

7. 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 Glossary.) There are five ways of becoming a naturalized 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, if any.

U.S. Naturalization Program

To be naturalized, an applicant generally 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 2003, immigrants naturalizing under the general provisions accounted for 91 percent of those for whom the nationality law provision was reported. (Provision of the law was not reported for 2 percent of naturalizations.)

The special provisions of naturalization law exempt certain applicants 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 2003 with naturalization law provision reported, 9 percent naturalized under the special provisions. Under the Child Citizenship Act of 2000,

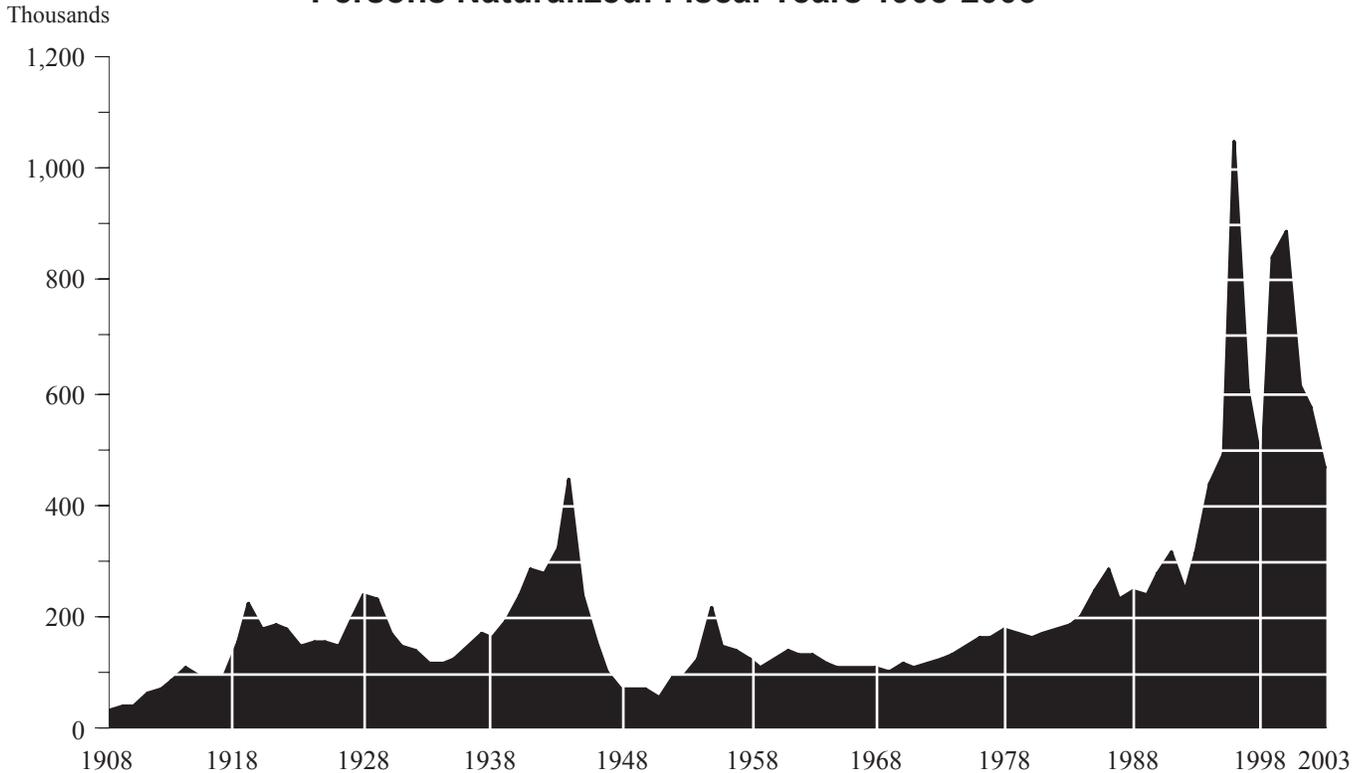
foreign-born children under 18 years of age, including adopted children, acquire U.S. citizenship automatically if they meet certain requirements. Among the requirements, the children must be lawful permanent residents and have at least one U.S. citizen parent. Acquisition of citizenship means citizenship acquired by law without the need to apply for citizenship. Previously, adopted children were required to apply for citizenship while children who immigrated with their parents derived U.S. citizenship through the naturalization of their parents. In addition, under certain conditions, children of a U.S. citizen who resides abroad may be naturalized. Under certain other conditions, applicants 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 persons filing these applications who meet the preliminary documentary requirements must be interviewed by officers from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to determine their eligibility to naturalize. During the interview the officer verifies the applicant's knowledge and understanding of the English language, as well as of the history and government of the United States. Those applicants found qualified are scheduled for an oath ceremony before a judge or USCIS district director.

Data Overview

The number of persons naturalizing each year depends partly on trends in legal immigration in preceding years. Because of the 5-year residency requirement for most applicants, naturalizations typically lag behind legal immigration by at least 6 or 7 years.

