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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of the economy and electorate in Washington. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up one-in-eight Washingtonians, and 44% of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. “New Americans”—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 7.5% of registered voters in the state. Immigrants are not only integral 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 \$30 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$8.6 billion and employed more than 60,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Washington 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 Washington’s population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Washington’s population rose from 6.6% in [1990](#),¹ to 10.4% in [2000](#),² to 12.3% in [2008](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Washington was home to 804,364 immigrants in [2008](#),⁴ which is roughly the total population of [San Francisco, California](#).⁵
- **44.0% of immigrants (or 353,780 people) in Washington were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **7.5% (or 231,755) of registered voters** in Washington 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

Nearly 1 in 6 Washingtonians are Latino or Asian—and they vote.

- **The Latino share of Washington’s population** grew from 4.4% in [1990](#),⁸ to 7.5% in [2000](#),⁹ to 9.8% (or 641,824 people) in [2008](#).¹⁰ **The Asian share of the population** grew from 4.0% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 5.5% in [2000](#),¹² to 6.5% (or 425,700 people) in [2008](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos accounted for 4.8% (or 148,000) of Washington voters** in the 2008 elections, and **Asians 4.3% (132,000)**, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁴
- In Washington, **more than four-in-five (or 83% 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 tens of billions of dollars and tens of thousands of jobs to Washington's economy.

- **The 2009 purchasing power of Asians in Washington totaled \$16.6 billion**—an increase of 454.6% since 1990. **Latino buying power totaled \$13.4 billion**—an increase of 552.2% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁶
- Washington's 26,890 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$7.1 billion and employed 44,938 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁷ The state's 10,261 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$1.5 billion and employed 15,852 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁸

Immigrants are integral to Washington's economy as workers and taxpayers.

- Immigrants comprised **14.8% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 515,102 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁹
- Immigrants contributed **\$1.48 billion in tax revenue** to the Washington state economy in [2007](#), accounting for 13.2% of all taxes paid in the state, according to a 2009 study by OneAmerica.²⁰
- Immigrants accounted for **16% of total economic output** in the Seattle metropolitan area as of 2007, according to a study by the [Fiscal Policy Institute](#).²¹ In fact, "immigrants contribute to the economy in direct relation to their share of the population. The economy of metro areas grows in tandem with the immigrant share of the labor force."²²
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly **3.5% of the state's workforce** (or 120,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²³
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Washington, **the state would lose \$14.5 billion in economic activity, \$6.4 billion in gross state product, and approximately 71,197 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²⁴

Immigrants are integral to Washington's economy as students.

- Washington's 15,943 **foreign students contributed \$384.8 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](#) (NAFSA).²⁵

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Washington, **33.9% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 28.2% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 17.0% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 35.5% of noncitizens.²⁶
- The number of immigrants in Washington with a college degree **increased by 61.3%** between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁷

- In Washington, **70.4% 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 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 U.S. Electoral College, [2008 Presidential Election: Popular Vote Totals](#).

¹⁵ Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, [Children in Immigrant Families in Washington](#) (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 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

²⁰ Pramila Jayapal and Sarah Curry, [Building Washington's Future: Immigrant Workers' Contributions to Our State Economy](#) (Seattle, WA: OneAmerica, April 2009), p. 29.

²¹ David Dyssegaard Kallick, [Immigrants in the Economy: Contribution of Immigrant Workers to the Country's 25 Largest Metropolitan Areas](#) (New York, NY: Fiscal Policy Institute, December 2009), p. 11.

²² Ibid., p. 1.

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, [Washington: Language & Education](#).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.