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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of the economy and electorate in Idaho. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up 5.9% of the state's population, and nearly a third of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 4.7% 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 \$3.2 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$635.7 million and employed nearly 6,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Idaho 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 Idaho's population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Idaho's population rose from 2.9% in [1990](#),¹ to 5.0% in [2000](#),² to 5.9% in [2008](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Idaho was home to 89,489 immigrants in [2008](#).⁴
- **31.3% of immigrants (or 28,023 people) in Idaho were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#)**⁵—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **4.7% (or 31,021) of registered voters** in Idaho 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](#).⁶

Nearly 1 in 9 Idahoans are Latino or Asian.

- The **Latino share of Idaho's population** grew from 5.3% in [1990](#),⁷ to 7.9% in [2000](#),⁸ to 10.2% (or 155,429 people) in [2008](#).⁹ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 0.8% in [1990](#),¹⁰ to 0.9% in [2000](#),¹¹ to 1.2% (or 18,286 people) in [2008](#),¹² according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos accounted for 4.7% (or 30,000) of Idaho voters** in the 2008 elections, and **Asians 0.9% (6,000)**, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹³

- In Idaho, **more than four-in-five (or 84%) children in immigrant families are 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 Idaho's economy.

- **The 2009 purchasing power of Latinos in Idaho totaled \$2.5 billion**—an increase of 527.4% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$650.6 million**—an increase of 477.4% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁵
- Idaho's 2,775 [Latino-owned businesses](#) had sales and receipts of \$351.8 million and employed 3,149 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁶ The state's 1,111 [Asian-owned businesses](#) had sales and receipts of \$283.9 million and employed 2,837 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁷

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

- Immigrants comprised **7.2% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 55,396 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁸
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly **3.1% of the state's workforce** (or 25,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.¹⁹
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Idaho, **the state would lose \$428.8 million in economic activity, \$190.4 million in gross state product, and approximately 3,060 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²⁰

Immigrants are important to Idaho's economy as students.

- Idaho's 2,147 **foreign students contributed \$42.6 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](#).²¹

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Idaho, **24.6% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 13.7% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 27.6% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 58.7% of noncitizens.²²
- The number of immigrants in Idaho with a college degree **increased by 94.4%** between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²³
- In Idaho, **74.5% 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](#).²⁴

Endnotes

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- 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 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).
- ⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, [*The Hispanic Population: 2000*](#), May 2001.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, [*The Asian Population: 2000*](#), February 2002.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹³ U.S. Electoral College, [*2008 Presidential Election: Popular Vote Totals*](#).
- ¹⁴ Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, [*Children in Immigrant Families in Idaho*](#) (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 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.
- 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), p. 69.
- ²¹ 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).
- ²² Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [*Idaho: Language & Education*](#).
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.