
NATURALIZATIONS FISCAL YEAR 2000

This report will appear as a chapter in the forthcoming *2000 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*. All references to Appendixes, 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 2000, immigrants naturalizing under the general provisions accounted for 94 percent of those for whom the nationality law provision was reported (Table 47). (Provision of the law was not reported for 8 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 2000 with naturalization law provision reported, 6 percent naturalized under the special provisions (Table 47). 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 to File Petition 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.

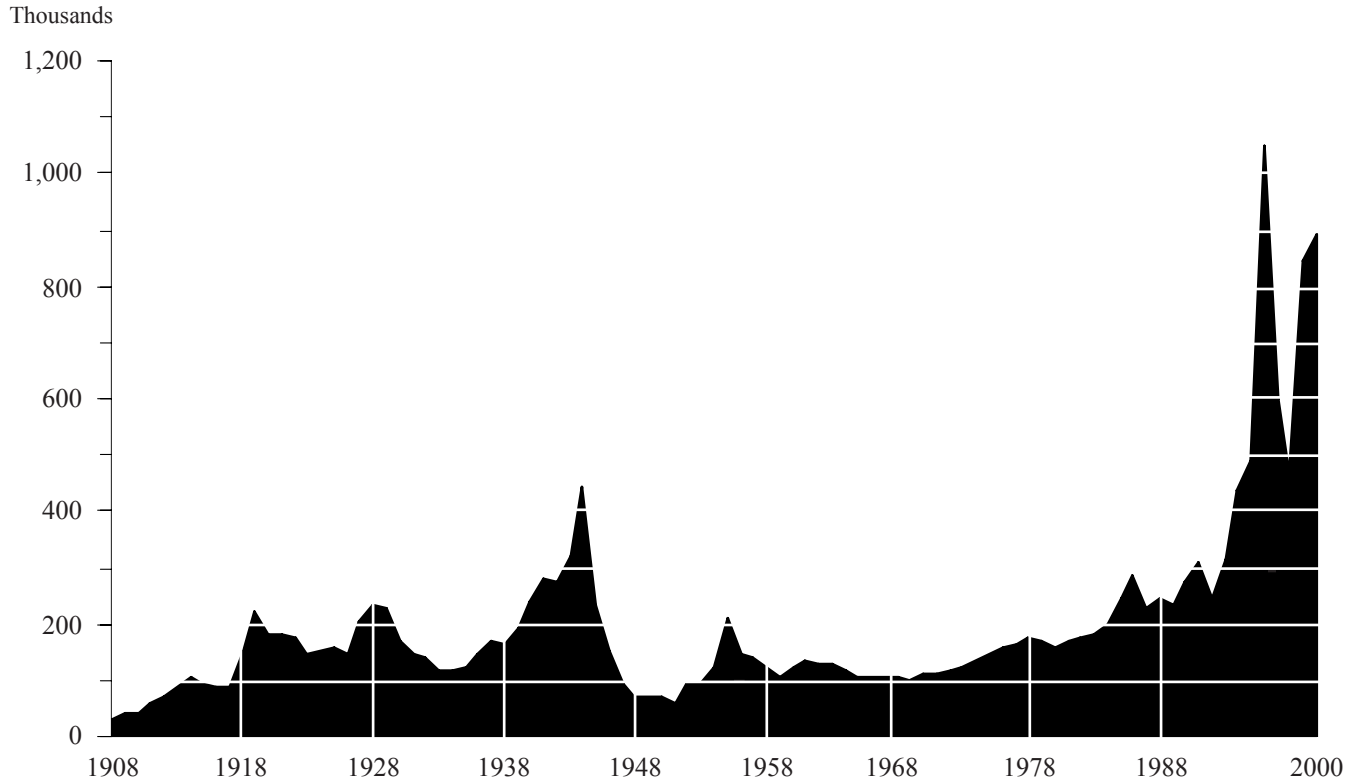
Nearly 889,000 people were naturalized during 2000.

Data Overview

The INS naturalized 888,788 persons in fiscal year 2000. This figure represents a 6 percent increase over naturalizations in 1999 (839,944) and is the second highest number of annual naturalizations ever following the record of 1,044,689 in 1996. During 1997 and 1998, fewer immigrants than expected were naturalized because of an application processing backlog. Although the backlog had been reduced substantially by the end of 2000, caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from these data about annual trends in naturalization.

