

Naturalizations in the United States: 2004

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June 2005

Each year, hundreds of thousands of foreign nationals become naturalized citizens of the United States. Naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is conferred upon a foreign citizen or national after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). After naturalization, foreign-born citizens can enjoy the same benefits, rights and responsibilities that the Constitution gives to U.S. citizens, such as the right to vote. They can also apply for a U.S. passport to travel overseas. They receive U.S. government protection and assistance when abroad. This Office of Immigration Statistics *Annual Flow Report* presents information on the number and characteristics of foreign nationals ages 18 years and over who were naturalized during 2004¹.

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

In 2004, USCIS naturalized 537,151 persons. The leading countries of birth of new citizens were Mexico (63,840), India (37,975), and the Philippines (31,448). The largest number of persons naturalizing lived in California (145,593), New York (66,234), and Florida (43,795).

THE NATURALIZATION PROCESS

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 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 U.S. history; and good moral character.

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. 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 wartime 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 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. During the interview the officer verifies the applicant's knowledge and understanding of the English language as well as 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

The data presented in this report consist of demographic information taken from the N-400 application. This information includes: date and country of birth; gender; marital status; state and metropolitan area of residence; date of permanent 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.

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



**Homeland
Security**

**Office of
Immigration Statistics**
Management Directorate

Table 1.
Persons Naturalized: Fiscal Years
1995 to 2004

Year	Number
2004	537,151
2003	463,204
2002	573,708
2001	608,205
2000	888,788
1999	839,944
1998	463,060
1997	598,225
1996	1,044,689
1995	488,088

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data.

Since 1996, the annual number of persons naturalizing has not always tracked the trend in the number of persons applying for naturalization because of an application processing backlog. At the end of 2004, there were 653,000 naturalization applications pending a decision. Caution should therefore be exercised in drawing conclusions from these data about trends in the demand to naturalize and in the demographic composition of persons naturalizing.

RESULTS

The number of persons naturalizing in the United States increased 16 percent to 537,151 in 2004 from 463,204 in 2003 (see Table 1, Figure 1). However, the average annual number of persons naturalizing was 11 percent lower during 2000 to 2004 (614,211) than in the previous five-year period of 1995 to 1999 (686,801).

Link with Legal Immigration

The number of persons naturalizing each year is determined partly by trends in legal immigration in preceding years. Because most legal permanent residents become eligible to naturalize after they fulfill a five-year residency requirement, naturalizations typically lag behind legal immigration. In addition, not all legal permanent residents naturalize. Among all persons ages 16 and over who became legal permanent residents between 1973 and 1989, only 57 percent had naturalized by the end of 2004.²

² Calculated from matched legal immigrant and naturalization records from USCIS.

Figure 1.
Persons Naturalized: Fiscal Years 1908 to 2004

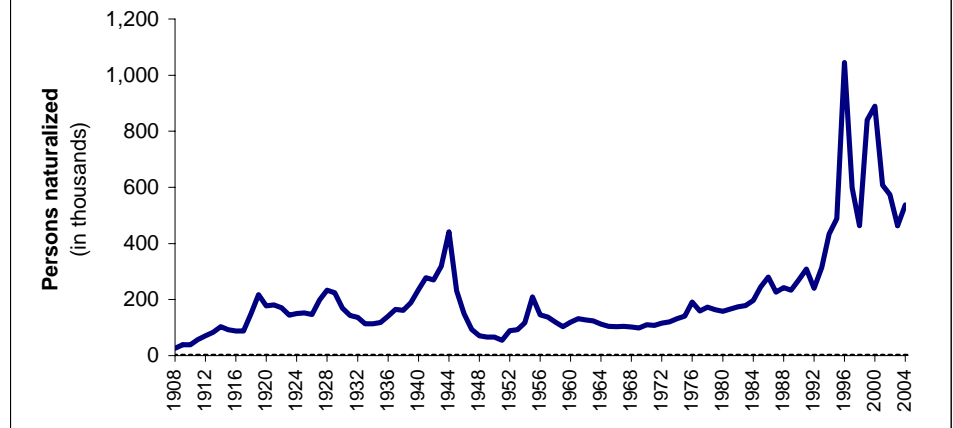


Table 2.
Persons Naturalized by Region and Country of Birth: Fiscal Years 2002 to 2004

