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NEW AMERICANS IN THE PEACH STATE: The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in Georgia

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of the economy and electorate in Georgia. Nearly one-in-ten Georgians are immigrants (foreign-born), and more than a third of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. “New Americans”—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 3.7% of registered voters in the state. Immigrants are not only integral to the state’s economy as workers, but also account for billions of dollars in tax revenue and consumer purchasing power. Moreover, Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) wield \$24.2 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$12.2 billion and employed nearly 75,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Georgia 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 Georgia’s population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Georgia’s population rose from 2.7% in [1990](#),¹ to 7.1% in [2000](#),² to 9.4% in [2008](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Georgia was home to 910,473 immigrants in [2008](#),⁴ which is more than the entire population of [San Francisco, California](#).⁵
- **34.5% of immigrants (or 314,426 people) in Georgia were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **3.7% (or 146,139) of all registered voters** in Georgia 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

More than one-in-ten Georgians are Latino or Asian.

- The **Latino share of Georgia’s population** grew from 1.7% in [1990](#),⁸ to 5.3% in [2000](#),⁹ to 7.9% (or 765,174 people) in [2008](#).¹⁰ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 1.1% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 2.1% in [2000](#),¹² to 2.9% (or 280,887 people) in [2008](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos comprised 3.1% (or 128,000) of Georgia voters in the 2008 elections**, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁴
- In Georgia, **more than four-in-five (or 83% of) children in immigrant families were U.S. citizens** in [2007](#),¹⁵ according to the Center for Social and Demographic Analysis at the University of Albany.

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

- **The 2009 purchasing power of Georgia's Latinos totaled \$15.5 billion**—an increase of 1,063% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$8.7 billion**—an increase of 678.3% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁶
- Georgia's 26,925 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$8.0 billion and employed 54,556 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁷ The state's 18,310 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$4.2 billion and employed 20,412 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁸

Immigrants are integral to Georgia's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **12.6% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 626,836 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁹
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **6.3% of the state's workforce** (or 325,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²⁰
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Georgia, **the state would lose \$21.3 billion in economic activity, \$9.5 billion in gross state product, and approximately 132,460 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²¹

Unauthorized immigrants contribute to the state's economy.

- Unauthorized immigrants in Georgia **contributed between \$215.6 million and \$252.5 million** in aggregated sales, income, and property tax, according to a [2006 study](#) by the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.²²
- The average unauthorized family in Georgia **contributed between \$2,340 and \$2,470** in state and local sales, income, and property tax, according to the [same study](#). An unauthorized family that does not pay income taxes would have a **sales and property tax contribution of \$1,800 to \$1,860**.²³

Immigrants are integral to Georgia's economy as students.

- Georgia's 14,026 **foreign students contributed \$366 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](#).²⁴

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Georgia, **39.0% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 24.4% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 14.5% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 36.5% of noncitizens.²⁵
- The number of immigrants in Georgia with a college degree **increased by 86.7%** between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁶

- In Georgia, **78.6% 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](#).²⁷

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 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 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

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

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁴ 2008 Current Population Survey, [Table 4b: Reported Voting and Registration of the Voting-Age Population, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2008](#).

¹⁵ Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, [Children in Immigrant Families in Georgia](#) (Albany, NY: University of Albany, SUNY, September 2009).

¹⁶ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2009](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2009).

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

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, [Asian-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

¹⁹ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

²⁰ Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, [A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009).

²¹ 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).

²² Sarah Beth Coffey, [Undocumented Immigrants in Georgia: Tax Contributions and Fiscal Concerns](#) (Atlanta, GA: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, 2006)

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 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).

²⁵ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Georgia: Language & Education](#).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.