Annual Flow Report

MARCH 2009

Naturalizations in the United States: 2008

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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 2008.[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.

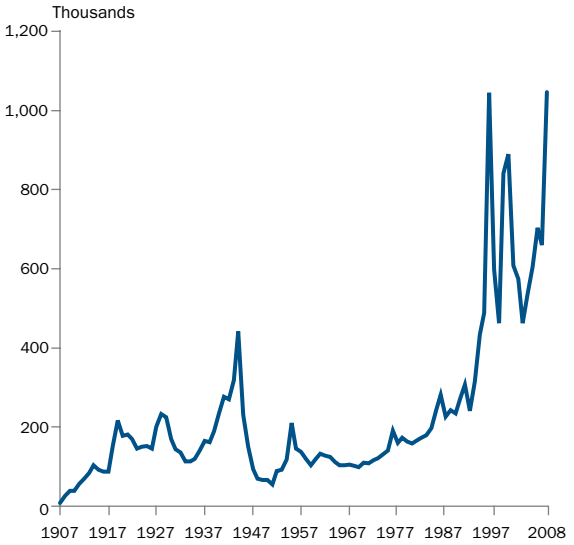
In 2008, a record number of persons (1,046,539) were naturalized in the United States (see Table 1 and Figure 1). The leading countries of birth of new citizens were Mexico (231,815), India (65,971), the Philippines (58,792), the People's Republic of China (40,017), and Cuba (39,871). The largest number of persons naturalizing lived in California (297,909), Florida (128,328), and New York (90,572).

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 residence 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.

Figure 1.
Persons Naturalized: Fiscal Years 1907 to 2008



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data. Fiscal Years 1907 to 2008.

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

Homeland Security

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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 naturalized in the United States increased 58 percent from 660,477 in 2007 to an all-time record of 1,046,539 in 2008. The increase is primarily attributable to the large volume (nearly 1.4 million) of naturalization applications received by USCIS in 2007 in advance of a fee increase and in response to special efforts to encourage eligible applicants to apply for U.S. citizenship. Many of these applications, especially those received during the latter part of 2007, were processed during 2008. Naturalization applications pending a decision decreased from 1,130,000 at the end of 2007 to 480,000 by the end of 2008. The number of applications filed for naturalization declined to 525,000 in 2008.

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 during 2000 to 2008 (see Figure 1). Naturalizations rose sharply during the mid-1990s primarily as a result of 1) the 2.7 million undocumented immigrants legalized under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 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.

Until the 1970s, the majority of persons naturalizing were born in European countries. With increased legal immigration from Asian countries, the arrival of Indochinese refugees in the 1970s, and the historically higher naturalization rate of Asian immigrants, the regional origin of new citizens shifted from Europe to Asia. Asia was the leading region of origin of new citizens in every year from 1976 to 2006, except 1996-2000 when IRCA legalization immigrants, 90 percent of whom were from North American countries, naturalized in large numbers. Beginning in 2007, naturalizations among North American-born immigrants again exceeded those of Asian-born immigrants.

Table 1.

Persons Naturalized by Region and Country of Birth: Fiscal Years 2006 to 2008

(Countries ranked by 2008 persons naturalized)

