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# Voting Patterns and Political Participation:

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A Look at Holyoke, MA

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Special Studies Research with  
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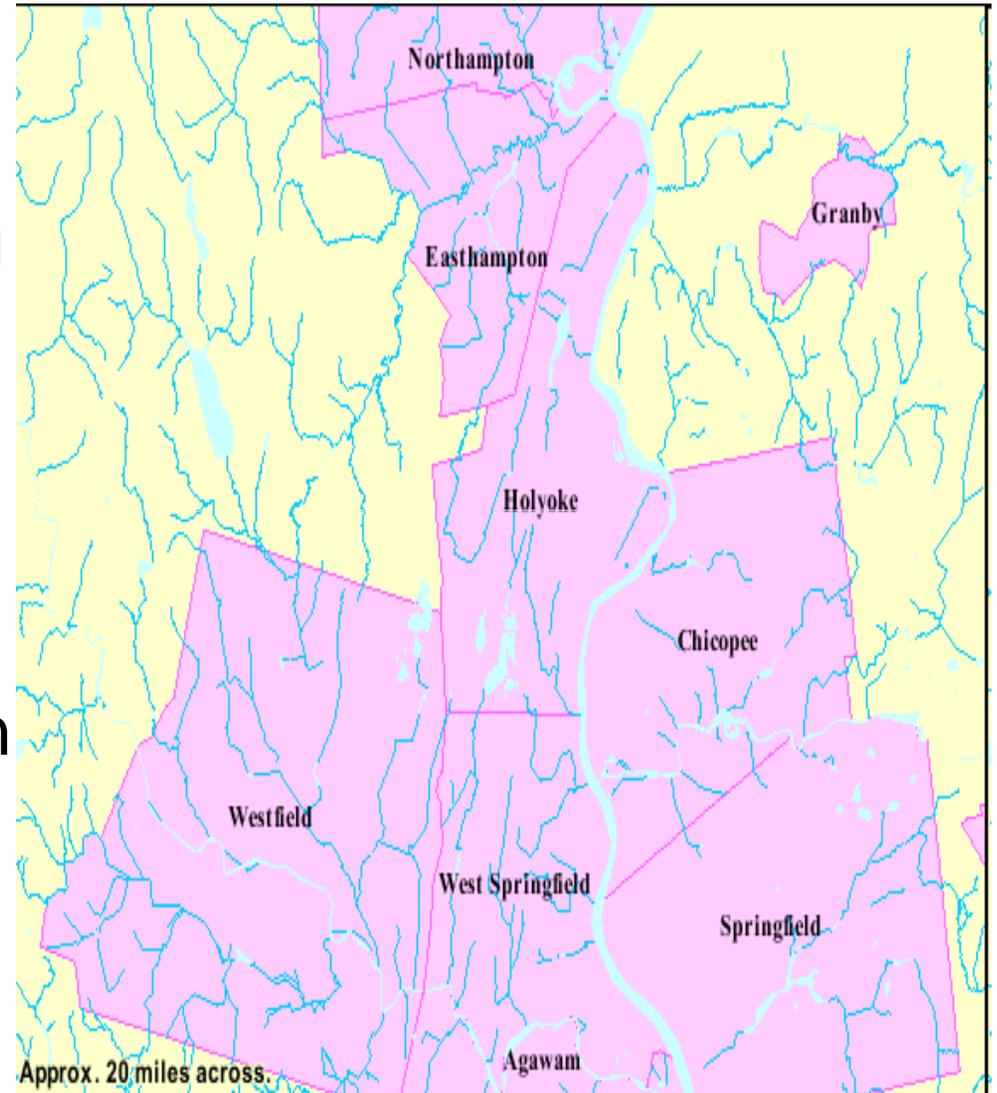
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# Overview of the Presentation

- 1) Describe Holyoke.
  - 2) Summarize the 1995 Voting Rights Act case.
  - 3) Outline political participation and political barriers.
  - 4) Evaluate whose vote matters.
  - 5) Discuss overarching themes of the research.
  - 6) Look at the sociology of place and how it explains this research.
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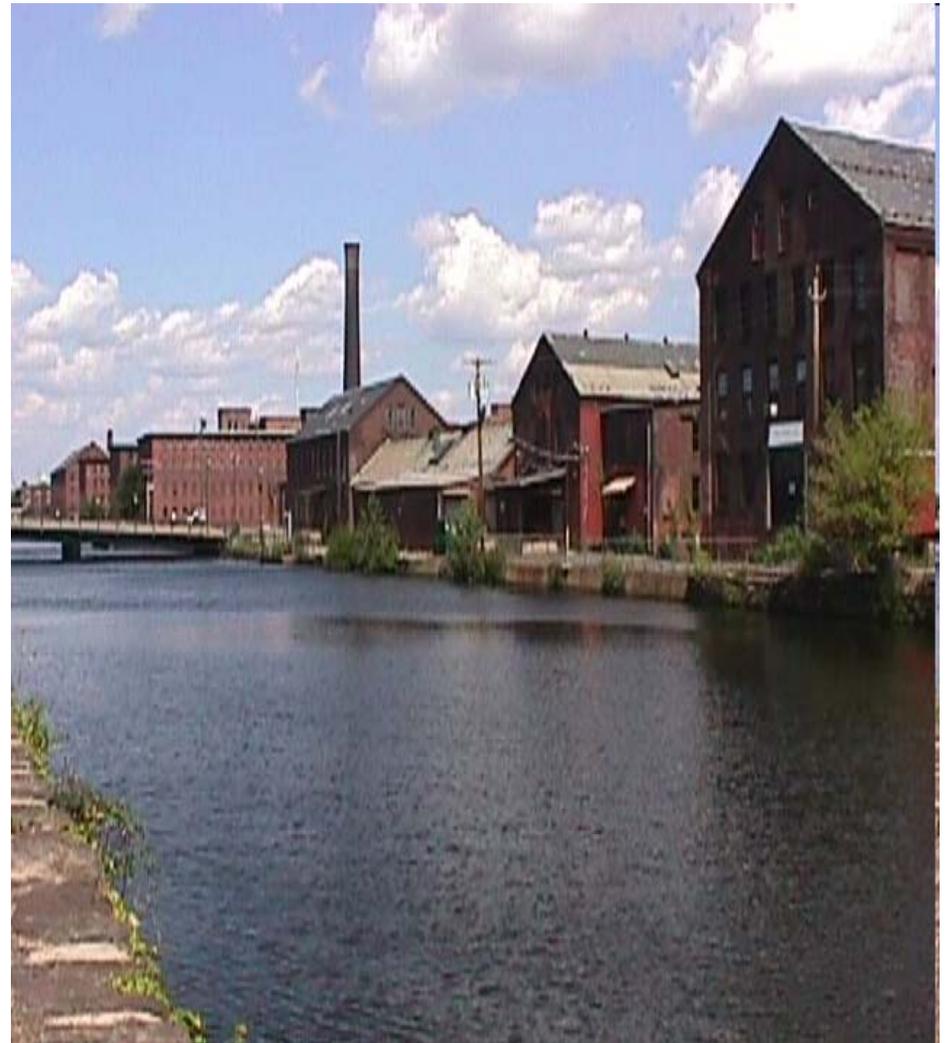
# History of Holyoke, MA

- The 'Good Old Days'
  - ❑ Founded manufacturing city in 1848.
  - ❑ Irish Catholics and French Canadians recruited to work in the factories.
  - ❑ Labor unions resulted in economic stability.
  - ❑ Upward social mobility for whites and Puerto Ricans recruited.



# History of Holyoke, MA cont.

- The Decline
  - Deindustrialization and suburbanization weakened Holyoke's social culture and economic foundation.
  - Land owners saw 'arson for hire' as a viable option.
  - Puerto Ricans serve as a visual reminder of the decline of Holyoke.



