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NEW AMERICANS IN THE GREAT LAKES STATE: The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in Michigan

Immigrants account for large and growing shares of the economy and the electorate in Michigan. Immigrants make up more than 6% of the state's population, and nearly 47% of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account 5.2% of all registered voters in the state. Latinos account for nearly 5% of all Michiganians and wield more than \$8.8 billion in consumer purchasing power. At last count, the sales and receipts of businesses owned by Latinos and Asians totaled more than \$8 billion. Michigan is also home to the largest proportion of Arab Americans, who generate an estimated \$544 million in state tax revenue each year. Immigrant workers and entrepreneurs are integral to Michigan'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 Michigan's population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Michigan's population rose from 3.8% in [1990](#),¹ to 5.3% in [2000](#),² to 6.1% in [2007](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Michigan was home to 609,457 immigrants in [2007](#),⁴ which is roughly equal to the total population of [Boston](#).⁵
- **46.9% of immigrants (or 285,770 people) in Michigan were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **5.2% (or 273,323) of all registered voters** in Michigan are "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](#).⁷

Nearly 5% of Michiganians are Latino—and they vote.

- The **Latino share of Michigan's population** grew from 2.2% in [1990](#),⁸ to 3.3% in [2000](#),⁹ to 4.0% (or 402,873 people) in [2007](#).¹⁰ The Asian share of the population grew from 1.1% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 1.8% in [2000](#),¹² to 2.4% (or 241,724 people) in [2007](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Latinos comprised **3% of Michigan voters** in the 2008 elections, and Asians 1%, according to [CNN exit polls](#).¹⁴ Barack Obama defeated John McCain among Latino voters in Michigan by 64% to 33%.

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Michigan has the highest proportion of Arab Americans in the nation, and they contribute to the state's economy.

- **The share of Michigan's population reporting Arab ancestry** rose from 0.82% in [1990](#),¹⁵ to 1.2% in [2000](#),¹⁶ to 1.4% (or 138,269 people) in [2007](#),¹⁷ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Dearborn, Michigan, has the largest proportion** of Arab Americans in the United States, representing nearly 30% of the city's population in [2000](#) (the last year for which data is available). By way of comparison, Arab Americans represented 0.87% of the population in New York and 0.69% in Los Angeles as of 2000.¹⁸
- Arab American employment accounted for **\$7.7 billion in total earnings** in the four counties of the Detroit metropolitan area in southeast Michigan, generating an estimated \$544 million in state tax revenue in 2005, according to the [Center for Urban Studies](#) at Wayne State University.¹⁹
- Arab American business and consumer spending **supported an estimated 141,541 jobs** in the four-county region in 2005, according to the same [study](#).²⁰

Latino and Asian entrepreneurs and consumers add billions of dollars and tens-of-thousands of jobs to Michigan's economy.

- The 2008 purchasing power of Michigan's Latinos totaled \$8.8 billion—an increase of 303.7% since 1990. Asian buying power totaled \$9.2 billion—an increase of 393.0% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.²¹
- Michigan's 15,337 [Asian-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$5.1 billion and employed 44,587 people in 2002,²² the last year for which data is available. The state's 9,841 [Latino-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$3.2 billion and employed 15,930 people in 2002,²³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.

Immigrants are essential to Michigan's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **6.9% of the state's workforce** in [2007](#) (or 348,016 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.²⁴
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **1.3% of the state's workforce** in [2008](#) (or 65,000 workers), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²⁵
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Michigan in 2008, **the state would lose \$3.8 billion in expenditures and approximately 20,339 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²⁶

Naturalized Citizens Excel Educationally.

- In Michigan, **36.3% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#) had a bachelor's or higher degree, compared to 37.7% of noncitizens. At the same time,

only 21.3% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 27.3% of noncitizens.²⁷

- The number of immigrants in Michigan with a college degree **increased** by 34.5% between 2000 and 2007, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁸
- 37.0% of Michigan’s foreign-born population age 25 and older **had a bachelor’s or higher degree** in [2007](#), compared to 23.7% of native-born persons age 25 and older.²⁹
- In Michigan, **74.8% 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 [2007](#).³⁰

Endnotes

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

² Ibid.

³ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 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).

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Hispanic Population: 2000](#), May 2001.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Asian Population: 2000](#), February 2002.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁴ CNN, Election Center 2008: [Presidential Exit Polls: Michigan](#).

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Arab Population: 2000](#), December 2003.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, [The Arab Population: 2000](#), December 2003.

¹⁹ Center for Urban Studies, [Arab American Economic Contribution Study](#) (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University: March 2007).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2008](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2008).

²² U.S. Census Bureau, [Asian-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

²³ U.S. Census Bureau, [Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

²⁴ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

²⁵ Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, [A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009).

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).

²⁷ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Michigan: Language & Education 2007](#).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.