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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of both the economy and the electorate in Illinois. Immigrants make up nearly 14% of the state's population, and 44% of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for nearly 10% of all registered voters in the state. Immigrants who are naturalized citizens excel in educational attainment. Latinos account for 15% of all Illinoisans and wield more than \$41 billion in consumer purchasing power. At last count, the sales and receipts of businesses owned by Latinos and Asians totaled nearly \$22 billion. Immigrant, Latino, and Asian workers and entrepreneurs are integral to Illinois's economy and tax base—and they are an electoral force with which every politician must reckon.

1 in 10 registered voters in Illinois are immigrants or the children of immigrants.

- **The foreign-born share** of Illinois' population rose from 8.3% in [1990](#),¹ to 12.3% in [2000](#),² to 13.8% in [2007](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **43.7% of immigrants in Illinois were naturalized U.S. citizens** in [2007](#)—meaning that they are eligible to vote.⁴
- **10% of all registered voters** in Illinois 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](#).⁵

Nearly 15% of Illinoisans are Latino—and they vote.

- The **Latino share of Illinois' population** grew from 7.9% in [1990](#),⁶ to 12.3% in [2000](#),⁷ to 14.9% in [2007](#).⁸ The Asian share of the population grew from 2.5% in [1990](#),⁹ to 3.4% in [2000](#),¹⁰ to 4.3% in [2007](#),¹¹ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Latinos comprised **7% of Illinois voters** in the 2008 elections, and Asians 2%, according to [CNN exit polls](#). Barack Obama defeated John McCain among Latino voters in Illinois by 72% to 27%.¹²

Naturalized Citizens Excel Educationally.

- In Illinois, **31.9% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#) had a **bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 23.2% of noncitizens. At the same time, only 21.8% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 37.5% of noncitizens.¹³

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1331 G STREET, NW • WASHINGTON, DC 20005 • TEL: (202) 507-7500 • FAX: (202) 742-5619

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- The number of immigrants in Illinois with a college degree **increased** by 33.9% between 2000 and 2007, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.¹⁴
- **38% of all college graduates** entering the Illinois labor force are **foreign-born**, according to a [2006 study](#) by Rob Paral and Associates.¹⁵
- The number of immigrants in Illinois with less than a high-school diploma **decreased** by 1.7% between [2000 and 2007](#).¹⁶
- In Illinois, **75.9% 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](#).¹⁷

Immigrants are essential to Illinois economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **17.8% of the state’s workforce** in [2007](#), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁸
- **One in six Illinois workers, or 17%**, was an immigrant in [2005](#), compared to only 14% in 2000, according to a study by Rob Paral and Associates.¹⁹
- Immigrants are a large part of Illinois’ [advancing job sectors](#), representing **27.7% of all net job creation** in the “health diagnosing” sector from 2000 to 2005.²⁰
- In just the Chicago metro area, the consumer expenditures of undocumented immigrants alone **generated more than 31,000 jobs** in the local economy and **added \$5.45 billion annually to the gross regional product**, according to a 2002 [survey](#) by the University of Illinois at Chicago.²¹

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

- The 2008 purchasing power of Illinois’s Latinos totaled \$40.9 billion—an increase of 364.2% since 1990. Asian buying power totaled \$22.5 billion—an increase of 340.2% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.²²
- Illinois’ 39,539 [Latino-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$7.4 billion and employed 60,576 people in 2002,²³ the last year for which data is available. The state’s 44,477 [Asian-owned](#) businesses had sales and receipts of \$14.5 billion and employed 98,305 people,²⁴ according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2002 Survey of Business Owners.

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 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).

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- ⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, [*The Hispanic Population: 2000*](#), May 2001.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, [*The Asian Population: 2000*](#), February 2002.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹² CNN, Election Center 2008: [Presidential Exit Polls: Illinois](#).
- ¹³ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Illinois: Language & Education 2007](#).
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Rob Paral and Associates, [*Illinois Immigrants: Fueling Prosperity in a Changing Economy*](#) (Chicago, IL: Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, October 4, 2006).
- ¹⁶ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Illinois: Language & Education 2007](#).
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).
- ¹⁹ Rob Paral and Associates, [*Illinois Immigrants: Fueling Prosperity in a Changing Economy*](#) (Chicago, IL: Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, October 4, 2006).
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Chirag Mehta et al., [*Chicago's Undocumented Immigrants: An Analysis of Wages, Working Conditions, and Economic Contributions*](#). (Chicago, IL: Center for Urban and Economic Development: University of Illinois at Chicago, February 2002).
- ²² Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [*The Multicultural Economy 2008*](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2008).
- ²³ U.S. Census Bureau, [*Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002*](#), August 2006.
- ²⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, [*Asian-Owned Firms: 2002*](#), August 2006.