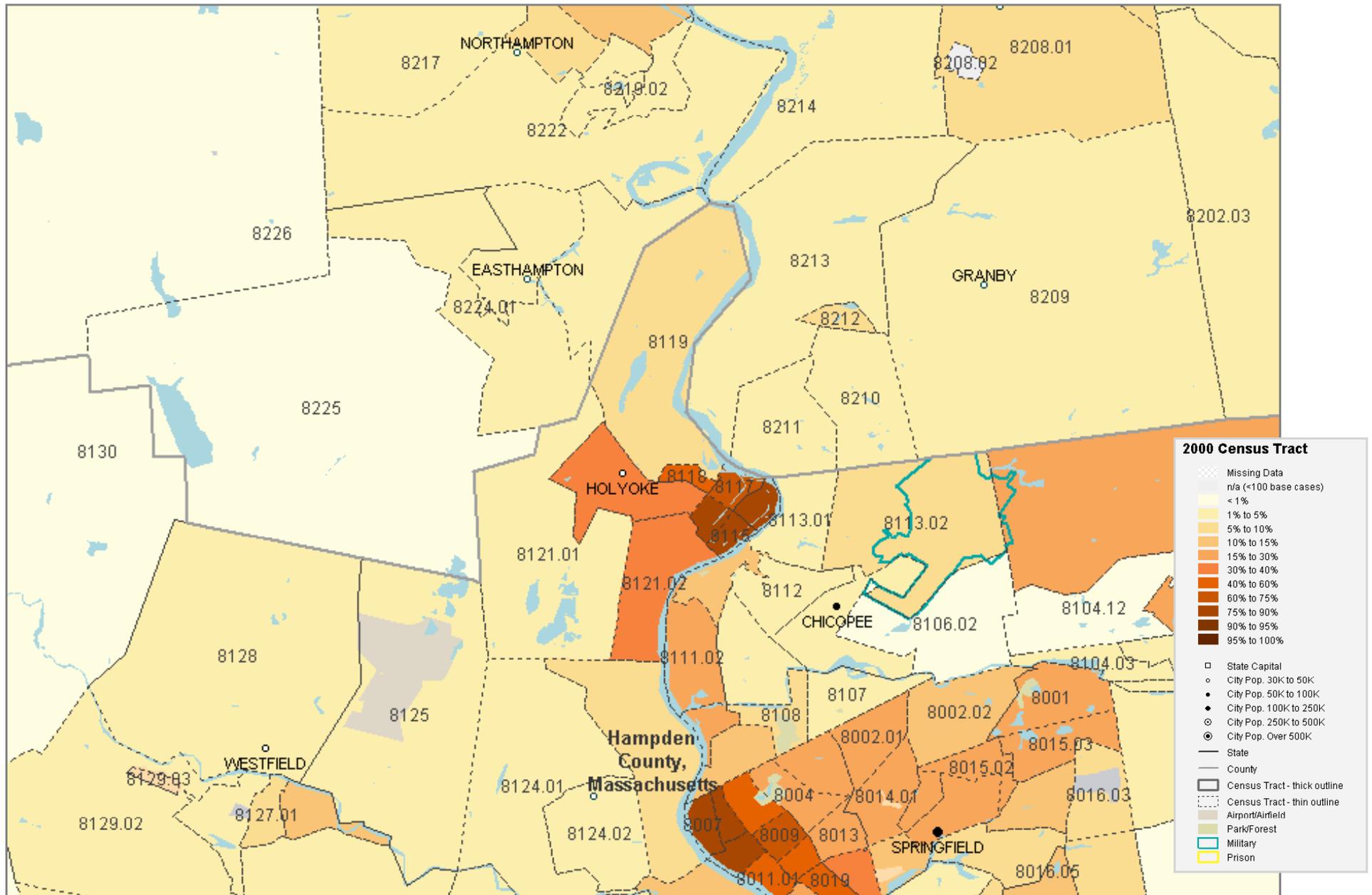
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# Holyoke Demographics:

