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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of Kentucky's economy and population. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up 2.8% of the state's population, and more than a third of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 1.0% of registered voters in the state. Immigrants are not only important to the state's economy as workers, but also account for billions of dollars in tax revenue and consumer purchasing power. Moreover, Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) wield \$3.9 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$2.2 billion and employed nearly 12,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Kentucky can ill-afford to alienate a significant component of its tax base and business community.

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

- **The foreign-born share** of Kentucky's population rose from 0.9% in [1990](#),¹ to 2.0% in [2000](#),² to 2.8% in [2008](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Kentucky was home to 119,503 immigrants in [2008](#),⁴ which is more than the total population of [Springfield, Illinois](#).⁵
- **34.0% of immigrants (or 40,613 people) in Kentucky were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **1.0% (or 22,399) of registered voters** in Kentucky 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

Latinos and Asians make up 3.3% of Kentucky's population.

- **The Latino share of Kentucky's population** grew from 0.6% in [1990](#),⁸ to 1.5% in [2000](#),⁹ to 2.3% (or 98,193 people) in [2008](#).¹⁰ **The Asian share of the population** grew from 0.5% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 0.7% in [2000](#),¹² to 1.0% (or 42,692 people) in [2008](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- In Kentucky, **nearly four-in-five (or 79% 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 thousands of jobs to Kentucky's economy.

- **The 2009 purchasing power of Latinos in Kentucky totaled \$2.1 billion**—an increase of 837% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$1.8 billion**—an increase of 495% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁵
- Kentucky's 3,236 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$1.4 billion and employed 11,966 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁶ The state's 2,094 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$769.6 million in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁷

Immigrants contribute to Kentucky's economy as workers and taxpayers.

- Immigrants comprised **3.8% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 77,770 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁸
- Immigrants contributed more than \$30 million in state sales and excise taxes to Kentucky in [2000](#), according a 2002 report by the Legislative Research Commission.¹⁹

Unauthorized immigrants contribute to Kentucky's economy as workers and consumers.

- Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly **1.3% of the state's workforce** (or 25,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²⁰
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Kentucky, **the state would lose \$1.7 billion in economic activity, \$756.8 million in gross state product, and approximately 12,059 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²¹

Immigrants contribute to Kentucky's economy as students.

- Kentucky's 4,760 **foreign students contributed \$92.5 million** to the state's economy in tuition, fees, and living expenses for the 2008-2009 academic year, according to [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#).²²

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Kentucky, **39.4% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 28.3% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 15.0% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 30.6% of noncitizens.²³
- The number of immigrants in Kentucky with a college degree **increased by 54.6%** between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁴
- In Kentucky, **64.4% 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](#).²⁵

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 U.S. Census Bureau, [*2008 Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties*](#), May 13, 2009.
- 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 Kentucky*](#) (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 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹⁹ Lauren Anderson, et al., [*Immigration in Kentucky: A Preliminary Description*](#), Research Report No. 305 (Frankfurt, KY: Legislative Research Commission, March 2002).
- 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 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).
- ²³ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [*Kentucky: Language & Education*](#).
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.