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NEW AMERICANS IN WEST VIRGINIA: The Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in the Mountain State

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of West Virginia's population and economy. Immigrants (the foreign-born) make up 1.3% of the state's population, and nearly half of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. Immigrants not only contribute to the state's economy as workers, but also account for millions of dollars in tax revenue and consumer purchasing power. Moreover, Latinos and Asians (both foreign-born and native-born) wield \$1.4 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$722.8 million and employed more than 5,600 people at last count. At a time when the economy is still recovering, West Virginia can ill-afford to alienate a significant component of its labor force, tax base, and business community.

Immigrants and their children are growing shares of West Virginia's population.

- **The foreign-born share** of West Virginia's population rose from 0.9% in [1990](#),¹ to 1.1% in [2000](#),² to 1.3% in [2011](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. West Virginia was home to 23,829 immigrants in [2011](#).⁴
- **44.5% of immigrants (or 10,599 people) in West Virginia were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2011](#)**⁵—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **<0.5% of the state's population** (or less than 10,000 people) in [2010](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.⁶

Nearly 35,000 West Virginians are Latino or Asian.

- The **Latino share of West Virginia's population** grew from 0.5% in [1990](#),⁷ to 0.7% in [2000](#),⁸ to 1.1% (or 21,302 people) in [2011](#).⁹ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 0.4% in [1990](#)¹⁰ to 0.6% (or 11,492 people) in [2011](#),¹¹ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- In West Virginia, **83% of children with immigrant parents** were U.S. citizens in [2009](#), according to data from the Urban Institute.¹²
- In [2009](#), **89% of children in Latino families** in West Virginia were U.S. citizens.¹³

Latino and Asian entrepreneurs and consumers add hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of jobs to West Virginia's economy.

- **The 2012 purchasing power of Latinos in West Virginia totaled \$653.9 million—an increase of 603% since 1990. Asian buying power totaled \$728.5 million—an increase of 264% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁴**
- **West Virginia's 899 [Latino-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$176.6 million and employed 1,430 people in 2007, the last year for which data is available.¹⁵ The state's 1,526 [Asian-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$546.2 million and employed 4,251 people in 2007, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁶**

Immigrants contribute to West Virginia's economy as workers.

- **Immigrants comprised 1.7% of the state's workforce in [2011](#) (or 13,710 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁷**

Unauthorized immigrants contribute to West Virginia's economy as workers and taxpayers.

- **Unauthorized immigrants comprised less than 0.5% of the state's workforce (or under 10,000 workers) in [2010](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.¹⁸**
- **If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from West Virginia, the state would lose \$26.6 million in economic activity, \$11.8 million in gross state product, and approximately 180 jobs, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).¹⁹**

Immigrants contribute to West Virginia's economy as students.

- **West Virginia's 2,708 foreign students contributed \$59.9 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](#).²⁰**

Naturalized citizens advance educationally.

- **In West Virginia, 48.3% of foreign-born persons who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2011](#) had a bachelor's or higher degree.²¹**
- **The number of immigrants in West Virginia with a college degree increased by 14.1% between 2000 and 2011, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²²**
- **In [2011](#), 42.1% of West Virginia's foreign-born population age 25 and older had a bachelor's or higher degree, compared to 18.1% of native-born persons above age 25.**
- **In West Virginia, 94.6% of children with immigrant parents were considered "English proficient" as of [2009](#), according to data from the Urban Institute.²³**
- **The English proficiency rate among Latino children in West Virginia was 96.6% as of [2009](#).²⁴**

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 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.
- ⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, [*The Hispanic Population: 2000*](#), May 2001.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, [*The Asian Population: 2000*](#), February 2002.
- ¹¹ 2011 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹² [The Urban Institute](#), data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2005 - 2009 American Community Survey.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [*The Multicultural Economy 2012*](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2012).
- ¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, [*Estimates of Business Ownership by Gender, Ethnicity, Race, and Veteran Status: 2007*](#), June 2011.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ 2011 American Community Survey (3-Year Estimates).
- ¹⁸ 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.
- ¹⁹ 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.
- ²⁰ NAFSA: Association of International Educators, [*The Economic Benefits of International Students to the U.S. Economy: Academic Year 2011-2012*](#) (Washington, DC: 2012).
- ²¹ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [West Virginia: Language & Education](#).
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ [The Urban Institute](#), data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2005 - 2009 American Community Survey.
- ²⁴ Ibid.