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NEW AMERICANS IN ARKANSAS: The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in the Natural State

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of the economy and population in Arkansas. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up 4.4% of the state's population, and more than one-quarter of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. Immigrants account for 5.8% of Arkansas workers and added nearly \$3 billion to the state's economy in 2004. Moreover, Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) wield roughly \$5.1 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$1.7 billion and employed more than 11,000 people at last count. At a time when the economy is still recovering, Arkansas 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 Arkansas's population.

- **The foreign-born share** of Arkansas's population rose from 1.1% in [1990](#),¹ to 2.8% in [2000](#),² to 4.4% in [2011](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Arkansas was home to 128,809 immigrants in [2011](#),⁴ which is greater than the population of [Springfield, Illinois](#).⁵
- **28.2% of immigrants (or 36,376 people) in Arkansas were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2011](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.⁷
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **1.8% of the state's population** (or 55,000 people) in [2010](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.⁸
- Arkansas had the **fastest-growing Latino population** of any state in the nation between 2000 and 2005, and the **fourth-fastest-growing immigrant population**, according to a [study](#) by the Urban Institute.⁹

More than 7% of Arkansans are Latino or Asian.

- The **Latino share of Arkansas's population** grew from 0.8% in [1990](#),¹⁰ to 3.2% in [2000](#),¹¹ to 6.5% (or 190,047 people) in [2011](#).¹² The **Asian share of the population** grew from 0.5% in [1990](#),¹³ to 0.8% in [2000](#),¹⁴ to 1.2% (or 34,342 people) in [2011](#),¹⁵ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- In Arkansas, **88.2% of children with immigrant parents were U.S. citizens in [2009](#)**, according to data from the Urban Institute.¹⁶
- In [2009](#), **91.5% of children in Asian families** in Arkansas were U.S. citizens, as were **89.5% of children in Latino families**.¹⁷

Immigrant, Latino, and Asian entrepreneurs, consumers, and taxpayers add billions of dollars and thousands of jobs to Arkansas's economy.

- Spending by immigrants generated **\$2.9 billion** in Arkansas business revenues in 2004, according to a [study](#) by the Urban Institute.¹⁸
- Immigrants (and their U.S.-born children) paid **\$19 million more in taxes than they consumed** in education, health services, and corrections, according to the [same](#) study.¹⁹
- Households headed by unauthorized immigrants in Arkansas paid **\$73.3 million in state and local taxes** in 2010, according to [data](#) from the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy,²⁰ which includes:
 - \$11.0 million in state income taxes.
 - \$3.0 million in property taxes.
 - \$59.4 million in sales taxes.
- The 2012 purchasing power of Arkansas's Latinos totaled **\$3.4 billion**—an increase of 1,998.2% since 1990. Asian buying power totaled **\$1.7 billion**—an increase of 1,031.8% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.²¹
- Arkansas's 5,436 [Latino-owned businesses](#) had sales and receipts of \$821 million and employed 4,269 people in 2007, the last year for which data is available. The state's 3,322 [Asian-owned businesses](#) had sales and receipts of \$855.7 million and employed 7,285 people in 2007, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.²²

Immigrants are integral to Arkansas's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **5.8% of the state's workforce** in [2011](#) (or 79,791 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.²³
- Without immigrant workers, **the state's manufacturing industry output would be lowered by about \$1.4 billion**—or about 8 percent of the industry's \$16.2 billion total contribution to the gross state product in 2004, according to a [study](#) by the Urban Institute.²⁴
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **3.0% of the state's workforce** (or 40,000 workers) in [2010](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²⁵
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Arkansas, **the state would lose \$798 million in economic activity, \$354 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](#).²⁶

Unauthorized immigrants pay taxes.

- Unauthorized immigrants in Arkansas paid **\$72.4 million** in state and local taxes in [2010](#), including \$58.5 million in sales taxes, \$9.4 million in state income taxes, and \$4.5 million in property taxes, according to data from the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy.²⁷
- Were unauthorized immigrants in Arkansas to have legal status, they would pay **\$88.9 million** in state and local taxes, including \$61.7 million in sales taxes, \$22.3 million in state income taxes, and \$4.9 million in property taxes.²⁸

Immigrants contribute to Arkansas's economy as students.

- Arkansas's 4,217 **foreign students contributed \$97.7 million** to the state's economy in tuition, fees, and living expenses for the 2011-2012 academic year, according to [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#).²⁹

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Arkansas, **23.7% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2011](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 16.4% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 30.9% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 50.5% of noncitizens.³⁰
- The number of immigrants in Arkansas with a college degree **increased by 88.2%** between 2000 and 2011, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.³¹
- In Arkansas, **79.6%** of children with immigrant parents were considered "English proficient" as of [2009](#).³²
- The English proficiency rate among Asian children in Arkansas was **87.4%**, while for Latino children it was **80.5%**, as of [2009](#).³³

Endnotes

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Foreign-Born Population: 2000](#), December 2003.

² Ibid.

³ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

⁸ Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, [Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, February 1, 2011), p. 24.

⁹ Randy Capps and Everett Henderson, [A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas](#) (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, April 2007), p. 1.

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Hispanic Population: 2000](#), May 2001.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Asian Population: 2000](#), February 2002.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁶ [The Urban Institute](#), data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2005 - 2009 American Community Survey.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Randy Capps and Everett Henderson, [A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas](#) (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, April 2007), p. 5.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Immigration Policy Center, [Unauthorized Immigrants Pay Taxes, Too: Estimates of the State and Local Taxes Paid by Unauthorized Immigrant Households](#) (Washington, DC: American Immigration Council, April 18, 2011).

²¹ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2012](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Arkansas, August 2012).

²² U.S. Census Bureau, [Estimates of Business Ownership by Gender, Ethnicity, Race, and Veteran Status: 2007](#), June 2011.

²³ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

²⁴ Randy Capps and Everett Henderson, [A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas](#) (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, April 2007), p. 6.

²⁵ Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, [*Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010*](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, February 1, 2011), p. 24.

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, [*Undocumented Immigrants’ State and Local Tax Contributions*](#) (Washington, DC: July 2013).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ NAFSA: Association of International Educators, [*The Economic Benefits of International Students to the U.S. Economy: Academic Year 2011-2012*](#) (Washington, DC: 2012).

³⁰ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Arkansas: Language & Education](#).

³¹ Ibid.

³² [The Urban Institute](#), data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2005 - 2009 American Community Survey.

³³ Ibid.