity while predominantly using English.

In 2018–2022, Portuguese-descendant populations remained visible across numerous counties, although language retention declined. Fresno, Santa Clara, Sacramento, Stanislaus, and Tulare counties demonstrated strong Portuguese-American presence across urban and rural contexts. Traditional settlement areas such as Monterey, Merced, and Kings counties reflected the enduring influence of Azorean and Madeiran immigrants originally drawn to agricultural work. Urban centers including San Jose, Sacramento, San Diego, and other Bay Area cities showed high levels of assimilation, with Portuguese-Americans integrated into city life but no longer retaining the language in large numbers. Central Valley counties—such as Madera, Colusa, and Glenn—continued to host Portuguese descendants, while coastal areas like Santa Cruz, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara indicated broader geographic dispersion beyond historic inland strongholds. Collectively, these trends highlight a deeply rooted yet increasingly linguistically assimilated Portuguese-American community across California's urban and rural landscapes.

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5.3.3. Florida cluster

Florida exhibits contrasting spatial patterns between Portuguese and non–Portuguese speakers. The Global Moran's I index for non–Portuguese speakers decreased from 0.12 in 2013–2017 to 0.09 in 2018–2022, signaling a decline in spatial clustering and suggesting increased residential dispersion. Conversely, Portuguese speakers showed an increase in spatial autocorrelation, with the Moran's I rising from 0.18 to 0.25 over the same period. Between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022, Portuguese-Americans are primarily concentrated in southeastern Florida. Broward County hosts the largest cluster, spanning multiple cities including Pompano Beach, Coral Springs, Fort Lauderdale, and Hollywood—indicative of a robust and linguistically retained Portuguese-speaking population. Miami-Dade County also exhibits dense concentrations, particularly in coastal and urban areas such as Miami Beach, Aventura, North Miami Beach, and downtown Miami. These patterns suggest strong cultural retention in urban, coastal, and affluent regions, where access to ethnic enclaves and Portuguese-speaking institutions supports continued language use. Central Florida also demonstrates a notable Portuguese-speaking population, particularly in Orange and Osceola counties surrounding the Orlando metropolitan area. Additional Portuguese-speaking communities appear in Palm Beach and Volusia counties, spanning both coastal and suburban areas, indicating cultural and linguistic retention across diverse socioeconomic contexts.

In 2018–2022, Portuguese language retention remains strong among Portuguese-Americans, particularly in urban and suburban counties. Broward County continues to serve as a hub, with

Portuguese-speaking populations in cities such as Coral Springs, Margate, Pompano Beach, and Davie. Miami-Dade County sustains vibrant communities in areas like Aventura, Sunny Isles Beach, and Miami Beach, where cultural diversity and access to immigrant networks likely support language maintenance. In Central Florida, Orange County—including Winter Garden, Pine Hills, and the International Drive area—remains a key site, potentially due to its appeal among Brazilian expatriates linked to tourism. Osceola and Palm Beach counties also show ongoing concentrations, with newer clusters emerging in Hillsborough (Tampa), Lee (Fort Myers), and Pinellas (St. Petersburg) counties. This expansion reflects both population growth and wider geographic dispersion of linguistically retained Portuguese heritage in Florida, supported by community infrastructure and access to Portuguese-language media or education.

Figure 5.12). This divergence indicates that while non–Portuguese speakers are becoming more evenly distributed across the state, Portuguese-speaking communities are forming more concentrated residential patterns, potentially driven by cultural affinity, community cohesion, or localized migration.

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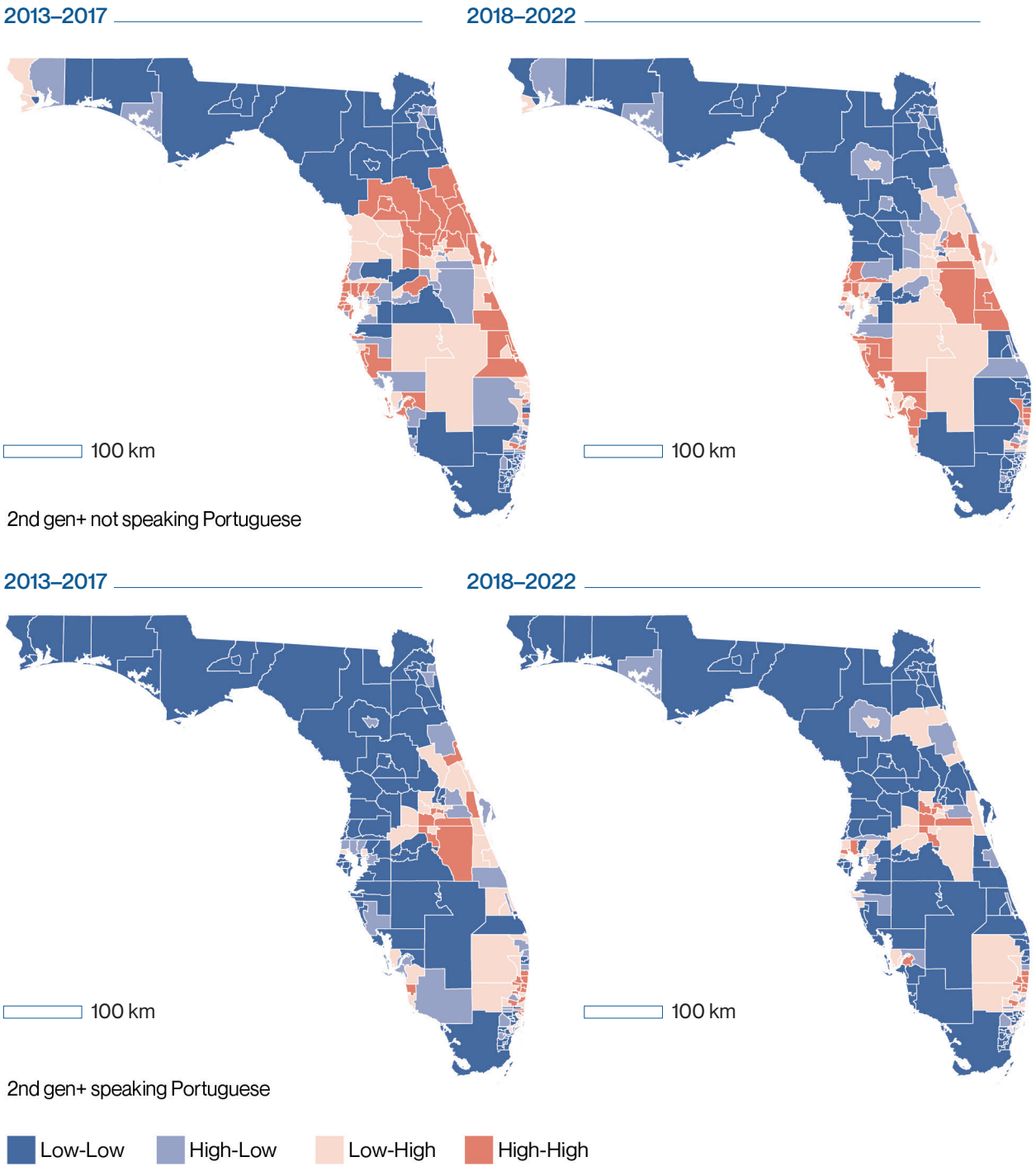
Figure 5.12: Concentration of Portuguese-Americans in Florida, PUMA level, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

In 2013–2017, Portuguese descendants who no longer speak the language were primarily concentrated in Southeast Florida, particularly in Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach counties. Cities such as Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood, Miami Beach, and Delray Beach hosted vibrant Portuguese-descendant communities. Although language retention was limited, cultural identity remained strong due to the presence of ethnic enclaves and community organizations. Central Florida—especially Orange, Osceola, and Seminole counties—also had sizable Portuguese-descendant populations, influenced by employment in the hospitality sector. Pinellas County, part of the Tampa Bay area, showed concentrations in cities such as Clearwater and St. Petersburg, reflecting the region's cultural and economic

diversity. Smaller clusters were observed in Volusia, Flagler, and St. Lucie counties, suggesting broader geographic dispersion. In 2018–2022, the trend of language loss among Portuguese descendants became more apparent. Although Portuguese-Americans remain present in counties such as Brevard, Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach, the Portuguese language is no longer widely spoken. In Brevard County, cities like Titusville, Melbourne, and Palm Bay illustrate this generational linguistic shift. Similar patterns were observed in Broward County (e.g., Davie and Cooper City) and in Miami-Dade (e.g., Miami Beach), where cultural ties persist but language retention has declined. Central Florida counties—Orange, Osceola, Seminole, and Pasco—exhibited parallel trends in cities such as Orlando and Kissimmee. In addition, Pinellas (Clearwater and St. Petersburg), Lee, Sarasota, and Palm Beach counties reflected continued Portuguese-descendant populations without significant language use. Collectively, these findings highlight an ongoing trend of linguistic assimilation across Florida's Portuguese-American communities, despite the persistence of cultural heritage.

5.3.4. New York-New Jersey cluster

In the New York and New Jersey region, the Global Moran's I for non-Portuguese speakers declined from 0.49 in 2013–2017 to 0.39 in 2018–2022, suggesting that this group became more spread out over time. Portuguese speakers, on the other hand, maintained relatively stable Moran's I values, with a slight increase from 0.22 to 0.23. Although still indicative of some spatial clustering, this stability implies that Portuguese-speaking communities have neither significantly dispersed nor become more concentrated. The gradual dispersal of non-speakers could be attributed to internal migration flows or housing market changes, whereas the Portuguese-speaking population may be sustaining long-standing residential areas with minimal change in spatial dynamics.

Figure 5.13 highlights regions across New York and New Jersey, where Portuguese-Americans are concentrated in between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022. These areas have maintained Portuguese language use among descendants of Portuguese immigrants, with a focus on certain counties and regions. In New Jersey, areas such as Bergen County (particularly Rutherford, North Arlington, and Hasbrouck Heights), Passaic County, Hudson County, and Middlesex County are prominent locations where Portuguese is still spoken among Portuguese-Americans. For example, Passaic & Clifton (South Passaic) and Paterson in Passaic County continue to have Portuguese-speaking communities. Middlesex County, including towns like Metuchen, South Edison, and New Brunswick, also have Portuguese descendants who speak the language. Additionally, Union County, which includes areas like Elizabeth, Plainfield, and Westfield, maintains Portuguese language use. In New York, areas such as Monroe County (including Rochester and Greece), Suffolk County (especially Brookhaven Town), and parts of Nassau County (specifically Hempstead Town) have continued to preserve Portuguese as a spoken language among the second generation and beyond. Manhattan in New York City (particularly Morningside Heights & Hamilton Heights) is also noted as an area where Portuguese is spoken among descendants. This data suggests that Portuguese language usage persists strongly in these regions, likely due to established Portuguese communities and cultural preservation across generations. These areas have consistently retained their linguistic heritage despite the passage of time.Figure 5.12). This divergence indicates that while non–Portuguese speakers are becoming more evenly distributed across the state, Portuguese-speaking communities are forming more concentrated residential patterns, potentially driven by cultural affinity, community cohesion, or localized migration.

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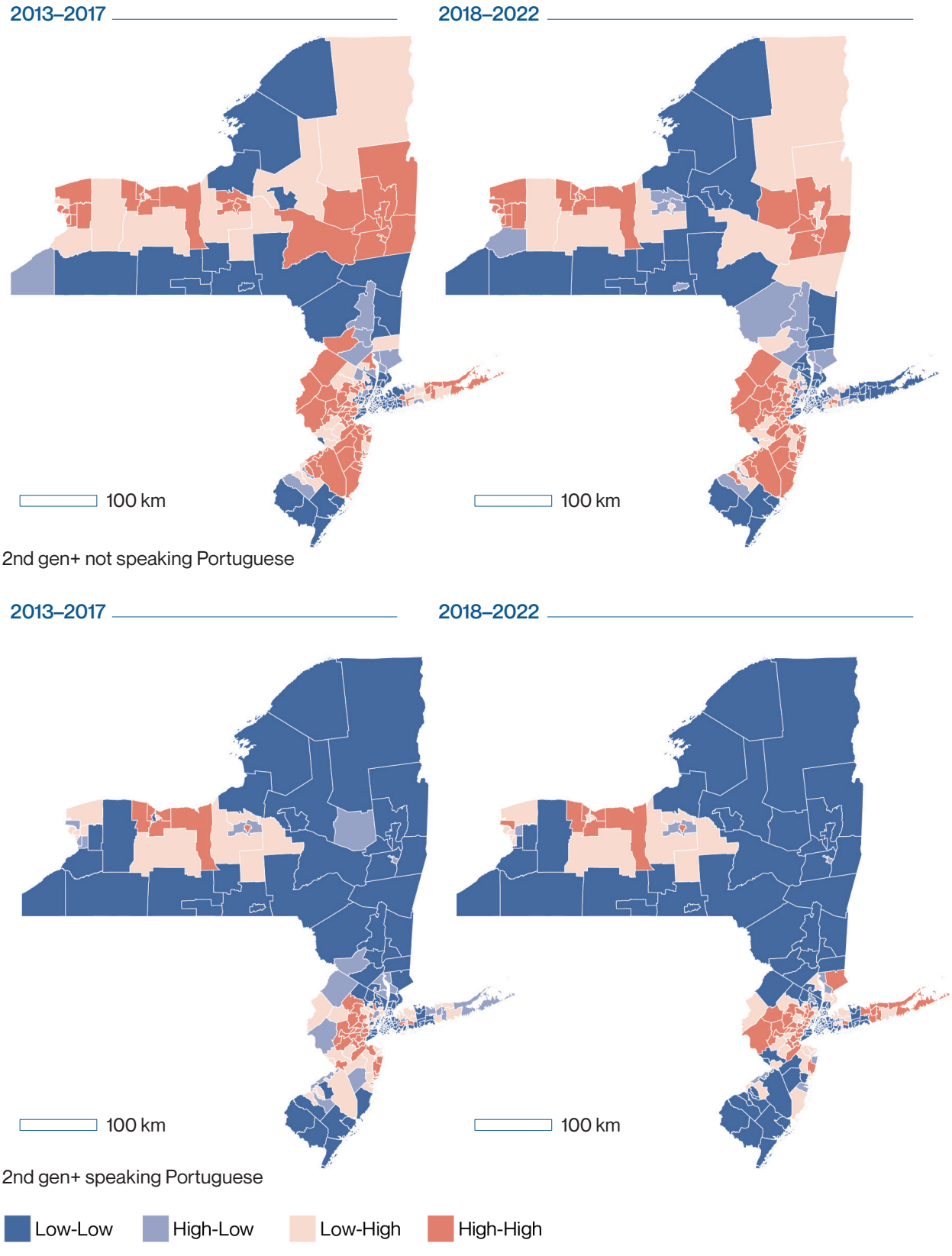
In 2018–2022, Portuguese language retention remains strong among Portuguese-Americans, particularly in urban and suburban counties. Broward County continues to serve as a hub, with Portuguese-speaking populations in cities such as Coral Springs, Margate, Pompano Beach, and Davie. Miami-Dade County sustains vibrant communities in areas like Aventura, Sunny Isles Beach, and Miami Beach, where cultural diversity and access to immigrant networks likely support language maintenance. In Central Florida, Orange County—including Winter Garden, Pine Hills, and the International Drive area—remains a key site, potentially due to its appeal among Brazilian expatriates linked to tourism. Osceola and Palm Beach counties also show ongoing concentrations, with newer clusters emerging in Hillsborough (Tampa), Lee (Fort Myers), and Pinellas (St. Petersburg) counties. This expansion reflects both population growth and wider geographic dispersion of linguistically retained Portuguese heritage in Florida, supported by community infrastructure and access to Portuguese-language media or education.

