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**NEW AMERICANS IN TENNESSEE:
The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians
in the Volunteer State**

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of the economy and population in Tennessee. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up roughly 4.8% of the state's population, and more than one-third of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) account for 1 in 16 Tennesseans and wield \$10.9 billion in consumer purchasing power. At last count, the sales and receipts of businesses owned by Latinos and Asians totaled \$5.4 billion and employed more than 38,000 people. At a time when the economy is still recovering, Tennessee 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 Tennessee's population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Tennessee's population rose from 1.2% in [1990](#),¹ to 2.8% in [2000](#),² to 4.8% in [2011](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Tennessee was home to 306,676 immigrants in [2011](#),⁴ which is more than the total population of [Saint Paul, Minnesota](#).⁵
- **34.6% of immigrants (or 106,035 people) in Tennessee were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2011](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly **2.2% of the state's population** (or 140,000 people) in [2010](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.⁷
- **3% (or 87,629) of all registered voters** in Tennessee are “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 2008 Census Bureau data by [Rob Paral & Associates](#).⁸

1 in 16 Tennesseans are Latino or Asian—and they vote.

- The **Latino share of Tennessee's population** grew from 0.7% in [1990](#),⁹ to 2.2% in [2000](#),¹⁰ to 4.6% (or 296,370 people) in [2011](#).¹¹ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 0.6% in [1990](#),¹² to 1.0% in [2000](#),¹³ to 1.8% (or 114,333 people) in [2011](#),¹⁴ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos comprised 1.4% (or 34,000) of Tennessee voters** in the 2008 elections, and **Asians 0.7% (or 18,000)**, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁵

- In Tennessee, **85.4% of children with immigrant parents** were U.S. citizens in [2009](#), according to data from the Urban Institute.¹⁶
- In [2009](#), **89% of children in Asian families** in Tennessee were U.S. citizens, as were **87.1% of children in Latino families**.¹⁷

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

- The 2012 **purchasing power of Tennessee's Latinos totaled \$6.1 billion**—an increase of 1,450.5% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$4.8 billion**—an increase of 909.1% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁸
- Tennessee's 11,178 **Asian-owned businesses had sales and receipts of \$3.6 billion and employed 26,402 people** in 2007,¹⁹ the last year for which data is available. The state's 8,700 **Latino-owned businesses had sales and receipts of \$1.8 billion and employed 12,074 people** in 2007,²⁰ according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.

Immigrants are essential to Tennessee's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **6.4% of the state's workforce** in [2011](#) (or 199,367 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.²¹
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **3.1% of the state's workforce** in [2010](#) (or 95,000 workers), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²²
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Tennessee, **the state would lose \$3.8 billion in economic activity, \$1.7 billion in gross state product, and approximately 25,919 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²³

Unauthorized immigrants pay taxes.

- Unauthorized immigrants in Tennessee paid **\$157.4 million** in state and local taxes in [2010](#), according to data from the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy,²⁴ which includes:
 - \$52,013 in state income taxes.
 - \$8.7 million in property taxes.
 - \$148.7 million in sales taxes.

Immigrants are integral to Tennessee's economy as students.

- Tennessee's 7,004 **foreign students contributed \$213 million** to the state's economy in tuition, fees, and living expenses for the 2010-2011 academic year, according to [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#).²⁵

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Tennessee, **34.1% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2011](#) had a bachelor's or higher degree, compared to 23.8% of noncitizens. Only 17.8% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 34.8% of noncitizens.²⁶
- The number of immigrants in Tennessee with a college degree **increased by 84.8%** between 2000 and 2011, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁷
- 27.8% of Tennessee's foreign-born population age 25 and older **had a bachelor's or higher degree** in [2011](#), compared to 23.4% of native-born persons age 25 and older.²⁸
- In Tennessee, **84.7% of children with immigrant parents** were considered "English proficient" as of [2009](#), according to data from the Urban Institute.²⁹
- The English proficiency rate among **Asian children in Tennessee was 92.1%**, while for **Latino children it was 82.1%**, as of [2009](#).³⁰

Endnotes

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

² Ibid.

³ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, [Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, February 1, 2011), p. 24.

⁸ 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 2010).

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Hispanic Population: 2000](#), May 2001.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹² U.S. Census Bureau, [The Asian Population: 2000](#), February 2002.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁵ 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](#).

¹⁶ [The Urban Institute](#), data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2005 - 2009 American Community Survey.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2012](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2010).

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, [Estimates of Business Ownership by Gender, Ethnicity, Race, and Veteran Status: 2007](#), June, 2011.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

²² Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, [Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, February 1, 2011), p. 24.

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).

²⁴ The Immigration Policy Center, [Unauthorized Immigrants Pay Taxes, Too](#) (Washington, DC: April 2011).

²⁵ NAFSA: Association of International Educators, [The Economic Benefits of International Students to the U.S. Economy: Academic Year 2011-2012](#) (Washington, DC: NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2010).

²⁶ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Tennessee: Language & Education](#).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ [The Urban Institute](#), data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2005 - 2009 American Community Survey.

³⁰ Ibid.