Region or country of birth	2004		2003		2002	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	537,151	100.0	463,204	100.0	573,708	100.0
REGION:						
Africa	34,531	6.4	28,568	6.2	31,527	5.5
Asia	218,974	40.8	192,050	41.5	232,412	40.5
Europe	89,014	16.6	74,186	16.0	93,627	16.3
North America	151,047	28.1	130,848	28.2	169,950	29.6
Caribbean	54,811	10.2	46,154	10.0	58,943	10.3
Central America	24,677	4.6	22,155	4.8	26,843	4.7
Other North America	71,559	13.3	62,539	13.5	84,164	14.7
Oceania	3,551	0.7	2,891	0.6	2,356	0.4
South America	38,676	7.2	33,701	7.3	42,888	7.5
Unknown	1,358	0.3	960	0.2	948	0.2
COUNTRY:						
Mexico	63,840	11.9	56,093	12.1	76,531	13.3
India	37,975	7.1	29,790	6.4	33,774	5.9
Philippines	31,448	5.9	29,081	6.3	30,487	5.3
Vietnam	27,480	5.1	25,995	5.6	36,835	6.4
China	27,309	5.1	24,014	5.2	32,018	5.6
Korea	17,184	3.2	15,968	3.4	17,307	3.0
Dominican Republic	15,464	2.9	12,627	2.7	15,591	2.7
Jamaica	12,271	2.3	11,232	2.4	13,973	2.4
Iran	11,781	2.2	10,807	2.3	11,796	2.1
Cuba	11,236	2.1	7,727	1.7	10,889	1.9
Poland	10,335	1.9	9,140	2.0	12,823	2.2
Colombia	9,819	1.8	7,962	1.7	10,634	1.9
El Salvador	9,602	1.8	8,738	1.9	10,716	1.9
Pakistan	8,744	1.6	7,431	1.6	8,658	1.5
Haiti	8,215	1.5	7,263	1.6	9,280	1.6
Ukraine	8,069	1.5	8,239	1.8	12,110	2.1
Bosnia-Herzegovina	8,013	1.5	4,994	1.1	4,095	0.7
Taiwan	7,889	1.5	6,746	1.5	8,611	1.5
United Kingdom	7,785	1.4	6,733	1.5	8,207	1.4
Canada	7,682	1.4	6,408	1.4	7,591	1.3
All other countries (including unknown)	195,010	36.3	166,216	35.9	201,782	35.2

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data.

Historical Trend

Naturalizations increased from an annual average of less than 120,000 during the 1950s to 210,000 during the 1980s (see Figure 1). During the 1990s, naturalizations rose sharply due to several factors. These include the naturalization of nearly 1 million of the 2.7 million undocumented immigrants legalized under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, legislative efforts to restrict public benefits for noncitizens, and a program requiring replacement of permanent resident cards, which led many legal permanent residents to naturalize.

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 has been the leading region of origin of new citizens in every year since 1976, except during 1996 to 2000 when IRCA legalization immigrants, nine-tenths of whom were from North American countries, naturalized in large numbers.

Region and Country of Birth

In 2004, 41 percent of persons naturalized were born in Asia compared with 28 percent from North American countries and 17 percent from European countries.

The leading country of birth of persons naturalizing was Mexico (12 percent), followed by India (7.1 percent), the Philippines (5.9 percent), Vietnam and China (each 5.1 percent). The top 10 countries represented 48 percent of new naturalized citizens in 2004 (see Table 2).

State and Metropolitan Areas of Residence

In 2004, 76 percent of persons naturalized were residents of 10 states. California was home to the largest percentage of persons naturalizing (27 percent), followed by New York and Florida (see Table 3).

Of all new citizens in 2004, 44 percent lived in 10 metropolitan areas (see Table 4). The leading metropolitan areas of resi-

Table 3.

Persons Naturalized by State of Residence: Fiscal Years 2002 to 2004

State	2004		2003		2002	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total.....	537,151	100.0	463,204	100.0	573,708	100.0
California	145,593	27.1	135,815	29.3	149,554	26.1
New York	66,234	12.3	63,945	13.8	94,276	16.4
Florida.....	43,795	8.2	35,170	7.6	44,792	7.8
Texas.....	35,417	6.6	28,671	6.2	42,828	7.5
New Jersey.....	30,291	5.6	22,987	5.0	26,783	4.7
Illinois.....	29,432	5.5	23,425	5.1	32,636	5.7
Massachusetts.....	16,263	3.0	11,472	2.5	18,040	3.1
Michigan	14,615	2.7	5,195	1.1	11,126	1.9
Virginia.....	13,478	2.5	9,593	2.1	10,612	1.8
Washington.....	12,667	2.4	11,790	2.5	9,339	1.6
All other states.....	129,366	24.1	115,141	24.9	133,722	23.3

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data.