Figure 5.13: Concentration of Portuguese-Americans in New York and New Jersey, PUMA level, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

As per the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese, their high concentration is captured across multiple counties and regions, including several prominent areas in New Jersey, such as Bergen, Passaic, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Essex, and Union counties. Additionally, the areas of high concentration include Monroe, Erie, and Nassau counties in New York. Looking at the specific regions within New Jersey, we see that counties like Bergen and Passaic—regions known for their significant Portuguese-speaking populations—are seeing a notable shift in language use, with the Portuguese descendants moving away from speaking Portuguese in favor of English or other languages. Similarly, areas like Middlesex County, which have traditionally had strong Portuguese immigrant populations, also show trends of language erosion among the second generation. In the state of New York, the pattern is similar, with counties like Monroe and Erie showing that younger generations, while still of Portuguese descent, are not continuing to speak the language. Even more suburban or rural areas such as Orange County in New York show trends of language shift, indicating that the process of language attrition is not confined to large urban centers but extends into smaller communities as well.

In sum, the spatial dynamics of Portuguese-Americans across the U.S. reveal a nuanced interplay between heritage retention and assimilation. Traditional clusters in New England, California, Florida, and the New York–New Jersey corridor continue to anchor Portuguese-speaking populations, often reflecting historical settlement patterns reinforced by community institutions and cultural cohesion. While some areas show increasing concentration among Portuguese speakers—suggesting cultural resilience and possible revival—others reflect clear signs of linguistic erosion and geographic dispersion, particularly among non-speakers.

The spatial dynamics of Portuguese-Americans across the U.S. reveal a nuanced interplay between heritage retention and assimilation.

5.4. Measuring and mapping residential segregation

Nachatter Singh Garha

Across all clusters, Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese consistently register higher dissimilarity index values[2] than non-speakers, indicating a more pronounced pattern of residential clustering. In the California cluster, the index for Portuguese speakers rises from 0.56 (2013–2017) to 0.58 (2018–2022), while non-speakers show only a slight increase, from 0.44 to 0.45 (Figure 5.14). This suggests that language retention is linked to stronger spatial clustering. A similar trend emerges in Florida, where the dissimilarity index for speakers increases from 0.55 to 0.57, while non-speakers remain stable and relatively widespread, with values of 0.28 and 0.27, respectively. These low values among non-speakers may reflect the state's multicultural composition and the assimilation of later-generation Portuguese descendants.

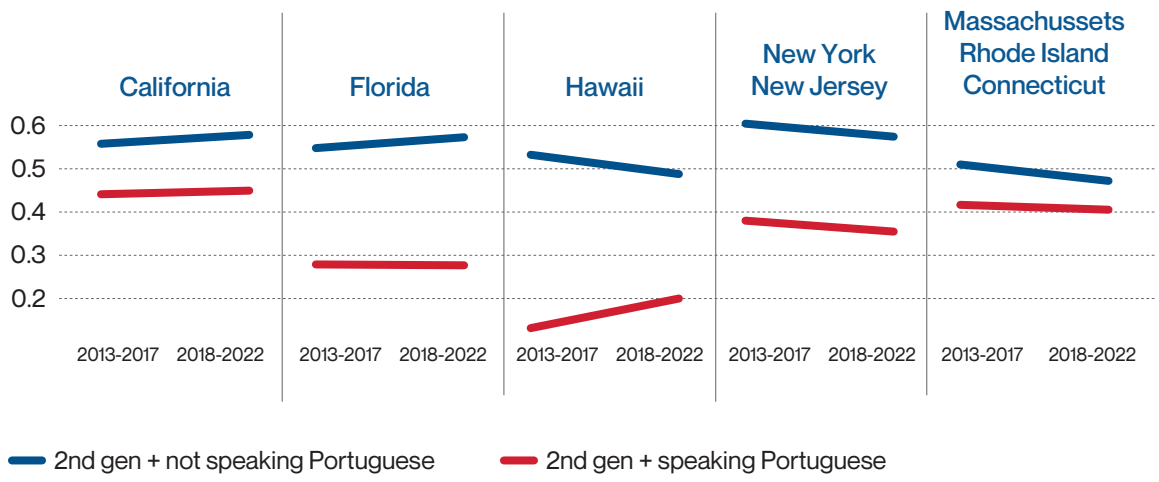
In Hawaii, contrasting dynamics unfold. Portuguese speakers become more integrated over time, with the index decreasing from 0.53 to 0.49, while non-speakers experience a slight rise from 0.13 to 0.19. Despite this increase, the values for non-speakers remain low, suggesting a generally integrated population—likely shaped by Hawaii's long history of interethnic coexistence. In the New York and New Jersey cluster, both groups show declining segregation: the index for speakers falls from 0.61 to 0.58, and for non-speakers from 0.38 to 0.36. While speakers remain relatively more segregated—perhaps due to the persistence of established ethnic enclaves—the decline points to gradual spatial diffusion. A similar pattern is evident in the Rhode Island–Massachusetts–Connecticut cluster, where the dissimilarity index declines for both groups: from 0.51 to 0.47 among speakers and from 0.42 to 0.41 among non-speakers. These shifts may reflect intermarriage, upward social mobility, or generational shifts away from Portuguese as a heritage language. Taken together, the findings point to a consistent trend: Portuguese speakers tend to be more spatially clustered than non-speakers. However, the gradual decline in dissimilarity over time, particularly among speakers, suggests a weakening of ethnic segregation and points to the complex interplay between language retention and residential patterns. On the West Coast, California attracted Portuguese immigrants to regions like the San Joaquin Valley and coastal cities such as San Jose, where their agrarian background facilitated integration into dairy farming and crop production. By the early 20th century, Portuguese-Americans were well established in California's agricultural economy (Machado, 2009). These regions remain home to large Portuguese-American populations, supported by community festivals and institutions that preserve cultural heritage.

Contemporary data from the ACS confirm that Portuguese-American populations remain heavily concentrated in traditional strongholds like Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and California, while smaller but growing communities are present in states such as Florida and Texas (Azevedo et al., 2023). In Florida, the south of the state in particular has seen an increase in Portuguese-identifying residents, attracted by climate, lifestyle, and economic factors (Da Ponte, 2015). Similarly, cities like San Antonio and Houston in Texas have experienced modest but notable growth in Portuguese-American populations.

In summary, the current body of literature regarding the integration of immigrants' descendants, particularly concerning Portuguese-Americans, demonstrates the intricate relationship between structural factors, cultural continuity, and intergenerational transmission. Although educational attainment and labor market participation persist as pivotal indicators of incorporation, they must be interpreted in conjunction with more intricate processes, including identity negotiation, language retention, community networks, and internal migration. The unique migratory histories and patterns

of geographic dispersion experienced by Portuguese-Americans demonstrate the capacity of ethnic identity to persist and adapt across generations, even in the absence of robust institutional frameworks. The studies reviewed emphasize that integration is not a linear process, but rather a multidimensional and context-dependent trajectory, influenced by both opportunity structures and the agency of individuals, families, and communities. These works provides a foundational understanding of the contemporary experiences of the Portuguese-Americans in the United States, while offering a more expansive perspective on the evolving dynamics of ethnicity and mobility within the context of immigrant America.

Figure 5.14: Segregation of Portuguese-Americans in different clusters, the PUMA level, 2013–2017 and 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

6. Educational and labor market outcomes of the Portuguese-Americans

Lara Patrício Tavares

6.1. A portrait of the Portuguese-Americans in 2018–2022

Since great part of the skills valued by the labor market are acquired at school, educational attainment is one of the key determinants of economic labor success. In the period from 2018–2022, approximately one-third of the individuals age nineteen and over in the U.S. had a bachelor's degree or a higher degree[3], with hardly no distinction between the Portuguese-Americans and all other U.S. residents (Table 6.1).

> One-third of the individuals aged nineteen and over in the U.S. had a bachelor's or a higher degree.

Table 6.1: Individuals aged 19 and over by educational attainment (bachelor's degree or higher) %, 2018–2022

	All other U.S. residents	Portuguese-Americans	Total
No BSc	67.05	66.53	67.05
Bachelor's degree or higher	32.95	33.47	32.95
Total	100	100	100

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

When looking at the educational levels below the bachelor's degree, it is interesting to note the slightly lower percentage of Portuguese-Americans with a General Education Development (GED)[4] or alternative certificate (0.5 pp.). When analyzing only those individuals who took a GED or alternative certificate, and disaggregating both groups into white and non-white, a remarkable difference emerges between the Portuguese-Americans non-whites and the non-whites among all other U.S. residents: the proportion of non-white individuals is much higher (roughly the double) among non-Portuguese-Americans (Table 6.2).

[3] In the data, individuals younger than nineteen do not hold a bachelor degree yet.
[4] The GED is a high school equivalency diploma, typically for those who did not finish regular high school.

Table 6.2: Portuguese-Americans aged 19 and over who took the GED Vs All other U.S. residents (white/non-white) %, 2018–2022

	Portuguese-Americans			All other U.S. residents		
	White	Non-white	Total	White	Non-white	Total
GED or alternative	85.63	14.37	100	71.95	28.05	100

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

When looking at the other end of the qualifications table, the Portuguese-Americans are at a disadvantage, showing lower percentages of Master's and Doctoral degrees. When focusing attention on these individuals only (Table 6.3), it is possible to observe that when comparing white Portuguese-Americans with Master's degrees with their other white U.S. counterparts, there is only a slight disadvantage. However, this disadvantage increases when looking at the Doctoral degree. At the same time, the non-white Portuguese-Americans show a relatively low percentage of individuals with Master's degrees when compared to almost all other non-white non-Portuguese-Americans. Interestingly, there is a higher proportion of non-white Portuguese-Americans with a doctoral degree than that observed among white Portuguese-Americans, which stands below that observed for any sub-group of non-white U.S. residents.

Table 6.3: Individuals aged 19 and over with at least a BSc degree by educational attainment, 2018–2022

	Portuguese-Americans			All other U.S. residents						
	White	Non-white	Total	White	Black/African American	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Other race (Hispanic)	Other races	Total
Bachelor's degree										
row %	89.42	10.58	100	76.98	5.86	0.49	8.95	2.23	5.48	100
column %	68.79	71.24	69.05	65.46	63.33	69.04	60.94	73.84	68.28	65.22
Master's degree										
row %	90.61	9.39	100	76.68	6.59	0.42	10.03	1.51	4.78	100
column %	27.87	25.27	27.6	29.73	32.48	27.06	31.12	22.69	27.16	29.75
Doctoral degree										
row %	89.34	10.66	100	73.38	5.03	0.36	15.12	1.36	4.75	100
column %	3.34	3.49	3.35	4.81	4.19	3.9	7.93	3.46	4.56	5.03
Total										
row %	89.75	10.25	100	76.71	6.04	0.46	9.58	1.97	5.23	100
column %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

The lower proportion of Portuguese-Americans in postgraduate programs can be better understood by examining the field of the bachelor's degree. The Portuguese-Americans show lower percentages graduating in fields like engineering or medical sciences and higher percentages graduating in transportation sciences or electrical and mechanic repairs, perhaps less conducive to pursing further studies.