Region/country of birth	2008		2007		2006	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0	702,589	100.0
REGION:						
Africa	54,420	5.2	41,652	6.3	50,397	7.2
Asia	323,792	30.9	238,797	36.2	257,125	36.6
Europe	115,187	11.0	86,742	13.1	107,459	15.3
North America	462,372	44.2	241,163	36.5	223,086	31.8
Caribbean	131,935	12.6	68,577	10.4	90,979	12.9
Central America	86,168	8.2	41,814	6.3	38,463	5.5
Other North America	244,269	23.3	130,772	19.8	93,644	13.3
Oceania	4,781	0.5	3,342	0.5	3,657	0.5
South America	84,853	8.1	48,133	7.3	59,985	8.5
Unknown	1,134	0.1	648	0.1	880	0.1
COUNTRY:						
Mexico	231,815	22.2	122,258	18.5	83,979	12.0
India	65,971	6.3	46,871	7.1	47,542	6.8
Philippines	58,792	5.6	38,830	5.9	40,500	5.8
China, People's Republic	40,017	3.8	33,134	5.0	35,387	5.0
Cuba	39,871	3.8	15,394	2.3	21,481	3.1
Vietnam	39,584	3.8	27,921	4.2	29,917	4.3
El Salvador	35,796	3.4	17,157	2.6	13,430	1.9
Dominican Republic	35,251	3.4	20,645	3.1	22,165	3.2
Colombia	22,926	2.2	12,089	1.8	15,698	2.2
Korea[1]	22,759	2.2	17,628	2.7	17,668	2.5
Jamaica	21,324	2.0	12,314	1.9	18,953	2.7
Haiti	21,229	2.0	11,552	1.7	15,979	2.3
Nicaragua	17,954	1.7	8,164	1.2	9,283	1.3
Guatemala	17,087	1.6	8,181	1.2	6,551	0.9
Peru	15,016	1.4	7,965	1.2	10,063	1.4
Poland	14,237	1.4	9,320	1.4	10,230	1.5
Canada	12,387	1.2	8,473	1.3	9,607	1.4
United Kingdom	12,095	1.2	7,752	1.2	9,104	1.3
Ecuador	11,908	1.1	7,229	1.1	8,321	1.2
Iran	11,813	1.1	10,557	1.6	11,363	1.6
All other countries	298,707	28.5	217,043	32.9	265,368	37.8

[1] Korea includes North and South Korea.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2006 to 2008.

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Table 2.

Persons Naturalized by State of Residence: Fiscal Years 2006 to 2008

(Ranked by 2008 persons naturalized)

State of residence	2008		2007		2006	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0	702,589	100.0
California	297,909	28.5	181,684	27.5	152,836	21.8
Florida	128,328	12.3	54,563	8.3	90,846	12.9
New York	90,572	8.7	73,676	11.2	103,870	14.8
Texas	82,129	7.8	53,032	8.0	37,835	5.4
New Jersey	59,950	5.7	35,235	5.3	39,801	5.7
Illinois	45,224	4.3	38,735	5.9	30,156	4.3
Virginia	29,949	2.9	14,171	2.1	20,401	2.9
Massachusetts	28,728	2.7	20,952	3.2	22,932	3.3
Arizona	24,055	2.3	12,091	1.8	9,707	1.4
Maryland	23,342	2.2	11,613	1.8	14,465	2.1
Other	236,353	22.6	164,725	24.9	179,740	25.6

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2006 to 2008.

Region and Leading Countries of Birth

The proportion of new citizens who were born in North American countries increased from 32 percent in 2006, to 37 percent in 2007, and to 44 percent in 2008 (see Table 1). During the same time period, naturalizations of Asian-born immigrants decreased from 37 percent to 31 percent, and naturalizations among European-born immigrants decreased from 15 percent to 11 percent.

Mexico was the leading country of birth of persons naturalizing in 2008 (22 percent). The next leading countries of origin of new citizens in 2008 were India (6.3 percent), the Philippines (5.6 percent), the People's Republic of China (3.8 percent), and Cuba (3.8 percent). The 10 countries with the largest number of naturalizations accounted for 57 percent of all new citizens in 2008.

From 2007 to 2008, naturalizations increased 90 percent among Mexican-born immigrants and more than 100 percent among immigrants from Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. These sending countries accounted for most of the growth in naturalizations of North American-born immigrants.

Leading States and Metropolitan Areas of Residence

Seventy-seven percent of all persons naturalizing in 2008 resided in 10 states (see Table 2). California was home to the largest percentage of persons naturalizing (29 percent), followed by Florida (12 percent) and New York (8.7 percent). Over one-half (56 percent) of all new citizens in 2008 lived in 10 metropolitan areas (see Table 3).[2] The leading metropolitan areas of residence were Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA (13 percent), New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA (13 percent), and Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL (8.5 percent).

States with the largest percentage increase in naturalizations from 2007 to 2008 included Florida, Virginia, Maryland, and Arizona. Among metropolitan areas, Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL and Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV had the largest percentage increases.

