



New Americans in Washington, D.C.: The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in Our Nation's Capital

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of the economy and electorate in Washington, D.C. About 1 in 7 Washingtonians are immigrants (foreign-born), and more than a third of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. “New Americans” —immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 12.7% of registered voters in the District. Immigrants are not only essential to the District’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 \$5.1 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$2.8 billion and employed more than 19,000 people at last count. Immigrant, Latino, and Asian workers, consumers, and entrepreneurs are integral to the District of Columbia’s economy and tax base—and they are an electoral force with which every politician must reckon.

Immigrants and their children are growing shares of Washington, D.C.’s population and electorate.

- The foreign-born share of Washington, D.C.’s population rose from 9.7% in [1990](#),¹ to 12.9% in [2000](#),² to 14.4% in [2013](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Washington, D.C. was home to 92,819 immigrants in [2013](#).⁴ 41% of immigrants (or 38,038 people) in Washington, D.C. were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2011](#)⁵—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly 3.1% of the District’s population (or 20,000 people) in [2012](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.⁶
- 12.7% (or 48,711) of registered voters Washington, D.C. 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 2012 Census Bureau data by the [American Immigration Council](#).⁷

1 in 7 Washingtonians are Latino or Asian.

- The Latino share of Washington, D.C.’s population grew from 5.4% in [1990](#),⁸ to 7.9% in [2000](#),⁹ to 10.1% (or 65,560 people) in [2013](#).¹⁰ The Asian share of the population grew from 1.8% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 2.7% in [2000](#),¹² to 3.6% (or 22,963 people) in [2013](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

- Latinos accounted for 3.7% (or 13,000) of Washington, D.C. voters in the 2012 elections, and Asians 2.6% (9,000) according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁴
- In Washington, D.C., 86.6% children with immigrant parents were U.S. citizens in [2009](#), according to data from The Urban Institute.¹⁵
- In [2009](#), 90.3% of children in Latino families in Washington, D.C. were U.S. citizens.¹⁶

Immigrant, Latino, and Asian entrepreneurs and consumers add billions of dollars and tens of thousands of jobs to Washington, D.C.'s economy.

- The 2014 purchasing power of Latinos in Washington, D.C. totaled \$3 billion—an increase of 540% since 1990. Asian buying power totaled \$2.1 billion—an increase of 828% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁷
- Washington, D.C.'s 3,428 [Latino-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$975 million and employed 7,201 people in 2007, the last year for which data is available.¹⁸ The District's 3,278 [Asian-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$1.8 billion and employed 11,998 people in 2007, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁹
- From 2006 to 2010, there were [4,003](#) new immigrant business owners in Washington, D.C., and new immigrant business owners had total net business income of \$242 million (which is 10.8 percent of all net business income in the state), according to Robert Fairlie of the University of California, Santa Cruz.²⁰
- In 2010, 18.2 percent of all business owners in Washington, D.C., were foreign-born, according to the [Fiscal Policy Institute](#).²¹
 - In the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria metropolitan area, one in three ([32.9%](#)) [business owners](#) were foreign-born in 2013, according to the Fiscal Policy Institute and Americas Society/Council of the Americas. Furthermore, over half (56.4%) of "Main Street" business owners—owners of businesses in the retail, accommodation and food services, and neighborhood services sectors—in the Washington metro area were foreign-born in 2013.²²

Immigrants are essential to Washington, D.C.'s economy as workers and taxpayers.

- Immigrants comprised 16.9% of the District's workforce in [2013](#) (or 63,506 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.²³
- Immigrants accounted for 20% of total economic output in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area as of 2007, according to a study by the [Fiscal Policy Institute](#).²⁴
- Latinos in Washington, D.C. paid \$405 million in federal taxes and \$179 million in state/local taxes in 2013, according to the [Partnership for a New American Economy](#).²⁵ In particular, foreign-born Latinos paid \$153

million in federal taxes and \$84 million in state/local taxes in 2013.

- The federal tax contribution of the District of Columbia's Latino population included \$257 million to Social Security and \$60 million to Medicare in 2013.²⁶ In particular, foreign-born Latinos contributed \$113 million to Social Security and \$26 million to Medicare in 2013.

Unauthorized immigrants are integral to Washington, D.C.'s economy as workers and taxpayers.

- Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly 4.1% of the District's workforce (or 15,000 workers) in [2012](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²⁷
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Washington, D.C., the District would lose \$1.1 billion in economic activity, \$490.5 million in gross product, and approximately 5,400 jobs, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²⁸
- Unauthorized immigrants in Washington, D.C. paid \$28.9 million in state and local taxes in [2012](#), including \$17.7 million in sales taxes, \$5.6 million in personal income taxes, and \$5.6 million in property taxes, according to data from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.²⁹
- Were unauthorized immigrants in Washington, D.C. to have lawful permanent residence, they would pay \$33.8 million in state and local taxes, including \$19.4 million in sales taxes, \$8.2 million in personal income taxes, and \$6.1 million in property taxes.³⁰

Immigrants are integral to Washington, D.C.'s economy as students.

