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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of the economy and population in the electoral swing state of Pennsylvania. Immigrants make up 5.4% of the state's population, and roughly half of them are naturalized U.S. citizens eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 5.2% of all registered voters in the state. Latinos and Asians account for nearly 7% of all Pennsylvanians and wield \$22.6 billion in consumer purchasing power. At last count, businesses owned by Latinos and Asians had sales and receipts of \$8.2 billion and employed nearly 53,000 people.

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

- **The foreign-born share** of Pennsylvania's population rose from 3.1% in [1990](#),¹ to 4.1% in [2000](#),² to 5.4% in [2007](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Pennsylvania was home to 665,176 immigrants in [2007](#),⁴ which is roughly equal to the total population of [Memphis, TN](#).⁵
- **50.8% of immigrants (or 338,238 people) in Pennsylvania were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **5.2% (or 311,525) of all registered voters** in Pennsylvania were "New Americans"—immigrants or the children of immigrants—according to an analysis of 2006 Census Bureau data by [Rob Paral & Associates](#).⁷

Nearly 7% of Pennsylvanians are Latino or Asian.

- The **Latino share of Pennsylvania's population** grew from 2.0% in [1990](#),⁸ to 3.2% in [2000](#),⁹ to 4.5% (or 559,476 people) in [2007](#).¹⁰ The Asian share of the population grew from 1.1% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 1.8% in [2000](#),¹² to 2.4% (or 298,387 people) in [2007](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Latinos comprised 2.8% (or 161,000) of Pennsylvania voters in the 2008 elections, and Asians about one-half of one percent (or 31,000), according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). Although the numbers of Latino and Asian voters were relatively small, they were equivalent to nearly one-third of the margin of victory ([624,551 votes](#)) by which Barack Obama defeated John McCain.

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

- The 2008 purchasing power of Pennsylvania's Latinos totaled \$11.3 billion—an increase of 429.5% since 1990. Asian buying power also totaled \$11.3 billion—an increase of 391.3% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁴
- Pennsylvania's 22,631 [Asian-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$6.5 billion and employed 42,743 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁵ The state's 11,023 [Latino-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$1.7 billion and employed 10,051 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁶

Immigrants are essential to Pennsylvania's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **6.3% of the state's workforce** in [2007](#) (or 396,707 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁷
- Immigrants accounted for **nearly three-quarters of labor-force growth in Philadelphia** between 2000 and 2006, according to a report by the [Brookings Institution](#).¹⁸
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **1.5% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 100,000 workers), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.¹⁹
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Pennsylvania, **the state would lose \$5.3 billion in expenditures, \$2.3 billion in economic output, and approximately 27,718 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²⁰

Immigrants in Pennsylvania Excel Educationally.

- The number of immigrants in Pennsylvania with a college degree **increased by 43.5%** between 2000 and 2007, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²¹
- 36.7% of Pennsylvania's foreign-born population age 25 and older **had at least a bachelor's degree** in [2007](#), compared to 25.1% of native-born persons age 25 and older.²²
- In Pennsylvania, **75.1% 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](#).²³

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 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.

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- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Asian Population: 2000](#), February 2002.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹⁴ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2008](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2008).
- ¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, [Asian-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.
- ¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, [Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.
- ¹⁷ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹⁸ Audrey Singer, et al., [Recent Immigration to Philadelphia: Regional Change in a Re-Emerging Gateway](#) (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, November 2008).
- ¹⁹ Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, [A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009).
- ²⁰ 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).
- ²¹ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Pennsylvania: Language & Education 2007](#).
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid.