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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of the economy and population in Tennessee. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up roughly 4% of the state's population, and nearly one-third of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) account for one-in-twenty Tennesseans and wield \$8.2 billion in consumer purchasing power. At last count, the sales and receipts of businesses owned by Latinos and Asians totaled \$3.2 billion and employed roughly 30,000 people. The Memphis metropolitan area is home to the state's largest proportion of Latinos, whose economic contributions totaled \$1.02 billion in 2001. At a time of economic recession, Tennessee 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 Tennessee's population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Tennessee's population rose from 1.2% in [1990](#),¹ to 2.8% in [2000](#),² to 4.0% in [2008](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Tennessee was home to 248,483 immigrants in [2008](#),⁴ which is roughly equal to the total population of [Lincoln, Nebraska](#).⁵
- **32.3% of immigrants (or 80,145 people) in Tennessee were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **1.3% (or 36,764) of all registered voters** in Tennessee 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

One-in-twenty Tennesseans are Latino or Asian—and they vote.

- The **Latino share of Tennessee's population** grew from 0.7% in [1990](#),⁸ to 2.2% in [2000](#),⁹ to 3.7% (or 229,951 people) in [2008](#).¹⁰ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 0.6% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 1.0% in [2000](#),¹² to 1.3% (or 80,794 people) in [2008](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Latinos comprised 1.4% (or 34,000) of Tennessee voters in the 2008 elections, and Asians 0.7% (or 18,000), according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁴

- In Tennessee, **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.

The Memphis metropolitan area has the largest proportion of Latinos in the state, and they contribute to the economy.

- **The Latino share of the population in the Memphis metropolitan area** rose from 0.75% in [1990](#),¹⁶ to 2.4% in [2000](#),¹⁷ to 3.6% (or 46,291 people) in [2007](#),¹⁸ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Latino workers had a **total economic impact of \$1.02 billion** in the Memphis area, according to a 2001 report from the [University of Memphis](#).¹⁹
- Latino workers in the Memphis area earned **\$570.8 million in wages and salaries** in 2000, paid at least **\$85.6 million in payroll and income taxes**, and generated approximately **\$12.3 million in local and state sales tax**, according to the [same study](#).²⁰
- Latinos spent more than **\$359 million in the local Memphis area economy** in [2000](#),²¹ including:
 - \$45 million in local grocery stores
 - \$20.2 million in restaurants
 - \$74.8 million for housing
 - \$49.4 million for utilities, furnishings and household supplies
 - \$23.1 million for clothing
 - \$69.0 million for transportation or car operation
 - \$14.2 million for health care services
 - \$38.1 million for other consumption items
 - \$26.0 million for savings in local banks

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

- The 2009 **purchasing power of Tennessee's Latinos totaled \$5.1 billion**—an increase of 1,186.1% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$3.1 billion**—an increase of 544.9% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.²²
- Tennessee's 7,241 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$2.2 billion and employed 21,971 people in 2002,²³ the last year for which data is available. The state's 4,301 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$1.0 billion and employed 7,995 people in 2002,²⁴ according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.

Immigrants are essential to Tennessee's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **5.2% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 164,029 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.²⁵
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **3.6% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 110,000 workers), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²⁶

- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Tennessee, **the state would lose \$3.8 billion in economic activity, \$1.7 billion in gross state product, and approximately 25,919 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²⁷

Immigrants are integral to Tennessee's economy as students.

- Tennessee's 5,690 **foreign students contributed \$139.5 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](#).²⁸

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Tennessee, **37.3% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) had a bachelor's or higher degree, compared to 24.5% of noncitizens. Only 15.0% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 37.4% of noncitizens.²⁹
- The number of immigrants in Tennessee with a college degree **increased** by 55.4% between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.³⁰
- 29.0% of Tennessee's foreign-born population age 25 and older **had a bachelor's or higher degree** in [2008](#), compared to 22.6% of native-born persons age 25 and older.³¹
- In Tennessee, **73.8% 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](#).³²

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

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, [1990 Census of Population and Housing](#).

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, [2000 Census of Population and Housing](#).

¹⁸ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁹ Marcela Mendoza, David H. Ciscel, and Barbara Ellen Smith, [Latino Immigrants in Memphis, Tennessee: Their Local Economic Impact](#) (Memphis, TN: University of Memphis, 2001).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2009](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2009).

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

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

²⁵ 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

²⁶ Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, [*A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States*](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009).

²⁷ 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).

²⁸ 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).

²⁹ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Tennessee: Language & Education](#).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.