



**CITY LIFE**  
**VIDA URBANA**

Stand Up, Fight Back

# EVICTIIONS IN BOSTON

The Disproportionate  
Effects of Forced Moves on  
Communities of Color

2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## ABSTRACT

The goal of this report is to provide rigorous research to systematically analyze who faces evictions in Boston. Using eviction records from Boston Housing Court (2014 – 2016) merged with data on neighborhood characteristics from the U.S. Census Bureau and property assessment data from the Boston Assessing Department, this report identifies patterns in the neighborhoods and properties most affected by evictions. Among other results, we find that eviction filings are disproportionately affecting neighborhoods of color, particularly neighborhoods with a large share of Black renters. We suggest a variety of paths forward to mitigate the chronic housing instability faced by Boston's communities of color.

### AUTHORS

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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City Life Vida Urbana is a non-profit grassroots community organization and housing advocacy group committed to fighting for racial, social and economic justice and gender equality by building working class power.



Figure 1  
City Life/Vida Urbana members and supporters rally to stop evictions of older women in Boston (2018).  
Photo by: Marilyn Humphries



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

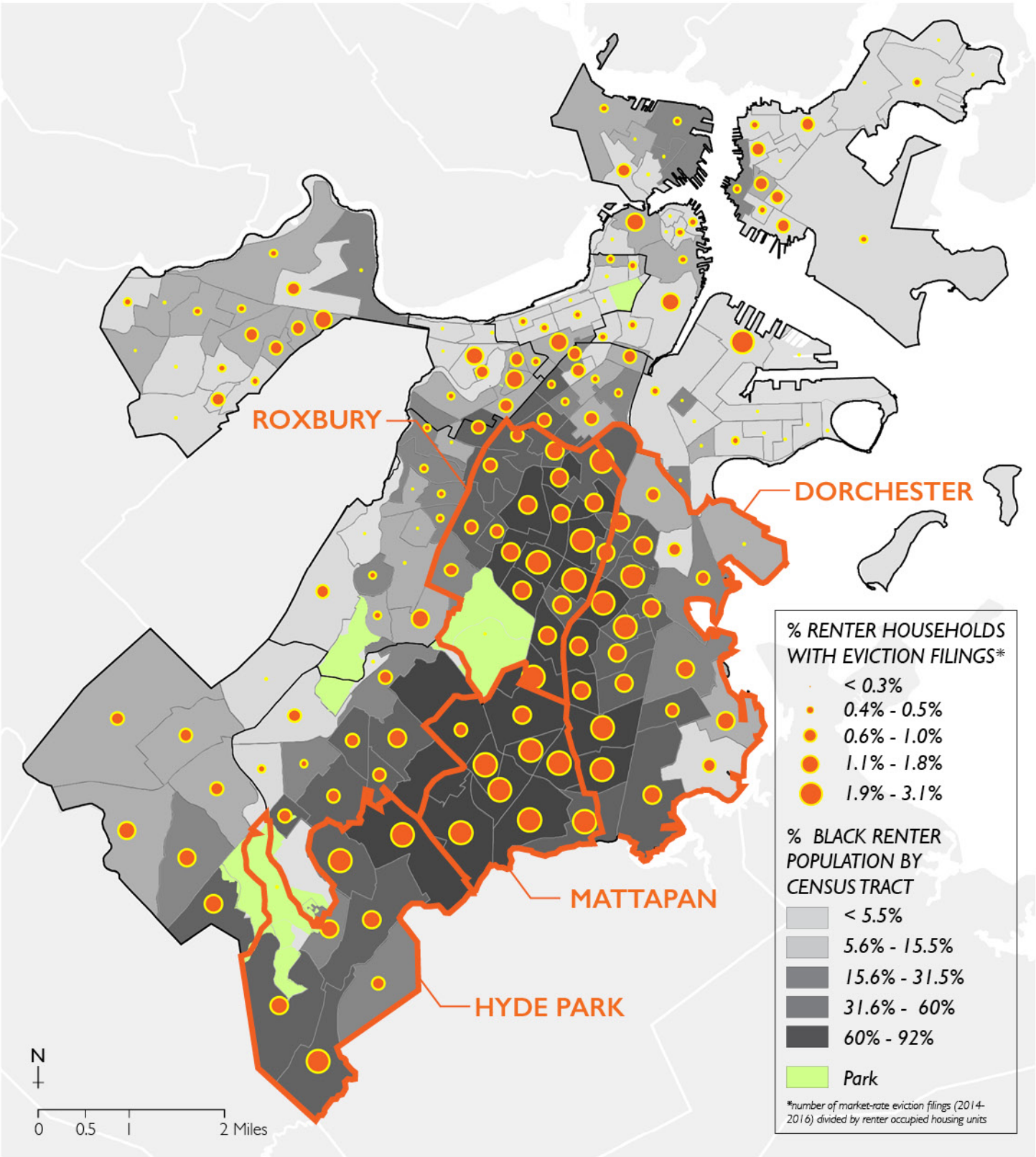
In the Boston neighborhoods where a majority of renters are people of color, half of renters spent 30 percent or more of their gross income on housing costs in 2015. **Between 2010 and 2019, property owners filed more than 50,000 evictions in Boston Housing Court**—an average of 5,451 per year.

