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NEW AMERICANS IN THE PINE TREE STATE: The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in Maine

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for significant and growing shares of the economy and population in Maine. Immigrants make up 3.4% of the state's population, and more than half of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. Moreover, Latinos and Asians wield more than \$650 million in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$318 million and employed more than 3,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Maine can ill-afford to alienate an important component of its labor force, tax base, and business community—especially since the state's population is aging rapidly and a growing number of retirees are depending on a declining number of workers.

Immigrants and their children are growing shares of Maine's population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Maine's population rose from 2.9% in [2000](#)¹ to 3.4% in [2007](#),² according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Maine was home to 44,464 immigrants in [2007](#).³
- **52.4% of immigrants (or 23,288 people) in Maine were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#)**⁴—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **1.8% (or 14,596) of registered voters** in Maine 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](#).⁵

Maine's Latino and Asian populations are growing.

- The **Latino share of Maine's population** grew from 0.7% in [2000](#)⁶ to 1.1% (or 14,489 people) in [2007](#).⁷ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 0.7% in [2000](#)⁸ to 1.0% (or 13,172 people) in [2007](#),⁹ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Immigrant, Latino, and Asian entrepreneurs and consumers add millions of dollars and thousands of jobs to Maine's economy.

- **The 2008 purchasing power of Maine's Latinos totaled \$363 million**—an increase of 367.4% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$303 million**—an increase of 271.1% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Maine.¹⁰

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- Maine's 833 [Asian-owned businesses](#) had sales and receipts of \$205 million and employed 2,364 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹¹ The state's 731 [Latino-owned businesses](#) had sales and receipts of \$113 million and employed 637 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹²

Immigrants are increasingly important to Maine's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **3.4% of the state's workforce** in [2007](#) (or 23,843 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹³
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised less than **0.5% of the state's workforce** (or fewer than 3,550 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.¹⁴
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Maine, **the state would lose \$137 million in expenditures, \$60.9 million in economic output, and approximately 1,080 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).¹⁵
- The importance of immigrant workers is growing as Maine's population becomes older. Over the next two decades, the ratio of seniors (age 65 and older) to prime-working-age adults (age 25 to 64) in Maine **will increase by 93%**, according to a study by the [University of Southern California](#).¹⁶

Immigrants have helped revitalize Lewiston.

- Roughly **3,500 Somali migrants** came to Lewiston between 2001 and 2007, and now comprise 10% of the town's population—the highest concentration of Somalis in America, according to a report by the [United Nations Development Program](#).¹⁷
- Although enrollment at the University of Maine has declined statewide since 2002, the student population at its Lewiston campus **increased 16% between 2002 and 2007**. Moreover, Andover College opened a Lewiston campus in 2004 and had to begin expanding almost immediately to handle the flood of applications.¹⁸

Naturalized Citizens Excel Educationally.

- **21.7% of foreign-born persons** in Maine who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**. At the same time, only 19.8% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 22.3% of noncitizens.¹⁹
- The number of immigrants in Maine with a college degree **increased by 27.2%** between 2000 and 2007, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁰
- 28.8% of Maine's foreign-born population age 25 and older **had at least a bachelor's degree** in [2007](#), compared to 26.7% of native-born persons age 25 and older.²¹

- In Maine, **76.6% 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 [2007](#).²²

Endnotes

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

² 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 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).

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Hispanic Population: 2000](#), May 2001.

⁷ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Asian Population: 2000](#), February 2002.

⁹ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁰ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2008](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Maine, 2008), p. 64.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, [Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

¹² U.S. Census Bureau, [Asian-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

¹³ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁴ Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, [A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009), p. 30.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Dowell Meyers, [Immigrants Contributions in an Aging America](#) (Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California, Summer 2008), p. 1.

¹⁷ Hassan Sheikh and Sally Healy, [Somalia’s Mission Million: The Somali Diaspora and its Role in Development](#) (United Nations Development Program, March 2009), p. 10.

¹⁸ Jesse Ellison, “[The Refugees Who Saved Lewiston](#),” *Newsweek*, January 2009.

¹⁹ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Maine: Language & Education](#).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.