

# Boston Harbor For All: Waterfront Visitation and Equity Study

## Fact Sheet

### The Research:

- Boston Harbor Now worked with Tectonix (technology partner) and Veraset (data partner), who provided 170 billion anonymized cell phone records for Massachusetts spanning 2019–2022. This dataset allowed analysis of visitation patterns of the Boston waterfront public open spaces (segmented by income, race, age, education, hometowns) without identifying individuals.
- To complement and validate the mobile data, MassINC Polling Group conducted a study of five waterfront parks (Christopher Columbus Waterfront Park, Martin’s Park, Piers Park, Pope John Paul II Park and Castle Island) in August 2023. Polling teams conducted park visitor headcounts and more than 1,550 surveys between August 9th and September 1st, during hours spanning from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., capturing data on daily use of the waterfront.

### Key Findings:

- While visitation to Boston’s waterfront has grown more diverse, **there is an opportunity for continued progress; BIPOC residents comprise nearly 60% of Boston’s population, yet make up under 40% of visitors to the city’s public waterfront spaces.**
- **White visitors are overrepresented by 19%** compared to their share of the city’s population.
- The Harbor Islands show the greatest inequity, with **Black and Latino visitors comprising just 14% combined** despite representing more than 40% of Boston’s population.
- Even along the Harborwalk – the most physically accessible segment – visitation remains predominantly White, suggesting additional **social and cultural barriers** (explored in the report’s narratives) beyond physical access.
- While **69% of Bostonians** overall view the waterfront as “welcoming and accessible,” **25% of Black** and **20% of Hispanic residents** report *not feeling welcome* as a major deterrent (MassINC Polling Group).
- More than **10 neighborhoods fall below 3% visitation**, concentrated in **Boston’s western and southern areas** (including West Roxbury, Mattapan, Roslindale, and Jamaica Plain). Just **three neighborhoods—Dorchester, East Boston, and South Boston—account for 50% of all Harborwalk visits**, while communities such as Roxbury and Mattapan are dramatically underrepresented.
- Most visitors are not affluent. Roughly **72% of Harborwalk visitors earn under \$100,000**, and **21% earn under \$60,000** – meaning Boston’s public waterfront is used primarily by middle- and working-class residents, not wealthier households.
- Boston’s waterfronts and islands served as vital blue and green refuges for physical and mental health recovery. Mobility data from 2019 through 2022 shows that residents, especially communities of color, and households with fewer resources, turned to open spaces along the Harborwalk and the Boston Harbor Islands during a period of widespread stress, uncertainty, and isolation. Waterfront park **visits grew by 7.2 percent in 2020 and the Boston Harbor Islands by 53.7 percent** during that same period.

### Visitation By Waterfront Area

(Data Source: Veraset Mobility Analysis)

Area	White	Black	Latino	AAPI	Two+ Races	Other
Harborwalk	63%	10%	13%	7%	4%	3%
Waterfront Parks	64%	11%	14%	6%	3%	2%
Harbor Islands	74.2%	5.8%	8.2%	6.7%	3%	2%