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Franco-Americans in New England Report

James Myall

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Franco-Americans in New England: Statistics from the American Community Survey

**Prepared for the Franco-American Taskforce
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James Myall

Introduction:

As per the request of the State of Maine Legislative Franco-American Task Force, the following is an analysis of the Franco-American population in New England from data collected by the United States Census Bureau. This report accompanies 'Franco-Americans in Maine', which was also delivered to the Task Force, and is designed to determine whether the trends visible in Maine's Franco-American population are reflected in other New England states (i.e. Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont). Information concerning methodology is repeated below for the sake of completeness.

About the American Community Survey:

The American Community Survey (ACS) is an annual survey conducted by the US Census Bureau to provide a broader snapshot of American life than is possible through the decennial census. The statistics gathered by the ACS are used by Congress and other agencies to determine the needs of Federal, State and local populations and agencies. The ACS is collected from randomly selected populations in every state to provide estimates which reflect American society as a whole.

The data for this report was taken from the ACS using the online tool of the US Census Bureau, American Factfinder, <<http://factfinder2.census.gov>>. This report largely relies on the 2010 5-year survey, which allows analysis of smaller population units than the 1-year survey which is more accurate. Although the ACS surveys all Americans, the website allows users to filter data by several categories, including ancestry and ethnic origin, thus allowing a comprehensive picture of the Franco population. Where possible, I have added US Census Bureau data on Maine, for comparison.

'French' and 'French Canadian':

The US Census Bureau's ACS poses the question "What is this person's ancestry or ethnic origin?" It is important to note that the ACS question has several limitations. The most important is that the ACS does not provide discrete answers from which the respondent can choose. Because the question is open-ended, respondents to the ACS in Maine are divided between those who selected 'French' as their ancestry and those who selected 'French Canadian.' Since respondents who identified as French outnumber those who identified as French Canadian by a ratio of more than 2:1, it can be reasonably surmised that many of the 'French' respondents were, in fact, of French-Canadian origin.

Therefore, this report will include aggregated statistics of those respondents who identified as either French or French Canadian. The data will necessarily include both Franco-Americans and French-Americans (a distinction which the Taskforce may or may not wish to draw), but it is reasonable to assume that the proportion of respondents who are immigrants (or descendents of immigrants) from France is small.

A second issue raised by the use of ACS data is that it depends on respondents to self-identify as Franco-Americans. Therefore, this data can only be said to refer to self-identifying Franco-Americans. On the other hand, one could argue that any survey of an ethnic group would have this limitation.

Additionally, respondents were only permitted to choose a single ancestry or ethnic group in response to this question. So the data necessarily excludes the population of mixed Franco ancestry, most notably those who may identify more strongly as Irish-Americans or Métis (mixed French and American Indian).

For simplicity, I will use the data for the combined 'French' and 'French Canadian' responses, referring to them below as 'Franco-Americans'

Data for non Franco-Americans was calculated by subtracting the numbers for 'French' and 'French Canadian' respondents from the numbers reported for all Mainers.

Highlights:

The ACS divides its data into several demographic, social and economic categories. This report focuses on those categories in which Franco-Americans displayed statistical differences from non-Francos in Maine. In particular these were *educational attainment* and *bilingualism*. For reference purposes, some basic information on Franco-American *identity, age and population distribution* across New England States was also included.

Population

In total, some 2,041,387 New Englanders identify as Franco-American. This represents some 11.5% of the region's population. This makes Franco-Americans the third-largest ethnic group in New England, behind Irish Americans (16.22%) and Italian Americans (11.21%).

However, the situation varies greatly in individual states. States in Southern New England – Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island – contain more than half of New England's Franco-Americans (1,258,237, or 61.6%), but make up relatively small populations *within* each of these states (8.7%, 11.8% and 16.6% respectively).

In Northern New England, by contrast – Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont – Franco-Americans make up the largest ethnic group. This difference between Southern New England, in which Francos form a minority, and Northern New England, where they form a plurality, highlights a difference which is repeated in other categories.

