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NEW AMERICANS IN THE PELICAN STATE: The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in Louisiana

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of the economy and population in Louisiana. Immigrants make up 3.3% of the state's population, and 43.2% of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 1.7% of all registered voters in the state. Immigrants are not only integral to the state's economy as workers, but also account for tens of million of dollars in tax revenue and consumer purchasing power. Moreover, Latinos and Asians wield nearly \$6.2 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$3.7 billion and employed more than 33,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Louisiana 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 Louisiana's population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Louisiana's population rose from 2.1% in [1990](#),¹ to 2.6% in [2000](#),² to 3.3% in [2007](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Louisiana was home to 143,267 immigrants in [2007](#),⁴ which is more than the population of [Syracuse, New York](#).⁵
- **43.2% of immigrants (or 61,952 people) in Louisiana were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **1.7% (or 37,048) of registered voters** in Louisiana 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 2006 Census Bureau data by [Rob Paral & Associates](#).⁷

Roughly 1 in 20 Louisianans are Latino or Asian.

- The **Latino share of Louisiana's population** grew from 2.2% in [1990](#),⁸ to 2.4% in [2000](#),⁹ to 3.1% (or 133,089 people) in [2007](#).¹⁰ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 1.0% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 1.2% in [2000](#),¹² to 1.4% (or 60,105 people) in [2007](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos accounted for 1.5% (or 32,000) of Louisiana voters** in the 2008 elections, and, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).

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

- **The 2008 purchasing power of Louisiana's Latino buying power totaled \$4.0 billion**—an increase of 238.1% since 1990. **Asians totaled \$2.2 billion**—an increase of 363.6% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁴

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- Louisiana's 8,218 [Asian-owned businesses](#) had sales and receipts of \$1.8 billion and employed 17,376 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁵ The state's 7,645 [Latino-owned businesses](#) had sales and receipts of \$1.9 billion and employed 16,319 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁶

Immigrants are integral to Louisiana's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **4.1% of the state's workforce** in [2007](#) (or 84,143 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁷
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **3.1% of the state's workforce** (or 60,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.¹⁸
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Louisiana, **the state would lose \$947 million in expenditures, \$421 million in economic output, and approximately 6,660 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).¹⁹

Latino workers are essential to rebuilding the Gulf Coast region after Hurricane Katrina.

- The number of Latino workers in New Orleans' reconstruction zone (Jefferson and Orleans Parishes) **more than doubled from 60,000 in 2006 to 150,000 in 2008**, according to a [study](#) by the Americas Society and Council of the Americas.²⁰
- Latino workers contributed to **making 86.9% of households inhabitable** after Hurricane Katrina in six parishes surrounding New Orleans in 2008, according to the [same study](#).²¹

Naturalized Citizens Excel Educationally.

- In Louisiana, **36.3% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 29.2% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 21.4% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 32.8% of noncitizens.²²
- The number of immigrants in Louisiana with a college degree **increased by 34.3%** between 2000 and 2007, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²³
- **32.7% of Louisiana's foreign-born population** age 25 and older **had a bachelor's or higher degree** in [2007](#), compared to 19.8% of native-born persons age 25 and older.²⁴
- In Louisiana, **74.0% 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](#).²⁵

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 Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2008](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2008), p. 64.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, [Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, [Asian-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

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

¹⁸ Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, [A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009), p. 30.

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 Americas Society and Council of the Americas, [U.S. Business and Hispanic Integration: Expanding the Economic Contributions of Immigrants](#) (New York, NY: Americas Society and Council of the Americas, July 2008).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Louisiana: Language & Education](#).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.