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**NEW AMERICANS IN THE NATURAL STATE:  
The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in Arkansas**

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of the economy and population in Arkansas. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up 3.8% of the state's population, and nearly one-third of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. Immigrants, who account for more than 5% of Arkansas workers, added nearly \$3 billion to the state's economy in 2004. Moreover, Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) wield roughly \$3.9 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$988 million and employed more than 10,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Arkansas 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 Arkansas's population and electorate.*

- **The foreign-born share** of Arkansas's population rose from 1.1% in [1990](#),<sup>1</sup> to 2.8% in [2000](#),<sup>2</sup> to 3.8% in [2008](#),<sup>3</sup> according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Arkansas was home to 109,257 immigrants in [2008](#),<sup>4</sup> which is nearly the population of [Springfield, Illinois](#).<sup>5</sup>
- Arkansas had the **fastest-growing Latino population** of any state in the nation between 2000 and 2005, and the **fourth-fastest-growing immigrant population**, according to a [study](#) by the Urban Institute.<sup>6</sup>
- **32.6% of immigrants (or 35,672 people) in Arkansas were naturalized U.S. citizens in 2008**<sup>7</sup>—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **1.4% (or 18,425) of registered voters** in Arkansas 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](#).<sup>8</sup>

*More than 6% of Arkansans are Latino or Asian.*

- The **Latino share of Arkansas's population** grew from 0.8% in [1990](#),<sup>9</sup> to 3.2% in [2000](#),<sup>10</sup> to 5.5% (or 157,046 people) in [2008](#).<sup>11</sup> The **Asian share of the population** grew from 0.5% in [1990](#),<sup>12</sup> to 0.8% in [2000](#),<sup>13</sup> to 1.0% (or 28,554 people) in [2008](#),<sup>14</sup> according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- In Arkansas, **more than four-in-five (or 83% of) children in immigrant families were U.S. citizens** in [2007](#),<sup>15</sup> according to the Center for Social and Demographic Analysis at the University of Albany.

*Immigrant, Latino, and Asian entrepreneurs and consumers add billions of dollars and thousands of jobs to Arkansas's economy.*

- **Spending by immigrants generated \$2.9 billion in Arkansas business revenues** in 2004, according to a [study](#) by the Urban Institute.<sup>16</sup>
- **Immigrants (and their U.S.-born children) paid \$19 million more in taxes than they consumed** in education, health services, and corrections, according to the [same](#) study.<sup>17</sup>
- **The 2009 purchasing power of Arkansas's Latinos totaled \$2.9 billion**—an increase of 1,653% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$964.7 million**—an increase of 547.7% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Arkansas.<sup>18</sup>
- Arkansas's 2,013 [Asian-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$614 million and employed 7,099 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.<sup>19</sup> The state's 2,094 [Latino-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$374 million and employed 3,198 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.<sup>20</sup>

*Immigrants are integral to Arkansas's economy as workers.*

- Immigrants comprised **5.2% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 71,371 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>21</sup>
- Without immigrant workers, **the state's manufacturing industry output would be lowered by about \$1.4 billion**—or about 8 percent of the industry's \$16.2 billion total contribution to the gross state product in 2004, according to a [study](#) by the Urban Institute.<sup>22</sup>
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **2.8% of the state's workforce** (or 40,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.<sup>23</sup>
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Arkansas, **the state would lose \$798 million in economic activity, \$354 million in gross state product, and approximately 6,660 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).<sup>24</sup>

*Immigrants contribute to Arkansas's economy as students.*

- Arkansas's 3,349 **foreign students contributed \$68.0 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](#).<sup>25</sup>

*Naturalized citizens excel educationally.*

- In Arkansas, **21.2% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 15.7% of noncitizens. At the same

time, only 31.4% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 55.8% of noncitizens.<sup>26</sup>

- The number of immigrants in Arkansas with a college degree **increased by 48.4%** between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.<sup>27</sup>
- In Arkansas, **72.1% 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](#).<sup>28</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [The Foreign-Born Population: 2000](#), December 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Randy Capps and Everett Henderson, [A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas](#) (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, April 2007), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> 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).

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [The Hispanic Population: 2000](#), May 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [The Asian Population: 2000](#), February 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

<sup>15</sup> Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, [Children in Immigrant Families in Arkansas](#) (Albany, NY: University of Albany, SUNY, September 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Randy Capps and Everett Henderson, [A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas](#) (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, April 2007), p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2009](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Arkansas, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [Asian-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

<sup>21</sup> 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

<sup>22</sup> Randy Capps and Everett Henderson, [A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas](#) (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, April 2007), p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, [A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009), p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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).

<sup>26</sup> Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Arkansas: Language & Education](#).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.