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**NEW AMERICANS IN RHODE ISLAND:
The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in the Ocean State**

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of the economy and electorate in Rhode Island. Roughly 1 in 8 Rhode Islanders are immigrants (foreign-born), and half of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. “New Americans”—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 13% 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 \$3.9 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of 1 billion and employed more than 5,700 people at last count. At a time when the economy is still recovering, Rhode Island 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 Rhode Island’s population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Rhode Island’s population rose from 9.5% in [1990](#),¹ to 11.4% in [2000](#),² to 13.5% in [2011](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Rhode Island was home to 141,570 immigrants in [2011](#),⁴ which is more than the entire population of [Savannah, Georgia](#).⁵
- **50.1% of immigrants (or 70,930 people) in Rhode Island were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2011](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly **3% of the state’s population** (or 30,000) in [2010](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.⁷
- **13% (or 73,808) of registered voters** in Rhode Island 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 2008 Census Bureau data by [Rob Paral & Associates](#).⁸

Nearly 1 in 6 Rhode Islanders are Latino or Asian.

- The **Latino share of Rhode Island’s population** grew from 4.6% in [1990](#),⁹ to 8.7% in [2000](#),¹⁰ to 12.8% (or 134,714 people) in [2011](#).¹¹ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 1.8% in [1990](#),¹² to 2.3% in [2000](#),¹³ to 3.2% (or 33,235 people) in [2011](#),¹⁴ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos accounted for 3.9% (or 20,000) of Rhode Island voters** in the 2008 elections, and **Asians 1.8% (9,000)**, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁵

- In Rhode Island, **91.1% of children with immigrant parents were U.S. citizens** in [2009](#), according to data from the Urban Institute.¹⁶
- In [2009](#), **97.1% of children in Asian families** in Rhode Island were U.S. citizens, as were **90.7% of children in Latino families**.¹⁷

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

- **The 2012 purchasing power of Latinos in Rhode Island totaled \$2.8 billion**—an increase of 593.7% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$1.1 billion**—an increase of 451.5% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁸
- Rhode Island's 5,765 **Latino-owned businesses had sales and receipts of \$460.6 million and employed 1,997 people** in 2007, the last year for which data is available.¹⁹ The state's 1,999 **Asian-owned businesses had sales and receipts of \$583.9 million and employed 3,729 people** in 2007, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.²⁰

Immigrants are essential to Rhode Island's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **16% of the state's workforce** in [2011](#) (or 91,844 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.²¹

Unauthorized immigrants are integral to Rhode Island's economy as workers and taxpayers.

- Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly **3.7% of the state's workforce** (or 20,000 workers) in [2010](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²²
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Rhode Island, **the state would lose \$698.0 million in economic activity, \$310.0 million in gross state product, and approximately 3,780 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²³

Unauthorized immigrants pay taxes.

- Unauthorized immigrants in Rhode Island paid **\$28.2 million** in state and local taxes in [2010](#), according to data from the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy,²⁴ which includes:
 - \$4.1 million in state income taxes.
 - \$2.9 million in property taxes.
 - \$21.2 million in sales taxes.

Immigrants are integral to Rhode Island's economy as students.

- Rhode Island's 5,054 **foreign students contributed \$191.2 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](#).²⁵

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Rhode Island, **22.6% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2011](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 20% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 29.7% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 41.2% of noncitizens.²⁶
- The number of immigrants in Rhode Island with a college degree **increased by 65.3%** between 2000 and 2011, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁷
- In Rhode Island, **85.9% of children with immigrant parents** were considered “English proficient” as of [2009](#), according to data from the Urban Institute.²⁸
- The English proficiency rate among **Asian children in Rhode Island was 92.3%**, while for **Latino children it was 80.3%**, as of [2009](#).²⁹

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 U.S. Census Bureau, [2008 Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties](#), May 13, 2009.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Rob Paral & Associates and the Immigration Policy Center, [The New American Electorate: The Growing Political Power of Immigrants and Their Children](#) (Washington, DC: American Immigration Council, October 2010).

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Hispanic Population: 2000](#), May 2001.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹² U.S. Census Bureau, [The Asian Population: 2000](#), February 2002.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁵ U.S. Electoral College, [2008 Presidential Election: Popular Vote Totals](#).

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

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2012](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2012).

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, [Estimates of Business Ownership by Gender, Ethnicity, Race, and Veteran Status: 2007](#), June 2011.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

²² 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.

²³ 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.

²⁴ The Immigration Policy Center, [Unauthorized Immigrants Pay Taxes, Too](#) (Washington, DC: April 2011).

²⁵ NAFSA: Association of International Educators, [The Economic Benefits of International Education to the United States for the 2011-2012 Academic Year: A Statistical Analysis](#) (Washington, DC: 2012).

²⁶ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Rhode Island: Language & Education](#).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ [The Urban Institute](#), data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2005 - 2009 American Community Survey.

²⁹ Ibid.