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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of the economy and electorate in Illinois. One-in-seven Illinoisans are immigrants (foreign-born), and more than two-fifths of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. “New Americans”—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 10% 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 \$66.2 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$21.9 billion and employed more than 150,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Illinois can ill-afford to alienate such a critical component of its labor force, tax base, and business community.

1 in 10 registered voters in Illinois are immigrants or the children of immigrants.

- **The foreign-born share** of Illinois’ population rose from 8.3% in [1990](#),¹ to 12.3% in [2000](#),² to 13.8% in [2008](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Illinois was home to 1,782,423 immigrants in [2008](#),⁴ which is more than the total population of [Phoenix, Arizona](#).⁵
- **44.4% of immigrants in Illinois (or 791,685 people) were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#)**—meaning that they are eligible to vote.⁶
- **10% of all registered voters** in Illinois are “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

1 in 5 Illinoisans are Latino or Asian—and they vote.

- **The Latino share of Illinois’ population** grew from 7.9% in [1990](#),⁸ to 12.3% in [2000](#),⁹ to 15.3% (or 1,973,939 people) in [2008](#).¹⁰ The Asian share of the population grew from 2.5% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 3.4% in [2000](#),¹² to 4.3% (or 554,767 people) in [2008](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos accounted for 5.8% (or 314,000) of Illinois voters** in the 2008 elections, and **Asians 1.4% (78,000)**, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁴
- In Illinois, **more than four-in-five (or 87% 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.

Immigrants are essential to the Illinois economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **17.5% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 1,198,293 people), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁶
- **Immigrants accounted for 18% of total economic output in the Chicago metropolitan area** as of 2007, according to a study by the [Fiscal Policy Institute](#).¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸
- Immigrants are a large part of Illinois' [advancing job sectors](#), representing **27.7% of all net job creation** in the “health diagnosing” sector from 2000 to 2005.¹⁹
- In just the Chicago metro area, the consumer expenditures of unauthorized immigrants alone **generated more than 31,000 jobs** in the local economy and **added \$5.5 billion annually to the gross regional product**, according to a 2002 [survey](#) by the University of Illinois at Chicago.²⁰
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Illinois, **the state would lose \$25.6 billion in economic activity, \$11.4 billion in gross state product, and approximately 119,214 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²¹

Latino and Asian entrepreneurs and consumers add tens of billions of dollars and tens of thousands of jobs to Illinois's economy.

- **The 2009 purchasing power of Illinois's Latinos totaled \$43.0 billion**—an increase of 387.2% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$23.2 billion**—an increase of 354.1% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.²²
- Illinois' **39,539 Latino-owned businesses had sales and receipts of \$7.4 billion and employed 60,576 people** in 2002,²³ the last year for which data is available. The state's **44,477 Asian-owned businesses had sales and receipts of \$14.5 billion and employed 98,305 people**,²⁴ according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2002 Survey of Business Owners.

Immigrants are integral to Illinois's economy as students.

- Illinois' **29,887 foreign students contributed \$823.5 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](#).²⁵

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Illinois, **34.1% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 23.3% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 21.0% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 39.6% of noncitizens.²⁶
- The number of immigrants in Illinois with a college degree **increased by 41.8%** between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁷

- In Illinois, **75.6% 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
- **38% of all college graduates** entering the Illinois labor force are **foreign-born**, according to a [2006 study](#) by Rob Paral and Associates.²⁹

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 Illinois](#) (Albany, NY: University of Albany, SUNY, September 2009).

¹⁶ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁹ Rob Paral and Associates, [Illinois Immigrants: Fueling Prosperity in a Changing Economy](#) (Chicago, IL: Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, October 4, 2006).

²⁰ Chirag Mehta, et al., [Chicago's Undocumented Immigrants: An Analysis of Wages, Working Conditions, and Economic Contributions](#) (Chicago, IL: Center for Urban and Economic Development, University of Illinois at Chicago, February 2002).

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 Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2009](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2009).

²³ U.S. Census Bureau, [Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

²⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, [Asian-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

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

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Rob Paral and Associates, [Illinois Immigrants: Fueling Prosperity in a Changing Economy](#) (Chicago, IL: Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, October 4, 2006).