Identity

As in Maine, Franco-Americans in New England describe themselves variously as 'French' or 'French Canadian' (see note on the ACS methodology above). In every state, the responses were divided similarly. Respondents described themselves as 'French' twice as often as they did 'French Canadian'. This reinforces the theory that these respondents could be described with confidence as Franco-Americans and not, for the most part, French-Americans.

Age

In Maine, Franco-Americans tend to be younger than non-Francos (39.1 years, compared to 43.7 years). Maine's trend is repeated in the other Northern New England states, but not in the Southern part of the region. In fact, Franco-Americans in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont are younger than their non-Franco neighbors *and* younger than their compatriots in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Educational Attainment

The task force was particularly concerned that Maine's Franco-Americans were underperforming educationally. Franco-Americans in Maine are less likely to graduate from high school than non-Francos, and less likely to achieve a higher education degree. At the high-school level, this pattern is repeated in New Hampshire and Vermont, but not in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island – in fact, in Southern New England, Franco-Americans are slightly *more likely* to graduate from high school.

Franco-Americans in Maine suffer from the highest rate of failure to graduate high school than many of the groups examined (11.5%; Rhode Island's rate for Franco-Americans is 14%), yet this is probably due to factors affecting all Mainers. The difference between Franco-Americans and non-Francos is in fact smaller in Maine than in New Hampshire and Vermont. Maine's Franco-Americans are 26% more likely to have less than a high school education than their non-Franco peers; in New Hampshire and Vermont, Franco-Americans are 31% and 32% more likely, respectively.

In terms of higher education, Franco-Americans in all states underachieve compared to non-Franco-Americans. Generally, in southern New England, Franco-Americans are between 20% and 28% less likely to achieve a Bachelor's degree or higher than non-Francos. In Northern New England, the difference is greater – between 26% and 46%. As with high school graduation rates, Maine has the second-lowest proportion of Franco-Americans with 4-year degrees (21.1%, the rate for Francos in Vermont is 20%). However, the difference in the proportion of the population holding 4-year degrees is less between Maine's Franco-Americans and non-Francos than in other states, especially compared to the other New England states.

Bilingualism

In this category, Maine stands out as having the highest rate of bilingualism of all New England states. 12.3% of Maine Franco-Americans over the age of five report speaking a language in addition to English, compared to approximately half that rate in other New England states. Some of this difference may be accounted for by the Acadian population in the St John Valley region of Aroostook County, in which French is particularly widely spoken.

Conclusions

In general, this report confirms that many of the findings of *Franco-Americans in Maine* are common to Franco-Americans across New England. That would suggest that the causes of these trends are indeed due to experiences and factors unique to Franco-Americans.

A clear divide emerges between northern New England states in which Franco-Americans make up an ethnic plurality (Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont), and Southern New England, where they are one of many minorities (Connecticut, Massachusetts, and, to a lesser extent, Rhode Island). In the northern New England states, Franco-Americans tend to be younger, and less well-educated, both compared to non-Francos in those states, and in comparison to their compatriots in southern states. These two phenomena may well be linked: the lower median age for Franco-Americans is probably accounted for by a higher birth rate, and lower education levels tend to correlate to higher birth rates.

Although it is not evidenced by this report, it would be a reasonable assumption that Franco-Americans in Southern New England are 'assimilated' (to use the word cautiously) to a greater extent than those in Northern New England. Franco-Americans in these states, forming only one of many minority groups, may have faced less historic discrimination, and have greater educational aspirations and opportunities. However, more research will be needed to support such a conclusion.