Chart J
Persons Naturalized: Fiscal Years 1908-2003



Source: 1961-2003, Table 31; 1908-60, previous *Yearbooks*.

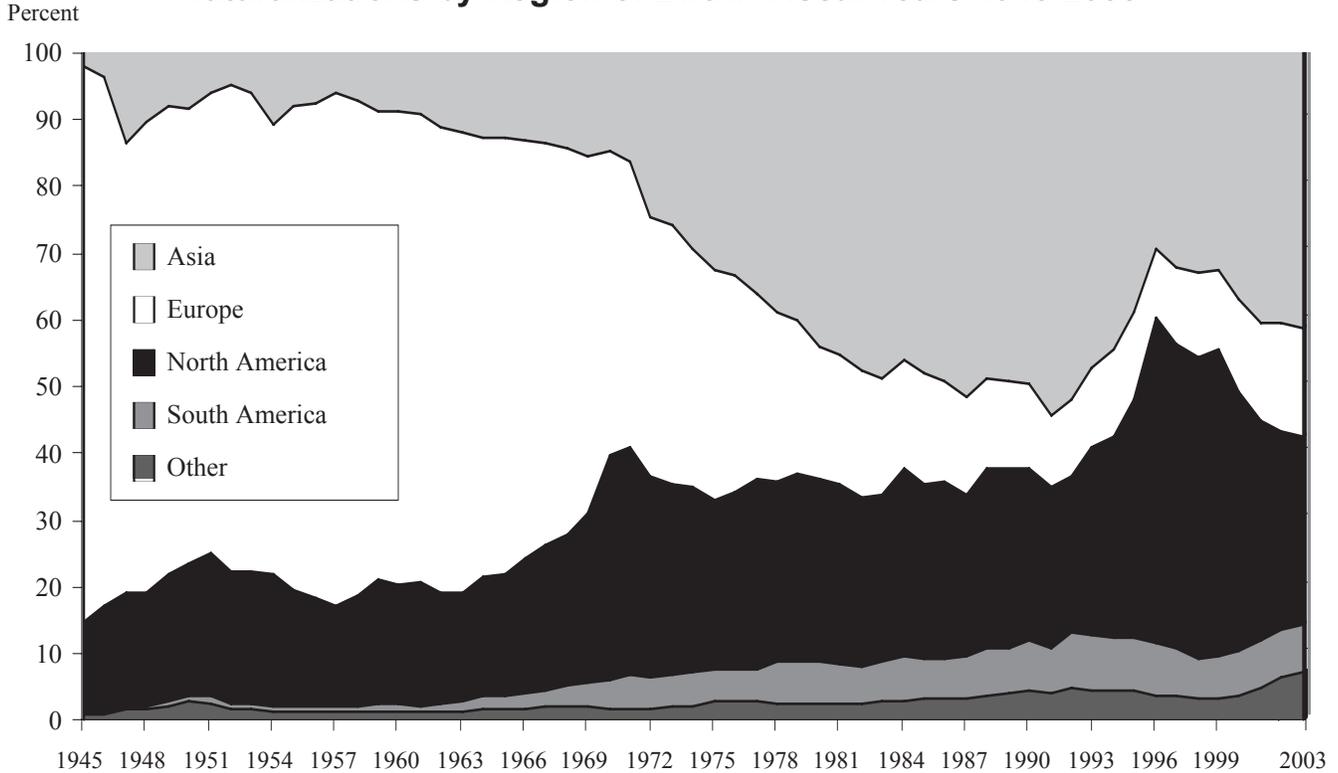
USCIS naturalized 463,204 persons in fiscal year 2003. This figure was 19 percent less than the number of naturalizations in 2002 (573,708). Application receipts for naturalization were lower in 2003 than 2002, which is consistent with, but not exclusively attributed to, the decline in legal immigration during the late 1990s. The number of naturalization applications in the processing backlog was about 625,000 at the end of both fiscal years 2002 and 2003. The distribution of this backlog was uneven among USCIS offices nationwide. The impact of the backlog on the demographic composition of new citizens cannot be determined with certainty so caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from the data.

More than 463,000 people were naturalized during 2003.

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 J and Table 31). Since 1990, naturalizations have exceeded 300,000 in every year except 1992. Naturalizations rose sharply beginning in 1994 due to several factors. A mandatory Green Card Replacement program initiated 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 immigrants 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). Naturalizations peaked at 1,044,689 in 1996. The number of persons naturalizing each year during the 2001-03 period was lower than the annual average level reached during the late 1990s but well above the level existing prior to 1994.

Chart K
Naturalizations by Region of Birth: Fiscal Years 1945-2003



Source: 1993-2003, Table 32; 1945-92, previous *Yearbooks*.