Between 1908 and 1990, the number of persons naturalizing each year exceeded 300,000 only twice, in 1943 and 1944,

Chart L
Persons Naturalized: Fiscal Years 1908-2000



Source: 1961-2000, Table 46; 1908-60, previous *Yearbooks*.

during World War II (Chart L and Table 46). Since 1991, naturalizations have exceeded 300,000 in every year except 1992. The current upward trend began during the 1970s and was driven by the immigration and subsequent naturalization of large numbers of immigrants from Asian countries following the elimination of country quotas in amendments to the Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA) of 1965. 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. During the mid 1990s, legislation passed that restricted 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). Although precise estimates are not available, many immigrants may have naturalized in response to this legislation.

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

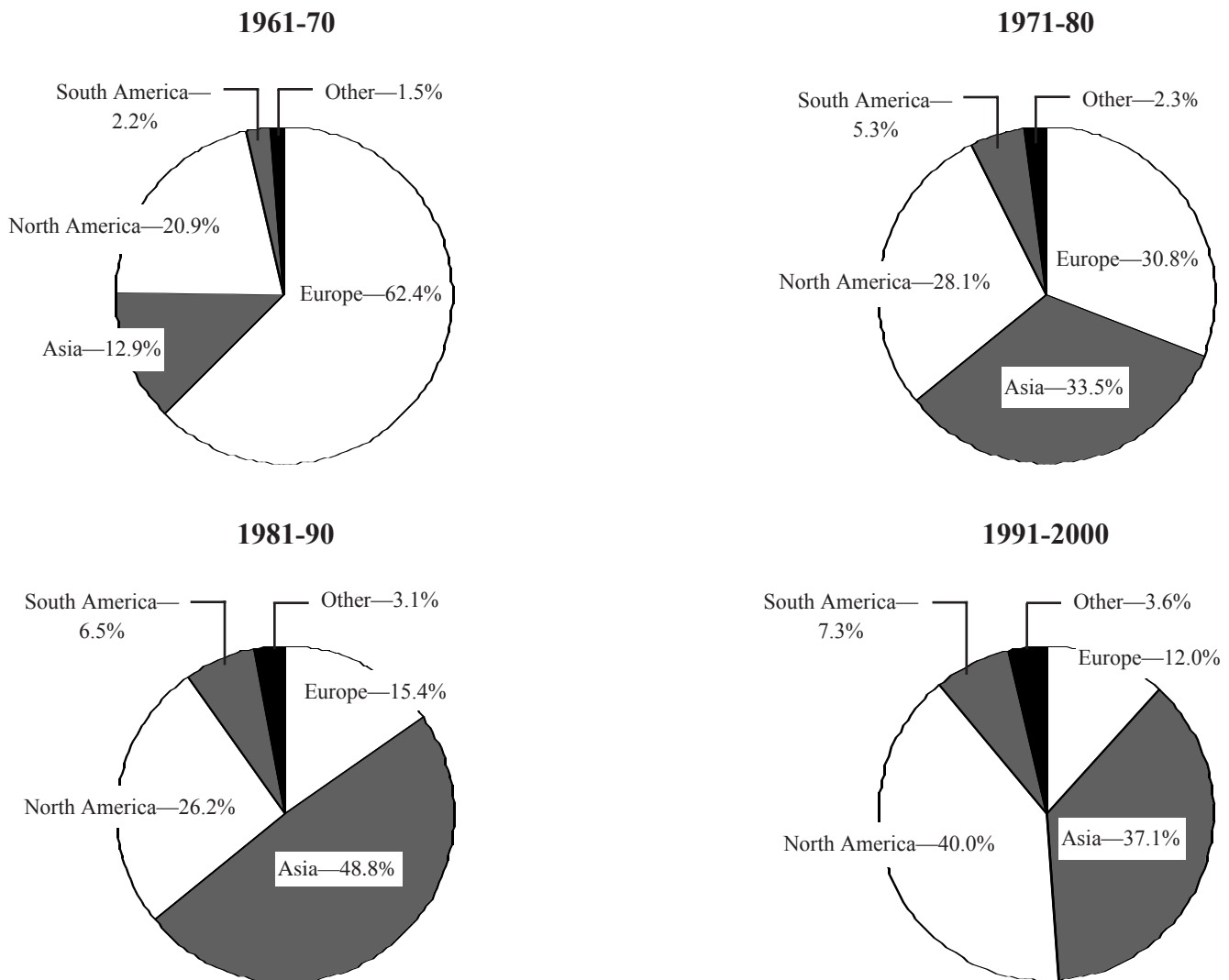
Until the 1970s, the majority of persons naturalizing were born in Europe because the country quotas in immigration

law favored those countries. Once the quotas ended in 1965 with the INA amendments, the regional origin of persons immigrating and naturalizing shifted from European to Asian countries. 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. The percent of persons naturalizing who were born in Asian countries decreased from 55 percent in 1991 to 29 percent in 1996 while North America's share increased from 24 percent to 49 percent during the same period. By 2000, 37 percent of persons naturalizing were born in Asia and 39 percent were from North American countries.