Appendix: Charts and Tables

Demographics

Table 1 - Ancestry of New England Population, ACS 2011 5-year survey

Ancestry	Estimate	Proportion
Total	18324351.00	
Irish	2972497.00	16.22%
Italian	2054267.00	11.21%
English	1879705.00	10.26%
French (except Basque)	1423379.00	7.77%
German	1147408.00	6.26%
Polish	785104.00	4.28%
French Canadian	678745.00	3.70%
American	567600.00	3.10%
Portuguese	498497.00	2.72%
Scottish	425288.00	2.32%
Scotch-Irish	282751.00	1.54%
Other	6,115,600	33.4%

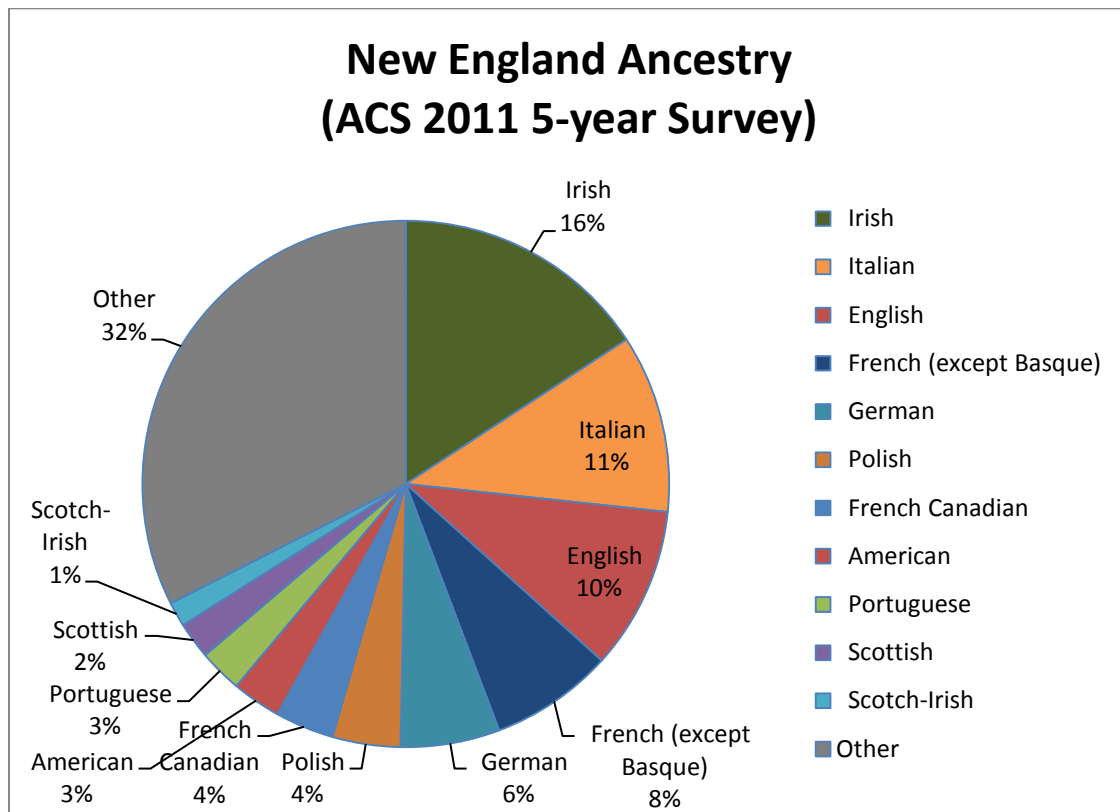


Table 2 - Distribution of Franco-American Populations in New England

State	CT	MA	ME	NH	RI	VT	Total
Franco-Americans	309467	773503	321994	321553	175267	139603	2041387
Total Population	3,577,073	6,557,254	1,327,567	1,316,759	1,052,886	625,960	14457499
Proportion	8.7%	11.8%	24.3%	24.4%	16.6%	22.3%	14.1%

