
NATURALIZATIONS FISCAL YEAR 2001

This report will appear as a chapter in the forthcoming *2001 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*. All references to Appendices, Charts, Tables, and other sections of the *Statistical Yearbook*, as well as detailed table numbers, appear as they will in the final *Yearbook* edition.

V. NATURALIZATIONS

This section presents information on the number and characteristics of persons who naturalize in the United States.

Naturalization refers to the conferring of U.S. citizenship, by any means, upon a person after birth. (See Appendix 2, p. A.2-8.) There are five ways of becoming a U.S. citizen: naturalization in a court ceremony; naturalization through an administrative hearing; derivation through the naturalization of parents; acquisition at birth abroad to citizen parents; and legislation conferring citizenship upon certain groups of persons (see Limitations of Data). As part of the naturalization process, applicants pledge an oath of allegiance to the United States, thereby renouncing allegiance to their former countries of nationality.

U.S. Naturalization Program

To naturalize, an immigrant must fulfill certain requirements set forth in the Immigration and Nationality Act concerning age, lawful admission, and residence in the United States. These general naturalization provisions specify that an alien must: be at least 18 years of age; have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence; and have resided in the country continuously for at least 5 years. Additional requirements include the ability to speak, read, and write the English language; knowledge of the U.S. government and U.S. history; and good moral character. In fiscal year 2001, immigrants naturalizing under the general provisions accounted for 92 percent of those for whom the nationality law provision was reported (Table 46). (Provision of the law was not reported for 5 percent of naturalizations.)

The special provisions of naturalization law exempt aliens from one or more of the requirements of the general provisions. Spouses and children of U.S. citizens and military classes constitute the main categories of special naturalization. The majority of people naturalizing as spouses of U.S. citizens may do so in 3 years rather than the 5 years prescribed under the general provisions. Of all new citizens in 2001 with naturalization law provision reported, 8 percent naturalized under the special provisions

(Table 46). Children who immigrate with their parents generally do not apply to naturalize, but derive U.S. citizenship through the naturalization of their parents. Children adopted by U.S. citizens are eligible for administrative naturalization by the INS. These children may be naturalized in court ceremonies prior to reaching age 18—there are no residency requirements. Under certain conditions, aliens who served honorably during war time and other conflicts may naturalize without prior admission to permanent resident status. Also, they need not have resided in the United States for a particular length of time. Aliens with lawful permanent resident status who have served honorably in the Armed Forces of the United States also are entitled to certain exemptions from the general naturalization requirements.

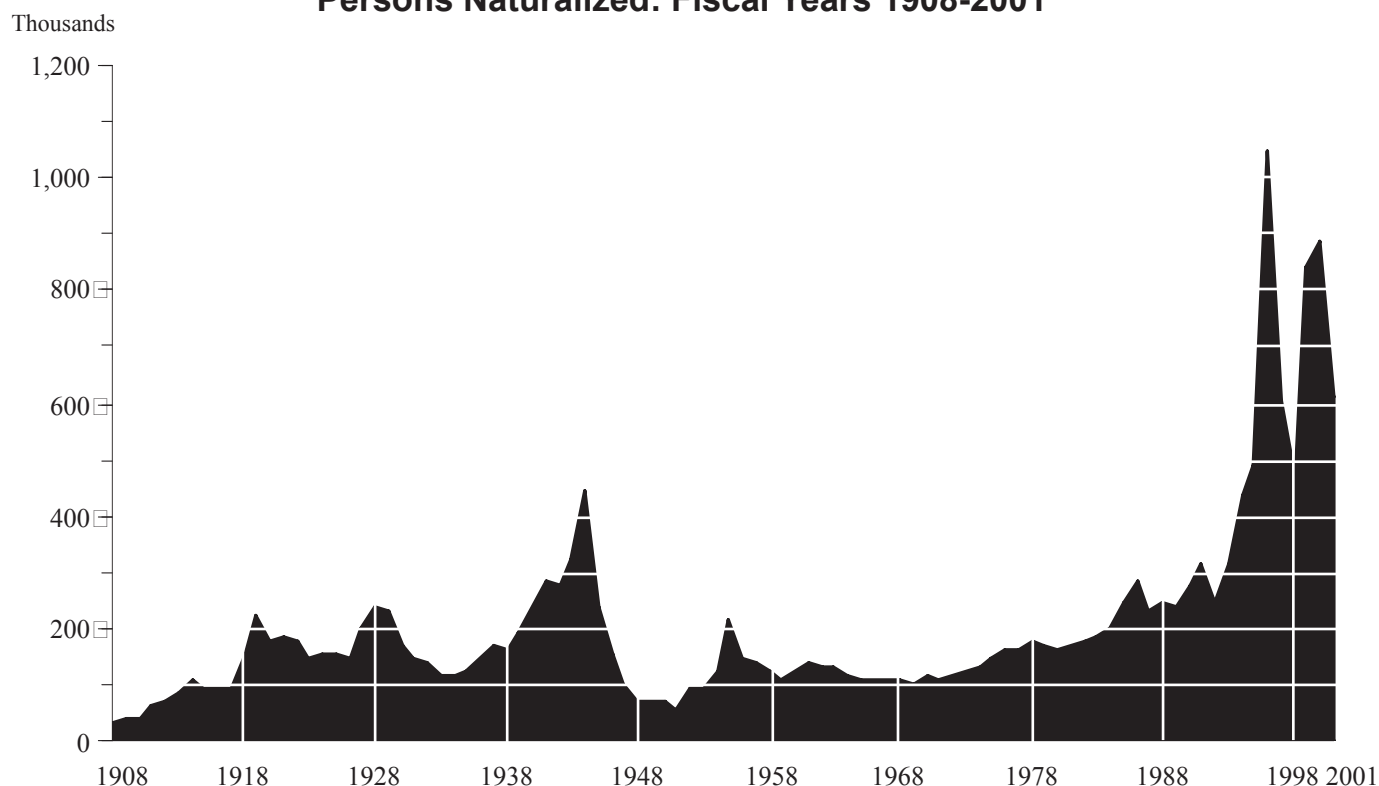
Every applicant for naturalization (age 18 and over) must file an application, Form N-400, *Application for Naturalization*. All aliens filing these applications who meet the preliminary documentary requirements must be interviewed by INS officers to determine their eligibility to naturalize. During the interview the officer discerns the applicant's knowledge and understanding of the English language, as well as of the history and government of the United States. Recently, applicants have been allowed to take standardized tests that are used to determine knowledge and reading and writing capabilities. Those applicants found qualified are scheduled for an oath ceremony before a judge or district director.

More than 608,000 people were naturalized during 2001.

Data Overview

The INS naturalized 608,205 persons in fiscal year 2001. This figure was less than the number of naturalizations in

Chart K
Persons Naturalized: Fiscal Years 1908-2001



Source: 1961-2001, Table 45; 1908-60, previous *Yearbooks*.

2000 (888,788) and 1999 (839,944) but greater than the number in 1998 (463,060) and 1997 (598,225). These fluctuations are due primarily to an application backlog and related workflow issues since the number of applications submitted for naturalization declined from 1997 to 2001. Because the impact of the backlog with respect to the annual number of naturalizations and demographic composition of new citizens cannot be determined with certainty, caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from the data.

Between 1908 and 1990, the number of persons naturalizing each year exceeded 300,000 only twice, in 1943 and 1944, during World War II (Chart K and Table 45). Since 1990, naturalizations have exceeded 300,000 in every year except 1992. Naturalizations rose sharply during the 1990s due to several factors. A mandatory Green Card Replacement program put into effect in 1992 led some permanent residents to naturalize who otherwise might not have done so. In 1994, the first of the 2.7 million illegal aliens who were granted legal permanent residence under the provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 became eligible to

naturalize. Also during the mid 1990s, an unknown number of immigrants naturalized in response to legislative efforts restricting public benefits for the noncitizen population, including Proposition 187 in California (1994), the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (1996), and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA, 1996).

Region and country of birth (Tables 49; 52-56)

Until the 1970s, the majority of persons naturalizing were born in Europe because the country quotas in immigration law favored those countries (Chart L). Once the quotas ended with the INA amendments in 1965, the regional origin of persons immigrating and naturalizing shifted from European to Asian countries. Asian immigrants also had historically higher naturalization rates than other immigrants. Between 1976 and 1995, Asia was the leading region of birth among persons naturalizing. Increased legal immigration from North American countries, especially due to IRCA, reduced Asia's share of naturalizations. In 1996, 49 percent of persons becoming U.S. citizens were born in North American countries compared to 29 percent in Asian countries. Between 1997 and 2001, North

