

July 2010

**NEW AMERICANS IN THE YELLOWHAMMER STATE:  
The Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in Alabama**

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of the economy and population in Alabama. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up 2.8% of the state's population, and nearly one-third of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. Immigrants are not only important 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 \$4.9 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$2.2 billion and employed more than 20,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Alabama 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 Alabama's population and electorate.*

- **The foreign-born share** of Alabama's population rose from 1.1% in [1990](#),<sup>1</sup> to 2.0% in [2000](#),<sup>2</sup> to 2.8% in [2008](#),<sup>3</sup> according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Alabama was home to 131,695 immigrants in [2008](#),<sup>4</sup> which is more than the total population of [Savannah, Georgia](#).<sup>5</sup>
- **30.1% of immigrants (or 39,634 people) in Alabama were naturalized U.S. citizens** in [2008](#)<sup>6</sup>—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **1.6% (or 39,687) of registered voters** in Alabama 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>7</sup>

*Nearly 4.0% of Alabamans are Latino or Asian.*

- The **Latino share of Alabama's population** grew from 0.6% in [1990](#),<sup>8</sup> to 1.7% in [2000](#),<sup>9</sup> to 2.8% (or 130,533 people) in [2008](#).<sup>10</sup> The **Asian share of the population** grew from 0.5% in [1990](#),<sup>11</sup> to 0.7% in [2000](#),<sup>12</sup> to 1.0% (or 46,619 people) in [2008](#),<sup>13</sup> according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- In Alabama, **roughly four-in-five (or 79% of) children in immigrant families were U.S. citizens** in [2007](#),<sup>14</sup> 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 Alabama's economy.*

- **The 2009 purchasing power of Latinos in Alabama totaled \$3.1 billion**—an increase of 1,026% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$1.8 billion**—an increase of 497.8% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.<sup>15</sup>
- Alabama's 2,524 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$748 million and employed 6,741 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.<sup>16</sup> The state's 4,270 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$1.5 billion and employed 14,527 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.<sup>17</sup>

*Immigrants are important to Alabama's economy as workers.*

- Immigrants comprised **3.8% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 84,806 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>18</sup>

*Unauthorized immigrants are important to Alabama's economy as workers and taxpayers.*

- Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly **3.6% of the state's workforce** (or 80,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.<sup>19</sup>
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Alabama, **the state would lose \$2.6 billion in economic activity, \$1.1 billion in gross state product, and approximately 17,819 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).<sup>20</sup>

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

- Alabama's 6,814 **foreign students contributed \$129 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>21</sup>

*Naturalized citizens excel educationally.*

- In Alabama, **36.0% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2008](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 27.3% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 14.4% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 35.2% of noncitizens.<sup>22</sup>
- The number of immigrants in Alabama with a college degree **increased by 48.5%** between 2000 and 2008, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.<sup>23</sup>
- In Alabama, **67.4% 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>24</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> U.S. Census Bureau, [\*2008 Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties\*](#), May 13, 2009.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</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>8</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [\*The Hispanic Population: 2000\*](#), May 2001.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- <sup>11</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [\*The Asian Population: 2000\*](#), February 2002.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- <sup>14</sup> Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, [\*Children in Immigrant Families in Alabama\*](#) (Albany, NY: University of Albany, SUNY, September 2009).
- <sup>15</sup> Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [\*The Multicultural Economy 2009\*](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2009).
- <sup>16</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [\*Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002\*](#), August 2006.
- <sup>17</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [\*Asian-Owned Firms: 2002\*](#), August 2006.
- <sup>18</sup> 2008 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- <sup>19</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, [\*A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States\*](#) (Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts, April 14, 2009), p. 30.
- <sup>20</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>21</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>22</sup> Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [\*Alabama: Language & Education\*](#).
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.