One of the new findings of *Portuguese Immigrants and descendants in the USA in the 21st Century* (Azevedo et al., 2023) concerning the Portuguese descendants was the difference, in terms of educational attainment, between those who speak Portuguese and those who do not – favoring the former. In this study we explore these differences further by distinguishing between the individuals who actually obtained the bachelor's degree and those who did not. We find qualitatively the same result: there is a higher proportion of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese with a bachelor's degree or higher when compared to all other U.S. residents (circa 3 p.p.). And once again, for the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese, the proportion with a bachelor's degree or higher is almost identical to that of all other U.S. residents (Table 6.4). However, an analysis into the higher educational levels, disaggregating prime-aged Portuguese-Americans according to whether they speak Portuguese or not, reveals that those who do not speak Portuguese not only have a higher proportion holding a Master's degree than those who do speak (11.12 vs 10.23), as that proportion is marginally higher than the one observed for all the other U.S residents. At the same time, there is a significantly lower percentage of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese holding a doctoral degree when compared to all the other U.S. residents – lower still than what is observed for the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese (1.07 vs 1.24 vs 1.7).

Table 6.4: Portuguese-Americans aged 19 and over who speak Portuguese and who do not speak Portuguese, by educational attainment (bachelor's degree or higher), 2018–2022

	All other U.S. residents	**Portuguese-Americans**		**Total**
		2nd gen+ not speaking Portuguese	**2nd gen+ speaking Portuguese**	
No BSc	67.05	66.75	63.81	67.05
Bachelor's degree or higher	32.95	33.25	36.19	32.95
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

6.1.1. Labor market situation

Although one can safely say that one individual's success cannot (and perhaps should not) be measured only by its economic dimension, it is undeniable that the labor market situation strongly determines individuals' well-being. On the one hand, it is in the labor market that the great majority of individuals sell their labor in exchange for income, which then is used to buy a variety of goods and services that satisfy their basic needs and provide material satisfaction. On the other hand, work is a fundamental aspect in most people's lives; it contributes to give life a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

The starting point of any analysis of the labor position of the Portuguese-Americans is to delve on who, age-wise, might be in the labor force. Although traditionally it was common to use 15 years old as the starting age of the working-age group, more recently the U.N. has been adopting the 19 years old threshold due to the expansion of the educational system – and we will follow the same criteria. The right-end of the working-age interval is more difficult to ascertain, as it varies from country to country, and the different welfare and social security systems. We opted for an empirically-driven criteria, i.e. we established it taking into consideration the age of those who were actually working. Given that, among those who were working, 95% were 76 years old or younger, here we will analyze individuals in the age range between 19 and 76.

Table 6.5 shows interesting differences between Portuguese-Americans and all the other U.S. residents in terms of labor market status. The proportion of Portuguese-Americans who are employed is significantly higher, which is due to a lower proportion of those not in the labor force (lower than 30%). The percentage unemployed tells a different story – it is higher for the Portuguese-Americans.

Exploring further these results by analyzing only the individuals with a bachelor's degree, reveals that the difference between Portuguese-Americans and all the other U.S. residents in what concerns the proportion of individuals employed grows slightly. The widening gap is primarily due to a higher participation rate in the labor market among Portuguese-Americans. In fact, less than one in five of the Portuguese-Americans aged 19 to 76 who hold a bachelor's degree was not in the labor force[9].

Table 6.5: Individuals aged 19–76, by employment status (%), 2018–2022

	2nd gen+	All other U.S. residents
Employed	67.28	62.40
Unemployed	3.34	3.01
Not in labor force	29.39	34.60
Total	100	100

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

The higher participation of the Portuguese-Americans in the labor market when compared to all the other U.S. residents is partly due to a higher female labor market participation (6 p.p.). On the other hand, the results pertaining to those not in the labor market are driven by the white Portuguese-Americans. In terms of those not in employment, for example, the percentage of non-white Portuguese-Americans unemployed is roughly the same that observed for all other non-white U.S. residents (circa 4.3%). In contrast, white Portuguese-Americans exhibit a slightly higher proportion of unemployed. When looking at the percentage in the labor force there is no difference among Portuguese-Americans according to their ethnicity.

[9] See table 1 in annex 2.

6.1.2. Labor market income

On average, a Portuguese-American earns a wage that is 7% higher than any other U.S. resident (Table 6.6). Wages depend crucially on educational attainment and the economic activity. Being education attainment one of the main wage determinants and given the higher proportion of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese holding a bachelor's degree (Table 6.4), it was foreseeable for them to command a higher average wage than both Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese and all other U.S. residents. Indeed, the wage premium of the Portuguese-Americans is driven by those who speak Portuguese, who have a wage differential of 10% relatively to the non-Portuguese-Americans.

These differences are substantially amplified when looking at the median: half of the Portuguese-Americans earn a wage that is 18% higher than that of half of the non-Portuguese-Americans. Most strikingly, the bottom half of the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese earn a wage that is 26% higher than those in the bottom half of the non-Portuguese-Americans. For the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese that wage differential is 16%.

Table 6.6: Average and median labor income (USD) of individuals aged 19–76, 2018–2022

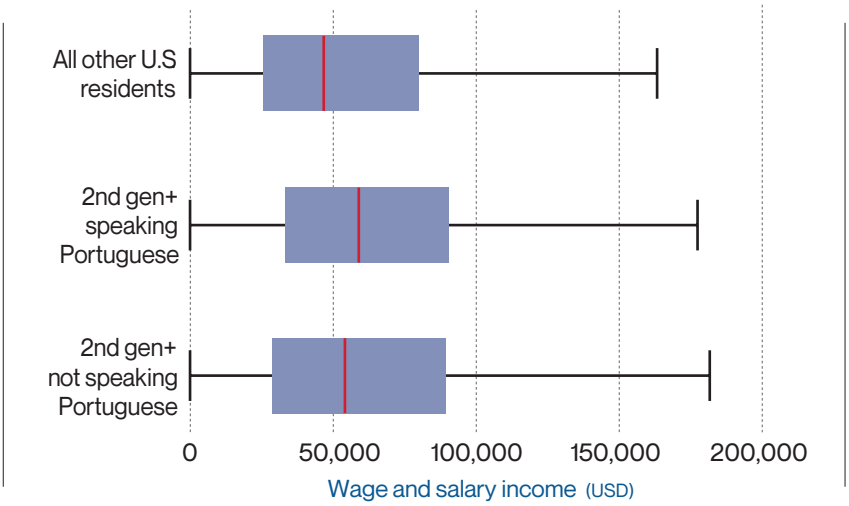
	Mean	Median
Portuguese-Americans	70,978	55,000
2nd gen+ speaking Portuguese	72,948	58,923
2nd gen+ not speaking Portuguese	70,792	54,046
All other U.S. residents	66,339	46,762

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Figure 6.1 clearly illustrates the reason for the sizeable discrepancy between the mean and median values (red line) of the labor income particularly for the Portuguese-Americans. The discrepancy between the mean and median arises from the higher dispersion in the upper part of the labor income distribution that characterizes all labor income distributions. Notably, while up to 75% of the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese earn a wage marginally higher than that of the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese, the latter group tends to earn higher wages at the top of the labor income distribution.

Since more than two-thirds of the Portuguese-Americans lack a bachelor's degree (Table 6.1), it is worthwhile to compare the wage dispersion of individuals without bachelor's degree (Figure 6.2).

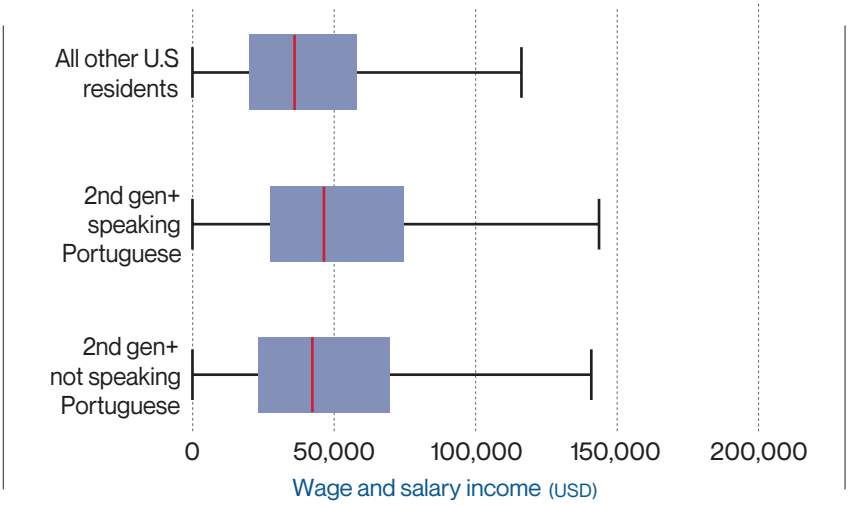
Figure 6.1: Dispersion of total individual income received as wage and salaries for individuals aged 19 to 76, 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Contrary to what Figure 6.1 shows, when focusing only on the individuals with no bachelor's degree (Figure 6.2) it is possible to observe that Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese have a (slightly) higher labor income dispersion. Although the median wage for the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese and do not have a bachelor's degree is substantially higher than the median wage for all other U.S. residents who do not hold a bachelor's degree (30% higher), it is identical to that observed for all other U.S. residents (USD 47.8K – in Table 6.6).

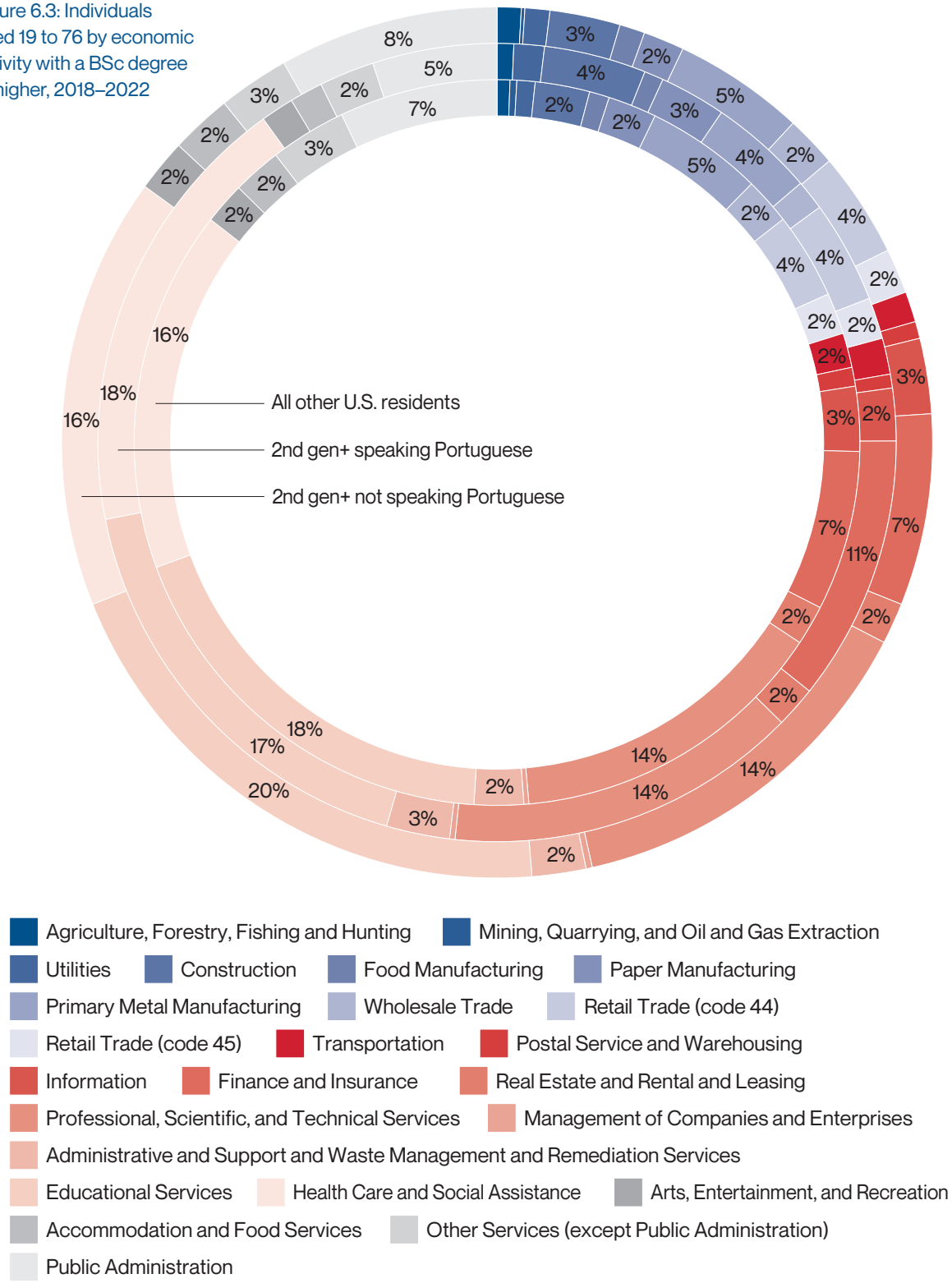
Figure 6.2: Dispersion of total individual income received as wage and salaries for individuals aged 19 to 76 with no BSc degree, 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Figure 6.3. explores the differences in the economic activity among those who hold a bachelor's degree. It shows that Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese and hold a bachelor's degree are slightly less concentrated than all other U.S. residents in the largest economic activity (educational services), and more concentrated in the second largest (health care and social assistance), unlike the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese and hold a bachelor's degree. There is an interesting contrast regarding the concentrations of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese in various occupations. Specifically, a higher concentration of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese work in construction compared to both Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese and all other U.S. residents. In contrast, Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese tend to have a lower concentration in public administration. Interestingly, the proportion of Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese, hold a bachelor's degree and work in public administration actually exceeds that of all other U.S. residents.