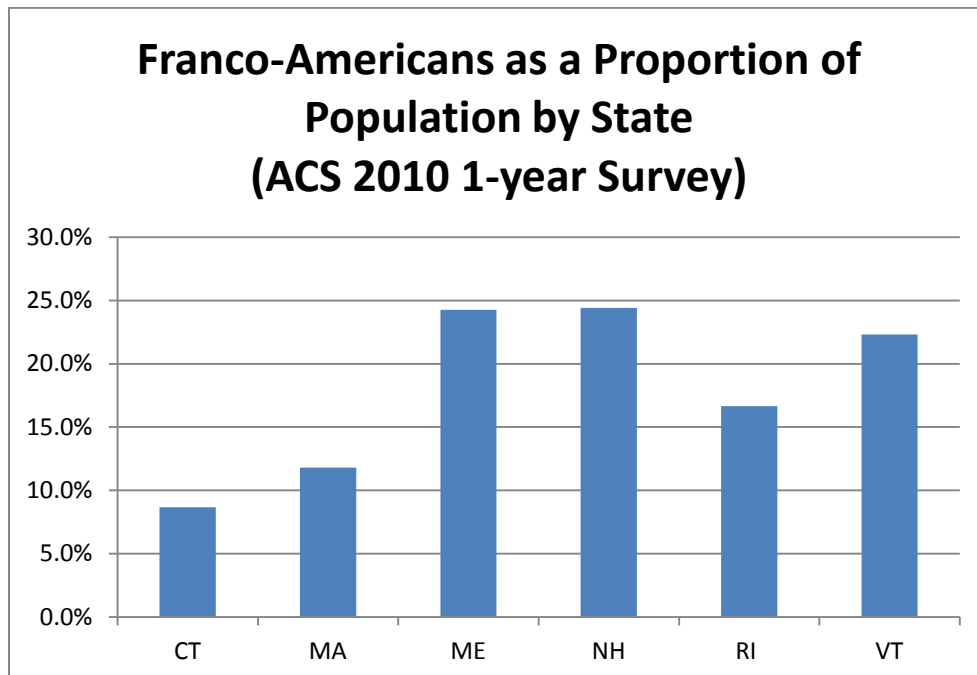
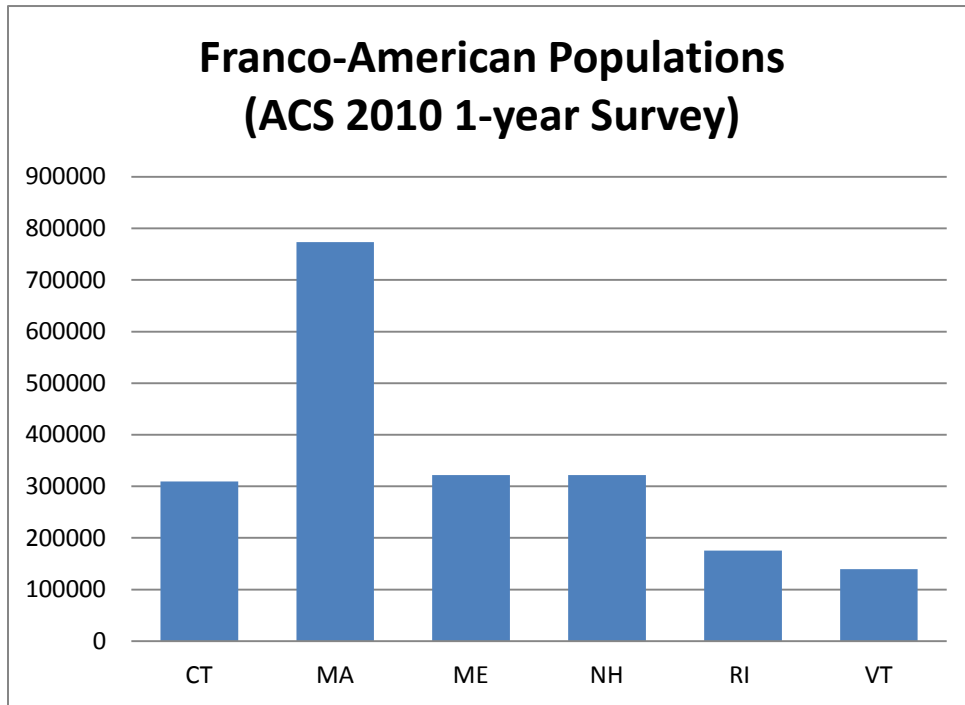


Table 3 - Franco-American Identity in New England

State	French	French-Canadian
CT	209533	99934
MA	516110	257393
ME	220990	101004
NH	210263	111280
RI	131536.00	48809.00
VT	93608.00	52118.00

