

Naturalizations in the United States: 2009

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Naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is conferred upon foreign citizens or nationals after fulfilling the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). After naturalization, foreign-born citizens enjoy nearly all the same benefits, rights and responsibilities that the Constitution gives to native-born U.S. citizens, including the right to vote. This Office of Immigration Statistics Annual Flow Report presents information on the number and characteristics of foreign nationals aged 18 years and over who were naturalized during 2009.¹

Data were obtained from administrative records of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the Department of Homeland Security. These records consist of information from applications for naturalization.

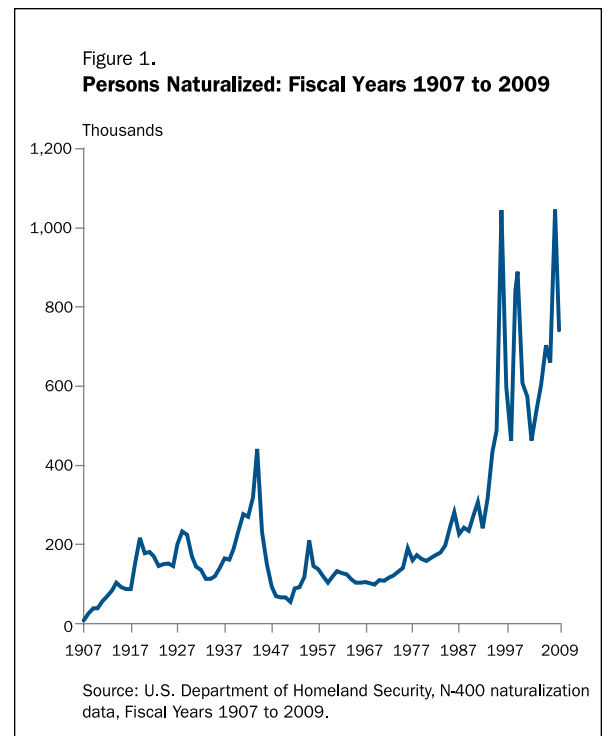
In 2009, the total number of persons naturalizing was 743,715 (see Table 1 and Figure 1). The leading countries of birth of new citizens were Mexico (111,630), India (52,889), the Philippines (38,934), the People's Republic of China (37,130), and Vietnam (31,168). The largest number of persons naturalizing lived in California (179,754), New York (88,733), and Florida (82,788).

THE NATURALIZATION PROCESS

To be naturalized, an applicant 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 a foreign national must be at least 18 years of age; have been granted lawful permanent resident status in the United States (be a legal permanent resident or LPR); 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 history; and good moral character.

Special provisions of naturalization law exempt certain applicants from one or more 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. Foreign-born children under 18 years of age, including adopted

children, acquire U.S. citizenship automatically without applying, if they meet certain requirements. Among the requirements, the children must be lawful permanent residents and have at least one U.S. citizen parent. Persons who served honorably during wartime and in other conflicts may naturalize under certain conditions without prior admission to permanent resident status or having 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.



¹ In this report, years refer to fiscal years (October 1 to September 30).



Every applicant for naturalization who is 18 years of age or older must file an N-400 *Application for Naturalization*. All persons filing these applications who meet the preliminary documentary requirements must be interviewed by officers from USCIS to determine their eligibility to naturalize. In most cases, the officer verifies the applicant's knowledge and understanding of the English language and the history and government of the United States. Those applicants found qualified are scheduled for an oath ceremony before a judge or before an officer delegated the authority to administer the oath by the Director of USCIS.

DATA

The data presented in this report consist of demographic information taken from N-400 applications. This information includes date and country of birth; gender; marital status; state and ZIP Code of residence; and section of applicable naturalization law. The data were obtained primarily from automated case tracking systems, but if not otherwise available, from the Central Index System of USCIS. Caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from these data about trends in the demand to naturalize. Year-to-year fluctuations in the number of naturalizations are not uncommon and reflect volatility in the volume of applications filed with USCIS and related impacts on application processing. Annual averages of persons naturalizing over a period of years provide a more accurate indication of long-term trends in the propensity to naturalize.

TRENDS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSONS NATURALIZING

The number of persons naturalizing in the United States declined to 743,715 in 2009 from 1,046,539 in 2008. The 2008 number, an all-time record, followed a surge in applications in 2007 in advance of a fee increase and efforts to encourage eligible immigrants to naturalize. The number of applications for naturalization, which declined from 2007 to 2008, edged upward to 570,000 in 2009. Additionally, the number of naturalization applications pending a decision decreased to 230,000 by the end of 2009.

Historical Trend

The average annual number of persons naturalizing increased from less than 120,000 during the 1950s and 1960s to 210,000 during the 1980s, 500,000 during the 1990s, and to 680,000 between 2000 and 2009 (see Figure 1). Naturalizations rose sharply during the mid-1990s. Factors that may have accounted for this increase include: 1) the 2.7 million undocumented immigrants legalized under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986

Table 1.