Figure 6.3: Individuals aged 19 to 76 by economic activity with a BSc degree or higher, 2018–2022



6.2 A portrait of the Portuguese-Americans in the main eight states

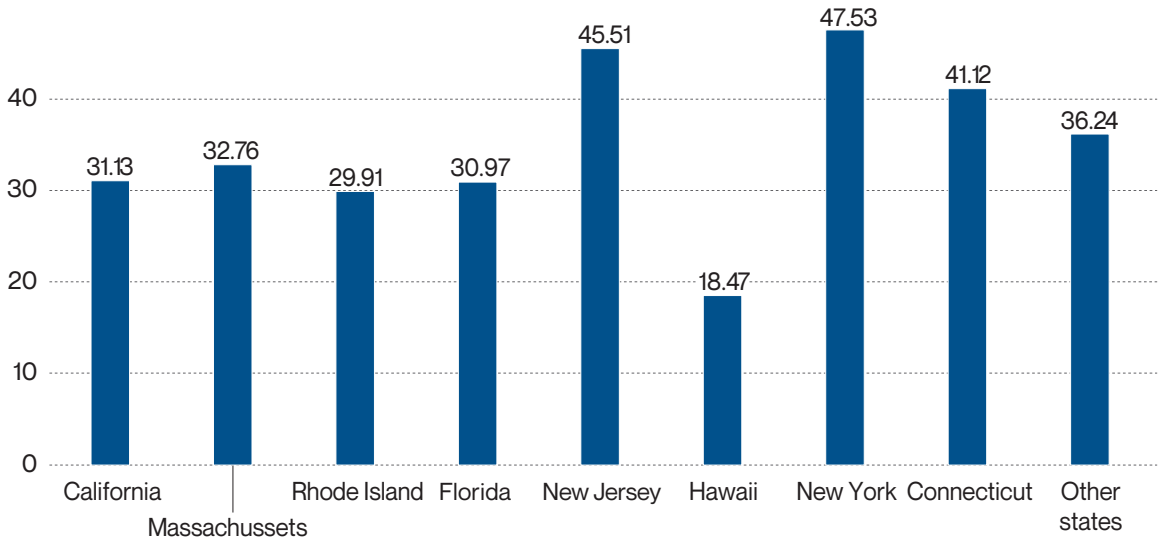
This section analyses the educational attainment and labor market situation in the main eight states of residence of the Portuguese-Americans (that compose the five clusters referred to in Chapter 4): California, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Florida, New Jersey, Hawaii, New York and Connecticut.

The Portuguese-Americans aged 19 to 76 years old are heterogeneous across their main eight states of residence in terms of the percentage holding a bachelor's degree or higher. This percentage

goes from 18.5% in Hawaii up to 47.5% in New York (Figure 6.4). Focusing on prime-aged individuals, i.e. those aged 25 to 54 years old, increases this heterogeneity. For this age group, almost six in ten Portuguese-Americans in the New York state hold a bachelor's degree or higher which contrasts with only one in five in Hawaii[7].

Focusing specifically on the prime-aged group, not only in New York but also, to a lesser extent, in New Jersey and Florida the percentage of Portuguese-Americans holding a bachelor's or higher degree surpasses that observed for all other U.S. residents.

Figure 6.4: Percentage of individuals aged 19 to 76 with a BSc degree or higher by main states, 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

When zooming in these states and contrasting the respective proportion of all individuals aged 19 and over who hold a bachelor's degree with that of all other U.S. residents (32.95%), the within-state results show that New Jersey and New York stand out. In these states, Portuguese-Americans exhibit a higher percentage of individuals holding a bachelor's degree, with New York showing a particularly striking difference of 11 percentage points.

The disaggregation of the Portuguese-Americans into those who speak Portuguese and those who do not, highlights a clear within-state advantage of the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese not only in New Jersey and New York (where the difference is larger in favor of those speaking Portuguese), but also in Florida and Connecticut. It is also worth pointing out that in the period 2013–2017, the advantage of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese was observable only in New York and Connecticut.

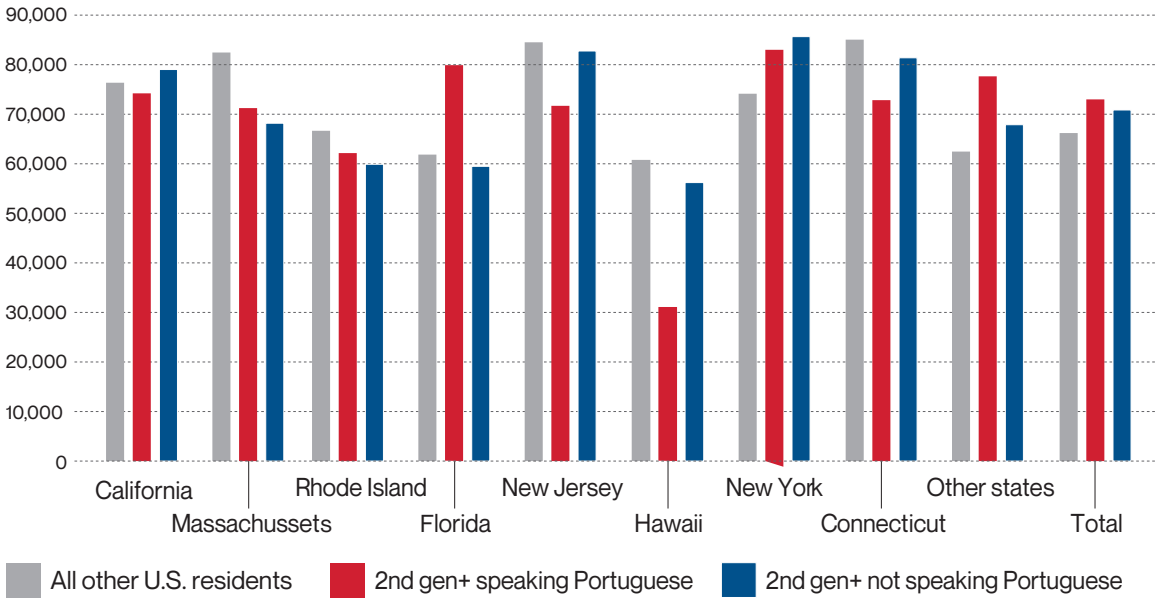
6.2.1. Labor income: zooming in the main eight states

In Connecticut, the state with the highest average wage (around USD 85k) among the eight, the Portuguese-Americans earn less than all other U.S. residents, particularly the ones who speak Portuguese, who earn 85% of the mean wage of all other U.S. residents. Also in New Jersey, the state with the second highest mean wage, the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese earn on average lower wages (85% of the mean wage of all other U.S. residents). In New Jersey the Portuguese-American who do not

[6] See table 2 in Annex 2.

speak Portuguese earn only slightly lower wages when compared with all other U.S. residents in the state. Also in Massachusetts, a state where there is a particularly high concentration of Portuguese-Americans, their average wage is lower than that of all other U.S. residents – those who speak Portuguese earn, on average, 14% less, and those who do not speak Portuguese 17% less. Florida's results are particularly interesting. As it can be seen in Figure 6.5, it is the only of the eight main states analyzed where the average wage of the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese is higher than that of all other U.S. residents. This result corroborates the findings about the participation of the Portuguese-Americans in broader migration trends toward more attractive economic destinations, reflecting the emergence of new regional dynamics over the last years.

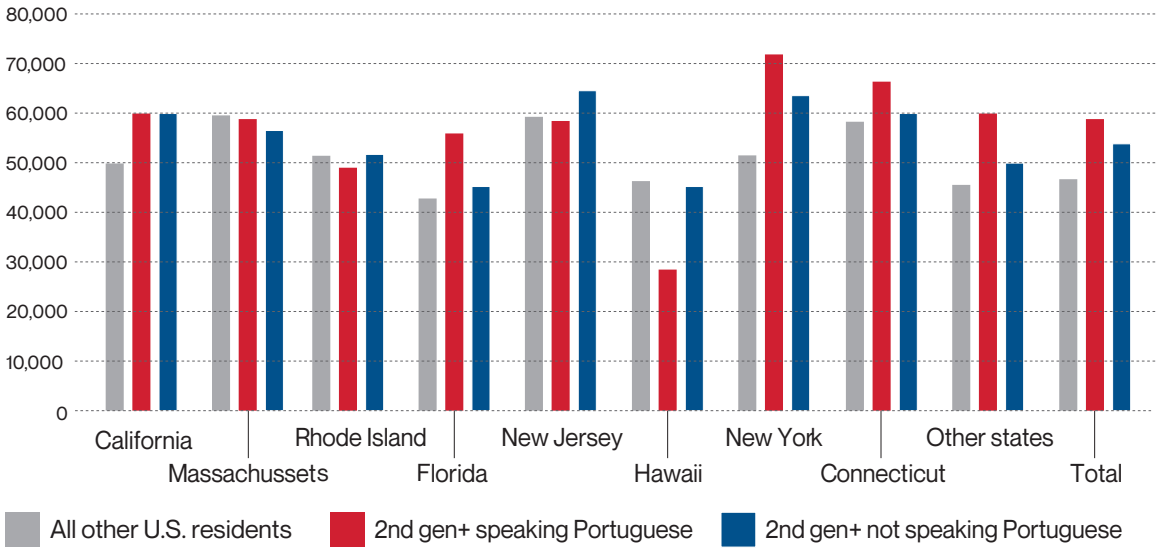
Figure 6.5: Mean wage (USD) for the individuals aged 19 to 76 by main states, 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

As mentioned before, the mean wage reflects the high dispersion in the labor income distribution, which means that is affected by some relatively fewer very high wages. Therefore, it is worthwhile looking at the median income by states as well. That indeed gives a different picture concerning the standing of the Portuguese-Americans vis-à-vis all other U.S. residents. As Figure 6.6 shows, when analyzing the median labor income, Massachusetts is the only state where both Portuguese-American groups (speaking and not speaking Portuguese) have a median income lower than all other U.S. residents. In California, Rhode Island, Florida, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese have a higher median income than all other U.S. residents, the same happening for the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese except in Rhode Island and New Jersey. Curiously, in California the median wage of both groups of Portuguese-Americans is identical, and higher than all the other U.S. residents.

Figure 6.6: Median wage (USD) for the individuals aged 19 to 76 by main states, 2018–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Summing up, one can say that the Portuguese-Americans do well in terms of educational qualifications when compared to all other U.S. residents. Taking into consideration that, in general, only around one in three individuals hold a bachelor's degree or a higher qualification, it is noteworthy that the Portuguese-Americans do not fall behind. On the contrary, the percentage of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese with a bachelor's degree or higher is actually higher than that of all other U.S. residents. Moreover, the percentage of Portuguese-Americans holding a GED certificate is slightly lower than that of all other U.S. residents, suggesting that they perform better in high school.

The Portuguese-Americans are very active in the labor market. The proportion of Portuguese-Americans who are employed is significantly higher than that observed for all other U.S. residents, partly due to a higher female labor market participation. On average, the Portuguese-Americans have a 7% wage premium relatively to any other U.S. resident, which is driven by those who speak Portuguese, and for whom the wage differential is 10%. These differences are greatly amplified when looking at the median.

When looking into the main eight states, it is possible to appreciate a great heterogeneity of educational and labor market outcomes of the Portuguese-Americans. In terms of educational attainment, the percentage holding a bachelor's degree or higher goes from 18.5% in Hawaii up to 47.5% in New York. Also the wage dynamics of the Portuguese-Americans seem rather different across states. In Florida the average wage of the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese is higher than that of all other U.S. residents, whereas only in Massachusetts and Hawaii none of the Portuguese-American groups (speaking and not speaking Portuguese) has a median labor income higher than all other U.S. residents.

6.3. A deeper look into the Portuguese-Americans' labor income

The results presented so far are purely descriptive, which means that it is not possible to know the reasons for what is being observed. What is more, it is not possible to interpret them as indicating the existence of causal relationships. For instance, consider the finding that Portuguese-Americans have a higher mean wage compared to that of all the other U.S. residents (Table 6.6). This result cannot be interpreted as causal; it does not imply that being a Portuguese-American in itself, alone, leads to a

higher wage. Surely, the higher mean wage of the Portuguese-Americans is a reflection of a host of factors: age, educational attainment, sex, state/place of residence, etc.

In this section we go one step further in our analysis and use statistical methods to examine the relationship between wages and some of its determinants, namely being a Portuguese-American, while holding constant all the other variables that could potentially confound the results. In other words, we estimate wage equations using ordinary least squares, where the wages are explained by a set of independent variables of interest. These include age, age-squared, sex, female, non-white, holding a bachelor's degree or higher and being Portuguese-American (the determinants), alongside other variables that may also influence wages and help explaining wage disparities, like usual hours worked per week, marital status, number of own children under age 5 in household, actual year of survey and the state of residence. For the reasons mentioned in the previous section, we focus on the working individuals aged between 19 and 76 years old. Additionally, we capitalize on our ability to statistically control for the year, thereby maximizing the full use of our data by including observations from 2013 to 2022.

Since we are interested in studying the labor market outcomes of the Portuguese-Americans, we use the total individual income received as wage or salary – referred as "wage", for short - to estimate wage equations, although ACS provides other types of income as well. Here the wage is annual, gross income i.e. before taxes, and it may correspond to labor income from more than one job. This is why it is important to include the usual hours worked per week in our estimation. Since we are analyzing data over a 10-year period, we will use real wages rather than nominal wages. This allows us to account for price changes that can occur over such a lengthy timeframe[7]. Given the results in Chapter 5, our estimations consider that although individual wages can be viewed as independent of each other across states, this may not necessarily be true within states. Finally, to enhance the interpretation of our results, we have used the logarithm of the wage.