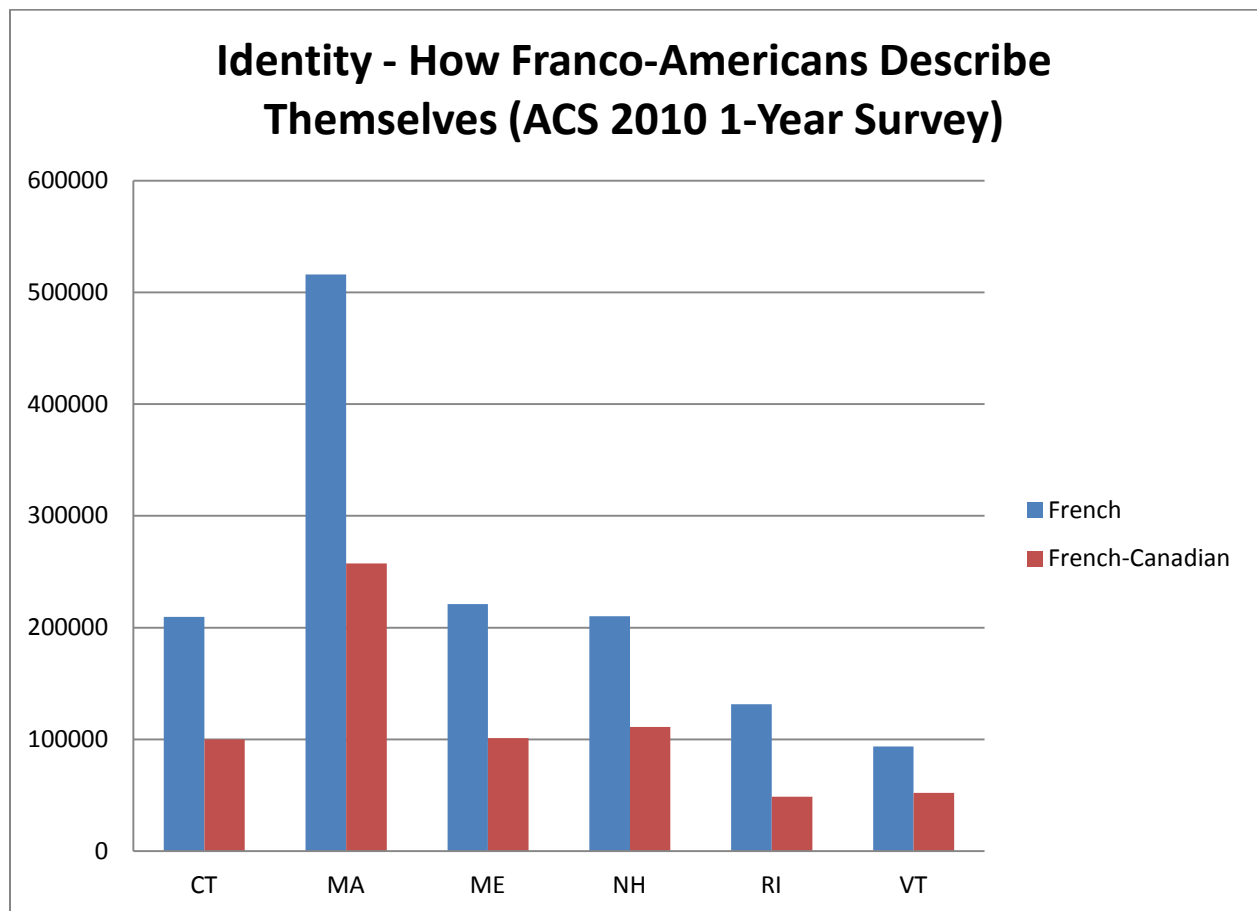