Mexico was the leading country of birth of persons naturalizing in 2000. However, the number of new Mexican born citizens decreased to 189,705 or 21 percent of the total in 2000 from 207,750 or 25 percent of the total in 1999 as the naturalization of IRCA legalized aliens slowed (see the Immigration Reform and Control Act section below). Other major countries of birth for persons naturalizing in 2000 were Vietnam (55,934), the People's Republic of China (54,534), the Philippines (46,563), India

Chart M
Persons Naturalized by Decade and Selected Region of Birth: Fiscal Years 1961-2000



Source: 1991-2000, Table 49; 1961-90, previous *Yearbooks*.

(42,198), the Dominican Republic (25,176), El Salvador (24,073), Korea (23,858), Jamaica (22,567), and Iran (19,251). These ten sending countries (including Mexico) represented 57 percent of new citizens in 2000.

State and metropolitan area of residence
 (Tables 51-53)

California was the residence of 300,662 or 34 percent of persons naturalizing in 2000 followed by New York with 138,504 or 16 percent. Other top states of residence included Florida, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey. These six states were home to 71 percent of new citizens in 2000. They were the same top destination states for legal immigrants in 2000.

Ten metropolitan areas accounted for the residence of 51 percent of persons naturalizing in 2000. These areas included Los Angeles, CA (136,892), New York, NY (120,344), Chicago, IL (38,244), Orange County, CA (32,915), Miami, FL (27,117), Houston, TX (22,199), San Jose, CA (22,087), Riverside-San Bernardino, CA (19,944), San Diego, CA (19,537), and Oakland, CA (16,877).

Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)

Aliens legalized under IRCA accounted for 136,255 naturalizations, or 15 percent of all naturalized citizens in 2000. The annual number of naturalizations by IRCA legalized aliens may have peaked in 1999 at 152,319

Table L
Median Years of Residence by Year of Naturalization and Region of Birth:
Selected Fiscal Years 1965-2000

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

(18 percent of the total). Of all IRCA legalized aliens who naturalized in 2000, 70 percent were born in Mexico. By the end of 2000, 815,669 or 30 percent of the total 2.7 million IRCA legalized aliens had naturalized.

Years in immigrant status

The median number of years of residence between the date of legal permanent residence and the date of naturalization was 10 years among aliens who naturalized in 2000. African, Asian, and European born immigrants who naturalized in 2000 spent a median of 8 years in immigrant status compared with 10 years for South Americans and 11 years for North Americans (Table L).

Understanding the Data

Data Collection

The INS 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 aliens approved for naturalization during a fiscal year.

Demographic data come from the naturalization application 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 naturalization law. These data are obtained from either an automated case-tracking system in operation in the larger INS offices, manually coded records from the smaller offices, and, if not otherwise available, from the Central Index System (CIS) of INS.

Limitations of Data

Data on naturalization shown in the *INS Statistical Yearbook* are obtained from information reported on

Form N-400, the application for naturalization for persons ages 18 and over. Until 1998, the data also included information from Form N-600, the application for certificate of citizenship for children. The N-600 is optional and used to provide evidence of citizenship for children under age 18 who automatically derive or acquire citizenship through their parents. The N-600 data may have represented as many as 3 to 4 percent of the naturalizations reported annually through 1997.

Aliens who become U.S. citizens through the legislative process also are not covered in the naturalization data collected by the INS. A recent example of the legislative procedure occurred upon the dissolution of the Trust Territory of the Pacific through which the Northern Mariana Islands became a commonwealth of the United States, making its residents U.S. citizens.

The 2000 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.

In addition, the number of cases with missing data has increased since 1995. This is largely because the Central Index System (CIS), the source of data for approximately 8 percent to 10 percent of all naturalization records, does not maintain information on state and metropolitan area of intended residence, marital status, occupation, provision of naturalization law, country of former allegiance, and gender in some instances. Cases with information supplied by the CIS come from areas where INS offices use manual coding systems, that is primarily states and metropolitan areas with low concentrations of immigrants.