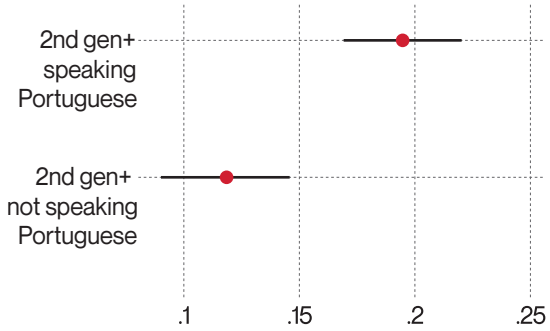
Naturally, our main determinant of interest relates to the impact on wages of being Portuguese-American. We want to explore whether being Portuguese-American is associated with a wage premium relative to all other U.S. residents, even when taking into consideration many of the factors that may influence wages. The descriptive results show clear differences between the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese and those who do not. Therefore, we present the estimations for these two groups separately, which is possible by the way the variable was constructed. In this analysis, non-Portuguese-Americans serve as the comparison group or the reference category.

Figure 6.7 illustrates clearly that the Portuguese-Americans earn higher wages, on average, when compared to all other U.S. residents with the same (observable) characteristics: with the same age, sex, race (white/non-white), educational attainment, type of job (routine/non-routine), state, etc. The Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese have a wage premium of 11.8% relatively to all other U.S. residents; for the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese this wage premium goes up to 19.5%.

Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese have a wage premium of 11.8% relative to all other U.S. residents; for the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese this wage premium goes up to 19.5%.

[7] Wage values are converted to 2010 dollars using the CPI-U by IPUMS.

Figure 6.7: Wage premium of the Portuguese-Americans relative to all other U.S. residents, 2013-2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Table 6.7. presents the estimations' results in full. The results for the main model (1) show that all the wage determinants are as expected: age is associated with a higher wage, although the increase diminishes as individuals gets older; being a female is associated with a wage penalty, as is being non-white; holding a bachelor's or higher degree is associated with a higher wage, as well as having a non-routine job, and being a Portuguese-American, particularly for those speaking Portuguese. It is important to emphasize the critical importance of educational attainment in determining wages: holding a bachelor's degree is associated with a 53.7% increase in the wage, all else being equal.

Table 6.7: Results of the estimations of wage equations for individuals aged 19 to 76, 2013–2022

Log (wage)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
		Prime-age	Male	Female	No BSc degree	BScDegree or higher	Routine	Non-routine
Age	0.050***	0.039***	0.055***	0.045***	0.047***	0.054***	0.044***	0.053***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age-squared	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Female (ref. category Male)	-0.203***	-0.231***			-0.170***	-0.239***	-0.129***	-0.226***
	(0.007)	(0.007)			(0.006)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Non-white (ref. category White)	-0.087***	-0.081***	-0.127***	-0.062***	-0.121***	-0.018	-0.106***	-0.073***
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.015)	(0.010)	(0.012)
BSc degree or higher (ref. category No BSc degree)	0.537***	0.554***	0.542***	0.517***			0.238***	0.601***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.015)			(0.011)	(0.014)
Non-routine (ref. category Routine)	0.121***	0.142***	0.153***	0.075***	0.039***	0.406***		
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)		
Non Portuguese-American (ref. category)								
2nd gen+ speaking Portuguese	0.195***	0.203***	0.173***	0.216***	0.254***	0.110***	0.211***	0.189***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.020)	(0.014)	(0.020)	(0.016)	(0.017)
2nd gen+ not speaking Portuguese	0.118***	0.123***	0.104***	0.131***	0.143***	0.081***	0.136***	0.111***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.020)	(0.013)
Constant	-12.271***	-9.364***	-16.282***	-8.227***	-13.134***	-9.641***	-7.488***	-13.997***
	(1.515)	(1.470)	(1.692)	(1.513)	(1.526)	(1.822)	(1.940)	(1.446)
Observations	13693128	8668584	7101010	6592118	8522735	5170393	4577112	9116016
R-squared	0.449	0.366	0.426	0.453	0.405	0.355	0.351	0.479

"Robust standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001"

Other controls: usual hours worked per week, marital status, number of own children under age 5 in household, actual year of survey and state.

The dependent variable is the log of the income wage, allowing the coefficients to be interpreted as approximately the percentage change in the wage. In model (1), for e.g. having a non-routine job is associated with a 12.1% increase relative to having a routine job.

Model (2) focuses specifically on the prime-aged individuals, defined as those aged between 25 and 54 years. On the one hand, this excludes the particularly young adults who typically face challenges entering the labor market – and who may have been struggling to find good-quality jobs since the 2008 Great Recession (Bell and Blanchflower 2018). On the other hand, by excluding individuals older than 54, we are excluding those who may be getting closer to retirement, which could influence wage dynamics. By focusing on prime-age individuals, we obtain stronger results concerning Portuguese-Americans: prime-age Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese enjoy a wage premium of 12.3% relative to all other U.S. residents counterparts. The Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese experience an even higher wage premium of 20.3%.

Both models (1) and (2) indicate a high wage penalty for women: being a woman is associated with a wage loss greater than 20% (20.3% in model 1 and 23.1% in model 2). This, together with the well-known issues involving women's participation in the labor market resulting in a motherhood penalty (Jee et al 2018), led us to estimate separate models for men and women, models (3) and (4), respectively. Although the results are not directly comparable, it is nonetheless striking the difference in some of the coefficients, particularly concerning non-white and non-routine categories – in opposite directions. Interestingly, being a Portuguese-American woman is associated with a greater wage increase compared to men – and, again, especially among those who speak Portuguese.

Given the weight of educational attainment as a wage determinant, it is worth looking separately at those who do not hold a bachelor's degree and those who do. By looking only at the individuals who do not hold a bachelor's degree, model (5) may help explain the results obtained earlier, whereby the Portuguese-Americans who do not hold a BSc degree or higher seem to be successful when compared with all the other U.S. residents with the same educational qualifications (Figure 6.2), i.e. showing a higher median labor income. What may explain their apparent 'success'? It does not seem to be due to having a non-routine job, given the modest wage increase associated with it for this sub-sample; on the other hand, being a Portuguese-American makes a difference: for those who do not speak Portuguese is associated with a 14.3% wage premium, and for those who speak Portuguese the wage premium is 25.4%. This suggests that for those with lower educational qualifications, speaking Portuguese somehow brings them additional benefits - which does not mean that it causes them directly to have higher wages. This result is corroborated when estimating the main model with interactions. Model 3 in Table 6.8 shows that for the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese and do not hold a bachelor's degree experience a wage premium of 25.8% compared to all other U.S. residents who do not hold a bachelor's degree. For the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese the wage premium is 14.5%.

Model (6) in Table 6.7 focuses on the individuals with a bachelor's degree. The results are stunningly different. The main determinant for this group's wage is the type of job they have i.e. having a non-routine job is associated with a 40.6% wage increase. On the one hand, being a Portuguese-American earns a much smaller wage premium – which nonetheless exists, and is significant.

The last two models in Table 6.7 estimate wage equations separately for routine and non-routine workers. As expected, given its correlation with educational attainment and the results of models (5) and (6), routine Portuguese-Americans workers who speak Portuguese have a higher wage premium than non-routine Portuguese-Americans workers who speak Portuguese. The fact that the difference in the wage premium between the two groups does not seem as large as that observed when considering the two educational attainment groups, suggests that the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese are not so concentrated in specific types of jobs. However, when looking at the results of model (4) in Table 6.8, which allows the comparison of routine workers of the different groups, we find that whereas for the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese and have a

routine job enjoy a wage premium of 23% relatively to all other U.S. residents who have routine job. In case of Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese the wage premium is 14.2%. In other words, this finding is similar to that obtained for educational attainment.

Table 6.8: Some interactions in the main wage equation model for individuals aged 19 to 76, 2013–2022

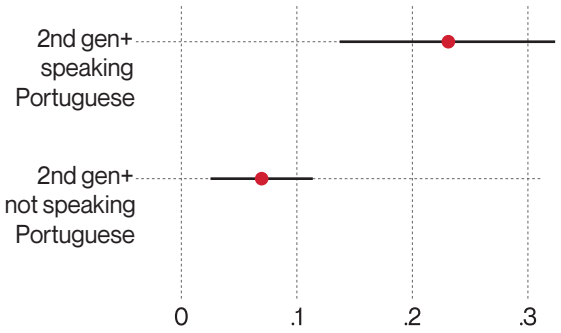
Log (wage)		(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)
Age		0.050***		0.050***		0.050***		0.050***
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
Age-squared		-0.000***		-0.000***		-0.000***		-0.000***
		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)
Female (ref. category Male)		-0.203***				-0.203***		-0.203***
		(0.007)				(0.007)		(0.007)
Non-white (ref. category White)				-0.087***		-0.087***		-0.087***
				(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)
BSc degree or higher (ref. category No BSc degree)		0.537***		0.537***				0.537***
		(0.014)		(0.014)				(0.014)
Non-routine (ref. category Routine)		0.121***		0.121***		0.121***		
		(0.008)		(0.008)		(0.008)		
Interactions #	*with*							
Non Portuguese-American (ref. category)	White		Male		No BSc		Routine	
Non Portuguese-American #	Non-white	-0.087***	Female	-0.203***	BSc degree	0.537***	Non-routine	0.121***
		(0.011)		(0.007)	or higher	(0.014)		(0.008)
2nd gen+ speaking Portuguese #	White	0.197***	Male	0.168***	No BSc	0.258***	Routine	0.230***
		(0.012)		(0.009)		(0.016)		(0.015)
2nd gen+ speaking Portuguese #	Non-white	0.032	Female	0.015	BSc degree	0.636***	Non-routine	0.299***
		(0.063)		(0.017)	or higher	(0.018)		(0.016)
2nd gen+ not speaking Portuguese #	White	0.118***	Male	0.107***	No BSc	0.145***	Routine	0.142***
		(0.015)		(0.011)		(0.018)		(0.022)
2nd gen+ not speaking Portuguese #	Non-white	0.034	Female	-0.074***	BSc degree	0.611***	Non-routine	0.228***
		(0.029)		(0.018)	or higher	(0.016)		(0.014)
Constant		-12.359***		-12.474***		-12.274***		-12.272***
		(1.515)		(1.515)		(1.515)		(1.515)
Observations		13693128		13693128		13693128		13693128
R-squared		0.449		0.449		0.449		0.449

"Robust standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001"
Other controls: usual hours worked per week, marital status, number of own children under age 5 in household, actual year of survey and state.

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

All the models presented take into consideration the state of residence but simply account for the fact that individuals live in different states. Although this allows us to conclude that our results are not due to differences across states, we cannot say anything about variations within states. To gain further insights, we estimated the main model (model 1 in table 6.7) for each of the main eight states. The results revealed that only in New York there is a significant difference in the wage premium between the group of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese and the group that does not speak Portuguese (Figure 6.8). It is worth pointing out that New York stands out in many regards: almost half of Portuguese-Americans aged 19 to 76 hold a bachelor's degree or higher (Figure 6.4), a percentage that significantly exceeds that observed for all other U.S. residents. The percentage is even higher for those who speak Portuguese, at 52.63%.

Figure 6.8: Wage premium of the Portuguese–Americans relative to all other U.S. residents in the New York State, 2013–2022



Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Summing up, when compared to all other U.S. residents with the same age, sex, race (white/non-white), educational attainment, type of job (routine/non-routine), state, etc., the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese have a wage premium of 11.8% ; for the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese this wage premium goes up to 19.5%. These results get stronger when focusing on prime-age individuals (12.3 % and 20.3%, respectively).

The estimation results show that the apparent labor market 'success' of the Portuguese-Americans who do not hold a bachelor's degree or higher is not due to having a non-routine job, for example, but being Portuguese-American helps – especially for those speaking Portuguese. On the contrary, for the Portuguese-Americans who hold a bachelor's degree or higher, the main wage determinant is the type of job they have i.e. having a non-routine rather than a routine job. For this group, being a Portuguese-American earns a much smaller wage premium.

The within-state estimation results reveal that in New York there is a significant difference in the wage premium between the group of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese and the group that does not speak Portuguese. This suggests some sort of positive selection in New York, which attracts particularly highly skilled and qualified individuals, which then reflects in their wages. It is interesting to note how speaking Portuguese is associated with higher wages in this context as well.

7. Experiences of the Portuguese-Americans in the U.S.

Alda Botelho Azevedo, Nachatter Singh Garha and Martha Estrada-Rivera

As explained in Chapter 3, in addition to the quantitative analysis, a qualitative study was conducted to further contextualize and deepen the interpretation of key findings. To this end, thirteen semi-structured interviews were carried out with participants selected for their expertise, institutional roles, or lived experience within Portuguese-American communities. In these interviews we touched on different aspects of the Portuguese presence in the USA (Figure 7.1). This chapter presents the results of the qualitative study and interprets them in light of major theoretical perspectives on migration and migrant descendants wherever relevant.

7.1. Language, identity and cultural transmission

The interviews highlight a well-known tension in migration studies: the gradual loss of language fluency across generations, which contrasts with the enduring emotional and symbolic significance of heritage languages. Among Portuguese-Americans, this often involves a shift from functional bilingualism to what Schiffrin (2006) describes as "language as memory".

> *"A lot to do with culinary experiences with food. A lot to do maybe sometimes with music, a song that great grandma used to listen to [...] has a lot to do with very small elements of culture."* — Diniz Borges

At the same time, interviewees associate the preservation of Portuguese not with institutional structures (schools, official programs), but with domestic spaces and intergenerational care—particularly the role of women.