Region and country of birth (Chart K and Table 32)

Until the 1970s, the majority of persons naturalizing were born in Europe because the country quotas in immigration law favored those countries. 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. With increased legal immigration from North American countries (including Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central America) beginning in the mid 1980s, the share of naturalizations from that region increased, peaking at 49 percent in 1996. Since 2001, Asia has been the leading region of naturalizations. In 2003, 42 percent of persons naturalizing were born in Asian countries compared to 28 percent for North American countries.

Mexico was the leading country of birth of persons naturalizing in 2003, accounting for 56,093 new citizens. Other major countries of birth for persons naturalizing in 2003 were India (29,790), the Philippines (29,081) Vietnam

(25,995), the People’s Republic of China (24,014), Korea (15,968), the Dominican Republic (12,627), Jamaica (11,232), Iran (10,807), and Poland (9,140). These ten sending countries (including Mexico) represented 49 percent of new naturalized citizens in 2003.

State and metropolitan area of residence (Table 33)

California was the residence of 135,815, or 29 percent, of persons naturalizing in 2003, followed by New York with 63,945, or 14 percent. Other top states of residence included Florida, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey. These six states were home to 67 percent of new citizens in 2003. They were the same top destination states for persons naturalizing in 2002.

Ten metropolitan areas accounted for the residence of 46 percent of persons naturalizing in 2003. These areas included: New York, NY (53,797); Los Angeles, CA (47,087); Chicago, IL (22,366); Washington, DC-MD-VA-WV (17,037); Orange County, CA (15,585); Miami, FL (14,375); Oakland, CA (13,727); San Francisco, CA (10,234); San Jose, CA (9,930); and Houston, TX (9,843).

Table I
Median Years of Residence by Year of Naturalization and Region of Birth:
Selected Fiscal Years 1965-2003

Region of birth	2003	2002	2001	2000	1995	1990	1985	1980	1975	1970	1965
Persons naturalized	8	8	9	10	9	8	8	8	7	8	7
Africa	7	7	10	8	6	7	7	7	6	6	6
Asia	8	8	8	8	7	7	7	7	6	6	6
Europe	7	7	7	8	9	10	9	10	8	9	7
North America	11	11	11	11	14	11	13	11	9	7	9
Oceania	9	9	10	11	11	10	8	8	7	9	8
South America	8	8	9	10	10	9	8	9	10	7	7

Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)

Naturalizations among immigrants legalized under IRCA declined from 43,164 (8 percent of the total) in fiscal year 2002 to 24,711 (5 percent of the total) in fiscal year 2003. The annual number of naturalizations among immigrants legalized under IRCA peaked in 1996 (227,905). Of all immigrants legalized under IRCA who naturalized in 2003, 68 percent were born in Mexico. By the end of 2003, approximately 957,000 or 36 percent of the total 2,688,000 immigrants legalized under IRCA had naturalized.

Years in immigrant status (Table I)

The median number of years of residence between the date of legal permanent residence and the date of naturalization was 8 years among persons who naturalized in 2003. European and African born immigrants spent the least time in legal immigrant status (7 years), followed by immigrants from Asia and South America (8 years), Oceania (9 years), and North America (11 years).

Gender, age, marital status, and occupation

(Table 34)

As in previous years, the majority (54 percent) of persons naturalizing in 2003 were female. Nearly 42 percent of new citizens were between ages 30-44 years of age. Two-thirds (64 percent) were married. By occupation, the largest number were professional and technical workers (10 percent), followed by operators, fabricators or laborers (9 percent). The former included slightly more women than men while the latter were predominantly male.

Understanding the Data

Data Collection

USCIS compiles two types of data on naturalizations: workload statistics and demographic statistics on the characteristics of persons who naturalize. Workload data include the number of naturalization applications received, the number of petitions filed, and the number of applicants approved for naturalization during a fiscal year.

Demographic data come from the N-400 application for naturalization for persons ages 18 and over and include: date and country of birth; gender; marital status; state and metropolitan area of residence; occupation; date of admission for permanent residence; and section of applicable naturalization law. These data are obtained from either an automated case-tracking system in operation in the larger USCIS offices, manually coded records from the smaller offices, and, if not otherwise available, from the Central Index System (CIS) of the USCIS.

Limitations of Data

The 2003 naturalization data do not necessarily reflect the demand to naturalize because of the backlog of applications pending a decision. The demographic characteristics of aliens whose cases were in the backlog are unknown.

Data prior to 2001 included small numbers of records for persons under age 18, most of which came from the N-600 application for certificate of citizenship. The

N-600 form is used to provide evidence of citizenship for persons residing in the United States who derived or acquired citizenship. The N-600K form is used to confer naturalization on qualified children under the age of 18 of a U.S. citizen who regularly resides abroad. Most N-600 records were excluded beginning in 1998. Persons ages 17 and under have been excluded from naturalization *Statistical Yearbook* tables since 2001.

Occupation was not reported for one-third of all records in 2003. This is consistent with the level of nonreporting in previous years. In addition, data are missing on about 2 percent of all records for state of residence, marital status, and provision of naturalization law. The Central Index System (CIS), which does not maintain information on these variables, was the source of data for these records.