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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of the economy and population in Louisiana. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up 3.1% of the state's population, and 45% of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 1.7% of all registered voters in the state. Immigrants are not only integral to the state's economy as workers, but also account for tens of million of dollars in tax revenue and consumer purchasing power. Moreover, Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) wield \$7.0 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$3.7 billion and employed more than 33,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Louisiana 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 Louisiana's population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Louisiana's population rose from 2.1% in [1990](#),¹ to 2.6% in [2000](#),² to 3.1% in [2008](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Louisiana was home to 134,704 immigrants in [2008](#),⁴ which is more than the population of [Syracuse, New York](#).⁵
- **44.9% of immigrants (or 60,591 people) in Louisiana were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **1.7% (or 37,048) of registered voters** in Louisiana 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 1 in 20 Louisianans are Latino or Asian.

- **The Latino share of Louisiana's population** grew from 2.2% in [1990](#),⁸ to 2.4% in [2000](#),⁹ to 3.4% (or 149,967 people) in [2008](#).¹⁰ **The Asian share of the population** grew from 1.0% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 1.2% in [2000](#),¹² to 1.5% (or 66,162 people) in [2008](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos accounted for 1.5% (or 32,000) of Louisiana voters** in the 2008 elections, and, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).
- In Louisiana, **nearly nine-in-ten (or 88% 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 tens of thousands of jobs to Louisiana's economy.

- **The 2009 purchasing power of Latinos in Louisiana totaled \$4.7 billion**—an increase of 295.1% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$2.3 billion**—an increase of 378.8% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁵
- Louisiana's 8,218 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$1.8 billion and employed 17,376 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁶ The state's 7,645 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$1.9 billion and employed 16,319 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁷

Immigrants are integral to Louisiana's economy as workers and consumers.

- Immigrants comprised **4.0% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 85,457 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁸
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **3.1% of the state's workforce** (or 60,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.¹⁹
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Louisiana, **the state would lose \$947 million in economic activity, \$421 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](#).²⁰

Latino workers have been essential to rebuilding the Gulf Coast region after Hurricane Katrina.

- The number of Latino workers in New Orleans' reconstruction zone (Jefferson and Orleans Parishes) **more than doubled from 60,000 in 2006 to 150,000 in 2008**, according to a [study](#) by the Americas Society and Council of the Americas.²¹
- Latino workers contributed to **making 86.9% of households habitable** after Hurricane Katrina in six parishes surrounding New Orleans in 2008, according to the [same study](#).²²

Immigrants contribute to Louisiana's economy as students.

- Louisiana's 6,213 **foreign students contributed \$118.9 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](#).²³

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Louisiana, **29.3% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 22.5% of noncitizens. At the same time, 26.4% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 34.4% of noncitizens.²⁴
- **25.9% of Louisiana's foreign-born population** age 25 and older **had a bachelor's or higher degree** in [2008](#), compared to 20.0% of native-born persons age 25 and older.²⁵

- In Louisiana, **75.2% 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](#).²⁶

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 Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, [Children in Immigrant Families in Louisiana](#) (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: Pew Hispanic Center, 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 Americas Society and Council of the Americas, [U.S. Business and Hispanic Integration: Expanding the Economic Contributions of Immigrants](#) (New York, NY: Americas Society and Council of the Americas, July 2008).

²² Ibid.

²³ 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).

²⁴ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Louisiana: Language & Education](#).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.