> *"It's the grandmother who made them memorize prayers or nursery rhymes in Portuguese. And even if they don't speak it anymore, they still remember those words."* — Cristiana Bastos

> *"It was the women who passed down the values, the language, the culture — and took care of the grandchildren."* — Onésimo Almeida

The specific emphasis on grandmothers as guardians of language and culture reflects a long-standing observation: cultural transmission often takes place through unpaid, feminized labor (Louie, 2006; Levitt and Schiller, 2004). These familial interactions—prayers, recipes, songs—are not trivial; they reinforce

ethnic attachment and cultural continuity (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). This pattern emerged frequently in the interviews, with several participants recalling instances in which grandchildren were motivated to learn Portuguese to communicate with grandparents who had never become fluent in English.

It is important, however, to take a more nuanced view. While heritage languages may endure in symbolic ways, they often persist in fragmentary forms, with their everyday use diminishing significantly beyond the first generation (Rumbaut, 2009). The interviews reflect a sense of continuity, but they also hint at the gradual erosion of language over time and across geographic and generational distances.

> *"They spoke Portuguese because they were talking to their father or grandmother. But when those people are no longer around, they stop practicing the language—because the wife or the husband doesn't speak it."* — Márcia Sousa da Ponte

At the same time, even as daily usage declines, heritage languages can acquire new functions. In several interviews, Portuguese was framed less as a marker of cultural belonging and more as a tool for opportunity—particularly in the context of social mobility and access to Portuguese nationality. This suggests a more pragmatic and instrumental use of language. It echoes recent research on dual citizenship and mobility rights (Harpaz & Mateos, 2019), in which heritage languages are viewed as pathways to global advantage rather than merely expressions of ethnic identity.

> *"It starts to appear [...] that in many cases the language is no longer associated with culture [...] it is another tool. [...] A student who only knows how to speak English, who will compete with a student who has in his curriculum English, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian or another language, has a disadvantage."* — João Caixinha

> *"[The Portuguese descendants] are asking for Portuguese citizenship through their grandparents, their great-grandparents, their ancestors... they have to take a Portuguese exam because the central registers of Portugal require the person to have knowledge of the Portuguese language at level A2."* — João Caixinha

This instrumental use of language differs from cultural transmission or community-based usage. However, it may nonetheless reinforce symbolic connections to Portugal or facilitate renewed cultural engagement. In this context, even motivations driven by practicality or citizenship requirements can align with broader dynamics of cultural continuity and identity.

These patterns often manifest in ways that are selective, emotionally resonant, and symbolic—what Herbert Gans (1979) termed symbolic ethnicity. Portuguese-Americans exemplify this dynamic, maintaining a connection to their heritage even as everyday cultural practices fade.

> *"There are some second generation Portuguese-American youth who don't speak Portuguese, but want to feel it. They want to experience it somehow. And that's where the cultural festivals, the dances, the folklore, even the Fado come in."* — Kimberly DaCosta Holton

> "Even those who don't speak Portuguese anymore still claim a connection to Portugal or to the Portuguese experience. You see it in food, you see it at weddings, you see it in other things. They want to be Portuguese again." — Onésimo Almeida

The case of Hawaii provides a clear example of this process. Here, the deliberate abandonment of the Portuguese language for the sake of assimilation has not led to cultural disappearance. Instead, what remains is a practice-based identity, passed on through food, religious festivals, and shared historical memory—even in the absence of language fluency.

> *"The Hawaiians were not allowed to speak their native language and the Portuguese chose not to pass their language on to their descendants so they would assimilate quickly into their new culture and achieve greater success in their new home."* — Marlene Andrade Hapai

> *"The Portuguese culture continues in Hawaii today, through its incorporation into Hawaii's local food, «festas» highlighting food and music. Catholic churches and other Christian churches service Portuguese and Holy Ghost feasts remain or are coming back."* — Marlene Andrade Hapai

This form of symbolic continuity shows that ethnic identity can persist even when its cultural core—language, religion, dense co-ethnic networks—has eroded, provided that selective practices remain emotionally meaningful and socially (Waters, 1990; Jiménez 2010).

Another strand in the interviews highlights the contemporary revaluation of Portuguese identity, especially among younger generations. As Portugal's global image has shifted—from peripheral and poor to cosmopolitan and "cool"—so too has the way Portuguese-Americans relate to their roots.

> *"Portugal today has a good international image. Cristiano Ronaldo, tourism, quality of life. That changes how Portuguese-Americans feel. Before, their parents were ashamed. Now they're proud."* — Onésimo Almeida

> *"Portugal used to be described as 'that little country next to Spain.' Now it's on the travel lists. That helps students feel better about their background. Pride follows perception."* — Paula Noversa

> *"They say, 'My family's from Cristiano Ronaldo's country.' Portugal is suddenly cool. That global shift feeds back into how they see themselves locally."* — Kimberly DaCosta Holton

This reflects a broader pattern in diaspora studies: the external rebranding of a homeland can catalyze internal shifts in diasporic self-perception (Brubaker, 2005). Yet this rediscovery is not nostalgic or passive. As the interviews show, young Portuguese-Americans are actively remaking identity on their own terms—using YouTube, TikTok, house parties, and cultural festivals. Their participation is symbolic, creative, and digitally mediated, rather than tied to formal ethnic organizations or traditional authority structures.

> "*Second- and third-generation kids are playing accordion and concertina, learning to perform «desgarradas». They find it on YouTube, they bring it into new contexts — house parties, TikTok. It's cultural fluency."* — Kimberly DaCosta Holton

> *"The garage bands, the backyard dances, the barbecues, the after-school rehearsals — that's where culture lives. Not just in the «clubes»."* — Kimberly DaCosta Holton

Transnational cultural forms are increasingly hybrid, youth-driven, and digitally dispersed Levitt and Schiller, 2004; Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2002). Rather than adhering to rigid notions of ethnicity, young Portuguese-Americans construct fluid affiliations—accessible, performative, and responsive to lifestyle and aesthetics. Together, these findings show that Portuguese-American identity is not fading—it is shifting: from rootedness in language and location to symbolic, aesthetic, and mediated forms of belonging.

Figure 7.1: Word cloud of interviews with experts on Portuguese-Americans populations in the U.S.

Sources: Authors' elaboration.

7.2. Education, family strategies, and intergenerational mobility

Education holds a complex place in the Portuguese-American migration story. For earlier generations, limited educational attainment was often not due to a lack of interest, but rather to structural barriers and the pressing need to prioritize survival. As in many working-class immigrant communities, families often prioritized more immediate and tangible forms of upward mobility—such as home ownership, family businesses, and financial stability—over formal academic achievement. This reflects what Michael B. Katz (2001) calls a "logic of security."

> *"There were stereotypes that the Portuguese didn't invest in education, only in goods, houses, business. It's descriptively true for a period, but it doesn't mean they were anti-education. It was a choice. Buying property was a very important mobility strategy, as shown by sociologist Rose Rodrigues for New Bedford."* — Cristiana Bastos

This was not a rejection of education, but a culturally and economically rational choice in a context where formal schooling did not guarantee social mobility. Yet alongside this pragmatic orientation, aspirations for educational advancement persisted—particularly among second-generation parents who had achieved stability and were now positioned to make intergenerational sacrifices.

"My father and my mother's pride [...] was to be able to provide an education at the university. That was what they wanted most in life." — Carolina Rendeiro

However, the ability to support educational success often depends on access to cultural capital, the implicit knowledge and institutional literacy required to navigate school systems (Lareau, 2003). Many Portuguese immigrant families lacked this background, not due to lack of care, but because their own experience with formal education was limited or nonexistent.

"There were exceptions, but most parents didn't want their kids to suffer like they did. So they didn't push education. They wanted them to get a job, make money, and be safe. It came from love, but it limited the next generation's possibilities." — Onésimo Almeida

"The great sin of our community is that the older generation didn't value school education. Not because they were against it — they just didn't have it themselves. They didn't know how to support it. You need to grow up with books in the house to understand that." — Onésimo Almeida

This reveals another known tension: immigrant families often place high hopes in education but may lack the tools to convert that hope into long-term outcomes. What they provide instead is an alternative infrastructure—dense familial networks that buffer children from precarity and create space for academic focus (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).

"Many Portuguese-American students talk about the advantages of living at home while pursuing a college degree full time. Many do not have to worry about preparing food, shopping, or doing laundry. [...] This frees them up to focus on school extra-curriculars and paid work." — Kimberly DaCosta Holton

These forms of care show that emotional and logistical family support can make a significant difference in achievement motivation, even in the absence of formal educational support (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995). However, this same family-centered ethic may also direct youth toward immediate income generation and informal labor pathways, rather than long-term professional careers.

"The family would always help—someone gets a job, they help the cousin get in too. But it's about survival: working in the bakery, the construction site. Not building a professional path." — Onésimo *Almeida*

"My parents called my family, and every month there was someone living in our house. [...] Everyone would give furniture for the first apartment." — Carolina Rendeiro

As successive generations attain educational credentials, the community shifts from a strategy of resilience to one of strategic integration (Louie, 2004). This transition does not erase earlier priorities but reframes them in light of new possibilities. Education becomes not just a path to mobility, but a way of reimagining what success looks like in a diasporic context.

7.2.1. Social mobility and redefining success

The integration of Portuguese immigrants and their descendants into U.S. socioeconomic structures reveals a complex interplay between class, origins, generational mobility, and evolving definitions of success. While early migration waves were often marked by low levels of formal education and a focus on survival through manual labor or family businesses, second generations and beyond increasingly pursued professional pathways—shaped by investment in education and long-term upward mobility.

> *"The first people who came, especially from the Azores, were people with little schooling. Many only studied until the fourth grade. They came from rural areas, they didn't know what college was. They didn't have books at home. When they came to America, they were looking for survival, not upward mobility."* — Onésimo Almeida

> *"Nobody had the assets that some other Europeans and descendants had by inheritance. The Portuguese earned comfort through blood, sweat, and tears. There's no taking anything for granted."* — Cristiana Bastos

As these communities consolidated economically, they began to redefine the idea of success. The small family-owned businesses and cleaning services of the 1970s gave way to professional roles in education, healthcare, law, and public service. This transition also brought greater inclusion of women and a broader redefinition of ambition, by expanding their access to professional careers and reshaping community perceptions of success

> *[In New Jersey and New York,] in the 1970s, success was owning small business. Now it's being a lawyer, a nurse, a social worker. The idea of success has shifted—and it's more inclusive of women, too. [...] Many in the second generation became white collar professionals* — Kimberly DaCosta Holton

> *"The first year I taught Portuguese at high school, I had 22 students in my Portuguese 4 class, which was the most advanced. And this was 30 some years ago. And of those 20 students, I had six who were going to college, six. Okay, the last year I taught high school, I had 28. In that same Portuguese 4 class, I had 25 that were going to college."* — Diniz Borges

Some interviewees described a delicate balance between integration and identity preservation among Portuguese-American families, which signals towards a form of strategic assimilation—where individuals navigate professional and social environments by minimizing overt ethnic markers while privately maintaining strong cultural attachments.

> *"They quickly integrated because they understood early on that, to thrive and succeed, they also had to integrate into the community. But the interesting thing is that they never forgot their origins. They managed to preserve their identity while also integrating seamlessly on a professional level. It is almost as if they wore a transparent veil."* — Sílvia Curado

This metaphor of the "transparent veil" echoes Kimberly DaCosta Holton's description of a shift from overt ethnic expression to symbolic ethnicity—wherein cultural identity remains present but subdued, particularly in professional or academic contexts.

"They do not wear their nationality—or maybe they do, but not explicitly, as if behind a transparent veil. They do treasure that identity deeply and are committed to preserving it and protecting it, yet they also realize that, in order to succeed, they must be perceived as equal to others." — Sílvia Curado

This dual commitment among Portuguese-Americans—to cultural continuity and successful integration—is characteristic of segmented assimilation theory (Waters et al., 2010), which suggests that second-generation and beyond often combine acculturation with selective heritage retention. Over time, higher education became a central tool for socioeconomic success, but also one that required balancing heritage with pragmatism. While the Portuguese language and culture are valued, students increasingly pursue hybrid identities—pairing heritage with strategic career choices.

"They value Portuguese language and culture. But students fear it might not be marketable as a stand alone degree. So they pair it with accounting, business, pre-law, pre-med... That's the dominant logic now." — Kimberly DaCosta Holton

"As more Portuguese put their efforts, energy and money into education and became qualified to hold positions requiring these degrees, their other Portuguese cultural qualities such as being hard workers, people of integrity and loyalty, created advantages to them acquiring better jobs." — Marlene Andrade Hapai

This generational transformation suggests that integration has been both deep and adaptive. Portuguese-Americans have increasingly moved from survival to participation, from invisibility to institutional presence, even as visible ethnic markers sometimes recede.

7.3. Institutional presence and community agency

Despite steady economic advancement and cultural resilience, the Portuguese-American community has historically struggled to translate social capital into sustained institutional presence and community agency. Many families succeeded in building small businesses and attaining middle-class status, but this did not necessarily lead to civic integration or political representation. This disconnection between socioeconomic mobility and institutional influence is a central tension in the Portuguese-American experience.

"Some families did well economically — opened businesses, bought houses — but that didn't mean they had a political voice. They stayed peripheral in civic life for a long period."— Cristiana Bastos

The interviews highlight a preference for entrepreneurship over public sector careers. For many, small businesses, especially those grounded in family labor, offered a more accessible and culturally familiar path to upward mobility than participation in civic or administrative institutions. This entrepreneurial emphasis, however, has had trade-offs.

"We still have a long way to go. The community, in general, did not necessarily get involved in politics or public administration. [...] It has a lot to do with the previous generation or the path taken by the previous generation." — Tony Cabral

This generational orientation toward private success has contributed to a pattern of political underrepresentation. Despite sizable communities in several states, Portuguese-descendant populations have not consistently mobilized around collective political goals. As multiple interviewees note, the community often lacks organizational capacity, voter turnout, and visibility in public decision-making spaces.

