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**NEW AMERICANS IN THE PALMETTO STATE:
The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in South Carolina**

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of the economy and population in the state of South Carolina. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up 4.4% of the state's population and more than one-third of immigrants in South Carolina are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 1.3% of all registered voters in the state. Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) wield nearly \$6 billion in consumer purchasing power. At last count, businesses owned by Latinos and Asians had sales and receipts of \$2.8 billion and employed more than 20,000 people. At a time of economic recession, South Carolina can ill-afford to alienate such an important component of its labor force, tax base, and business community.

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

- **The foreign-born share** of South Carolina's population rose from 1.4% in [1990](#),¹ to 2.9% in [2000](#),² to 4.4% in [2008](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. South Carolina was home to 195,069 immigrants in [2008](#),⁴ which is more than the entire population of [Little Rock, Arkansas](#).⁵
- **34.7% of immigrants (or 67,762 people) in South Carolina were naturalized U.S. citizens** in [2008](#)⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **1.3% (or 25,812) of all registered voters** in South Carolina 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-twenty South Carolinians are Latino or Asian—and they vote.

- The **Latino share of South Carolina's population** grew from 0.9% in [1990](#),⁸ to 2.4% in [2000](#),⁹ to 4.1% (or 183,672 people) in [2008](#).¹⁰ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 0.6% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 0.9% in [2000](#),¹² to 1.1% (or 49,278 people) in [2008](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos comprised 0.9% (or 18,000) of South Carolina voters in the 2008 elections**, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁴

- In South Carolina, **more than four-in-five (or 82%) 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 billions of dollars and tens of thousands of jobs to South Carolina's economy.

- **The 2009 purchasing power of South Carolina's Latinos totaled \$3.8 billion**—an increase of 925.1% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$2.0 billion**—an increase of 544.2% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁶
- South Carolina's 4,414 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$2.1 billion and employed 15,011 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁷ The state's 3,015 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$691 million and employed 5,584 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁸

Immigrants are integral to South Carolina's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **5.6% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 124,917 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁹
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **2.2% of the state's workforce** (or 50,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²⁰
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from South Carolina, **the state would lose \$1.8 billion in economic activity, \$782.9 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 are important to South Carolina's economy as students.

- South Carolina's 3,966 **foreign students contributed \$88.2 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 South Carolina, **29.6% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 21.2% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 18.2% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 37.3% of noncitizens.²³
- The number of immigrants in South Carolina with a college degree **increased by 48.6%** between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁴
- In South Carolina, **71.2% 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 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 2008 Current Population Survey, [*Table 4b: Reported Voting and Registration of the Voting-Age Population, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2008*](#).
- ¹⁵ Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, [*Children in Immigrant Families in South Carolina*](#) (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 Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, [*A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States*](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009).
- 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).
- 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, [*South Carolina: Language & Education*](#).
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.