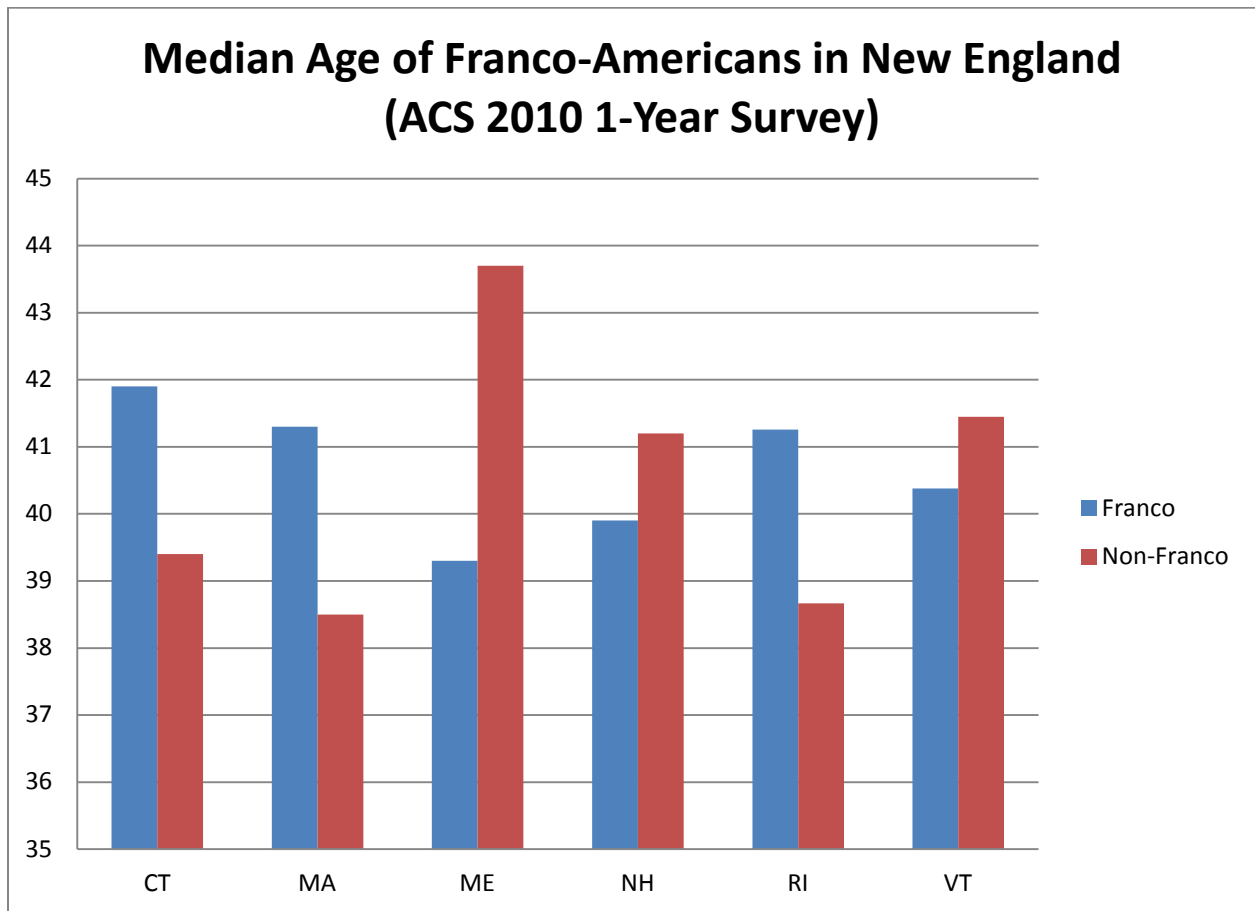


