

# Characteristics of Persons Naturalizing in the United States Between 1980 and 2008

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The number of persons naturalizing in the United States increased from 2.1 million during the 1980s to 5.0 million during the 1990s and 6.1 million during 2000–2008. This Office of Immigration Statistics *Fact Sheet* provides information showing some of the changes in social, demographic, and economic composition of new citizens that accompanied the growth in their numbers during the 1980–2008 period.<sup>1</sup>

Data were obtained from applications for legal permanent resident (LPR) status and naturalization of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on persons who naturalized between 1980 and 2008 at ages 18 and over.<sup>2</sup> Variables examined include age at naturalization, gender, region and country of birth, and years spent in LPR status prior to naturalization. Estimates of the educational attainment and median income of naturalized citizens from the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) of the U.S. Census Bureau are presented as supplemental information because DHS collects limited data on the socioeconomic characteristics of immigrants.<sup>3</sup> Since DHS and ACS data measure different components of the naturalized citizen population, they are not strictly comparable.<sup>4</sup>

## FINDINGS

Tables 1 and 2 present the results of the analysis of DHS and ACS data. Key findings are highlighted as follows:<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this publication, years refer to calendar years.

<sup>2</sup> DHS data on persons who derived citizenship when they were under age 18 are incomplete.

<sup>3</sup> Comparing DHS and ACS data by period of naturalization became possible beginning in 2008 with the addition of a question on year of naturalization in the ACS. ACS data are restricted to persons ages 18 and over at naturalization.

<sup>4</sup> DHS data capture the “flow” of persons who naturalized during the 1980–2008 period. ACS estimates are a population “stock” measure and include persons that naturalized in 1980 or later and resided in the United States as of 2008.

<sup>5</sup> All comparisons using ACS estimates are statistically significant at the 90-percent confidence level.

- The median number of years spent in LPR status by all persons naturalizing ranges from seven to nine years across naturalization periods (see Table 1). Asian-born immigrants naturalizing in the 1980s and African-born immigrants naturalizing in 2000–2008 spent the least time as LPRs (6 years). Persons born in North America naturalizing in the 1980s and 2000–2008 spent the most time in LPR status (11 years).
- The median age at naturalization was 34 years for persons naturalizing in the 1980s and increased to 39 years for persons naturalizing in later periods.
- The share of naturalizations among persons born in Asia declined from 49 percent in the 1980s to 38 percent in the 1990s and 2000–2008, while North American-born persons increased their share from 26 percent in the 1980s to 40 percent in the 1990s and then decreased to 35 percent in 2000–2008. In the 1990s, Mexico replaced the Philippines as the leading country of birth of new citizens.
- In 2008, households headed by persons naturalized in the 1980s had a higher median income than those headed by persons naturalizing later (see Table 2). Median incomes of families headed by naturalized citizens show a similar pattern.
- Persons naturalized in the 1980s were more likely to hold a college degree than those naturalized in the 1990s or 2000–2008. Over 40 percent of all naturalized citizens from each naturalization period had a high school education or less in 2008.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Office of Immigration Statistics web page at <http://www.dhs.gov/immigrationstatistics>.



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Table 1.

### Characteristics of Persons Naturalized by Period of Naturalization: 1980 to 2008

(Countries ranked by 2000–2008 naturalization period)

Characteristic	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2008
Total naturalizations . . . . .	2,139,598	5,040,769	6,104,325
<b>Median years in legal permanent resident status</b> (by region and country of birth)			
<b>Region of birth</b>			
All regions . . . . .	7	9	8
Africa . . . . .	7	7	6
Asia . . . . .	6	7	7
Europe . . . . .	9	8	7
North America . . . . .	11	10	11
Oceania . . . . .	8	10	9
South America . . . . .	8	9	8
<b>Leading countries of birth</b>			
Mexico . . . . .	14	10	12
India . . . . .	7	8	7
Philippines . . . . .	6	6	8
Vietnam . . . . .	6	7	7
China, People's Republic . . . . .	7	7	7
<b>Age at naturalization</b>			
Median age (years) . . . . .	34	39	39
<b>Percent distribution</b>			
Percent of total naturalizations . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Age at naturalization</b>			
18 to 24 years . . . . .	15.1	10.0	10.2
25 to 34 years . . . . .	33.4	25.4	25.5
35 to 44 years . . . . .	25.3	26.8	28.4
45 to 54 years . . . . .	11.9	15.5	17.2
55 to 64 years . . . . .	6.4	10.3	10.8
65 years and over . . . . .	4.0	10.4	8.0
Unknown . . . . .	3.8	1.7	-
<b>Gender</b>			
Male . . . . .	47.6	44.7	45.0
Female . . . . .	51.2	50.9	54.0
Unknown . . . . .	1.2	4.4	1.1
<b>Region of birth</b>			
Africa . . . . .	2.4	3.0	5.6
Asia . . . . .	48.8	37.8	38.3
Europe . . . . .	15.7	11.4	13.4
North America . . . . .	26.2	39.7	34.6
Oceania . . . . .	0.4	0.4	0.5
South America . . . . .	6.3	7.3	7.5
Unknown . . . . .	0.2	0.3	0.2
<b>Country of birth</b>			
Mexico . . . . .	8.4	18.9	16.3
India . . . . .	4.2	4.0	6.2
Philippines . . . . .	11.2	6.8	5.7
Vietnam . . . . .	8.0	6.4	5.2
China, People's Republic . . . . .	4.8	4.4	5.1
All other countries . . . . .	63.5	59.5	61.5

- Figure rounds to 0.0.

Note: Includes only persons who naturalized at age 18 or over.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data, 1980 to 2008.

Table 2.

### Median Income and Educational Attainment of Naturalized Citizens by Period of Naturalization: 2008

Income <sup>1</sup>	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2008
Median household income . . . . .	\$66,908	\$59,372	\$57,030
Median family income . . . . .	\$79,231	\$65,177	\$61,103
<b>Education (aged 25 and over)</b>			
Percent of total naturalized citizens . . . . .	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not a high school graduate . . . . .	19.9	24.7	22.8
High school graduate . . . . .	20.8	21.4	22.1
Some college or associate degree . . . . .	23.9	22.9	22.3
Bachelor's degree . . . . .	21.0	19.2	20.0
Graduate or professional degree . . . . .	14.5	11.8	12.9

<sup>1</sup>Income of naturalized citizen householders in the past 12 months in 2008 inflation-adjusted dollars.

Note: Includes only persons who naturalized at age 18 or over.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey.