Fact Sheet

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Trends in Naturalization Rates: 2008 Update

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INTRODUCTION

Cumulative naturalization rates through 2005 approached 60 percent for immigrants who had obtained legal permanent resident (LPR) status at least 20 years earlier (Baker, 2007). Naturalizations grew at a record pace between 2006 and 2008 with a total of 2.4 million immigrants becoming new citizens in the United States (Lee and Rytina; 2009). This Office of Immigration Statistics *Fact Sheet* provides updated information on the cumulative naturalization rates and the timing of naturalization through 2008[1] of immigrants who obtained legal permanent resident status from 1973 through 1999.

DATA AND METHODS

Data were obtained from matched LPR and naturalization records from DHS administrative systems. Cumulative naturalization rates through 2005 and 2008 and 10-year naturalization rates through 2008 were calculated for each LPR cohort.[2] The data were restricted to immigrants who were 18 years of age and older when LPR status was obtained.[3]

[1] For the updated report, years refer to fiscal years (October 1 through September 30); the previous report (Baker, 2007) used calendar year data.

FINDINGS

Cumulative Naturalization Rates

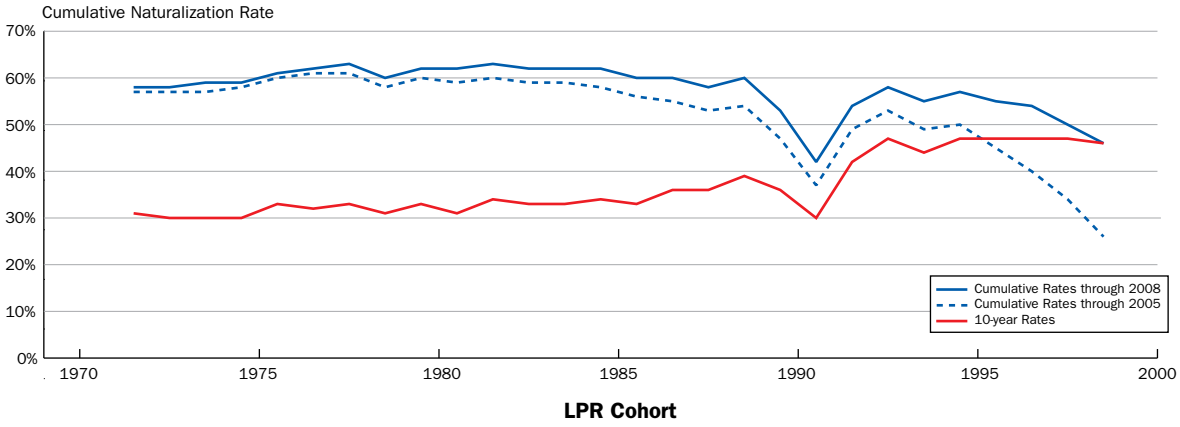
The naturalization rates for all immigrant cohorts grew from 2005 through 2008, with the greatest increases occurring among the most recent cohorts (see Figure 1). Among earlier cohorts, including immigrants who obtained LPR status from the early 1970s through mid 1980s, naturalization rates increased several percentage points—to as high as 63 percent—by 2008. More recent cohorts, with less time spent in LPR status, had lower cumulative naturalization rates.[4]

[2] Immigrant cohorts are defined by the year in which LPR status was obtained.

[3] Many immigrants who become U.S. citizens before the age of 18 do so automatically, without filing an application, and therefore without record in DHS electronic case-tracking systems.

[4] The 1990-1992 cohorts include large numbers of persons legalized under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 who have lower naturalization rates than other LPRs.

Figure 1.
Cumulative Naturalization Rates for 1973-1999 LPR Cohorts through 2008



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

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Timing

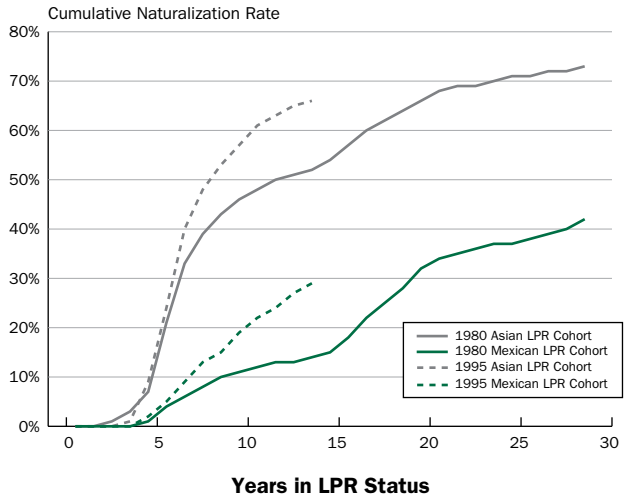
Most immigrants must satisfy a 5-year residency requirement (3 years for spouses of U.S. citizens) before becoming eligible to naturalize. The subsequent 5- to 10-year period, during which naturalization rates already tend to be relatively high, exhibited especially high rates for recent cohorts. For example, approximately one third of immigrants who obtained LPR status from the mid-1970's through the mid-1980's naturalized within 10 years, whereas nearly half the immigrants who obtained status in the mid-to-late-1990's did so (see Figure 1). This pattern persists by geographic origin as illustrated by Figure 2. Naturalization rates for Asian and Mexican LPR cohorts of 1995 exceeded those of the respective 1980 cohorts during the years immediately after the typical residency requirement was met. Assuming that recent trends reflect increased demand and not simply a shift in timing, lifetime naturalization rates for recent cohorts may eventually exceed the lifetime rates of earlier cohorts.

REFERENCES

Baker, Bryan C., 2007. "Trends in Naturalization Rates," Office of Immigration Statistics, Policy Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ntz_rates508.pdf

Lee, James and Rytina, Nancy, 2009. "Naturalizations in the United States: 2008," Office of Immigration Statistics, Policy Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/natz_fr_2008.pdf

Figure 2.
Cumulative Naturalization Rates by Years in LPR Status



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

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