



## New Americans in Rhode Island: The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in the Ocean State

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of the economy and electorate in Rhode Island. Roughly 1 in 8 Rhode Islanders are immigrants (foreign-born), and over half of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. “New Americans”—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 13.6% of registered voters in the state. Immigrants are not only essential 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 \$3.9 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$1 billion and employed more than 5,700 people at last count. Immigrant, Latino, and Asian workers, consumers, and entrepreneurs are integral to Rhode Island’s economy and tax base—and they are an electoral force with which every politician must reckon.

### **Immigrants and their children are growing shares of Rhode Island’s population and electorate.**

- The foreign-born share of Rhode Island’s population rose from 9.5% in [1990](#),<sup>1</sup> to 11.4% in [2000](#),<sup>2</sup> to 12.9% in [2013](#),<sup>3</sup> according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Rhode Island was home to 135,972 immigrants in [2013](#).<sup>4</sup>
- 51.3% of immigrants (or 69,709 people) in Rhode Island were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2013](#)<sup>5</sup>—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly 3.3% of the state’s population (or 35,000) in [2012](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.<sup>6</sup>
- 13.6% (or 75,047) of registered voters in Rhode Island 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 2012 Census Bureau data by the [American Immigration Council](#).<sup>7</sup>

### **Nearly 1 in 6 Rhode Islanders are Latino or Asian.**

- The Latino share of Rhode Island’s population grew from 4.6% in [1990](#),<sup>8</sup> to 8.7% in [2000](#),<sup>9</sup> to 13.6% (or 142,853 people) in [2013](#).<sup>10</sup> The Asian share of the population grew from 1.8% in [1990](#),<sup>11</sup> to 2.3% in [2000](#),<sup>12</sup> to 3.2% (or 33,240 people) in [2013](#),<sup>13</sup> according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

- Latinos accounted for 6.8% (or 32,000) of Rhode Island voters in the 2012 elections, and Asians 1.1% (5,000), according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).<sup>14</sup>
- In Rhode Island, 91.1% of children with immigrant parents were U.S. citizens in [2009](#), according to data from the Urban Institute.<sup>15</sup>
- In [2009](#), 97.1% of children in Asian families in Rhode Island were U.S. citizens, as were 90.7% of children in Latino families.<sup>16</sup>

### **Immigrant, Latino, and Asian entrepreneurs and consumers add billions of dollars and thousands of jobs to Rhode Island's economy.**

- The 2014 purchasing power of Latinos in Rhode Island totaled \$2.8 billion—an increase of 596% since 1990. Asian buying power totaled \$1.1 billion—an increase of 449% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.<sup>17</sup>
- Immigration boosts housing values in communities. From 2000 to 2010, according to the [Americas Society/Council of the Americas](#), the value added by immigration to the price of the average home was \$1,574 in Providence County.<sup>18</sup>
- Rhode Island's 5,765 [Latino-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$460.6 million and employed 1,997 people in 2007, the last year for which data is available.<sup>19</sup> The state's 1,999 [Asian-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$583.9 million and employed 3,729 people in 2007, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.<sup>20</sup>
- From 2006 to 2010, there were [6,478](#) new immigrant business owners in Rhode Island, and they had total net business income of \$360 million, which makes up 13% of all net business income in the state, according to Robert Fairlie of the University of California, Santa Cruz.<sup>21</sup>
- In 2010, [12.9% of all business owners](#) in Rhode Island were foreign-born, according to the Fiscal Policy Institute.<sup>22</sup> In 2013, [15.5% of business owners](#) in the Providence-New Bedford-Fall River metropolitan area were foreign-born, according to the Fiscal Policy Institute and Americas Society/Council of the Americas.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, 24.5% of "Main Street" business owners—owners of businesses in the retail, accommodation and food services, and neighborhood services sectors—in the Providence metro area were foreign-born in 2013.<sup>24</sup>

### **Immigrants are essential to Rhode Island's economy as workers and taxpayers.**

- Immigrants comprised 15.2% of the state's workforce in [2013](#) (or 86,565 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>25</sup>

- Latinos in Rhode Island paid \$251 million in federal taxes and \$172 million in state/local taxes in 2013, according to the [Partnership for a New American Economy](#). In particular, foreign-born Latinos paid \$146 million in federal taxes and \$111 million in state/local taxes.<sup>26</sup>
  - The federal tax contribution of Rhode Island's Latino population included \$216 million to Social Security and \$50 million to Medicare in 2013. Foreign-born Latinos contributed \$137 million to Social Security and \$32 million to Medicare that year.<sup>27</sup>

### **Unauthorized immigrants are integral to Rhode Island's economy as workers and taxpayers.**

- Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly 4.6% of the state's workforce (or 25,000 workers) in [2012](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.<sup>28</sup>
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Rhode Island, the state would lose \$698.0 million in economic activity, \$310 million in gross state product, and approximately 3,780 jobs, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).<sup>29</sup>

### **Unauthorized immigrants pay taxes.**

- Unauthorized immigrants in Rhode Island paid \$33.1 million in state and local taxes in [2012](#), including \$17.9 million in sales taxes, \$4 million in personal income taxes, and \$11.2 million in property taxes, according to data from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.<sup>30</sup>
- Were unauthorized immigrants in Rhode Island to have lawful permanent residence, they would pay \$40.2 million in state and local taxes, including \$19.7 million in sales taxes, \$8.1 million in personal income taxes, and \$12.4 million in property taxes.<sup>31</sup>

### **Immigrants are integral to Rhode Island's economy as students.**

- Rhode Island's 5,549 foreign students contributed \$212.2 million to the state's economy in tuition, fees, and living expenses for the 2013-2014 academic year, according to [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#).<sup>32</sup>
- Foreign students contribute to Rhode Island's metropolitan areas. From 2008 to 2012, according to the [Brookings Institution](#), 8,733 foreign students paid \$222 million in tuition and \$104 million in living costs in the Providence-New Bedford-Fall River metropolitan area.<sup>33</sup>
- Foreign students also contribute to innovation in Illinois. In 2009, "non-resident aliens" comprised 37.5% of master's degrees and 56.5% of doctorate degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, according to the [Partnership for a New American Economy](#).<sup>34</sup>

## Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Rhode Island, 22.6% of foreign-born persons who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2011](#) had a bachelor's or higher degree, compared to 20% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 29.7% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 41.2% of noncitizens.<sup>35</sup>
- The number of immigrants in Rhode Island with a college degree increased by 65.3% between 2000 and 2011, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.<sup>36</sup>
- In Rhode Island, 85.9% of children with immigrant parents were considered “English proficient” as of [2009](#), according to data from the Urban Institute.<sup>37</sup>
- The English proficiency rate among Asian children in Rhode Island was 92.3%, while for Latino children it was 80.3%, as of [2009](#).<sup>38</sup>

## Endnotes

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8. U.S. Census Bureau, [The Hispanic Population: 2000](#), May 2001.
9. Ibid.
10. 2013 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
11. U.S. Census Bureau, [The Asian Population: 2000](#), February 2002.
12. Ibid.
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14. U.S. Electoral College, [2008 Presidential Election: Popular Vote Totals](#).
15. [The Urban Institute](#), data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2005 - 2009 American Community Survey.
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27. Ibid.
28. Jeffrey S. Passel, D'Vera Cohn, and Molly Rohal, *Unauthorized Immigrant Totals Rise in 7 States, Fall in 14* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, November 18, 2014), p. 30.
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31. Ibid.
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