- Washington, D.C.'s 9,980 foreign students contributed \$377.6 million to the District's economy in tuition, fees, and living expenses for the 2013-2014 academic year, according to [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#).³¹
- From 2008 to 2012, according to the [Brookings Institution](#), 35,459 foreign students paid \$706 million in tuition and \$479 million in living costs in the Washington metropolitan area.³²
- Foreign students also contribute to innovation in Washington, D.C. In 2009, "non-resident aliens" comprised 17.6 percent of master's degrees and 26.2 percent of doctorate degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, according to the [Partnership for a New American Economy](#).³³

Naturalized citizens excel educationally.

- In Washington, D.C., 51.5% of foreign-born persons who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2011](#) had a bachelor's or higher degree, compared to 47.2% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 15.2% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 27.7% of noncitizens.³⁴

- The number of immigrants in Washington, D.C. with a college degree increased by 45.4% between 2000 and 2011, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.³⁵
- In Washington, D.C., 90.8% of children with immigrant parents were considered “English proficient” as of [2009](#).³⁶
- The English proficiency rate among Latino children in Washington, D.C. was 83.9%, as of [2009](#).³⁷

Endnotes

1. U.S. Census Bureau, [The Foreign-Born Population: 2000](#), December 2003.
2. Ibid.
3. 2013 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Jeffrey S. Passel, D'Vera Cohn, and Molly Rohal, [Unauthorized Immigrant Totals Rise in 7 States, Fall in 14](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, November 18, 2014), p. 29.
7. Walter A. Ewing and Guillermo Cantor, [New Americans in the Voting Booth: The Growing Electoral Power of Immigrant Communities](#) (Washington, DC: American Immigration Council, October 2014), p. 25.
8. U.S. Census Bureau, [The Hispanic Population: 2000](#), May 2001.
9. Ibid.
10. 2013 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
11. U.S. Census Bureau, [The Asian Population: 2000](#), February 2002.
12. Ibid.
13. 2013 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
14. 2012 Current Population Survey, [Table 4b. Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2012](#).
15. [The Urban Institute](#), data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2005 - 2009 American Community Survey.
16. Ibid.
17. Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2014](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2014), pp. 22, 24.
18. U.S. Census Bureau, [Estimates of Business Ownership by Gender, Ethnicity, Race, and Veteran Status: 2007](#), June 2011.
19. Ibid.
20. Robert W. Fairlie, [Open for Business: How Immigrants are Driving Small Business Creation in the United States](#) (New York, NY: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2012).
21. David Dyssegaard Kallick, [Immigrant Small Business Owners: A Significant and Growing Part of the Economy](#) (New York, NY: Fiscal Policy Institute, 2012).
22. David Dyssegaard Kallick, [Bringing Vitality to Main Street: How Immigrant Small Businesses Help Local Economies Grow](#) (New York, NY: Americas Society/Council of the Americas and Fiscal Policy Institute, 2015).
23. 2013 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
24. David Dyssegaard Kallick, [Immigrants in the Economy: Contribution of Immigrant Workers to the Country's 25 Largest Metropolitan Areas](#) (New York, NY: Fiscal Policy Institute, December 2009), p. 11.
25. Partnership for a New American Economy, [The Power of the Purse: The Contributions of Hispanics to America's Spending Power and Tax](#)

[*Revenues in 2013*](#) (New York, NY: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2014).

26. Ibid.
27. Jeffrey S. Passel, D'Vera Cohn, and Molly Rohal, [*Unauthorized Immigrant Totals Rise in 7 States, Fall in 14*](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, November 18, 2014), p. 29.
28. 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 District and by Industry*](#) (Waco, TX: April 2008), p. 69.
29. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, [*Undocumented Immigrants' State and Local Tax Contributions*](#) (Washington, DC: April 2015).
30. Ibid.
31. NAFSA: Association of International Educators, [*The Economic Benefits of International Students to the U.S. Economy: Academic Year 2013-2014*](#) (Washington, DC: 2014).
32. Neil Ruiz, [*The Geography of Foreign Students in U.S. Higher Education: Origins and Destinations*](#) (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2014).
33. Partnership for a New American Economy, [*Help Wanted: The Role of Foreign Workers in the Innovation Economy*](#) (New York, NY: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2013).
34. Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [*Washington, D.C.: Language & Education*](#).
35. Ibid.
36. [*The Urban Institute*](#), data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series datasets drawn from the 2005 - 2009 American Community Survey.
37. Ibid.