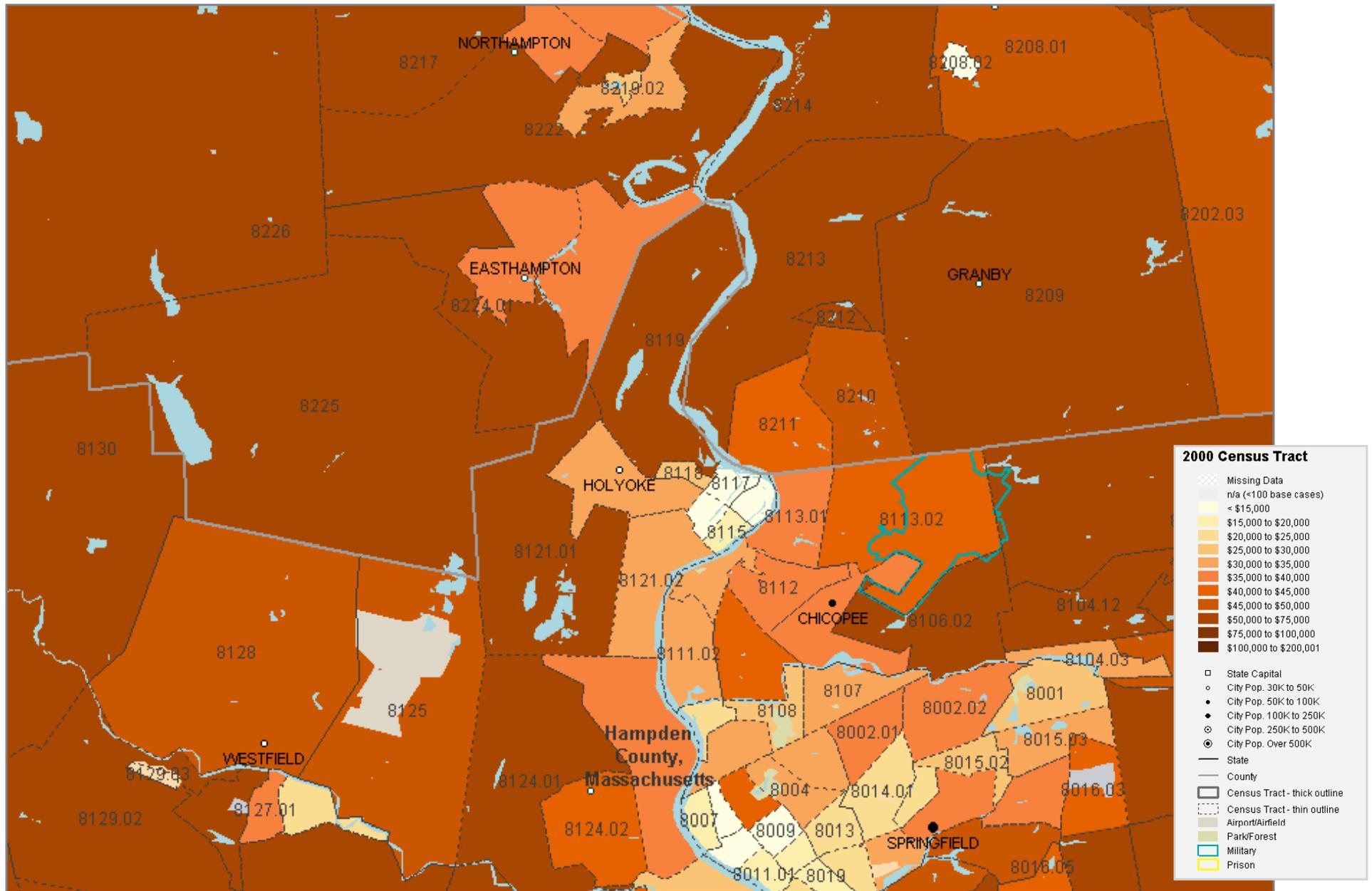
## 2000 Census Data

- Total Population: 39,838 with 41.4% Latino and 57.6% white.
  - Median income is \$30,441.
  - Over 25% of families and 40% of children live in poverty.
  - Almost 70% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunches.
  - Only 41.5% of homes are owner occupied.
  - Over 50% of children under 18 are raised in single-parent households.
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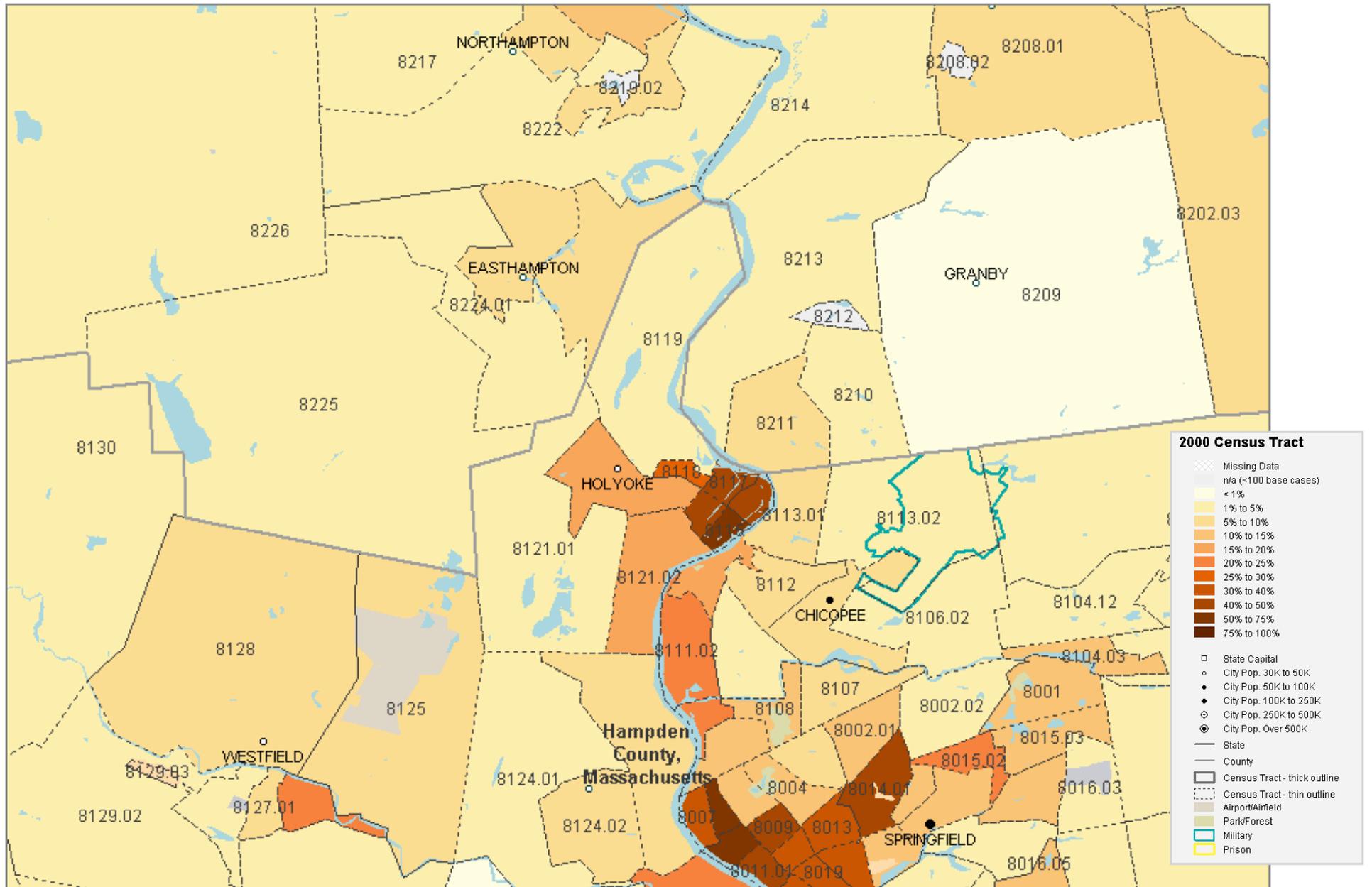
# % Hispanic