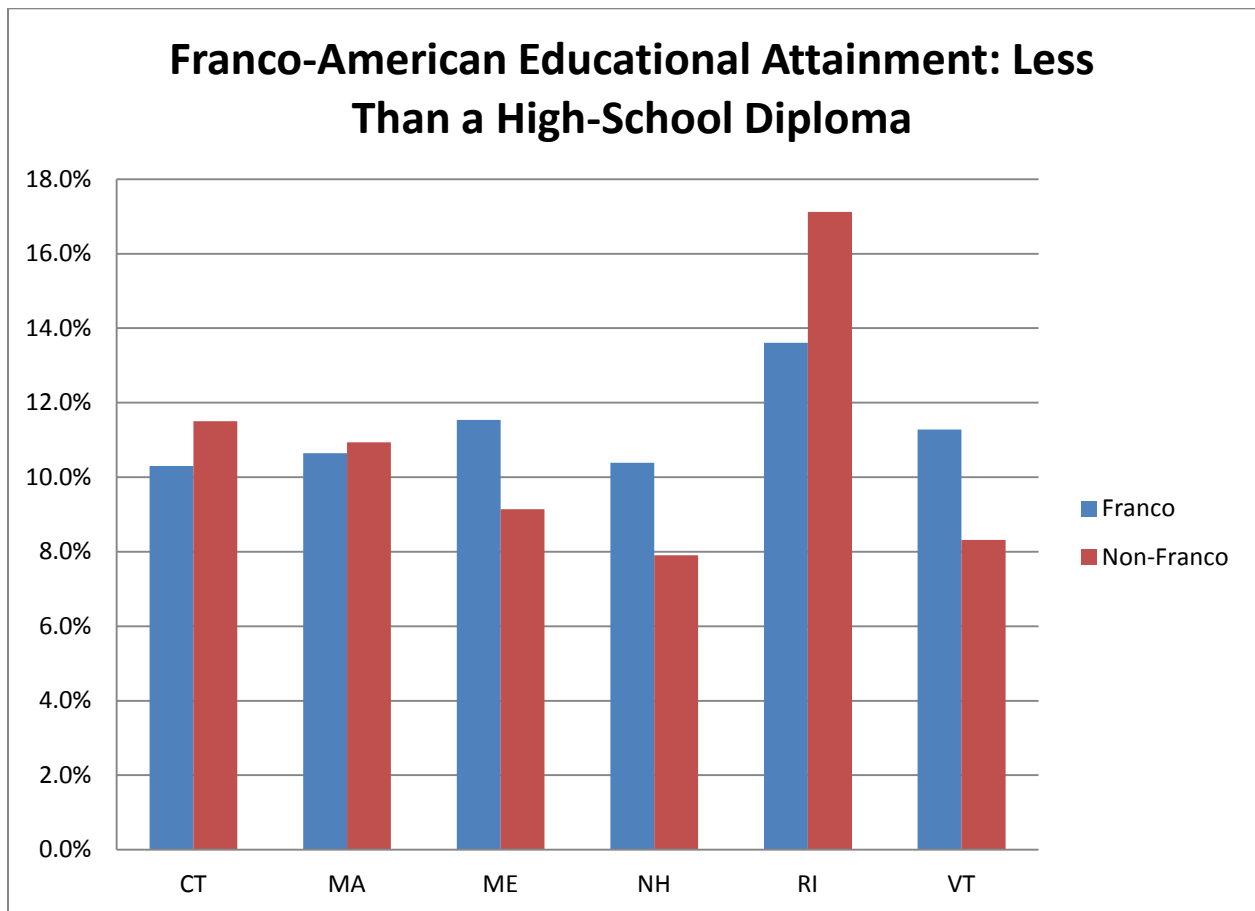
Table 4 - Median Age of Franco-Americans in New England

