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

Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians account for growing shares of the economy and population in Nebraska. Immigrants make up 5.6% of the state's population, and more than one-third of them are naturalized U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote. "New Americans"—immigrants and the children of immigrants—account for 2.7% of 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 \$3.8 billion in consumer purchasing power, and the businesses they own had sales and receipts of \$1.1 billion and employed more than 9,000 people at last count. At a time of economic recession, Nebraska 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 Nebraska's population and electorate.

- **The foreign-born share** of Nebraska's population rose from 1.8% in [1990](#),¹ to 4.4% in [2000](#),² to 5.6% in [2007](#),³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Nebraska was home to 98,512 immigrants in [2007](#)⁴ (an increase of 249.3% since 1990), which is nearly the total population of [Berkeley, California](#).⁵
- **37.0% of immigrants (or 36,423 people) in Nebraska were naturalized U.S. citizens** in [2007](#)⁶—meaning that they are eligible to vote.
- **2.7% (or 23,006) of registered voters** in Nebraska 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 11 Nebraskans are Latino or Asian.

- The **Latino share of Nebraska's population** grew from 2.3% in [1990](#),⁸ to 5.5% in [2000](#),⁹ to 7.5% (or 133,093 people) in [2007](#).¹⁰ The **Asian share of the population** grew from 0.8% in [1990](#),¹¹ to 1.3% in [2000](#),¹² to 1.4% (or 24,844 people) in [2007](#),¹³ according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Latinos accounted for 2.8%** (or 24,000) **of Nebraska voters** in the 2008 elections, and Asians 0.9% (or 8,000), according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).¹⁴

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

- **The 2008 purchasing power of Latinos in Nebraska totaled \$2.8 billion**—an increase of 720.6% since 1990. **Asian buying power totaled \$1.0 billion**—an increase of 635.5.0% since 1990, according to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia.¹⁵
- Nebraska's 1,456 **Asian-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$685.6 million and employed 6,191 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available.¹⁶ The state's 1,966 **Latino-owned businesses** had sales and receipts of \$433.8 million and employed 2,862 people in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners.¹⁷

Immigrants make vital economic contributions to Nebraska's state and local economy:

- Immigrant spending accounted for \$1.6 billion worth of total production in Nebraska's economy and generated roughly 12,000 jobs for the state in 2006, according to a [study](#) at the University of Nebraska-Ohama.¹⁸
- The impact of immigrant spending made a large impact on the state's local economies [in 2006](#),¹⁹ including:
 - \$1.14 billion in production and 8,331 jobs in Omaha and Lincoln.
 - \$204 million in production and 1,275 jobs in Nebraska's Eastern region.
 - \$238 million in production and 1,896 jobs in Nebraska's Western region.
- Nebraska's immigrants also contributed roughly \$154 million in property, income, sales, and gas tax revenue in 2006, according to the [same study](#).²⁰

Immigrants are integral to Nebraska's economy as workers.

- Immigrants comprised **6.5% of the state's workforce** in [2007](#) (or 63,090 workers), according to the U.S. Census Bureau.²¹
- Unauthorized immigrants comprised **2.8% of the state's workforce** (or 30,000 workers) in [2008](#), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.²²
- If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Nebraska, **the state would lose \$852.4 million in expenditures, \$378.6 million in economic output, and approximately 5,400 jobs**, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time, according to a report by the [Perryman Group](#).²³

Immigrants are integral to Nebraska's economy as students.

- Nebraska's 4,335 **foreign students contributed \$88.6 million** to the state's economy in tuition, fees, and living expenses for the 2008-2009 academic year, according to the [National Association of Foreign Student Advisers](#) (NAFSA).²⁴

Naturalized Citizens Excel Educationally.

- In Nebraska, **24.3% of foreign-born persons** who were naturalized U.S. citizens in [2007](#) had a **bachelor's or higher degree**, compared to 19.8% of noncitizens. At the same time, 32.6% of naturalized citizens lacked a high-school diploma, compared to 51.4% of noncitizens.²⁵
- The number of immigrants in Nebraska with a college degree **increased by 61.1%** between 2000 and 2007, according to [data](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.²⁶
- In Nebraska, **73.5% 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](#).²⁷

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

¹⁵ Jeffrey M. Humphreys, [The Multicultural Economy 2008](#) (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2008), p. 64.

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

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

¹⁸ Christopher S. Decker, [Nebraska's Immigrant Population: Economic and Fiscal Impacts](#) (Omaha, NE: Office of Latino/Latin American Studies, University of Nebraska at Omaha, October 2008).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ 2007 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates).

²² Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, [A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States](#) (Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts, April 14, 2009), p. 30.

²³ 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.

²⁴ Association of International Educators, [The Economic Benefits of International Education to the United States for the 2008-2009 Academic Year: A Statistical Analysis](#) (Washington, DC: National Association of Foreign Student Advisors, 2009).

²⁵ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [Nebraska: Language & Education](#).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.