Persons Naturalized by Region and Country of Birth: Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009

(Countries ranked by 2009 persons naturalized)

Region/country of birth	2009		2008		2007	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	743,715	100.0	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0
REGION:						
Africa	60,383	8.1	54,420	5.2	41,652	6.3
Asia*	276,375	37.2	330,361	31.6	243,783	36.9
Europe	90,149	12.1	108,618	10.4	81,756	12.4
North America	250,266	33.7	462,372	44.2	241,163	36.5
Caribbean	84,917	11.4	131,935	12.6	68,577	10.4
Central America	43,914	5.9	86,168	8.2	41,814	6.3
Other North America	121,435	16.3	244,269	23.3	130,772	19.8
Oceania	3,928	0.5	4,781	0.5	3,342	0.5
South America	61,674	8.3	84,853	8.1	48,133	7.3
Unknown	940	0.1	1,134	0.1	648	0.1
COUNTRY:						
Mexico	111,630	15.0	231,815	22.2	122,258	18.5
India	52,889	7.1	65,971	6.3	46,871	7.1
Philippines	38,934	5.2	58,792	5.6	38,830	5.9
China,						
People's Republic	37,130	5.0	40,017	3.8	33,134	5.0
Vietnam	31,168	4.2	39,584	3.8	27,921	4.2
Cuba	24,891	3.3	39,871	3.8	15,394	2.3
Dominican Republic	20,778	2.8	35,251	3.4	20,645	3.1
El Salvador	18,927	2.5	35,796	3.4	17,157	2.6
Korea, South**	17,576	2.4	22,759	2.2	17,628	2.7
Colombia	16,593	2.2	22,926	2.2	12,089	1.8
Jamaica	15,098	2.0	21,324	2.0	12,314	1.9
Haiti	13,290	1.8	21,229	2.0	11,552	1.7
Pakistan	12,528	1.7	11,813	1.1	9,147	1.4
Iran	12,069	1.6	11,813	1.1	10,557	1.6
Poland	10,604	1.4	14,237	1.4	9,320	1.4
Peru	10,349	1.4	15,016	1.4	7,965	1.2
United Kingdom	10,060	1.4	12,095	1.2	7,752	1.2
Canada	9,753	1.3	12,387	1.2	8,473	1.3
Russia	9,490	1.3	10,778	1.0	7,660	1.2
Nigeria	9,298	1.3	8,597	0.8	6,582	1.0
All other countries	260,660	35.0	314,468	30.0	217,228	32.9

*Beginning in Fiscal Year 2009, data for Asia in all fiscal years include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

**Data for South Korea prior to Fiscal Year 2009 include a small number of cases from North Korea.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009.

becoming eligible for citizenship; 2) legislative efforts to restrict public benefits for non-citizens; and 3) implementation of a mandatory program requiring replacement of permanent resident cards issued before 1977.

Until the 1970s, the majority of persons naturalizing were born in European countries. The regional origin of new citizens shifted from Europe to Asia due to increased legal immigration from Asian countries, the arrival of Indochinese refugees in the 1970s, and the historically higher naturalization rate of Asian immigrants. Consequently, Asia has been the leading region of origin of new citizens in most years since 1976.

Table 2.**Persons Naturalized by State of Residence: Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009**

(Ranked by 2009 persons naturalized)

State of residence	2009		2008		2007	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	743,715	100.0	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0
California	179,754	24.2	297,909	28.5	181,684	27.5
New York	88,733	11.9	90,572	8.7	73,676	11.2
Florida	82,788	11.1	128,328	12.3	54,563	8.3
Texas	54,024	7.3	82,129	7.8	53,032	8.0
New Jersey	35,077	4.7	59,950	5.7	35,235	5.3
Illinois	28,112	3.8	45,224	4.3	38,735	5.9
Virginia	24,730	3.3	29,949	2.9	14,171	2.1
Massachusetts	21,748	2.9	28,728	2.7	20,952	3.2
Washington	19,853	2.7	18,665	1.8	14,671	2.2
Maryland	17,099	2.3	23,342	2.2	11,613	1.8
Other	191,797	25.8	241,743	23.1	162,145	24.5

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009.

Leading States and Metropolitan Areas of Residence

Seventy-four percent of all persons naturalizing in 2009 resided in 10 states (see Table 2). California was home to the largest percentage of persons naturalizing (24 percent), followed by New York (12 percent) and Florida (11 percent). Fifty-four percent of all new citizens in 2009 lived in 10 metropolitan areas (see Table 3).² The leading metropolitan areas of residence were New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA (15 percent), Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA (11 percent), and Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL (7.3 percent).

From 2008 to 2009, naturalizations declined in all leading states of residence except Washington. The greatest percentage decrease in the number of naturalizations occurred in New Jersey (41 percent) and California (40 percent). Among leading metropolitan areas of residence, the largest percentage decreases occurred in San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA (45 percent) and Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL (39 percent).

Gender, Age, and Marital Status

In 2009, females accounted for 53 percent of all persons naturalizing (see Table 4). More than one-half (54 percent) of new citizens were ages 25 to 44 years. The median age of all persons naturalizing was 40 years. Persons 65 years and over accounted for nearly 8 percent of naturalizations in 2009 (see Table 5). Two-thirds (67 percent) of persons naturalizing in 2009 were married, and 20 percent were single (see Table 6).