> *"We have a diaspora of 5 million Portuguese abroad. And we are not able to elect four members of [the Portuguese] parliament. Four! Because people don't vote."* — Tony Cabral

> *"Fall River and New Bedford have high concentrations of Luso-descendants, but their economic power hasn't always translated into political power. That's changing, but slowly."* — Paula Noversa

> *"Compared to other groups—Italians, Irish, Cape Verdeans—we are less organized politically. We don't vote as a bloc. We don't have many Portuguese in Congress. There's no strong political lobby."* — Onésimo Almeida

This gradual shift is increasingly visible in the actions of younger generations, who are finding new and often symbolic ways to assert Portuguese identity within mainstream civic spaces.

> *"And an old student of mine, her name is Susete. She got married to a Portuguese man and she moved to Livingston and she is raising her kids. She called me out of the blue and said you know, I'm so proud of my daughter. I'm so proud of my daughter because she lobbied the mayor of our town to recognize Portugal Day and to get a flag hoisted up on June 10th. She spent a whole year lobbying for this official recognition and she got it. [...] This is a little bit of a different variation on the typical Chicago school idea that you're going to lose your ethnicity completely in three generations. [...] This is, yes, you're moving out of the ethnic enclave, but you're literally and figuratively planting an ethnic flag there."* — Kimberly DaCosta Holton

The relative weakness of institutional representation has had tangible consequences for Portuguese heritage education and cultural programming. In regions with high linguistic density—such as parts of California and New England—Portuguese has historically been included in public school curricula. However, these programs are frequently underfunded, inconsistently implemented, and heavily reliant on the efforts of local advocates. Without sustained institutional support, heritage language education remains fragile, limiting both its reach and continuity across generations. While symbolic expressions of identity remain strong within the community, the lack of structural backing undermines long-term visibility and access—particularly for younger Portuguese-Americans who may have limited exposure to formal language instruction or cultural education outside grassroots initiatives.

> *"Portuguese studies programs have been closing. There is little funding. The community is small and often doesn't have political weight or interest to maintain programs."* — João Caixinha

> *"Portuguese is one of the most spoken languages in New Jersey, but there were few Portuguese language programs in the public secondary schools and universities. Schools didn't see the*

need. It took student activism to change that." — Kimberly DaCosta Holton

Even long-standing cultural associations and clubs—once vital for the preservation of traditions—have shown limitations in terms of institutional leadership development. While they played a critical role in maintaining language and rituals, their inward-facing structure often failed to produce civic leaders or foster engagement with broader American political life.

> *"The clubs worked. They preserved language, traditions. But they were closed in on themselves. You didn't see them generating leaders for American society — for politics or institutions."*— Onésimo Almeida

Taken together, these perceptions point to a historical imbalance: strong cultural cohesion but weak institutional leverage. However, several interviewees hint at a turning point—especially through student activism, increasing civic awareness, and localized political involvement. These emerging shifts may suggest a new generation of Portuguese-Americans may be moving toward more visible forms of participation and representation.

7.4. Ethnic in-betweenness and the politics of belonging

The Portuguese-American experience in the United States illustrates the ambiguities and limitations of racial classification within American society. Although commonly considered white in official terms, Portuguese immigrants and their descendants have historically occupied a liminal racial position—treated as marginal within dominant white society, while excluded from most minority protections or diversity frameworks.

> *"According to the U.S. Govt, the Portuguese are not recognized as a legal minority group. But they are included in some diversity programs at the state and local levels. Miguel Moniz termed Portuguese-Americans a 'shadow minority'."*— Kimberly DaCosta Holton

Portuguese immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were not unequivocally accepted as white. They were racialized through associations with poverty, Catholicism, linguistic difference, and rural backwardness—particularly those from the Azores or Madeira.

> *"They weren't classified as "white" enough to access the full privileges of whiteness. But neither were they part of the Black or Hispanic/Latino communities. Nor did they attempt to create a distinct community in the past – many simply blended in as much as possible. It was a way of adapting to the American race politics."* — Cristiana Bastos

> *"They could have joined Hispanic groups to benefit from minority status, but community leaders promoted another strategy – not being considered has a "minority". They wanted to say 'we are already here.' It's a strategy of dealing with a racialized social hierarchy."* — Cristiana Bastos

This strategy echoes the process of "becoming white," in which working-class European immigrants gained social inclusion by downplaying visible ethnic markers in exchange for acceptance into the racial mainstream (Roediger's, 1991). However, Portuguese-Americans were not for a long time absorbed into the racial majority—what Cristiana Bastos calls "floating in between."

"For a long time, the Portuguese were not considered white enough to be at the top. But they're not Black either. So they float in between whiteness and non-whiteness. It's a racial classification problem manipulated by immigration laws. In the extremely racist Immigration Act of 1924 they were excluded." — Cristiana Bastos

The social consequences of this in-betweenness were profound. Symbolic boundaries—social distinctions drawn between groups—shape access to inclusion (Lamont, 2000). For many Portuguese-Americans, this meant adopting strategies of crypto-ethnicity: concealing their origins, suppressing their language, or avoiding ethnic identification in public life.

"I had an older woman tell me she was taught never to say she was Portuguese. That kind of crypto-ethnicity was common in some contexts, especially in the early to mid twentieth century. [...]There were times it wasn't safe to be openly Portuguese." — Kimberly DaCosta Holton

"There was a lot of shame. People didn't want to say they were Portuguese. At the same time, they'd have the flag on the car. It's contradictory. The stigma stayed, but so did the love." — Onésimo Almeida

This contradiction—between public silence and private pride—mirrors historical accounts of racialized immigrant and their descendants' navigating schools, labor markets, and public institutions that penalized cultural difference.

"There was a time when if you spoke Portuguese in school, you got hit. [...] Students were embarrassed. The schools made it clear that English was the only acceptable language." — Paula Noversa

Even today, Portuguese-American students often report experiences of racial misclassification and cultural dissonance. Their ethnic identity remains unrecognized by institutions, yet insufficiently validated within broader ethnic minority categories.

"Students get asked: 'Are you white?' 'Are you Latino?' They say, 'I'm Portuguese.' Sometimes they're told: 'That doesn't count.' It's an ethnic in-betweenness." — Kimberly DaCosta Holton

Generational shifts have altered this dynamic. While earlier waves (1880–1920) emphasized assimilation and invisibility, later waves—particularly post-1960s arrivals—entered the U.S. in an era of multiculturalism, where hyphenated identities were increasingly valorized.

"If you're looking at the Portuguese who immigrated in the first great wave, 1880 to 1920, it was really important to become American. In the second great wave [...] they came at a time when there was this burgeoning sense of multiculturalism and the hyphenated American [...] Portuguese-Americans." — Paula Noversa

Portuguese-Americans complicate the binary logic of American racial categorization. Their case illustrates how race is not a static identity but a process: negotiated, contested, and structured by both state classification and social perception.

7.5. Place, mobility and the spatial transformation of community

Place has played a central role in the Portuguese-American experience as a social and symbolic anchor for identity, integration, and community life. Early waves of Portuguese immigrants often settled in ethnic enclaves, drawn by kinship ties, labor opportunities, and cultural familiarity. These neighborhoods served a dual function: they provided protection and autonomy but also reflected the external constraints of exclusion.

> *"People wanted to live near each other — it was voluntary. But they were also pushed into certain areas: less green, more crowded. [...] In Fall River, they lived near dye factories, toxic zones. It wasn't just choice — they were pushed to the less desirable areas, well described by Joseph Comforti's "Another City" and by the historical sociology of Fall River by Paula Noversa."* — Cristiana Bastos

This dual nature of population enclaves—as both spaces of refuge and sites of marginality—is well documented in urban geography and migration studies. Doreen Massey (1994) has argued that space is never neutral: it is socially constructed and differentially accessible, shaped by power relations and mobility regimes. Portuguese settlement patterns illustrate this: while clustering enabled ethnic resilience, it also reflected structural barriers to wider participation in urban life.

Yet within these spatial constraints, enclaves became vibrant centers of self-sufficient ethnic life. As Paula Noversa and others note, Portuguese neighborhoods allowed immigrants to access services, socialize, and conduct daily life without engaging dominant institutions or language systems—a phenomenon similar to what Sarah Mahler (1995) describes as "local transnationalism."

> *"Living in Portuguese neighborhoods allowed a lot of agency for immigrants. [...] You could buy insurance, get medical care, bank, go to church — all in Portuguese. You didn't feel the burden of being foreign."* — Paula Noversa

> *"Many people didn't even need to learn English. They managed to go to the bank, to the doctor, to deal with things without having to learn English. [...] It's the danger of neighborhoods."* — Anonymous interviewee

However, this spatial model began to loosen with generational shifts. As descendants of immigrants accessed higher education and professional careers, geographic mobility increased. Residential choices became less about ethnic density and more about economic opportunity and lifestyle preferences—marking a transition from enclave-based belonging to dispersed integration.

> *"The younger generation moves — for college, for work. [...] They plan life like any American: seek opportunity, maybe return later. Moving for economic gain is a sign of integration and success."* — Paula Noversa

> *"They are living together and being integrated in another area, it is normal that this mobility is visible and we find Portuguese descendants residing in states that sometimes we are amazed at*

how they ended up there." — Márcia Ponte

This transition aligns with Vertovec's (2004) notion of "transnationalism from below", where community affiliation becomes less spatial and more networked—sustained through digital platforms, symbolic practices, and periodic cultural engagement rather than shared geography. The disintegration of physical ethnic centers has led to what Cristiana Bastos describes as a fragmented but persistent identity infrastructure.

> "[In Ferry Street,] the restaurants, the butcher, the liquor store, the club — mostly gone now. What remains is symbolic: festivals, recipes, Facebook groups. The neighborhood disappeared, but the identity was reassembled in fragments."— Cristiana Bastos

Rather than signaling loss, this shift may reflect a re-scaling of community. As geographer Nina Glick Schiller (2005) suggests, diasporic identity today often exists across multiple scales—local, national, and transnational—linked through memory, media, and affective ties. Portuguese-American identity no longer depends on spatial proximity but endures through diasporic consciousness and flexible cultural forms.

In this light, the Portuguese-American case exemplifies the deterritorialization of ethnicity: the movement from bounded neighborhoods to diffuse but emotionally charged networks. While place still matters—especially in memory and ritual—the new logic of belonging is relational rather than spatial, mediated through generational values, digital platforms, and symbolic continuity.

8. An American dream in Portuguese?

Alda Botelho Azevedo and Lara Patrício Tavares

8.1. Main Results

Demographic trends and patterns

— Between 2013–2017 and 2018–2022, the Portuguese-American population grew by 0.80%, a change driven by the Portuguese speakers, despite a decline in non–Portuguese-speaking descendants.

— 13.74% of Portuguese-Americans spoke Portuguese at home in 2018–2022.

— The population of Portuguese-Americans is aging, but Portuguese speakers are generally younger than non-speakers.

— State-level population dynamics diverge, with growth in Florida, Texas, New Jersey, and New York contrasting with declines in historical hubs like California, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island.

— New York and New Jersey show a balanced age structure, while Florida leads in overall growth but lacks generational renewal.

— In all the three clusters, California, Massachusetts–Rhode Island–Connecticut, and Hawaii the population of Portuguese-American is declining. However, both in California and Hawaii there is a rise in the number of Portuguese speakers.

Spatial distribution of the Portuguese-Americans

— Portuguese-Americans are present in all states of the United States, but remain heavily concentrated in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, California and Hawaii.

— Overall geographical distribution is becoming more dispersed across the United States, with emergent states like Texas, Colorado, North Carolina and South Carolina.

— In California, Florida, and Massachusetts–Rhode Island–Connecticut, the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese are increasingly more clustered, which is not always the case for non–Portuguese speakers.

— Across all regions, Portuguese speakers tend to live closer to one another compared to non-speakers. This spatial segregation increased in California and in Florida, unlike in New York/New Jersey, Hawaii, and New England.

Education and labor market outcomes

Educational attainment

— One-third of the individuals aged 19 and over in the U.S. had a bachelor's or a higher degree, with almost no distinction between the Portuguese-Americans and all other U.S. residents.

— Among the individuals who took a GED or alternative certificate, the proportion of non-white is much higher (roughly the double) among non-Portuguese-Americans.
— The Portuguese-Americans are at a disadvantage in terms of postgraduate qualifications, showing lower percentages of Master's and Doctoral degrees.
— There is a higher proportion of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese with a bachelor's degree or higher when compared to all other U.S. residents. And once again, for the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese, the proportion with a bachelor's degree or higher is almost identical to that of all other U.S. residents.
— The percentage holding a bachelor's degree or higher goes from 18.5% in Hawaii up to 47.5% in New York.
— Holding a bachelor's degree is associated with a 53.7% increase in the wage, all else being equal.

Labor market situation

— The proportion of Portuguese-Americans who are employed is significantly higher, which is due to a lower proportion of those not in the labor force.
— Less than one in five of the Portuguese-Americans aged 19 to 76 who hold a bachelor's degree was not in the labor force.
— The higher participation of the Portuguese-Americans in the labor market when compared to all the other U.S. residents is partly due to a higher female labor market participation.