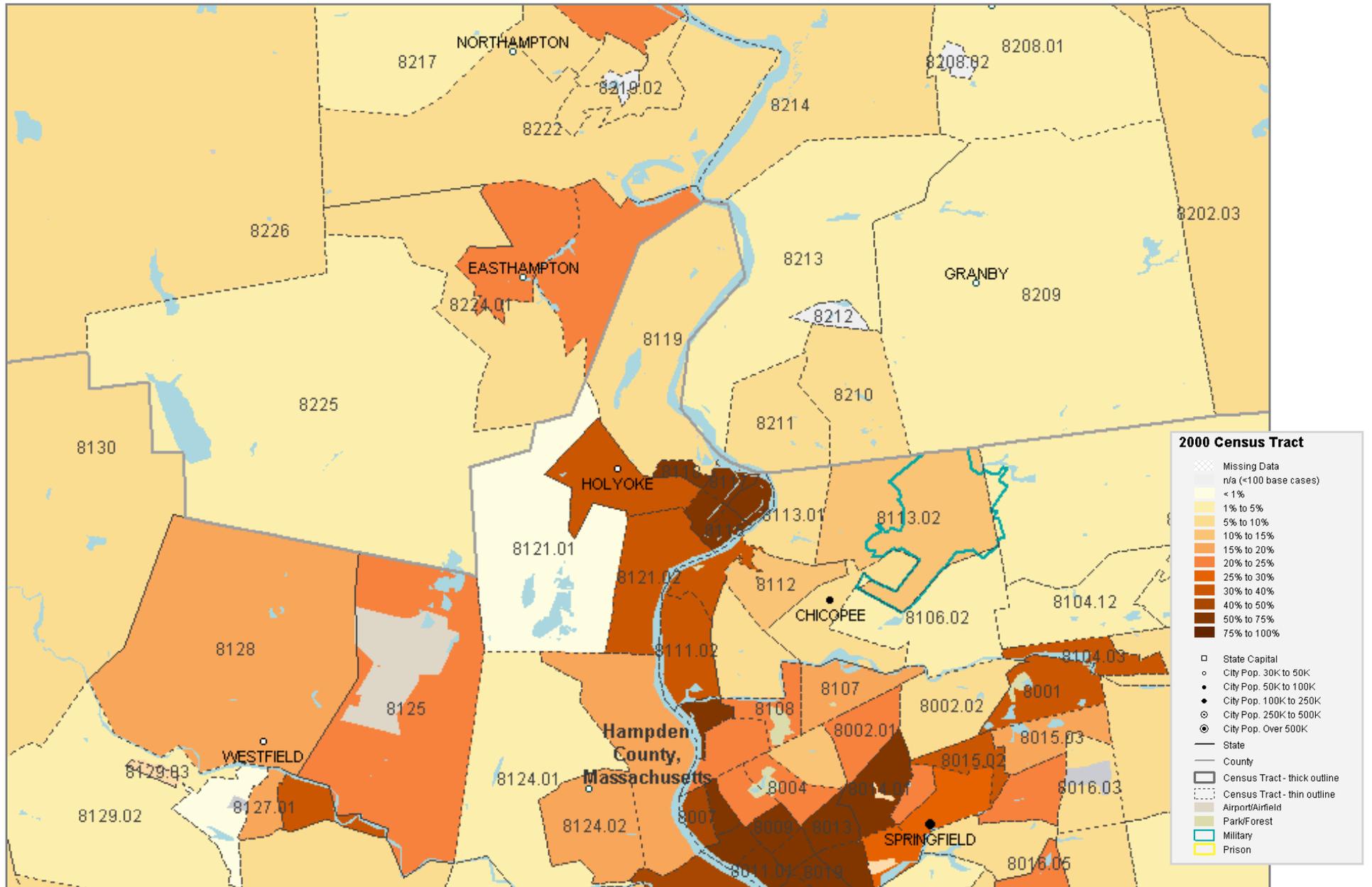
# Median Household Income



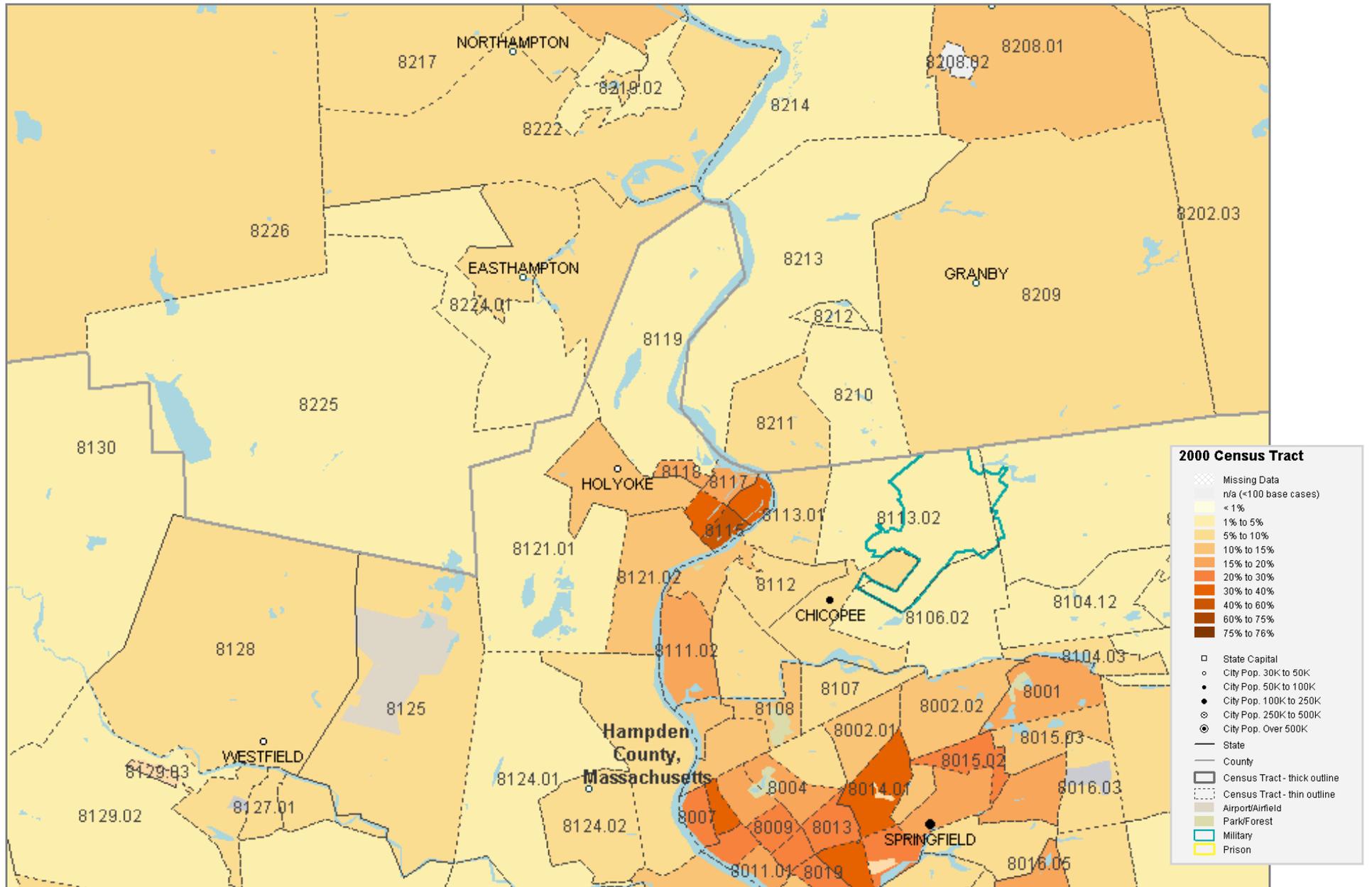
# % Living in Poverty



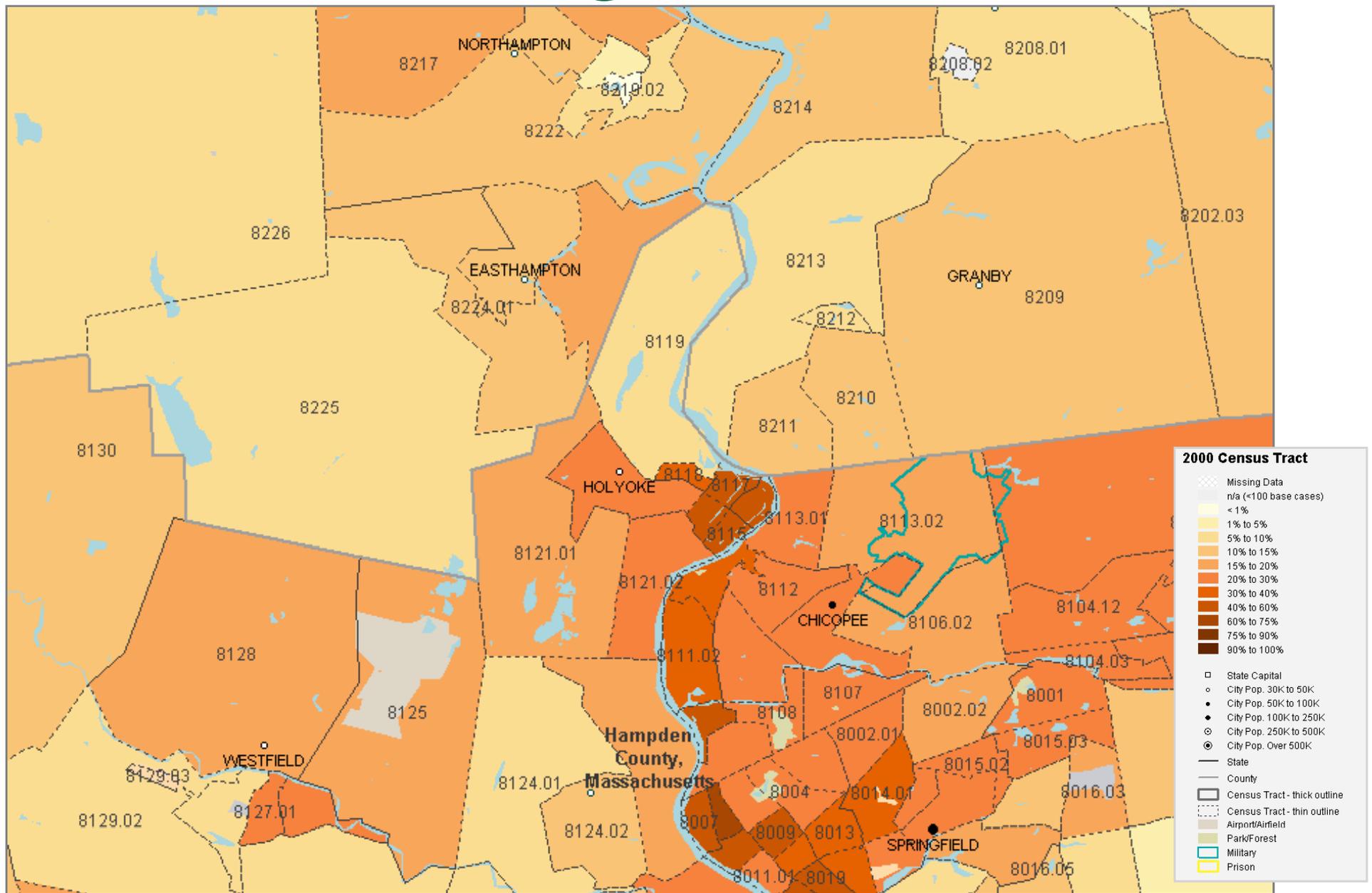
# % Under 18 Living In Poverty



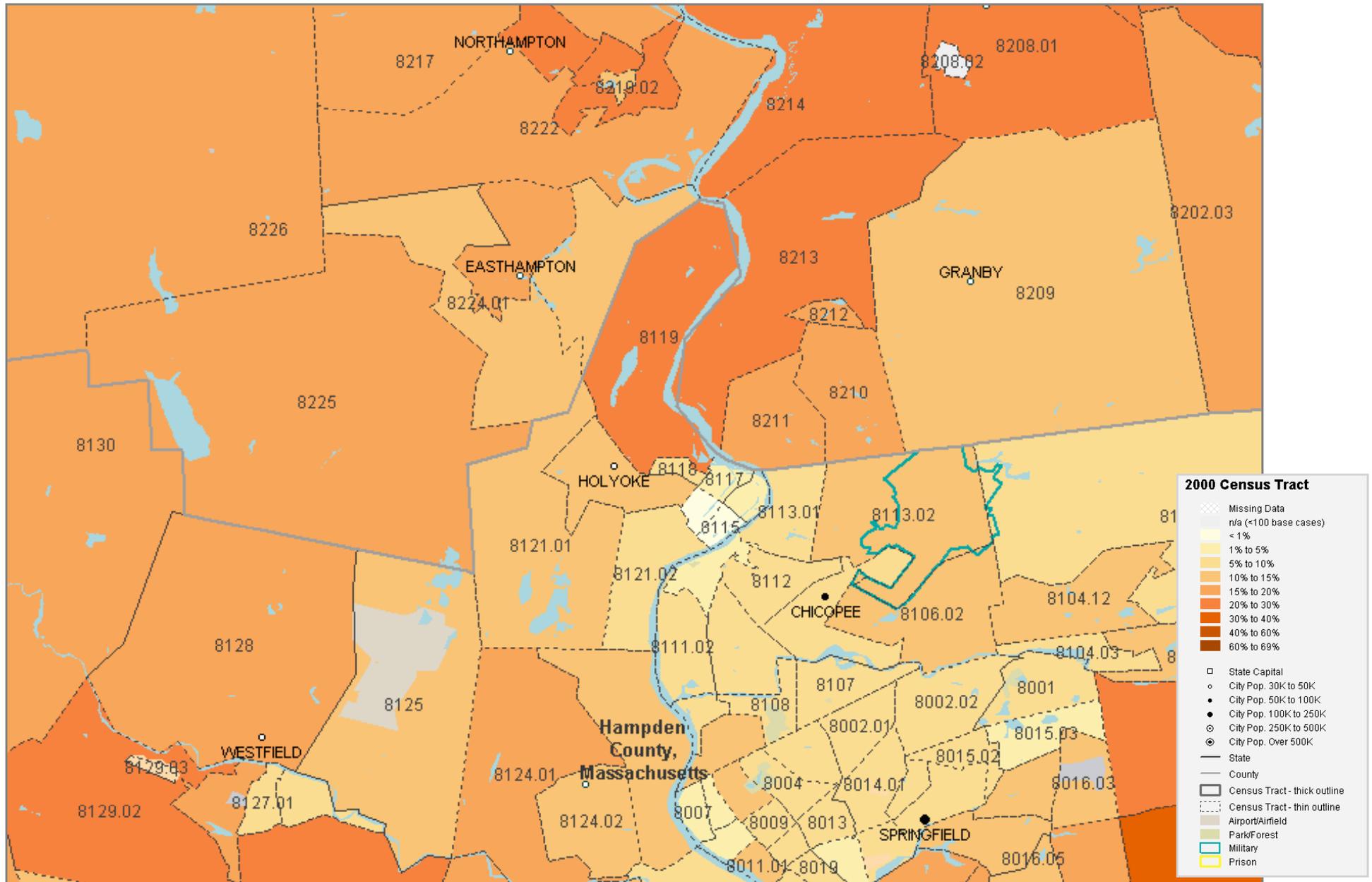
# % Single Parent: Female



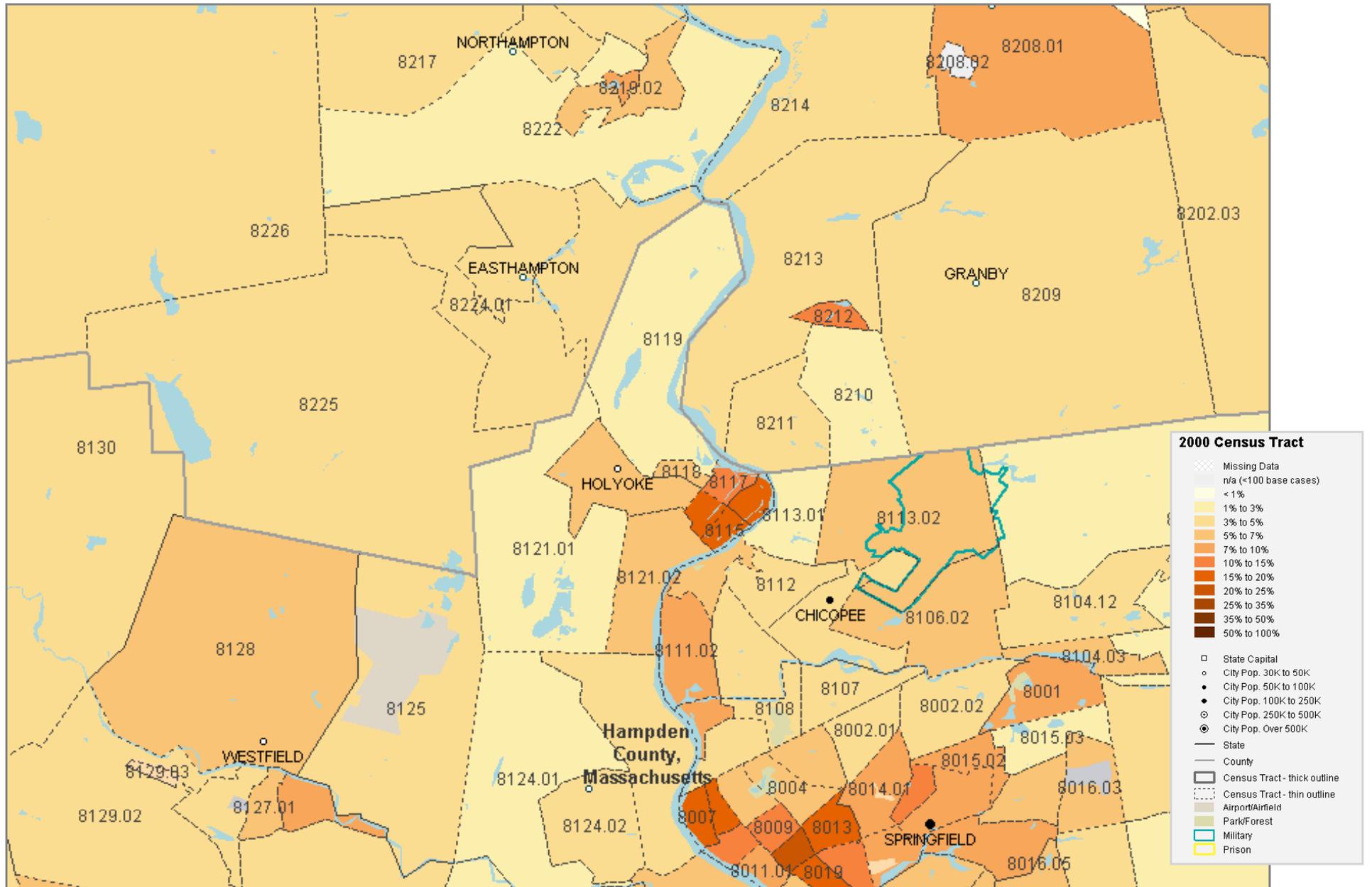
# % Less Than High School



# % Bachelor's Degree

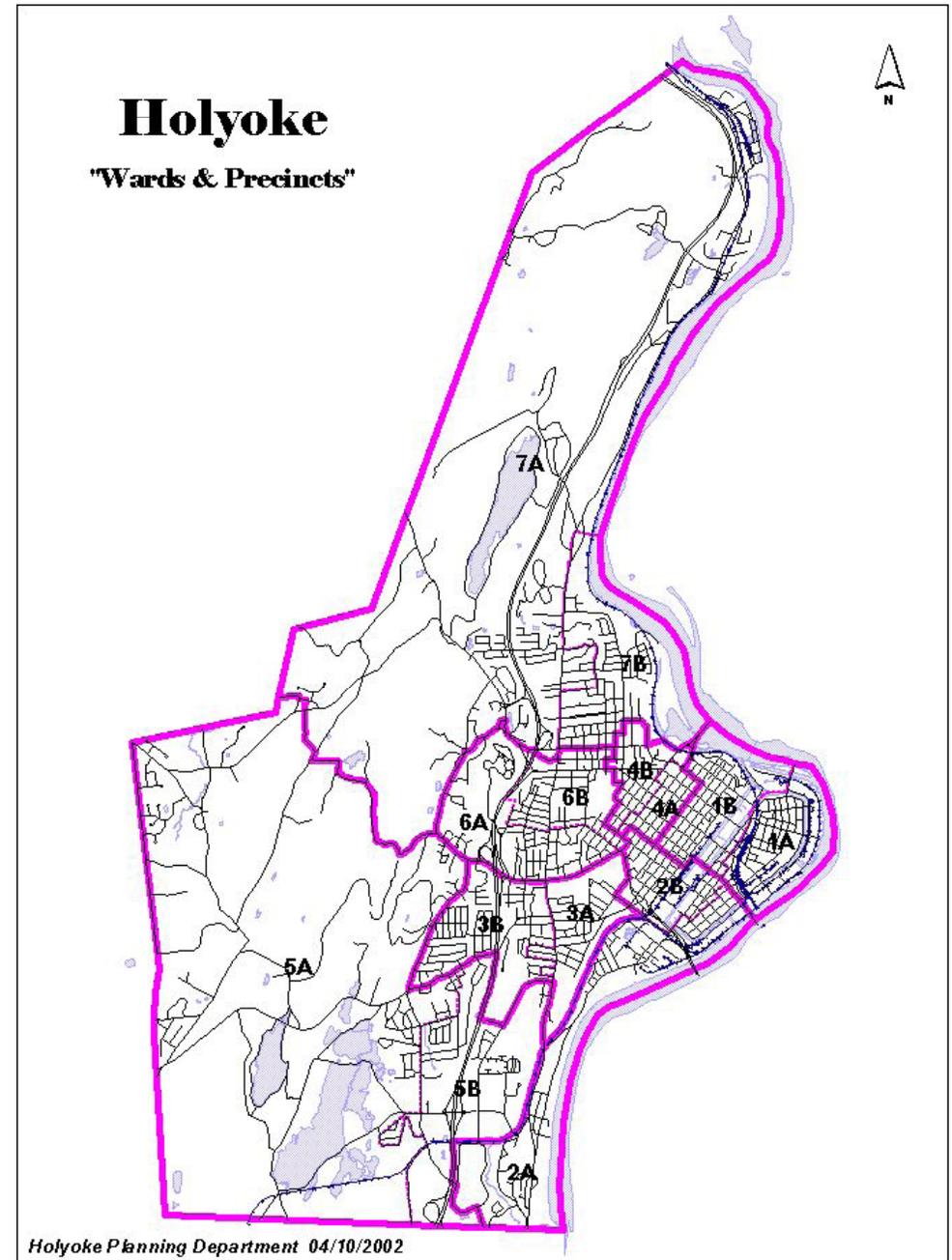


# % Unemployed



# Political Structure

- Holyoke is divided into 7 wards.
- City Council made up of a member from each ward and 8 at-large councilors.
  - Originally designed to weaken the influence of the labor unions in the early 1900s.



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# Voting Rights Act Case:

## The Victory

- Voting Rights Act of 1982 (VRA) prohibits laws to be passed that combined with social and historical conditions would dampen a community's ability to elect an official.