Table 4.

Persons Naturalized by Metropolitan Area of Residence: Fiscal Years 2002 to 2004

State	2004		2003		2002	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total.....	537,151	100.0	463,204	100.0	573,708	100.0
New York, NY	55,195	10.3	53,797	11.6	81,421	14.2
Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA	51,940	9.7	47,087	10.2	55,892	9.7
Chicago, IL	27,852	5.2	22,366	4.8	30,808	5.4
Washington, DC-MD-VA-WV.....	19,763	3.7	17,037	3.7	18,270	3.2
Miami, FL.....	18,560	3.5	14,375	3.1	19,641	3.4
San Jose, CA.....	15,120	2.8	9,930	2.1	14,976	2.6
Orange County, CA	14,797	2.8	15,585	3.4	13,805	2.4
Houston, TX.....	12,145	2.3	9,843	2.1	15,985	2.8
Oakland, CA	11,613	2.2	13,727	3.0	12,723	2.2
San Francisco, CA.....	11,511	2.1	10,234	2.2	9,900	1.7
Other areas.....	298,655	55.6	249,223	53.8	300,287	52.3

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data.

Table 5.

Persons Naturalized by Sex: Fiscal Years 2002 to 2004

Sex	2004		2003		2002	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total.....	537,151	100.0	463,204	100.0	573,708	100.0
Male.....	244,335	45.5	208,930	45.1	264,443	46.1
Female.....	290,267	54.0	250,832	54.2	301,466	52.5
Unknown	2,549	0.5	3,442	0.7	7,799	1.4

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data.

dence were New York (10 percent), Los Angeles-Long Beach (9.7 percent), and Chicago (5.2 percent).

Gender, Age, and Marital Status

The majority of persons naturalizing are female. In 2004, females accounted for 54 percent of persons naturalizing (see Table 5).

More than one-half (54 percent) of new citizens were between ages 25 to 44 years. The median age of all persons naturalizing was 38 years. Persons ages 65 years and over accounted for 8.1 percent of naturalizations in 2004 (see Table 6).

Two-thirds (65 percent) of persons naturalizing in 2004 were married and 22 percent were single (see Table 7). In addition, 6.2 percent were widowed, and 4.8 percent were divorced or separated.

Years in Immigrant Status

The median number of years of residence between the date of legal immigration and the date of naturalization was 8 years among persons naturalized in 2004 (see Table 8). African and European-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).



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Office of Immigration Statistics web page at uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics.

Table 6.
Persons Naturalized by Age: Fiscal Years 2002 to 2004

Age	2004		2003		2002	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total.....	537,151	100.0	463,204	100.0	573,708	100.0
18-24 years.....	60,722	11.3	56,863	12.3	67,175	11.7
25-34 years.....	141,721	26.4	123,564	26.7	151,576	26.4
35-44 years.....	149,662	27.9	127,678	27.6	159,935	27.9
45-54 years.....	88,013	16.4	75,394	16.3	96,360	16.8
55-64 years.....	53,725	10.0	44,301	9.6	55,949	9.8
65 years and over.....	43,307	8.1	35,400	7.6	42,712	7.4
Unknown.....	1	--	4	--	1	--
Median age.....	38	N/A	38	N/A	38	N/A

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data.

Table 7.
Persons Naturalized by Marital Status: Fiscal Years 2002 to 2004

Marital status	2004		2003		2002	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total.....	537,151	100.0	463,204	100.0	573,708	100.0
Single.....	118,209	22.0	108,013	23.3	128,902	22.5
Married.....	349,252	65.0	298,361	64.4	370,498	64.6
Widowed.....	33,556	6.2	15,522	3.4	17,702	3.1
Divorced/Separated.....	26,028	4.8	33,829	7.3	40,997	7.1
Unknown.....	10,106	1.9	7,479	1.6	15,609	2.7

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data.

Table 8.
Persons Naturalized by Region of Birth and Median Years of Residence: Selected Fiscal Years 1965 to 2004

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

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data.