Labor market income

— Half of the Portuguese-Americans earn a wage that is 18% higher than that of half of the non-Portuguese-Americans. Most strikingly, the bottom half of the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese earn a wage that is 26% higher than those in the bottom half of the non-Portuguese-Americans.
— Although the median wage for the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese and do not have a bachelor's degree is substantially higher than the median wage for all other U.S. residents who do not hold a bachelor's degree (30% higher), it is identical to that observed for all other U.S. residents.
— According to the estimation results, the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese have a wage premium of 11.8% relatively to all other U.S. residents; for the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese this wage premium goes up to 19.5%.
— Among those who do not hold a bachelor's degree, being a Portuguese-American makes a difference: for those who do not speak Portuguese is associated with a 14.3% wage premium, and for those who speak Portuguese the wage premium is 25.4%.
— Among those who hold a bachelor's degree, being a Portuguese-American earns a much smaller wage premium. The main wage determinant for this group is the type of job they have whereby having a non-routine job is associated with a 40.6% wage increase.
— Only in New York there is a significant difference in the wage premium between the group of Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese and the group that does not speak Portuguese.

Experiences of the Portuguese-Americans in the U.S.

— Portuguese often persists symbolically across generations—not as daily language but through emotionally charged practices like prayers, food, and family rituals.

— While emotional ties remain strong, the Portuguese language is also increasingly used for practical purposes such as dual citizenship and competitive job markets.

— Many younger Portuguese-Americans express their heritage through digital and symbolic forms, indicating a shift from traditional ethnic clubs to more flexible, performative, and affective modes of affiliation.

— A shift in Portugal's international image—from marginal to "cool"—has enhanced Portuguese-Americans' confidence and connection to their roots. "Pride follows perception" becomes a recurring theme.

— Due to structural barriers, many early migrants often prioritized property and stability for their children over education. Subsequent generations of migrants put more emphasis on their children's education recognizing it's importance for labor market success.

— Success transitioned from small business ownership to professional careers, particularly for women.

— The community's strong cultural cohesion has not translated into political or institutional power. Civic engagement, funding for language programs, and political representation remain limited.

8.2. Conclusions

This study explores the performance of Portuguese-Americans in the United States, by looking at their spatial and residential patterns, education attainment, labor market participation and wages from work. What emerges from our findings is not a uniform story of upward mobility or decline, but rather a nuanced and evolving reality shaped by both assimilation and heritage preservation. Portuguese-Americans increasingly identify as Americans with Portuguese roots, embracing a fluid, hybrid identity. Instead of signaling the disappearance of Portuguese ethnicity, it shows its reconfiguration. Success today seems to lie in the ability to integrate into the broader society while maintaining elements of cultural distinctiveness when they are meaningful.

From 2013 to 2022, the overall Portuguese-American population grows by 0.8%. This change is largely driven by a 16% increase in Portuguese speakers, which offsets a 1.3% decline among non-speakers. However, this apparent stability at national-level conceals substantial regional variation. The Portuguese-American population is in decline in traditional strongholds such as Massachusetts, Rhode Island, California, and Hawaii. However, it is increasing in Florida, New York, and New Jersey, and new clusters are emerging in states such as Texas, Colorado, North Carolina, and South Carolina. This is a sign of the adaptability of Portuguese-Americans that then reflects in their labor markets outcomes.

It is important to note that New York stands out in many ways. Nearly half of Portuguese-Americans with labor income have a bachelor's degree or higher, a proportion that stands signifiicantly above that observed for all U.S. residents. This percentage is even higher for Portuguese speakers. This suggests positive selection in New York, attracting highly skilled and qualified individuals, which is reflected in their wages. Interestingly, speaking Portuguese is also associated with higher wages in this context.

Although residential clustering is weakening, Portuguese speakers remain more concentrated than non-speakers, especially in areas with strong historical ties to immigration, such as parts of Northeast (that includes New York) and California's Central Valley. In contrast, non–Portuguese speakers are more geographically dispersed, with modest declines in the Northeast, reflecting a trajectory of assimilation less tied to ethnic enclaves and more aligned with mainstream mobility patterns.

One could argue that Portuguese-Americans fare well in terms of educational attainment compared to other U.S. residents. Considering that only around one in three individuals holds a bachelor's degree or higher, it is noteworthy that Portuguese-Americans do not fall behind. In fact, the percentage of Portuguese-Americans with a bachelor's degree or higher who speak Portuguese is higher than that of all other U.S. residents. Additionally, the percentage of Portuguese-Americans with a GED is slightly lower than that of other U.S. residents, suggesting that they perform better in high school.

Portuguese-Americans are highly active in the labor market. The proportion of Portuguese-Americans who are employed is significantly higher than that of other U.S. residents, partly due to higher female labor market participation. On average, Portuguese-Americans have a wage premium compared to other U.S. residents, a difference driven by Portuguese speakers. These differences are greatly amplified when looking at the median.

When compared to all other U.S. residents with the same age, sex, race, educational attainment, type of job, state, etc., the Portuguese-Americans who do not speak Portuguese have a wage premium of 11.8%; for the Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese this wage premium goes up to 19.5%. These results get stronger when focusing on prime-age individuals.

The apparent labor market 'success' of Portuguese-Americans without a bachelor's degree is not due to having a non-routine job. Being Portuguese-American helps, especially for those who speak Portuguese. Conversely, for Portuguese-Americans with a bachelor's degree or higher, the main wage determinant is the type of job they have; that is, having a non-routine job rather than a routine one. For this group, being Portuguese-American earns a much smaller wage premium.

Language use emerges as both a marker of identity and a mirror of transformation within the Portuguese-American community. While Portuguese remains a minority language—spoken at home by just 13.7% of Portuguese-Americans in 2018–2022—its recent growth is noteworthy. Portuguese speakers are, on average, younger than non-speakers, indicating a generational shift marked by renewed interest in heritage and cultural continuity. This revival is not solely the result of intergenerational transmission; rather, it also reflects symbolic reattachment, where language is reactivated as a form of selective identity in a multicultural society. New generations, often more free from the ambivalences of their ancestors, play a key role in cultural retention. Their curiosity, pride, and engagement contribute to sustaining ties to the ancestral homeland in ways that are both meaningful and contemporary. Beyond its cultural value, speaking Portuguese increasingly yields instrumental benefits. It can enhance employment opportunities and it facilitates access to Portuguese citizenship through ancestry. Thus, language retention today blends cultural pride with strategic advantage, revealing how Portuguese-Americans negotiate their sense of belonging in both symbolic and practical terms. However, some results suggest that Portuguese-Americans who speak Portuguese may integrate into separate economies and social structures, which could hinder their social mobility, as Borjas (2006) suggests.

Ultimately, the American dream in Portuguese is a story of transformation. Their success is not simply about economic gain or geographic spread—it is also about how a community renegotiates its place in a country that both enables and absorbs ethnic diversity. The Portuguese-American experience, far from static, continues to evolve in response to both internal dynamics and external opportunities—a process that speaks to the very heart of what it means to be successful in a multicultural America.

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Annex 1. Methodological notes

1. Methodological note on the spatial analysis

1.1. Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA)

In this study, to explore the spatial distribution of individuals of Portuguese-Americans in the states with their highest concentration, Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) identifiers were utilized from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) USA. PUMAs are statistical geographic units defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, each representing a population of at least 100,000 residents. These units are designed to provide detailed spatial information in public-use microdata while preserving respondent confidentiality. In this study, the variable PUMA was used in conjunction with STATEFIP to uniquely identify geographic locations within states. This enabled the analysis of population patterns at a sub-state level without compromising privacy. Since PUMA boundaries are constructed using combinations of counties, census tracts, or other geographic units, they offer a meaningful level of spatial resolution for regional analyses, particularly in urban areas. The analysis was based on the 2020 PUMA definitions, which reflect boundary updates made following the 2010 decennial census. Using PUMA-level data allowed for the investigation of local disparities and regional trends that would not be apparent in state-level aggregations.

1.2. Local Indicators of Spatial Association (LISA)

To identify spatial patterns and clusters of the Portuguese-American population, Local Indicators of Spatial Association (LISA) were employed, specifically using the Local Moran's I statistic. Global Moran's I ranges from –1 to +1, where values near +1 indicate strong clustering, values near –1 indicate strong dispersion, and values around 0 suggest a random spatial pattern. LISA refers to a set of statistical tools that identify the degree and location of spatial clustering in geographic data allowing to detect areas of local spatial autocorrelation—areas where high or low values cluster together more than would be expected under a random spatial distribution. In contrast to global measures like Moran's I, which assess overall spatial autocorrelation across an entire study area, LISA focuses on identifying spatial patterns at a local level. This method allows for the detection of localized spatial autocorrelation, highlighting areas where values are significantly clustered or where spatial outliers occur. LISA helps detect hot spots, cold spots, and spatial outliers: Hot spots (High-High), where a high value surrounded by high values, Cold spots (Low-Low), where a low value surrounded by low values, and Spatial outliers, which include High-Low cluster, where a high value surrounded by low values and a Low-High cluster, where a low value surrounded by high values. The Local Moran's I for each spatial unit *i* was calculated using the following formula:

$$I_i = \frac{(x_i - \bar{x})}{S^2} \sum_j w_{ij}(x_j - \bar{x})$$

where *n* is the total number of spatial units. A standardized z-score was also computed for each observation to further assess significance, using:

$$Z_i = \frac{I_i - E[I_i]}{\sqrt{\mathrm{Var}[I_i]}}$$

where *Var[I_i]* represents the variance of the local Moran statistic.
To visualize the results, LISA cluster maps were generated, categorizing spatial units based on their local Moran's I values. These maps delineated areas of high-high and low-low clustering as well as high-low and low-high spatial outliers, with color coding and hatching used to denote significance at the 95% confidence level. Overall, the use of Local Moran's I provided critical insights into the spatial distribution of the studied variable, allowing for the identification of meaningful geographic patterns that would be overlooked by global measures of spatial autocorrelation.

1.3. Dissimilarity Index (D)

To assess the degree of residential segregation between two population groups, the Dissimilarity Index (D) was calculated. This index quantifies the evenness with which two groups are distributed across geographic subunits (e.g., census tracts or neighborhoods) within a larger area. The dissimilarity Index ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates perfect integration (even distribution of the two groups across all subunits), and 1 indicates complete segregation (each subunit contains only one group). The formula for the index is given by:

$$D = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^{n} \left| \frac{a_i}{A} - \frac{b_i}{B} \right|$$

In this formula, a_i and b_i are the populations of groups A and B in geographic unit *i*, and A and B are the total populations of groups A and B in the entire study area, respectively. The index measures the proportion of one group that would have to move to a different unit for the two groups to be evenly distributed across all units. Values above 0.60 are commonly interpreted as high segregation, while values below 0.30 indicate low segregation (Massey & Denton, 1988). The Dissimilarity Index is particularly useful for comparing segregation patterns across different regions or time periods, as it provides a standardized measure that is not affected by the relative size of the groups.

2. Methodological note on the qualitative study

Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted between January 30 and May 12, 2025, with participants selected for their expertise, roles, or lived experience within Portuguese-American communities. Interviewees were identified through the Luso-American Development Foundation (FLAD) and personal networks. All participants provided recorded or signed informed consent. Interviews were conducted both in person and online via Zoom, with an average duration of 61 minutes. Online sessions were audio- and video-recorded, and all interviews were transcribed using Turboscribe, with manual review to ensure transcription accuracy. Interviews conducted in Portuguese were translated into English by the research team. Errors are our own.

Table A1. List of interviewees and their roles in the Portuguese-American communities

Interviewee	Position / Affiliation
Anonymous interviewee	Honorary Consul of Portugal
Carolina Rendeiro	Honorary Consul of Portugal in Miami
Cristiana Bastos	Senior Research Fellow at the Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade de Lisboa
Diniz Borges	Director, PBBI – Portuguese Beyond Borders Institute (at Fresno State University)
João Caixinha	Coordinator for the Portuguese Language Programs and Education Affairs in the USA
Kimberly DaCosta Holton	Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies, Rutgers University, Newark
Márcia Sousa da Ponte	Counsellor for the Portuguese Communities, USA
Marlene Hapai	President, Hawaii Island Portuguese Chamber of Commerce Cultural and Educational Center
Mónica Teixeira de Sousa	Professor of Law, Roger Williams University
Onésimo Almeida	Professor Emeritus of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, Brown University
Paula Noversa	Assisting Teaching Professor, UMASSD
Sílvia Curado	President, Portuguese American Post Graduate Society - PAPS
Tony Cabral	State Representative, New Bedford, Massachusetts

Annex 2.

Table 1: Individuals aged 19–76 by employment status with a BSc or higher degree, 2018–2022

	Portuguese-Americans	All other U.S. residents
Employed		
row %	40.43	39.69
column %	78.67	73.43
Unemployed		
row %	25.59	24.49
column %	2.47	2.18
Not in labor force		
row %	22.19	23.77
column %	18.86	24.38
Total		
row %	34.58	33.72
column %	100	100

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

Table 2: Individuals aged 25–54 with a BSc or higher degree, 2018–2022

	Portuguese-Americans	All other U.S. residents
California		
% row	40.14	41.05
% colum	23.95	13.2
Massachusetts		
% row	41.17	56.48
% colum	19.19	3.11
Rhode Island		
% row	36.42	45.13
% colum	5.36	0.33
Florida		
% row	39.39	37.02
% colum	4.38	5.46
New Jersey		
% row	53.26	51.83
% colum	5.6	3.72
Hawaii		
% row	20.24	37.68
% colum	2.06	0.43
New York		
% row	57.65	45.24
% colum	4.54	7.22
Connecticut		
% row	47.12	50.17
% colum	3.65	1.37
Other states		
% row	44.03	37.38
% colum	31.28	65.16
Total		
% row	41.76	39.3
% colum	100	100

Source: American Community Survey microdata. Own calculations.

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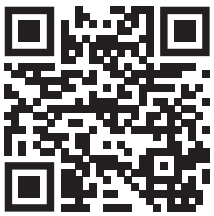

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