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**NEW AMERICANS IN THE MOUNTAIN STATE:
The Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in West Virginia**

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of West Virginia's population and economy. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up 1.3% of the state's population, and nearly half of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. Immigrants not only contribute to the state's economy as workers, but also account for millions of dollars in tax revenue and consumer purchasing power. Moreover, Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) wield \$1.1 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$622.4 million and employed more than 5,500 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, West Virginia would be ill-advised to alienate a significant component of its tax base and business community.

Immigrants and their children are growing shares of West Virginia's population.

- **The foreign-born share** of West Virginia's population rose from 0.9% in [1990](#),¹ to 1.1% in [2000](#),² to 1.3% in [2008](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. West Virginia was home to 23,273 immigrants in [2008](#).⁴
- **45.6% of immigrants (or 10,618 people) in West Virginia were naturalized U.S. citizens** in [2008](#)⁵—meaning that they are eligible to vote.

Nearly 30,000 West Virginians are Latino or Asian.

- The **Latino share of West Virginia's population** grew from 0.5% in [1990](#),⁶ to 0.7% in [2000](#),⁷ to 1.1% (or 19,959 people) in [2008](#).⁸ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 0.4% in [1990](#)⁹ to 0.5% (or 9,072 people) in [2008](#),¹⁰ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- In West Virginia, **nearly nine-in-ten (or 89% of) children in immigrant families were U.S. citizens** in [2007](#),¹¹ according to the Center for Social and Demographic Analysis at the University of Albany.

Latino and Asian entrepreneurs and consumers add hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of jobs to West Virginia's economy.

- **The 2009 purchasing power of Latinos in West Virginia totaled \$549.6 million**—an increase of 491.2% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$567.7 million**—an increase of 183% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹²

- West Virginia's 648 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$187.3 million and employed 1,395 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹³ The state's 1,234 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$435.1 million and employed 4,329 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁴

Immigrants contribute to West Virginia's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **1.6% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 13,647 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁵

Unauthorized immigrants contribute to West Virginia's economy as workers and taxpayers.

- Unauthorized immigrants comprised less than **0.5% of the state's workforce** (or under 10,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.¹⁶
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from West Virginia, **the state would lose \$26.6 million in economic activity, \$11.8 million in gross state product, and approximately 180 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).¹⁷

Immigrants contribute to West Virginia's economy as students.

- West Virginia's 2,732 **foreign students contributed \$59.7 million** to the state's economy in tuition, fees, and living expenses for the 2008-2009 academic year, according to [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#).¹⁸

Naturalized citizens advance educationally.

- In West Virginia, **44.0% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**. At the same time, only 11.3% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 20.6% of noncitizens.¹⁹
- The number of immigrants in West Virginia with a college degree **increased by 19.0%** between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁰
- In [2008](#), **44.6% of West Virginia's foreign-born population** age 25 and older had a bachelor's or higher degree, **compared to 16.7% of native-born persons** above age 25.
- In West Virginia, **69.7% 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 [2008](#).²¹

Endnotes

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau, [*The Foreign-Born Population: 2000*](#), December 2003.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, [*The Hispanic Population: 2000*](#), May 2001.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, [*The Asian Population: 2000*](#), February 2002.
- ¹⁰ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹¹ Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, [*Children in Immigrant Families in West Virginia*](#) (Albany, NY: University of Albany, SUNY, September 2009).
- ¹² Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [*The Multicultural Economy 2008*](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2008), p. 64.
- ¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, [*Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002*](#), August 2006.
- ¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, [*Asian-Owned Firms: 2002*](#), August 2006.
- ¹⁵ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹⁶ Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, [*A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States*](#) (Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts, April 14, 2009), p. 30.
- ¹⁷ 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.
- ¹⁸ NAFSA: Association of International Educators, [*The Economic Benefits of International Education to the United States for the 2008-2009 Academic Year: A Statistical Analysis*](#) (Washington, DC: NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2009).
- ¹⁹ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [*West Virginia: Language & Education*](#).
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid.