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August 5, 2009

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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for large and growing shares of the economy and electorate in the swing state of Colorado. One in ten Coloradans is an immigrant, and one in five is Latino. Nearly one-third of immigrants in Colorado are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. “New Americans”—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 5.4% of all registered voters in the state. Latinos and Asians wield nearly \$26 billion in consumer purchasing power. At last count, businesses owned by Latinos and Asians had sales and receipts of \$7.6 billion and employed more than 53,000 people. Immigrant, Latino, and Asian workers, consumers, and entrepreneurs are integral to Colorado’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 Colorado’s population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Colorado’s population rose from 4.3% in [1990](#),¹ to 8.6% in [2000](#),² to 10% in [2007](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Colorado was home to 485,170 immigrants in [2007](#),⁴ which is roughly equal to the total population of [Sacramento, CA](#).⁵
- **31.5% of immigrants (or 152,957 people) in Colorado were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#)**⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **5.4% (or 122,867) of all registered voters** in Colorado 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

1 in 5 Coloradans are Latino—and they vote.

- **The Latino share of Colorado’s population** grew from 12.9% in [1990](#),⁸ to 17.1% in [2000](#),⁹ to 19.9% (or 967,442 people) in [2007](#).¹⁰ **The Asian share of the population** grew from 1.7% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 2.2% in [2000](#),¹² to 2.7% (or 131,261 people) in [2007](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos comprised 8.4% (or 195,000) of Colorado voters in the 2008 elections**, and Asians 2.1% (or 48,000), according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁴ The number of Latino and Asian voters exceeds the margin of victory ([214,987 votes](#)) by which Barack Obama defeated John McCain.¹⁵

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

- **The 2008 purchasing power of Colorado's Latinos totaled \$21 billion**—an increase of 427.3% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$4.8 billion**—an increase of 521.1% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁶
- Colorado's 24,054 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$5.1 billion and employed 32,465 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁷ The state's 10,910 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$2.5 billion and employed 21,343 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁸

Immigrants are integral to Colorado's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **11.4% of the state's workforce** in [2007](#) (or 303,048 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁹
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **5.4% of the state's workforce** (or 150,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²⁰
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Colorado, **the state would lose \$8.0 billion in expenditures, \$3.6 billion in economic output, and approximately 39,738 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²¹

Unauthorized immigrants pay taxes.

- Unauthorized immigrants in Colorado paid **between \$159 million and \$194 million** in state and local taxes in [2005](#), according to a study by the Bell Policy Center,²² which includes:
 - \$24 million to \$30 million in state income taxes.
 - \$10 million to \$13 million in property taxes.
 - \$125 million to \$151 million in sales taxes.
- In addition, **Colorado employers paid between \$12 million and \$15 million in unemployment insurance taxes** to the state on behalf of unauthorized workers in 2005, according to the [same study](#). Unauthorized workers are prohibited by state law from collecting unemployment insurance benefits.²³

Naturalized Citizens Excel Educationally.

- In Colorado, **34.4% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#) **had a bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 18.8 % of noncitizens. At the same time, only 20.1% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 42.9% of noncitizens.²⁴
- The number of immigrants in Colorado with a college degree **increased** by 44.5% between 2000 and 2007, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁵

- In Colorado, **67.8% 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](#).²⁶

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 2008 Current Population Survey, [Table 4b: Reported Voting and Registration of the Voting-Age Population, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2008](#).

¹⁵ U.S. Electoral College, [2008 Presidential Election: Popular Vote Totals](#).

¹⁶ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2008](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2008).

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, [Hispanic-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, [Asian-Owned Firms: 2002](#), August 2006.

¹⁹ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

²⁰ Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, [A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009).

²¹ 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).

²² Robin Baker and Rich Jones, [State and Local Taxes Paid in Colorado by Undocumented Immigrants](#) (Denver, CO: The Bell Policy Center, 2006).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Colorado: Language & Education](#).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.