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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of the economy and population in Wisconsin. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up 4.4% of the state's population, and two-fifths of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 3.0% of registered voters in the state. Immigrants are not only integral to the state's economy as workers, but also account for tens of million of dollars in tax revenue and consumer purchasing power. Moreover, Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) wield \$8.7 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$2.5 billion and employed more than 20,500 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Wisconsin can ill-afford to alienate such a significant component of its labor force, tax base, and business community.

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

- **The foreign-born share** of Wisconsin's population rose from 2.5% in [1990](#),¹ to 3.6% in [2000](#),² to 4.4% in [2008](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Wisconsin was home to 247,649 immigrants in [2008](#),⁴ which is more than the total population of [Jersey City, New Jersey](#).⁵
- **41.4% of immigrants (or 102,607 people) in Wisconsin were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **3.0% (or 88,438) of registered voters** in Wisconsin 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](#).⁷

Roughly 1 in 14 Wisconsinites are Latino or Asian—and they vote.

- **The Latino share of Wisconsin's population** grew from 1.9% in [1990](#),⁸ to 3.6% in [2000](#),⁹ to 5.1% (or 287,026 people) in [2008](#).¹⁰ **The Asian share of the population** grew from 1.1% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 1.7% in [2000](#),¹² to 2.0% (or 112,559 people) in [2008](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos accounted for 2.3% (or 66,000) of Wisconsin voters** in the 2008 elections, and Asians 1.1% (31,000), according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁴
- In Wisconsin, **more than four-in-five (or 86% of) children in immigrant families were U.S. citizens** in [2007](#),¹⁵ according to the Center for Social and Demographic Analysis at the University of Albany.

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

- **The 2009 purchasing power of Latinos in Wisconsin totaled \$5.7 billion**—an increase of 627.4% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$3.0 billion**—an increase of 472.1% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁶
- Wisconsin's 4,957 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$1.5 billion and employed 11,603 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁷ The state's 3,750 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$975.5 million and employed 9,011 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁸

Migrant workers are integral to Wisconsin's economy as laborers and taxpayers.

- Migrant workers constituted **more than 40% of all hired dairy employees** (totaling roughly 5,316 individuals) in [2008](#), according to a study at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.¹⁹
- **More than 5,000 migrant workers, plus 1,000 dependents, arrive annually** in Wisconsin to work in canning, food-processing, and agriculture, according to 2003 [study](#) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.²⁰
- Migrant workers' direct spending generated about **\$14.9 million per year in income** to Wisconsin residents and business, **roughly \$8.7 million in tax revenue** to state and local governments and the creation of **417 jobs for Wisconsinites** annually, according to the [same study](#).²¹

Immigrants are important to Wisconsin's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **5.0% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 156,440 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.²²
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **1.8% of the state's workforce** (or 55,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²³
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Wisconsin, **the state would lose \$2.6 billion in economic activity, \$1.2 billion in gross state product, and approximately 14,579 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²⁴

Immigrants are important to Wisconsin's economy as students.

- Wisconsin's 8,647 **foreign students contributed \$195.3 million** to the state's economy in tuition, fees, and living expenses for the 2008-2009 academic year, according to the [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#) (NAFSA).²⁵

Naturalized citizens advance educationally.

- In Wisconsin, **30.3% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 25.2 of noncitizens. At the same time, only

24.1% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 36.5% of noncitizens.²⁶

- The number of immigrants in Wisconsin with a college degree **increased by 43.3%** between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁷
- In Wisconsin, **75.4% 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 [2008](#).²⁸

Endnotes

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *The Foreign-Born Population: 2000*, December 2003.

² Ibid.

³ 2008 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.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *The Asian Population: 2000*, February 2002.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁴ U.S. Electoral College, *2008 Presidential Election: Popular Vote Totals*.

¹⁵ Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, *Children in Immigrant Families in Wisconsin* (Albany, NY: University of Albany, SUNY, September 2009).

¹⁶ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, *The Multicultural Economy 2009* (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2009).

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, *Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002*, August 2006.

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Asian-Owned Firms: 2002*, August 2006.

¹⁹ Jill Harrison, Sarah Lloyd, and Trish O’Kane, *Overview of Immigrant Workers on Wisconsin Dairy Farms* (Madison, WI: Program on Agricultural Technology Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, February 2009), p. 2.

²⁰ Doris P. Slesinger and Steven Deller, *Economic Impact of Migrant Workers on Wisconsin’s Economy* (Madison, WI: Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, February 2003), p. 27.

²¹ Ibid., p. 26.

²² 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

²³ Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, *A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States* (Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts., April 14, 2009), p. 30.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ NAFSA: Association of International Educators, *The Economic Benefits of International Education to the United States for the 2008-2009 Academic Year: A Statistical Analysis* (Washington, DC: NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2009).

²⁶ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, *Wisconsin: Language & Education*.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.