State	Franco-Americans	Non-Francos
CT	41.9	39.4
MA	41.3	38.5
ME	39.3	43.7
NH	39.9	41.2
RI	41.3	38.7
VT	40.4	41.5



**Table 5 - Education of Franco-Americans in New England:
Proportion with less than a high school diploma**

State	Franco	Non-Franco	Difference
CT	10.3%	11.51%	-10.5%
MA	10.6%	10.93%	-2.7%
ME	11.5%	9.1%	26.4%
NH	10.4%	7.91%	31.5%
RI	14%	17.12%	-18.2%
VT	11%	8.31%	32.4%



**Table 6 - Education of Franco-Americans in New England:
Proportion with a Bachelor's Degree or higher**

State	Franco	Non-Franco	Difference
CT	28.7%	36.15%	-20.6%
MA	29.0%	40.37%	-28.2%
ME	21.1%	28.5%	-26.0%
NH	23.0%	35.87%	-35.9%
RI	25%	31.38%	-20.3%
VT	20%	37.61%	-46.8%

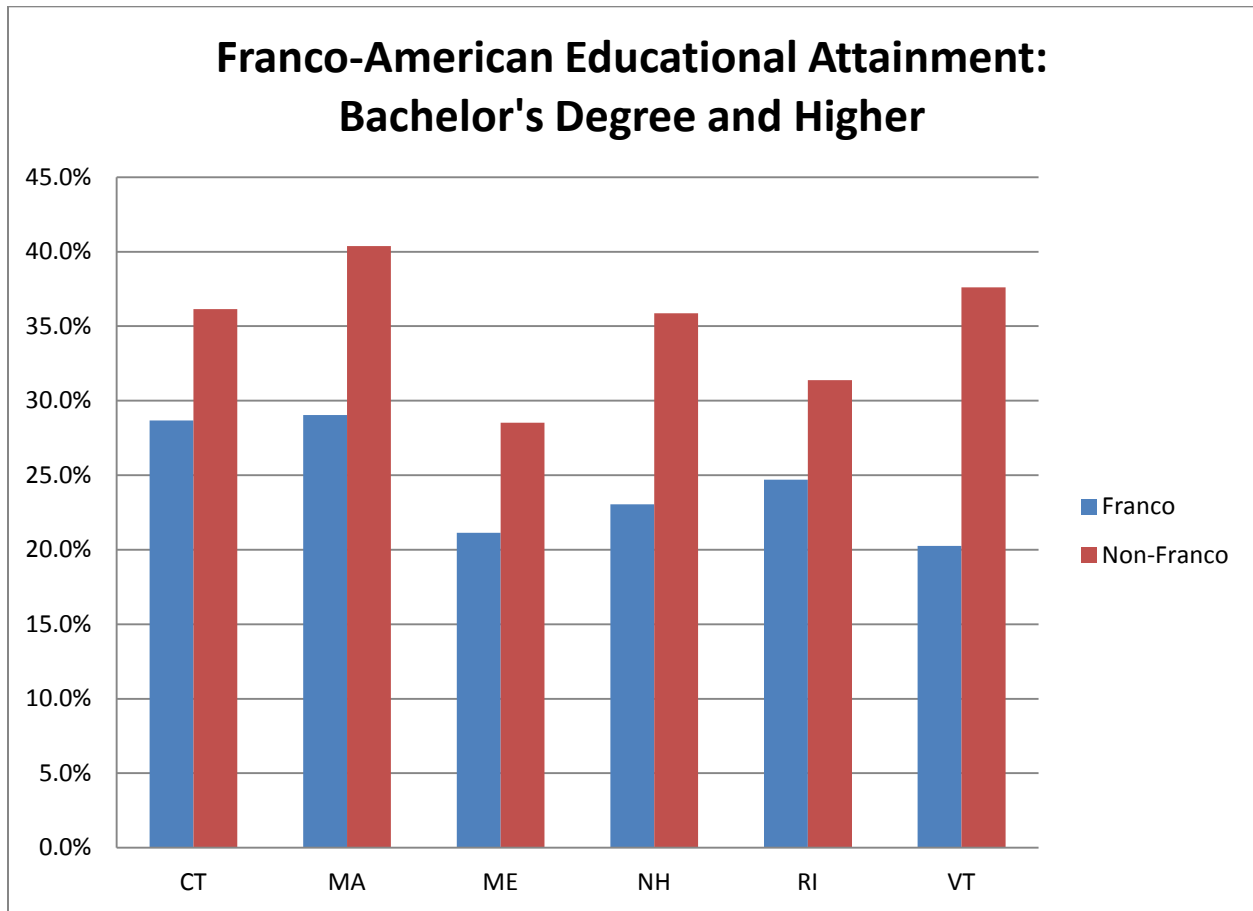


Table 5 - Bilingualism in New England States:
Proportion of Over-5s Speaking a Language Other than English.

State	Franco
CT	7.0%
MA	4.8%
ME	12.3%
NH	6.0%
RI	5.9%
VT	5.1%