² Beginning in 2005, the Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) redefined metropolitan areas (Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas), to conform with new standards issued by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget for Core-Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs). See Federal Register, Vol. 65, No. 249, Wednesday 12/27/2000, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg/metroareas122700.pdf>. The most current CBSA definitions are available from OMB at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/info/reg/statpolicy.html#fs>.

Region and Leading Countries of Birth

Thirty-seven percent of persons naturalizing in 2009 were born in Asia, followed by 34 percent from North America, and 12 percent from Europe (see Table 1). Mexico was the leading country of birth of persons naturalizing in 2009 (15 percent). The next leading countries of origin of new citizens in 2009 were India (7.1 percent), the Philippines (5.2 percent), the People's Republic of China (5.0 percent), and Vietnam (4.2 percent). The 10 countries with the largest number of naturalizations accounted for 50 percent of all new citizens in 2009.

From 2008 to 2009, naturalizations increased among immigrants from African countries but decreased among immigrants from all other regions. The greatest decrease in naturalizations—in number and as a percentage of all naturalizations—occurred among immigrants from North American countries.

Table 3.**Persons Naturalized by Metropolitan Area of Residence: Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009**

(Ranked by 2009 persons naturalized)

Metropolitan area of residence	2009		2008		2007	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	743,715	100.0	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA	112,801	15.2	134,571	12.9	99,007	15.0
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	84,061	11.3	138,618	13.2	78,454	11.9
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	54,202	7.3	89,440	8.5	36,159	5.5
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	32,690	4.4	40,731	3.9	19,367	2.9
Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	26,676	3.6	43,548	4.2	37,736	5.7
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	20,956	2.8	37,852	3.6	25,873	3.9
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	19,422	2.6	23,627	2.3	12,253	1.9
Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX	18,380	2.5	28,275	2.7	18,398	2.8
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH	17,429	2.3	22,859	2.2	16,954	2.6
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	17,423	2.3	25,172	2.4	18,069	2.7
Other	339,675	45.7	461,846	44.1	298,207	45.2

Note: Metropolitan areas defined based on Core-Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs).

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009.

Table 4.

**Persons Naturalized by Gender:
Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009**

Gender	2009		2008		2007	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	743,715	100.0	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0
Male	351,633	47.3	456,767	43.6	294,244	44.6
Female	391,807	52.7	589,427	56.3	365,807	55.4
Unknown	275	—	345	—	426	0.1

— Figure rounds to 0.0.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009.

Table 5.

Persons Naturalized by Age: Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009

Age	2009		2008		2007	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	743,715	100.0	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0
18 to 24 years	60,955	8.2	87,397	8.4	65,592	9.9
25 to 34 years	188,179	25.3	245,799	23.5	167,320	25.3
35 to 44 years	215,889	29.0	306,960	29.3	192,811	29.2
45 to 54 years	133,538	18.0	195,785	18.7	108,277	16.4
55 to 64 years	87,245	11.7	131,854	12.6	74,352	11.3
65 years and over	57,908	7.8	78,744	7.5	52,125	7.9
Unknown	1	—	0	—	0	—
Median age	40	X	40	X	39	X

X Not applicable.

— Figure rounds to 0.0.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009.

Table 7.

Persons Naturalized by Region of Birth and Median Years in Legal Permanent Resident Status: Selected Fiscal Years 1965 to 2009

Region of birth	Year																
	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1995	1990	1985	1980	1975	1970	1965
Total	7	9	8	7	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	8	8	8	7	8	7
Africa	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	6	6	7	6	7	7	7	6	6	6
Asia	6	7	6	6	7	8	8	7	8	8	7	7	7	7	6	6	6
Europe	7	7	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	9	10	9	10	8	9	7
North America	11	12	11	10	11	10	11	11	11	11	14	11	13	11	9	7	9
Oceania	8	9	9	8	9	9	9	9	10	11	11	10	8	8	7	9	8
South America	6	8	7	7	8	8	8	8	9	10	10	9	8	9	10	7	7

Note: Excludes persons who were not required to be legal permanent residents prior to naturalization.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 1965 to 2009.

Years in Immigrant Status

Persons naturalizing in 2009 spent a median of seven years in legal permanent resident status before becoming citizens (see Table 7). Immigrants born in Africa, Asia, and South America spent the least time in legal immigrant status (6 years), followed by immigrants from Europe (7 years), Oceania (8 years), and North America (11 years). From 2008 to 2009, the median years spent in legal permanent resident status decreased by two years.

Table 6.

**Persons Naturalized by Marital Status:
Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009**

Marital status	2009		2008		2007	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	743,715	100.0	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0
Single	147,270	19.8	218,003	20.8	140,971	21.3
Married	497,899	66.9	701,382	67.0	438,805	66.4
Other*	98,546	13.3	127,154	12.1	80,701	12.2

*Includes persons who were divorced, separated, widowed, or of unknown marital status.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2007 to 2009.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about immigration and immigration statistics, visit the Office of Immigration Statistics web page at <http://www.dhs.gov/immigrationstatistics>.