Gender, Age, and Marital Status

In 2008, females accounted for 56 percent of all persons naturalizing (see Table 4). More than one-half (53 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 2008 (see Table 5). Two-thirds (67 percent) of persons naturalizing in 2008 were married, and 21 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/inforeg/statpolicy.html#fs.

Table 3.

Persons Naturalized by Metropolitan Area of Residence: Fiscal Years 2006 to 2008

(Ranked by 2008 persons naturalized)

Metropolitan area of residence	2008		2007		2006	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0	702,589	100.0
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	138,618	13.2	78,454	11.9	65,811	9.4
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA	134,572	12.9	99,009	15.0	132,325	18.8
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	89,440	8.5	36,159	5.5	63,621	9.1
Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	43,548	4.2	37,736	5.7	29,047	4.1
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	40,729	3.9	19,364	2.9	26,461	3.8
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	37,852	3.6	25,873	3.9	24,038	3.4
Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX	28,278	2.7	18,398	2.8	13,893	2.0
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	25,180	2.4	18,070	2.7	12,112	1.7
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	24,142	2.3	12,347	1.9	14,129	2.0
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	23,627	2.3	12,253	1.9	11,311	1.6
Other	460,553	44.0	302,814	45.8	309,841	44.1

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 2006 to 2008.

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Table 4.

Persons Naturalized by Gender: Fiscal Years 2006 to 2008

Gender	2008		2007		2006	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0	702,589	100.0
Male	456,767	43.6	294,244	44.6	313,771	44.7
Female	589,427	56.3	365,807	55.4	387,773	55.2
Unknown	345	—	426	0.1	1,045	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 2006 to 2008.

Table 6.

Persons Naturalized by Marital Status: Fiscal Years 2006 to 2008

Marital status	2008		2007		2006	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0	702,589	100.0
Single	218,003	20.8	140,971	21.3	154,003	21.9
Married	701,382	67.0	438,805	66.4	459,718	65.4
Other	127,154	12.1	80,701	12.2	88,868	12.6

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2006 to 2008.

Table 5.

Persons Naturalized by Age: Fiscal Years 2006 to 2008

Age	2008		2007		2006	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	1,046,539	100.0	660,477	100.0	702,589	100.0
18 to 24 years	87,397	8.4	65,592	9.9	74,289	10.6
25 to 34 years	245,799	23.5	167,320	25.3	186,445	26.5
35 to 44 years	306,960	29.3	192,811	29.2	200,151	28.5
45 to 54 years	195,785	18.7	108,277	16.4	111,837	15.9
55 to 64 years	131,854	12.6	74,352	11.3	73,097	10.4
65 years and over	78,744	7.5	52,125	7.9	56,769	8.1
Unknown	0	—	0	—	1	—
Median age	40	X	39	X	38	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 2006 to 2008.

Table 7.

Persons Naturalized by Region of Birth and Median Years in Legal Permanent Resident Status: Selected Fiscal Years 1965 to 2008

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

Years in Immigrant Status

Persons naturalizing in 2008 spent a median of nine years in legal permanent resident status before naturalizing (see Table 7). At the regional level, African-born immigrants spent the least time in legal immigrant status (6 years), followed by immigrants from Asia and Europe (7 years), South America (8 years), Oceania (9 years), and North America (12 years). From 2007 to 2008, the median years spent in legal permanent resident status increased by one year. This increase partly reflects the demand to naturalize by long-term resident LPRs.

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.

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Homeland Security

Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2008

Naturalizations

Table #	Title
Table 20	Petitions for Naturalizations filed, Persons Naturalized, and Petitions for Naturalization denied: Fiscal Years 1907 to 2008 *(XLS, 27 KB)*
Table 21	Persons Naturalized by Region and Country of Birth: Fiscal Years 1999 to 2008 *(XLS, 47 KB)*
Table 22	Persons Naturalized by State of Residence: Fiscal Years 1999 to 2008 *(XLS, 27 KB)*
Table 23	Persons Naturalized by Core Based Statistical Area (CBSA) of Residence: Fiscal Years 1999 to 2008 *(XLS, 21 KB)*
Table 24	Persons Naturalized by Gender, Age, Marital Status, and Occupation: Fiscal Year 2008 *(XLS, 18 KB)*

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