While court records of eviction filings significantly undercount the extent of evictions and displacement, they are the best available data source on evictions. Our analysis of Boston Housing Court eviction records in Boston from 2014 to 2016 finds that:



**Communities of color are disproportionately affected by eviction filings in both subsidized and market-rate rental housing. The focus of this report is eviction filings in market-rate rental housing.**

**Market-rate eviction filings are correlated with indicators of poverty. However, they are more closely correlated with the neighborhood racial composition, particularly the share of Black renters.** These adverse impacts of eviction filings in communities of color are intertwined with decades of documented discriminatory policies and institutional racism—policies which have faced strong grassroots community resistance.



**Average Annual Market-Rate Rental Housing Eviction Filing Rate Underlaid with Black Renter Population, 2014-2016**

Author: David Robinson, 2020  
Source: Boston Department of Neighborhood Development;  
American Community Survey 2013-2017 5-Year Estimate



# RACIAL COMPOSITION AND MARKET-RATE EVICTION FILINGS

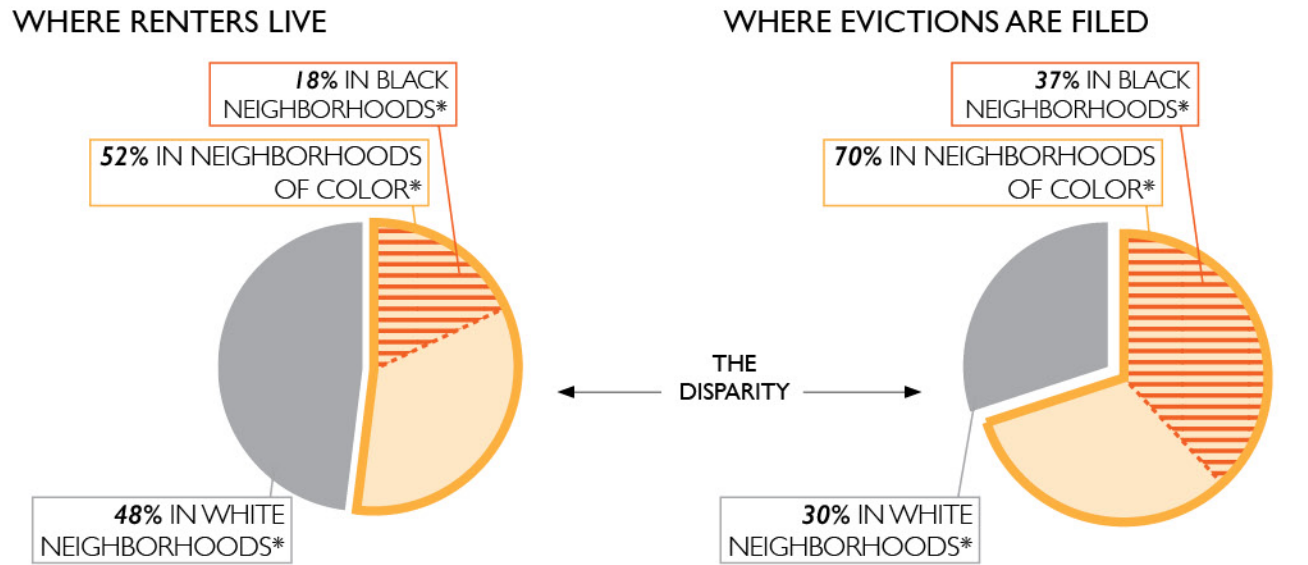


Figure 3  
Source: American Community Survey 2013-2017 5-year estimates; Boston Department of Neighborhood Development.  
\*renter-occupied units as percent of Boston total (left chart); market-rate eviction filings as percent of Boston total (right chart); majority race defined as 50% or greater

2 The frequency of market-rate eviction filings is 24 percent higher in rental units in small properties with absentee landlords than in units in comparable size rental buildings with an owner-occupant.

