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NEW AMERICANS IN THE GARDEN STATE: The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in New Jersey

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of the economy and electorate in New Jersey. Immigrants make up roughly 20% of the state's population, and more than half of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 15.1% of all registered voters in the state. Moreover, Latinos and Asians wield roughly \$67.3 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$25.7 billion and employed 125,593 people at last count. Immigrant workers contributed at least \$47 billion to the state economy in 2006, representing almost one-quarter (or 23%) of all earnings statewide. At a time of economic recession, New Jersey can ill-afford to alienate such a critical component of its labor force, tax base, and business community.

Immigrants and their children are growing shares of New Jersey's population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of New Jersey's population rose from 12.5% in [1990](#),¹ to 17.5% in [2000](#),² to 19.9% in [2007](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. New Jersey was home to 1,731,202 immigrants in [2007](#),⁴ which is more than the population of [Phoenix, Arizona](#).⁵
- **51.2% of immigrants (or 886,921 people) in New Jersey were naturalized U.S. citizens** in [2007](#)⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **15.1% (or 526,565) of registered voters** in New Jersey were "New Americans"—naturalized citizens or the U.S.-born children of immigrants who were raised during the current era of immigration from Latin America and Asia which began in 1965—according to an analysis of 2006 Census Bureau data by [Rob Paral & Associates](#).⁷

Nearly 1 in 4 New Jerseyans are Latino or Asian.

- The **Latino share of New Jersey's population** grew from 9.6% in [1990](#),⁸ to 13.3% in [2000](#),⁹ to 15.9% (or 1,381,061 people) in [2007](#).¹⁰ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 3.5% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 5.7% in [2000](#),¹² to 7.5% (or 651,444 people) in [2007](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos comprised 9.3% (or 337,000) of New Jersey voters** in the 2008 elections, and **Asians 5.9% (or 215,000)**, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). The number of Latino and Asian voters in New Jersey is equivalent to more than 90% of Barack Obama's margin of victory ([602,215 votes](#)) over John McCain.¹⁴

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Latino and Asian entrepreneurs and consumers add billions of dollars and tens-of-thousands of jobs to New Jersey's economy.

- **The 2008 purchasing power of New Jersey's Latinos totaled \$35.6 billion**—an increase of 294.2% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$31.7 billion**—an increase of 460.2% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁵
- New Jersey's 51,957 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$18.5 billion and employed 85,171 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁶ The state's 49,841 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$7.2 billion and employed 40,422 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁷

Immigrants are integral to New Jersey's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **25.3% of the state's workforce** in [2007](#) (or 1,146,425 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁸
- **Immigrant workers contributed at least \$47 billion** to New Jersey's Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P.) in 2006, representing almost one-quarter (23%) of all earnings statewide, according to a [study](#) at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.¹⁹
- **More than 40% of the state's scientists and engineers** with advanced degrees were foreign-born in 2006, according to the same [study](#).²⁰
- Immigration to New Jersey **raised the wages of native-born workers without a high-school diploma by 3.0%** between 1990 and 2000, according to the same [study](#).²¹
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **9.2% of the state's workforce** (or 425,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²²
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from New Jersey, **the state would lose \$24.2 billion in expenditures, \$10.7 billion in economic output, and approximately 103,898 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²³

Naturalized Citizens Excel Educationally.

- In New Jersey, **39% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 31.7% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 16.6% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 25.5% of noncitizens.²⁴
- The number of immigrants in New Jersey with a college degree **increased by 42.8%** between 2000 and 2007, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁵

- **35.7% of New Jersey’s foreign-born population** age 25 and older **had a bachelor’s or higher degree** in [2007](#), compared to 33.2% of native-born persons age 25 and older.²⁶
- In New Jersey, **83.2% of all children** between the ages of 5 and 17 in families that spoke a language other than English at home also spoke English “very well” as of [2007](#).²⁷

Endnotes

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Foreign-Born Population: 2000](#), December 2003.

² Ibid.

³ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Rob Paral and Associates, [The New American Electorate: The Growing Political Power of Immigrants and Their Children](#) (Washington, DC: Immigration Policy Center, American Immigration Law Foundation, October 2008).

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Hispanic Population: 2000](#), May 2001.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Asian Population: 2000](#), February 2002.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁴ U.S. Electoral College, [2008 Presidential Election: Popular Vote Totals](#).

¹⁵ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2008](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2008), p. 64.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, [Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, [Asian-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

¹⁸ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁹ Ira N. Gang and Anne Morrison Piehl, [Destination, New Jersey: How Immigrants Benefit the State Economy](#) (New Brunswick, NJ: Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, December 2008), p. 17.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 11.

²¹ Ibid, p. 16.

²² Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, [A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009), p. 30.

²³ The Perryman Group, [An Essential Resource: An Analysis of the Economic Impact of Undocumented Workers on Business Activity in the US with Estimated Effects by State and by Industry](#) (Waco, TX: April 2008), p. 69.

²⁴ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [New Jersey: Language & Education](#).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.