  - In 1992 citizens filed a suit against the City of Holyoke for violating the VRA through the structuring of the city council.
  - Court required to investigate the 'totality of circumstances' surrounding the Latino community and Holyoke's political structure
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# ‘Totality of Circumstances’

- The deciding considerations made by the court.
    - Is there a sizeable Latino community that is concentrated within the city?
    - Are they politically cohesive?
    - Do whites work as a voting bloc against them?
    - Is voting racially polarized?
    - Are there racial overtones to the campaigns?
    - Can Latinos elect an official of their choosing?
    - Is there a response to the concerns of Latinos?
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# Voting Rights Act Case: The Appeal

- Improvements in the 1995 Election
    - No racial overtones.
    - A number of newly appointed Latinos in city government.
    - An increase in the number of Latinos in Ward 4, giving Latinos a majority in wards 1 and 2 and half of ward 4.
  - New Testimony
    - Sanchez speaks about his near loss when running for an at-large seat in the city council.
    - McGiverin testifies to the difficulties of campaigning faced by first-time candidates and the importance of name recognition.
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# Defining Political Participation

- Political participation describes activities taken on by citizens as a way of trying to “influence the structure of the government, the selection of government officials, or the policies of government” in such a way that the system is maintained or subject to change.
    - Formal Politics (ex. voting, running for office, etc.)
    - Informal Politics (ex. rallies, petitioning, etc.)
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## Quote from *Alex Sanchez*

**“...any good candidate can win  
a seat on the council.”**

(Personal interview 03/04/08)