3 Market-rate eviction filings are concentrated in neighborhoods with lower property values and older buildings. However, within these neighborhoods, owners of market-rate housing are more likely to file evictions in more recently constructed or remodeled buildings with higher property values per square foot than the neighborhood average.

## EVICTON FILINGS PER 100 MARKET-RATE RENTAL UNITS, BY NEIGHBORHOOD (2014-2016)

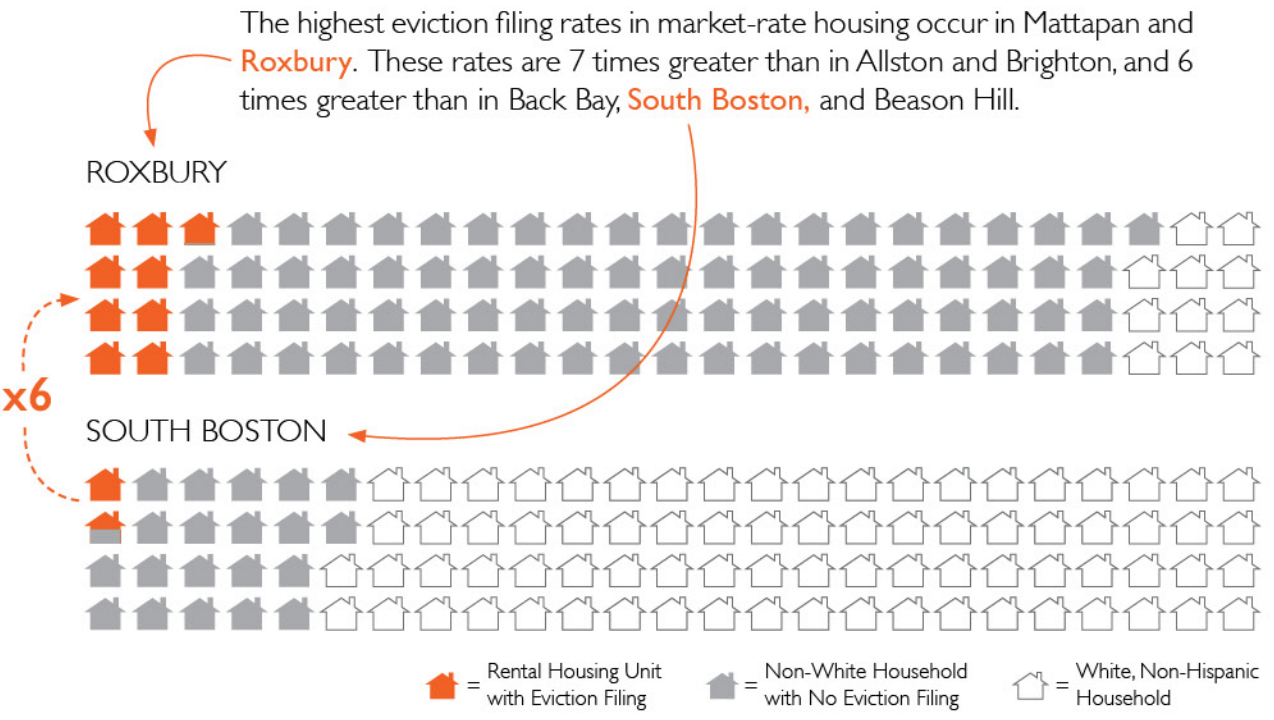
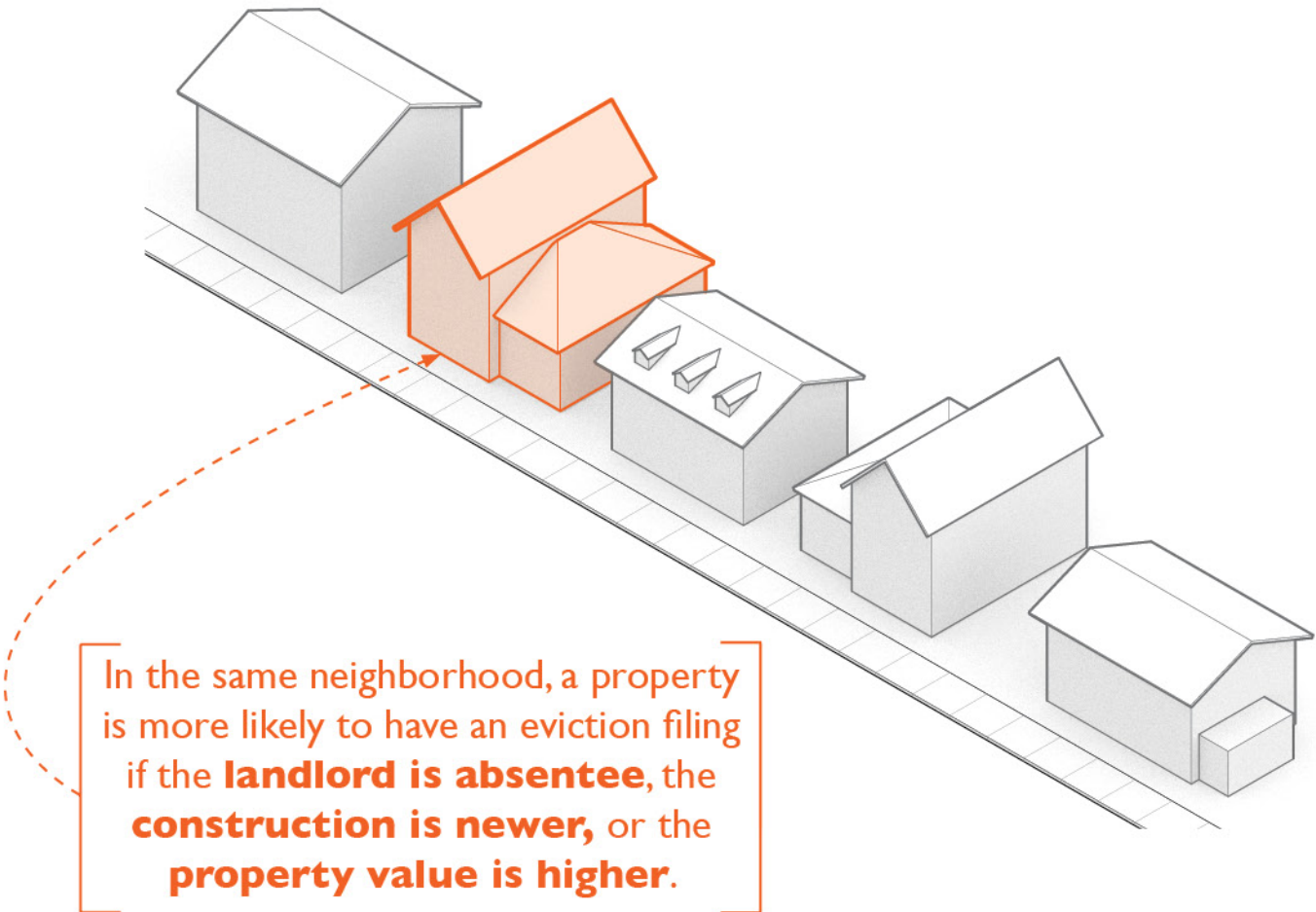
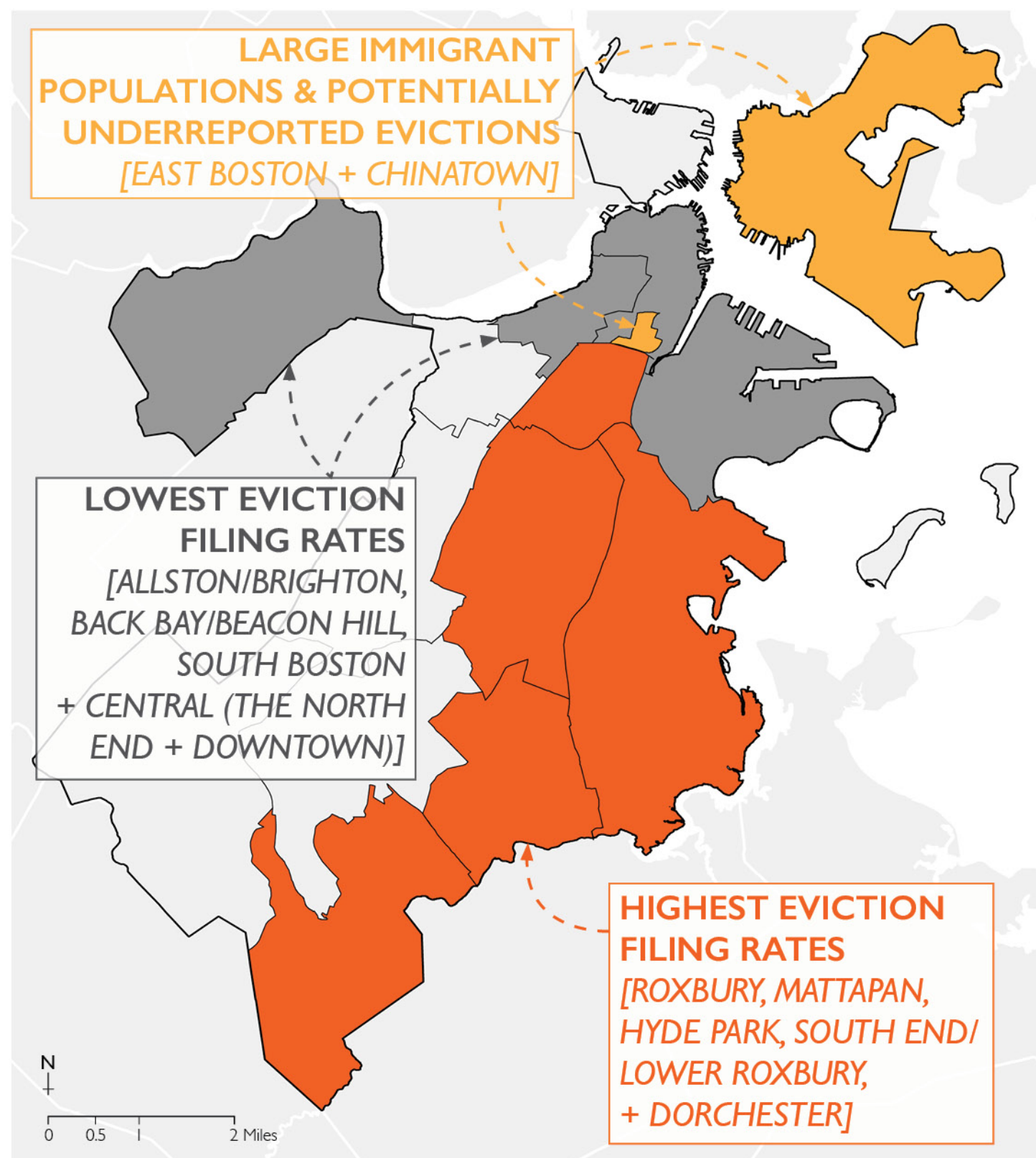


