
Spotlight On Naturalization Trends In Advance Of The 2008 Elections

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Becoming a US citizen has been long regarded as a significant indicator of immigrants' integration into US civic and political life.

Beginning October 1, 2008, immigrants who wish and are eligible to become US citizens will have to take a revised citizenship test. The new test was created to ensure that future citizens have a good understanding of US history and civic values, as well as English language skills.

This Spotlight examines the foreign born age 18 and older who became US citizens (i.e., naturalized) in 2006, the latest year for which data are available. It also highlights some of the trends surrounding naturalization since the 1970s.

The Spotlight draws on a number of sources: the 2006 American Community Survey, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) Annual Flow Report, and online OIS tables on newly naturalized citizens.

Note: all references for annual data from DHS are for the government's fiscal year (October 1 through September 30); otherwise they refer to the calendar year.

Click on the bullet points below for more information:

Definitions

Naturalization

According to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), "naturalization is the process by which US citizenship is conferred upon a foreign citizen or national after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the [Immigration and Nationality Act](#) (INA).

To be eligible for naturalization, an immigrant must be at least 18 years of age; have lawful permanent residence (a green card) for at least five continuous years (three continuous years if the individual is married to a US citizen); demonstrate good moral character (e.g., have no criminal record, not be involved in prostitution, or not have practiced polygamy); be able to read, write, and speak

- There were nearly 15.2 million naturalized citizens eligible to vote in the United States in 2006.
- Hispanics accounted for almost a third of all naturalized citizens.
- In California, 19 percent of citizens age 18 and older were foreign born.
- A July 2002 executive order made noncitizen members of the armed forces eligible for expedited US citizenship.
- Asian and European immigrants have the highest naturalization rates while Mexican immigrants have one of the lowest.
- More than 700,000 lawful permanent residents became US citizens in 2006.
- In 2006, US Citizenship and Immigration Services denied 120,722 naturalization petitions.
- Between 1997 and 2006, over 6.3 million people became naturalized citizens, more than one-and-a-half times the 3.8 million who naturalized between 1987 and 1996.
- The increased number of naturalizations since 1994 is partly a result of the legalization of unauthorized immigrants under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).
- In 2006, foreign born from Mexico, the Philippines, and India accounted for almost a quarter of all naturalizations.
- Almost half of those who naturalized in 2006 lived in three states: California, New York, and Florida.
- The state with the fewest naturalizations in 2006 was Wyoming.
- Of the 84,000 Mexican foreign born naturalized in 2006, the largest groups resided in California, Texas, and Illinois.
- The New York, Los Angeles, and Miami metropolitan areas were home to more than one-third of new US citizens.
- In 2004, an estimated 8 million lawful permanent residents were eligible for naturalization.
- For immigrants who naturalized in 2006, the median time between date of legal immigration to the United States and date of naturalization was seven years.

the English language; and have knowledge and an understanding of American history fundamentals and US government principles.

Applicants who are over 50 and have been lawful permanent residents (LPRs) for more than 20 years, as well as applicants who are over 55 and have been LPRs for more than 15 years, are exempted from the English language portion of the test.

Foreign born

Foreign born are defined as people who were not US citizens at birth.

Naturalized citizen

Naturalized citizens are defined as foreign born who became US citizens through naturalization.

There were nearly 15.2 million naturalized citizens eligible to vote in the United States in 2006.

According to 2006 ACS estimates, there were 15,164,752 naturalized citizens age 18 and older in the United States eligible to vote. They accounted for 7.3 percent of all persons eligible to vote (206,328,748).

Note: "Eligible to vote" does not mean that citizens are registered to vote or take part in local, state, or national elections. It only means they have US citizenship and are of voting age.

Hispanics accounted for almost a third of all naturalized citizens.

Of the 15.1 million naturalized citizens age 18 and older, 31.2 percent (4,737,157) are of Hispanic or Latino origin. They accounted for 26.4 percent of all Hispanic citizens eligible to vote (17,975,043).

In California, 19 percent of citizens age 18 and older were foreign born.