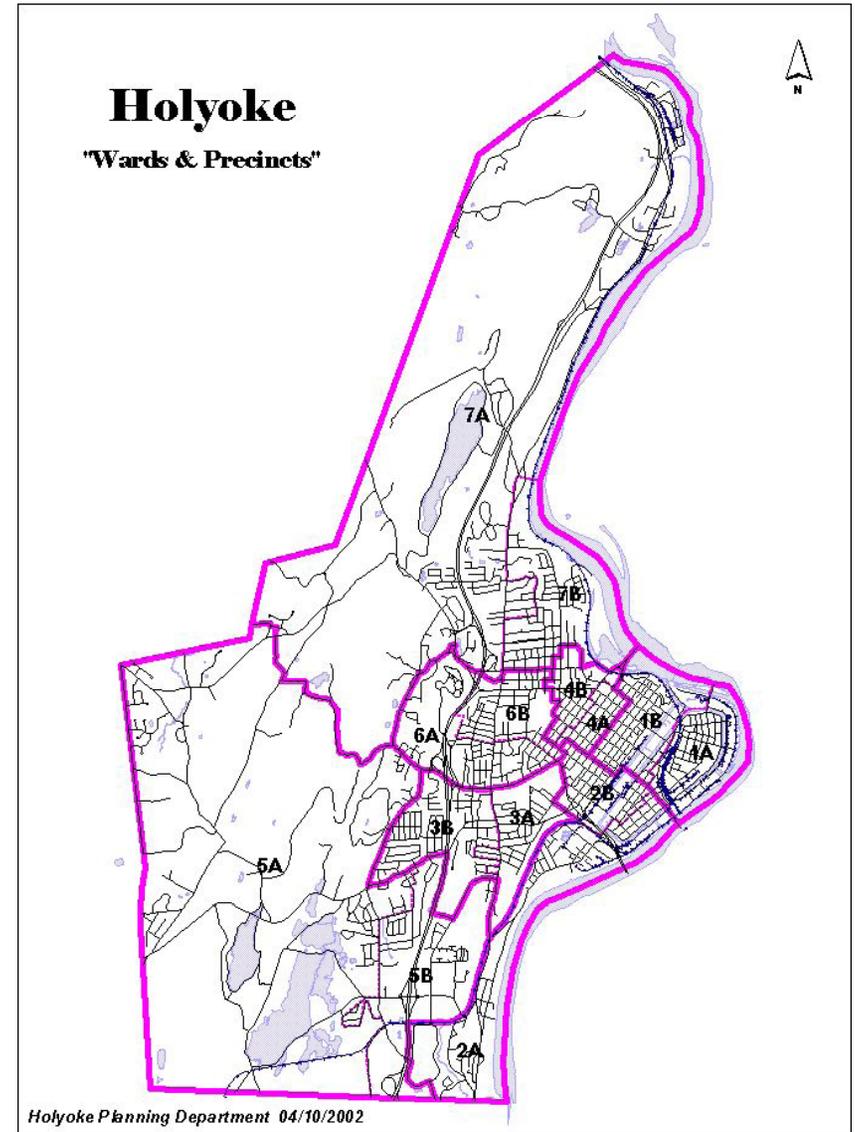
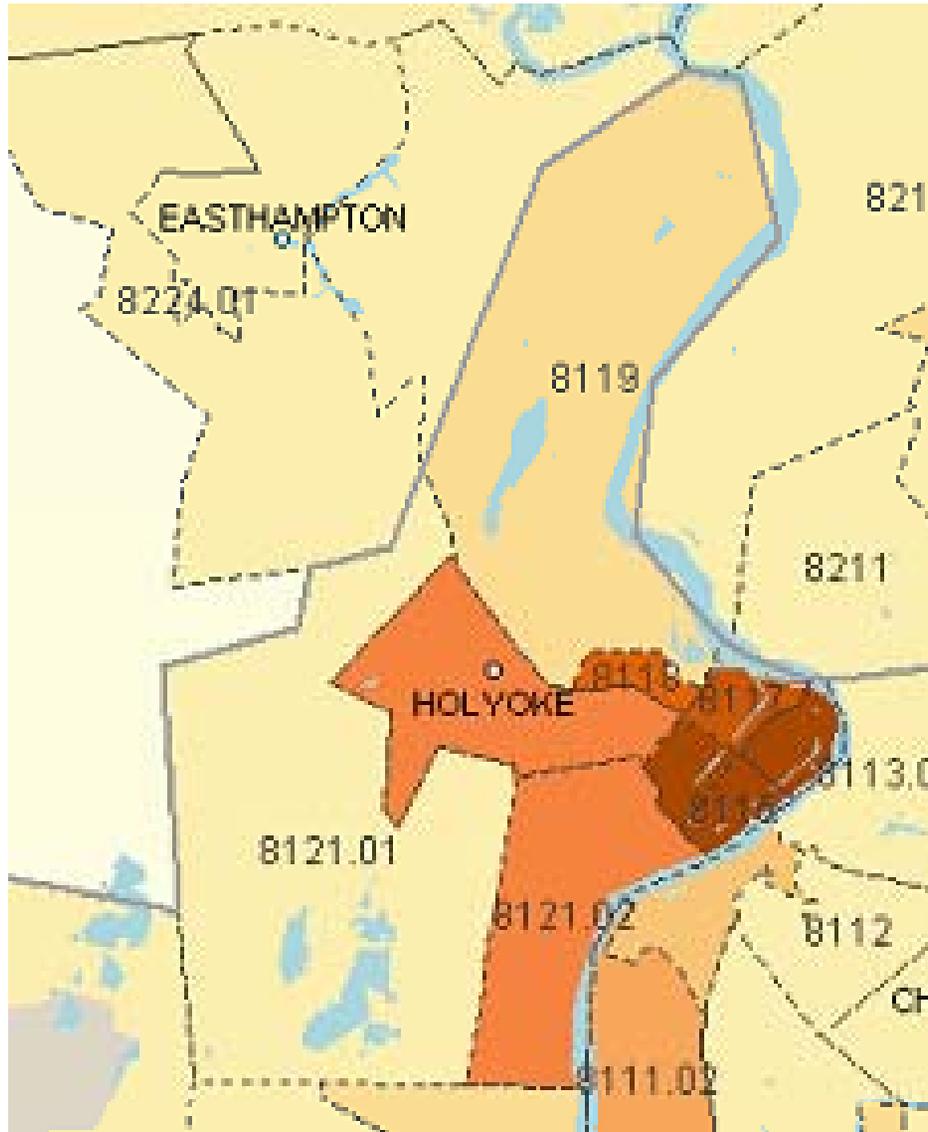
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# Measuring Political Participation

- Measured political participation in Holyoke by the percentage of residents voting in city council elections because:
    - voting is the most popular form of participation.
    - the data is publicly accessible.
    - quantitative data is easier to measure.
  - Voting information is recorded by ward and not by census tract as the demographic data.
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# Census Tract v. Ward



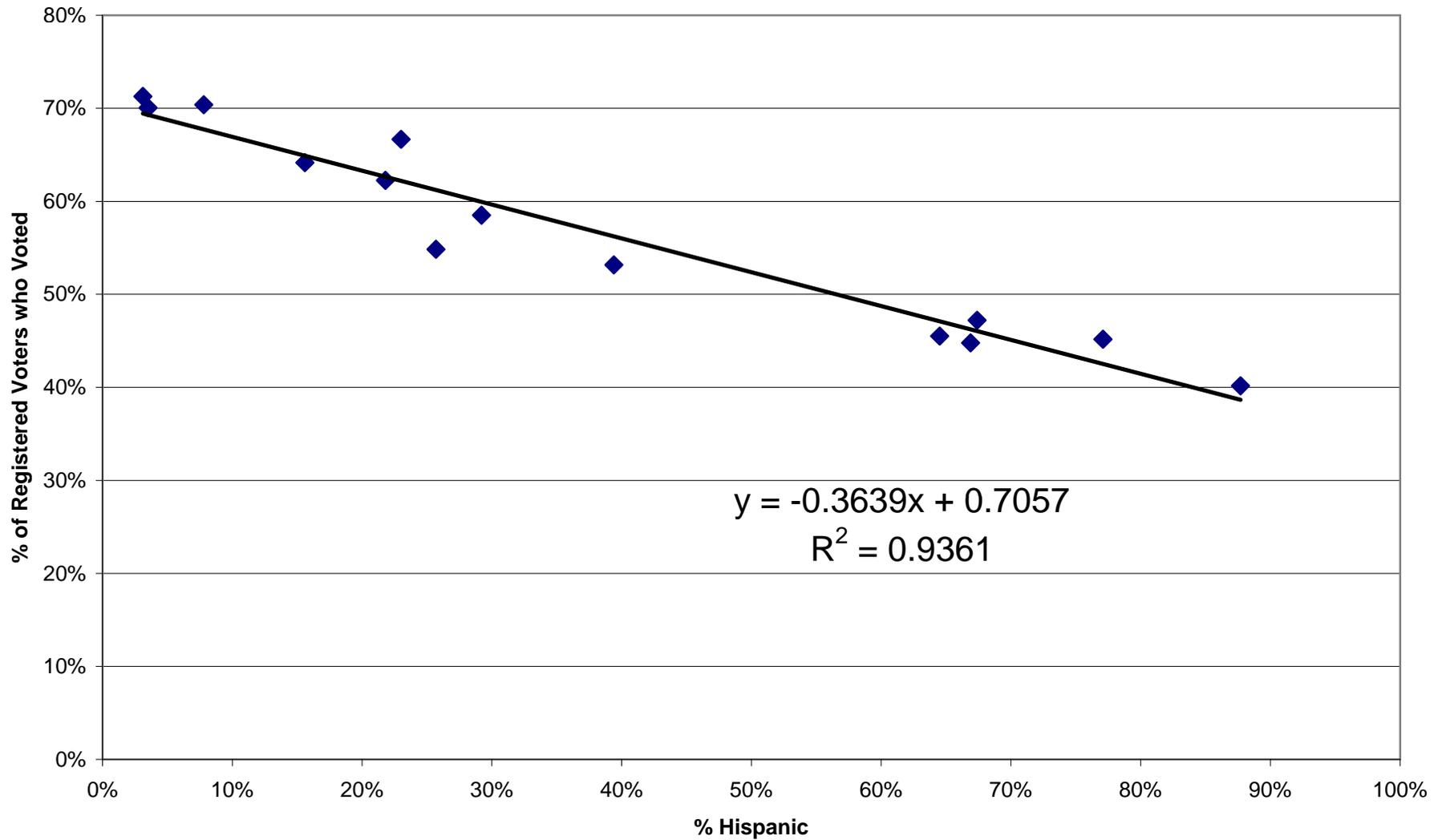
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# Electing City Councilors in Holyoke