Figure 4  
Source: American Community Survey 2013-2017 5-year estimates; Boston Department of Neighborhood Development.







## Boston Neighborhoods Categorized by Market-Rate Eviction Filing Rates

Author: David Robinson, 2020  
Source: Boston Department of Neighborhood Development;  
American Community Survey 2013-2017 5-Year Estimate

## MOVING FORWARD

Current housing policy largely treats housing as a commodity, not a basic human right. Addressing the disproportionate effects of evictions and housing instability on Boston's communities of color requires policy solutions that help shift to a housing system based on the principle that housing should be recognized as a fundamental human right.

There are currently a number of viable policy options, endorsed by organizations that work with residents most impacted by evictions, which take incremental steps towards a housing system that prevents evictions, stabilizes people's housing, and treats housing as a fundamental human right. All of these policies are currently under consideration in the Massachusetts state legislature, and many are part of the City of Boston's legislative agenda. These include:

- 1 **LIMITS** on annual **RENT INCREASES**
- 2 **LEGAL REPRESENTATION** for low-income renters in Housing Court
- 3 Requirements that **EVICTIONS MUST HAVE "JUST-CAUSE"**
- 4 **OPPORTUNITIES** for tenants **TO PURCHASE** their rental homes at the point of sale
- 5 **SEALING OF EVICTION RECORDS** to prevent discrimination based on an eviction record
- 6 **A TAX ON LARGE REAL ESTATE TRANSFERS** to support the development of affordable housing
- 7 Expanding **RENTAL ASSISTANCE**