In 2006, 19.0 percent (4,151,339) of citizens age 18 and older residing in California and 16.1 percent (2,082,559) in New York were naturalized citizens (see Map 1). In four more states, naturalized foreign born accounted for 10 or more percent of all citizens — New Jersey (14.2 percent or 822,883), Hawaii (12.8 percent or 116,205), Florida (12.1 percent or 1,501,771), and Nevada (10.5 percent or 166,924).

[Map 1. Share of Naturalized Citizens Among All US Citizens, Age 18 and Above, by State \(PDF\)](#)

Please note: Due to compatibility issues, you may need to download the map to your computer in order for it to load properly.

A July 2002 executive order made noncitizen members of the armed forces eligible for expedited US citizenship.

Section 329 of the Immigration and Nationality Act authorizes the president to issue executive orders specifying periods of conflict during which foreign-born members of the US military are eligible for immediate US citizenship.

In a July 2002 executive order, President George W. Bush specified that such a period of hostilities began after September 11, 2001, and that foreign-born, noncitizen military personnel serving on or after that date were thus eligible for expedited citizenship. During times of peace, noncitizen armed forces members may obtain citizenship after a one-year waiting period.

For more information about the foreign born in the US military, see the January 2007 Spotlight on **[The Foreign Born in the Armed Services](#)**.

Asian and European immigrants have the highest naturalization rates while Mexican immigrants have one of the lowest.

According to a DHS study of naturalization trends between 1973 and 2005, among Asian immigrants who became lawful permanent residents (LPRs) in the United States between 1990 and 1995, approximately 60 to 65 percent became naturalized US citizens by 2005. Among European immigrants, 50 to 60 percent became citizens.

In contrast, among Mexican immigrants who became LPRs in the United States between 1990 and 1995, a smaller share — 20 to 30 percent — became naturalized US citizens by 2005. Mexican immigrants have historically had lower naturalization rates than other immigrant groups for a variety of reasons, including limited English skills and low perceived value of having US citizenship.

Note: The full report "Trends in Naturalization Rates" is available [here](#).

More than 700,000 lawful permanent residents became US citizens in 2006.

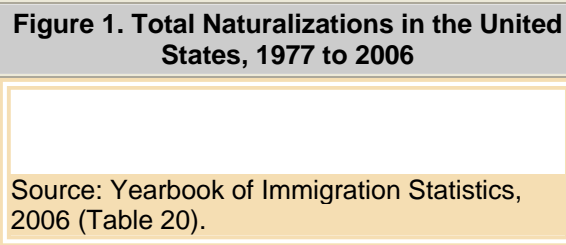
In 2006, US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) naturalized 702,589 lawful permanent residents, 16.3 percent more people than were naturalized in 2005 (604,280). The 702,589 newly naturalized citizens represent about 2 percent of the total US foreign-born population of 37.5 million according to 2006 ACS estimates.

In 2006, US Citizenship and Immigration Services denied 120,722 naturalization petitions.

The 120,722 applicants whom USCIS denied citizenship received denials for one or more of the following reasons: applicant could not prove five years of permanent residence in the United States; applicant was determined to lack allegiance to the United States; applicant was determined to have bad moral character; or applicant failed the English language or American civics test.

Between 1997 and 2006, over 6.3 million people became naturalized citizens, more than one-and-a-half times the 3.8 million who naturalized between 1987 and 1996.

The number of individuals naturalized between 1997 and 2006 (6,279,154) increased 1.7 times from the 1987-1996 period (3,802,824) (see Figure 1).



The increased number of naturalizations since 1994 is partly a result of the legalization of unauthorized immigrants under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).

Under IRCA, 2.7 million unauthorized immigrants received lawful permanent resident status. This increased the pool of foreign born eligible for naturalization.

In 2006, foreign born from Mexico, the Philippines, and India accounted for almost a quarter of all naturalizations.

Of those naturalized in 2006, 12.0 percent were born in Mexico (83,979), 6.8 percent in India (47,542), and 5.8 percent in the Philippines (40,500) (see Figure 2).