- Calculating the Voter Turnout Rate
    - The percentage of the number of registered voters divided by the number of those who actually voted.
  - By Ward
    - Holyoke has 7 wards, each divided into an 'A' and 'B' ward, resulting in 14 wards.
  - Wards with a Latino Majority
    - Wards 1, 2, and 4 have a Latino majority.
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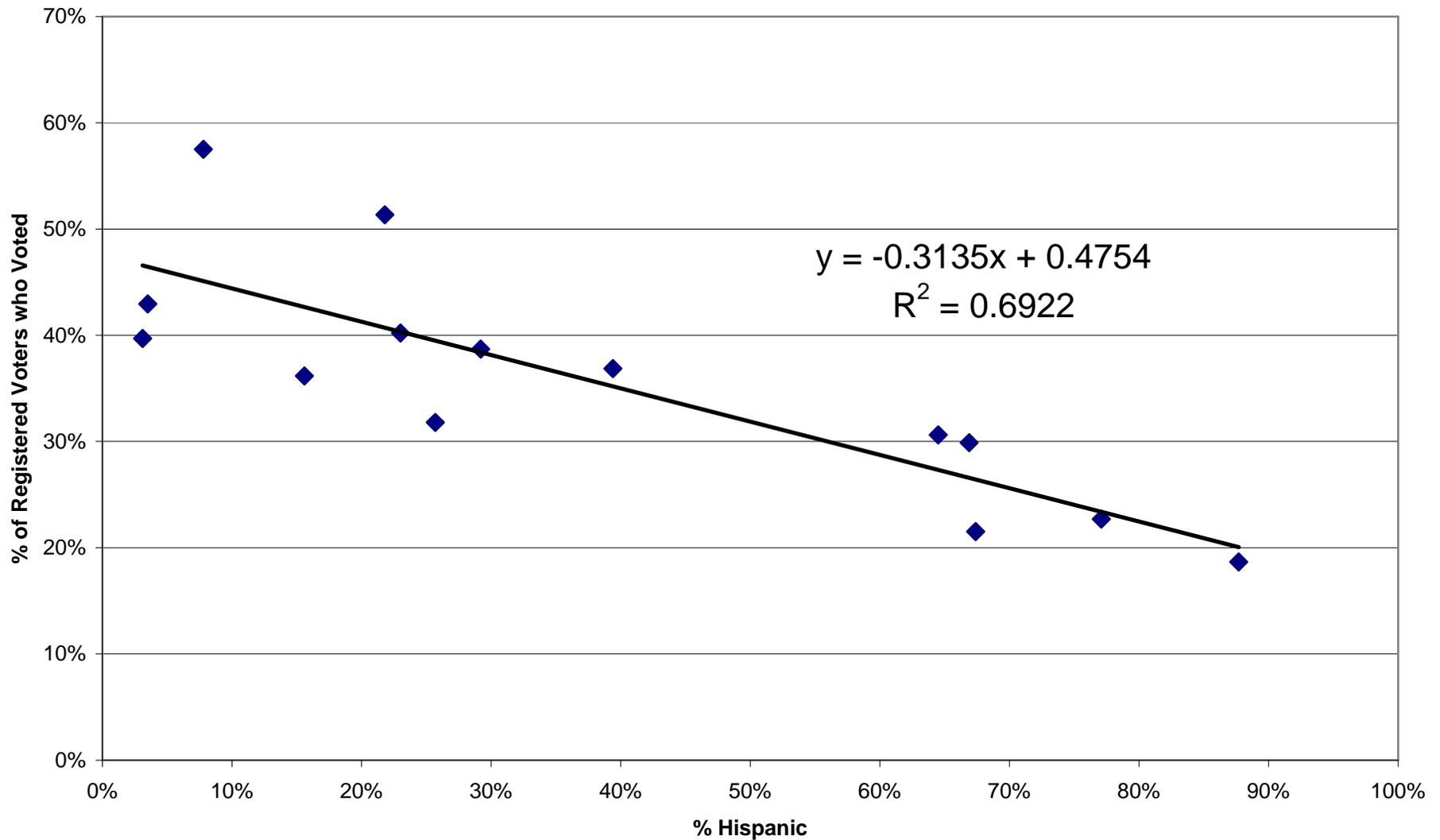
# Correlation Between Race and Voting

1999



# Correlation Between Race and Voting

2001



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# Quote from a Current City Councilor

I think the voter turnouts are low in every ward when it comes to the percentage of people that should vote...and I think it is regardless of which ward you are looking at. I think there is a tremendous amount of apathy.

(Personal Interview 10/15/08)

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# Predicting Political Participation

- Social characteristics and life experiences determine a person's likelihood to participate in politics.
  - The socioeconomic status model hypothesizes that the more social and economic capital a person has, the more they will participate in politics.
  - Political barriers are the characteristics that make it more difficult for someone to participate politically.
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# Political Barriers

- Focusing on six variable in particular:
    - ❑ youthfulness of community
    - ❑ lower levels of formal education
    - ❑ lower incomes
    - ❑ high poverty rates
    - ❑ low homeownership rates
    - ❑ time consumed by care work and navigating public bureaucracies of health, welfare etc.
- as barriers for the Latino community of Holyoke.
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# Political Barriers cont.

## ■ Youthfulness of the Community

- average 24.2 years in LMW vs. 38 years in WMW
  - Young less likely to be married, more mobile and less support and encouragement to vote.

## ■ Low Homeownership Rates

- average 91.5% rent in LMW vs. 44.2% in WMW
    - Homeowners tend to be less mobile and more stable.
      - higher stake in community
      - sense of entitlement
      - larger social network
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# Political Barriers cont.

- Low Educational Attainment
  - A higher level of educational attainment means:
    - knowing more about
      - the political system and how it functions.
      - of the consequences of not participating.
      - bureaucracies.
    - having more pressure to:
      - participate politically.
      - keep up with local events,
      - have an opinion.

	<b>Latino Majority Wards</b>	<b>White Majority Wards</b>
<b>&gt; 9<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	27.6%	6.5%
<b>High School Diploma</b>	28.6%	29.1%
<b>Bachelor's Degree</b>	1.6%	13.7%
<b>Graduate Degree</b>	0.83%	8.3%

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# Political Barriers cont.

- **Low Income and High Poverty Rates**
    - average median income in LMW is \$13,589 v. \$40,977 in WMW
    - average 39% living in/below poverty level in LMW v. 16.8% in WMW
      - Less time and energy to focus on politics.
      - Have less pressure and expectations to participate.
      - Financially invest less in the community.
      - Less likely to be a homeowner.
  - **Time Consumed by Care-work and Navigating Bureaucracies**
    - average female heads of households with children under 18 is 30.8% in LMW v. 9.2% in WMW
    - in LMW 18.4% of households care for a disabled person between 5-20 years old v. 13.2% in WMW
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# Overarching Themes

- What is preventing the Latino community from participating in formal politics?
    - Lack of Resources
      - Finding Information
      - Transportation
      - Language Skills
      - Campaigning Difficulties
        - Time
        - Money
        - Broad Social Network
        - Mentoring
      - Time and Energy
      - SURVIVAL
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# Overarching Themes cont.

- ❑ Little Social Capital

- Social Capital: “the features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively...in their efforts to attain shared goals...” (Conway 189)
  - ❑ Social Network
  - ❑ Knowledge of the System
  - ❑ Middle-Class Ideology

- ❑ Disbelief in the System

- Their issues are not heard.
  - Do not see direct results.
  - Do not personally know the candidates.
  - Do not see a place for them.
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# Quote from a Current Councilor

“If the need arose yes. If people were there that needed translation yes, but to get them there...there never is anyone there that needs translation that we know of...”

(Personal Interview 11/02/08)

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Does their vote  
matter?

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