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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of the economy and population in Utah. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up 8.3% of the state's population, and nearly one-third of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 4.1% of registered voters in the state. Immigrants are not only integral to the state's economy as workers, but also account for tens of millions of dollars in tax revenue and consumer purchasing power. Moreover, Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) wield \$7.5 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$1.3 billion and employed more than 12,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Utah 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 Utah's population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Utah's population rose from 3.4% in [1990](#),¹ to 7.1% in [2000](#),² to 8.3% in [2008](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Utah was home to 226,440 immigrants in [2008](#),⁴ which is more than the total population of [Winston-Salem, North Carolina](#).⁵
- **32.0% of immigrants (or 72,399 people) in Utah were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **4.1% (or 38,195) of registered voters** in Utah 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 one-in-seven Utahns are Latino or Asian—and they vote.

- **The Latino share of Utah's population** grew from 4.9% in [1990](#),⁸ to 9.0% in [2000](#),⁹ to 12.0% (or 328,371 people) in [2008](#).¹⁰ **The Asian share of the population** grew from 1.5% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 1.7% in [2000](#),¹² to 2.0% (or 54,728 people) in [2008](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos accounted for 2.2% (or 21,000) of Utah voters** in the 2008 elections, and Asians 1.2% (11,000) according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).
- In Utah, **nearly three-in-five (or 57% of) children in immigrant families were U.S. citizens** in [2007](#),¹⁴ 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 tens of thousands of jobs to Utah's economy.

- The **2009 purchasing power of Latinos in Utah totaled \$5.8 billion**—an increase of 679.2% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$1.7 billion**—an increase of 402.5% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁵
- Utah's 2,824 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$707.0 million and employed 7,145 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁶ The state's 5,177 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$555.1 million and employed 5,251 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁷

Mexican immigrants are integral to Utah's economy as taxpayers.

- Mexican immigrants in Utah **"own property valued at \$984 million,"** have more than **\$1.0 billion in purchasing power**, and paid more than **\$67 million in state and local taxes in 2000**, according to a report by the Institute of Public and International Affairs at the University of Utah,¹⁸ including:
 - \$7.5 million in income tax;
 - \$52.2 million in sales tax; and
 - \$7.6 million in property tax.

Immigrants are integral to Utah's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **11.2% of the state's workforce** in **2008** (or 154,290 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁹
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **5.8% of the state's workforce** (or 80,000 workers) in **2008**, according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²⁰
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Utah, **the state would lose \$2.3 billion in economic activity, \$1.0 billion in gross state product, and approximately 14,219 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²¹

Immigrants are integral to Utah's economy as students.

- Utah's 6,301 **foreign students contributed \$115.8 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](#).²²

Latinos are one of the fastest growing groups of new converts to the Mormon Church.

- Mormons now make up **58% percent of Utah's population**, according to the [Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life](#).²³
- Latinos make up **30% of all current Mormon Church members**. The Mormon Church also has roughly **2.5 million Latin American members**—up more than 70% from four years ago.²⁴

- Latinos will represent more than **an estimated 50% of Mormon Church members by 2020**, according to [Armando Solorzano](#), researcher at the University of Utah.²⁵

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Utah, **29.6% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 17.7% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 20.7% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 38.5% of noncitizens.²⁶
- The number of immigrants in Utah with a college degree **increased by 64.8%** between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁷
- In Utah, **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 [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 Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, [Children in Immigrant Families in Utah](#) (Albany, NY: University of Albany, SUNY, September 2009).

¹⁵ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2009](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2009).

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, [Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, [Asian-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

¹⁸ Institute of Public and International Affairs, [Mexico and Utah: A Complex Economic Relationship](#) (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah, 2005), xi-xii.

¹⁹ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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.

²² 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: National Association of Foreign Student Advisors, 2009).

²³ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, [U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Utah](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, November 24, 2009).

²⁴ Daniel González, “[LDS members conflicted on church's illegal-migrant growth](#),” *The Arizona Republic*, April 3, 2009.

²⁵ Ann Bardsley, [U of U Researcher Reports Latino Immigrants’ Experiences in Utah to be Mixed](#) (Salt Lake City, UT: News Center, The University of Utah, 2005).

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

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.