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NEW AMERICANS IN THE SUNSHINE STATE: Florida's Immigrants and Latinos are a Political and Economic Powerhouse

There are few states where the growing political and economic clout of immigrants, children of immigrants, and Latinos is as apparent as Florida. Immigrants account for nearly one-in-five Floridians, and close to half of them are U.S. citizens eligible to vote. Latinos comprised roughly one-in-seven of the state's voters in the 2008 elections, while immigrants and their children were one-in-seven of the state's registered voters as of 2006. Latinos in Florida wield more than \$100 billion in consumer purchasing power and, at last count, owned one out of every six businesses in the state. Immigrant and Latino workers and entrepreneurs are integral to Florida's economy and tax base—and they are an electoral force with which every politician must reckon.

Immigrants and their children are a large and growing share of Florida's electorate.

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the foreign-born share of Florida's population rose from 12.9% in [1990](#),¹ to 16.7% in [2000](#),² to 18.9% in [2007](#).³ Florida was home to 3,440,918 immigrants in [2007](#),⁴ which is nearly the total population of [Los Angeles, CA](#).⁵
- 45.6% of immigrants in Florida were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#)⁶ (up from 42.9% in [1990](#)⁷)—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- An analysis of 2006 Census Bureau data by [Rob Paral & Associates](#) found that **14% of all registered voters** in Florida 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 1965.⁸

1 in 5 Floridians is Latino—and they vote.

- The Latino share of Florida's population grew from 12.2% in [1990](#),⁹ to 16.8% in [2000](#),¹⁰ to 20.6% in [2007](#).¹¹ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 1.2% in [1990](#),¹² to 1.7% in [2000](#),¹³ to 2.2% (or 401,527 people) in [2007](#),¹⁴ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Latinos comprised 15.4% (or 1,227,000) of Florida voters in the 2008 elections, and Asians 1.1% (or 84,000), according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁵ The number of Latino and Asian voters far exceeded the margin of victory ([236,450 votes](#)) by which Barack Obama defeated John McCain in Florida.¹⁶

Immigrant workers and taxpayers are integral to Florida's economy.

- Florida's immigrant workers contributed an estimated \$20 billion to the state in taxes each year, according to a 2007 study by [Florida International University](#):¹⁷

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- \$10.5 billion in federal taxes
 - \$4.5 billion in state and local taxes
 - \$1.3 billion in property taxes
 - \$3.2 billion in sales taxes.
- Immigrants made up 23% of Florida’s labor force in 2005, up from 19% in 2000.
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from New York in 2008, **the state would lose \$43.9 billion in expenditures, \$19.5 billion in economic output, and approximately 262,436 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).¹⁸

Latino and Asian consumers and business owners are essential to Florida’s economy.

- The 2008 **purchasing power of Florida’s Latinos totaled \$101.3 billion**—an increase of 409% since 1990. Latino consumers accounted for about 15% of the state’s total buying power—the third highest of any state in the nation. **Asian buying power totaled \$15.8 billion**—an increase of 566.7% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁹
- Florida’s 266,688 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$40.9 billion and employed 222,516 people in 2002,²⁰ the last year for which data is available. The state’s 41,258 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$11.2 billion and employed 91,422 people in 2002,²¹ according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Survey of Business Owners.

Naturalized Citizens Excel Educationally.

- In Florida, **27.6% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#) had a bachelor’s or higher degree, compared to 22.0% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 19.8% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 30.7% of noncitizens.²²
- The number of immigrants in Florida with a college degree **increased by 62.4%** between 2000 and 2007, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²³
- In Florida, **79.1% 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](#).²⁴

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

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 2008).

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

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

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

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ 2007 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 U.S. Electoral College, [2008 Presidential Election: Popular Vote Totals](#).

¹⁷ Emily Eisenhauer, et al., [Immigrants in Florida: Characteristics and Contributions](#) (Miami, Florida: Research Institute for Social and Economic Policy of the Center for Labor Research and Studies, Florida International University: May 21, 2007)

¹⁸ 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).

¹⁹ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2008](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2008).

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, [Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau, [Asian-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

²² Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Michigan: Language & Education 2007](#).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.