According to ACS 2006, of the 37.5 million foreign born in the United States, 30.7

percent were from Mexico (11,541,404), 4.4 percent were from the Philippines (1,638,413), and 4.0 percent were from India (1,519,157).

Figure 2. Top 10 Countries of Birth for Naturalizations in the United States in 2006

Source: Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2006: Data tables on Naturalizations (Table 21).

Almost half of those who naturalized in 2006 lived in three states: California, New York, and Florida.

Of the 702,589 new citizens in 2006, 21.8 percent lived in California (152,836), 14.8 percent in New York (103,870), and 12.9 percent in Florida (90,846) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Top 10 States with the Largest Numbers of Naturalizations, 2001 to 2006 (ranked by 2006 numbers)

Rank	State of residence	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total 2001-2006
1	California	202,668	149,213	135,599	145,593	170,489	152,836	956,398
2	New York	98,858	94,181	63,888	66,234	84,624	103,870	511,655
3	Florida	48,577	44,732	35,105	43,795	42,999	90,846	306,054
4	New Jersey	26,730	26,760	22,968	30,291	33,160	39,801	179,710
5	Texas	43,287	42,767	28,638	35,417	38,553	37,835	226,497
6	Illinois	32,256	32,585	23,401	29,432	27,739	30,156	175,569
7	Massachusetts	17,596	18,024	11,461	16,263	22,685	22,932	108,961
8	Virginia	7,414	10,598	9,583	13,478	17,653	20,401	79,127
9	Georgia	3,223	11,066	11,068	6,880	7,903	19,785	59,925
10	Pennsylvania	8,383	9,619	9,443	10,205	13,307	15,846	66,803
	Other states	117,267	133,101	111,281	139,563	145,168	168,281	814,661
	Total	606,259	572,646	462,435	537,151	604,280	702,589	3,485,360

Source: Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2006 (Table 22).

The state with the fewest naturalizations in 2006 was Wyoming.

In Wyoming, 169 lawful permanent residents naturalized in 2006. The next-lowest numbers of naturalizations were in Montana (225), North Dakota (329), South Dakota (342), West Virginia (390), and Mississippi (495).

Of the 84,000 Mexican foreign born naturalized in 2006, the largest groups resided

in California, Texas, and Illinois.

Almost half of the 83,979 Mexican foreign born naturalized in 2006 resided in California (45.5 percent or 38,210), while 15.2 percent were in Texas (12,796) and 7.9 percent were in Illinois (6,675).

The New York, Los Angeles, and Miami metropolitan areas were home to more than one-third of new US citizens.

Approximately 19 percent of all those who naturalized in 2006 lived in the greater New York metropolitan area (132,326), 9.4 percent lived in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area (65,813), and 9.1 percent lived in the greater Miami metropolitan area (63,623).

These metropolitan areas — together with the Chicago (4.1 percent or 29,047), Washington, DC (3.8 percent or 26,462), San Francisco (3.4 percent or 24,042), and Boston (2.6 percent or 18,585) metropolitan areas — were home to 51.2 percent of the individuals who became US citizens in 2006.

In 2004, an estimated 8 million lawful permanent residents were eligible for naturalization.

According to the latest available OIS estimates, there were 8 million lawful permanent residents LPRs eligible to naturalize in 2004. They included 2.3 million (29.3 percent) LPRs in California, 1.1 million (13.6 percent) in New York, 800,000 (9.9 percent) in Texas, and 600,000 (7.8 percent) in Florida.

Note: The full report "Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population and Population Eligible to Naturalize in 2004" is available [here](#).

For immigrants who naturalized in 2006, the median time between date of legal immigration to the United States and date of naturalization was seven years.

Among persons who became US citizens in 2006, the median number of years of residence between the date of legal immigration and the date of naturalization was seven years.

Between 2000 and 2005, the median number of years of residence prior to naturalization was eight years. This decrease may be due to faster application processing, as well as to changes in the demand for naturalization.

Note: The full report "Naturalizations in the United States 2006" is available [here](#).

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