

# U.S. Naturalizations: 2011

JAMES LEE

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 2011.<sup>1</sup>

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 2011, the total number of persons naturalizing was 694,193 (see Table 1 and Figure 1). The leading countries of birth of new citizens were Mexico (94,783), India (45,985), the Philippines (42,520), the People's Republic of China (32,864), and Colombia (22,693). The largest number of persons naturalizing lived in California (151,183), Florida (87,309), and New York (76,603).

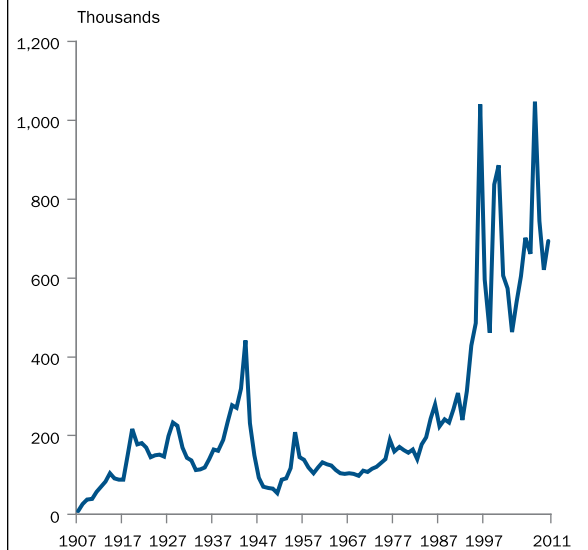
## THE NATURALIZATION PROCESS

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 resident status 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 who has legal and physical custody of the child. 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 2011



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data, Fiscal Years 1907 to 2011.

<sup>1</sup> In this report, years refer to fiscal years (October 1 to September 30).



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 Secretary of Homeland Security.

## 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 naturalizing in the United States increased to 694,193 in 2011 from 619,913 in 2010 following a decrease from 743,715 in 2009 and 1,046,539 in 2008. The record number of naturalizations in 2008 followed a surge in applications in 2007 in advance of an application fee increase and efforts to encourage eligible immigrants to naturalize. The annual number of applications for naturalization decreased from 2007 to 2008 and increased again after 2008 to 760,000 in 2011.

### 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 between 2000 and 2009 (see Figure 1). Naturalizations rose sharply during the mid-1990s. Factors that may have accounted for this increase include: 1) the 2.7 million undocumented immigrants legalized under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986

**Table 1.**

### Persons Naturalized by Region and Country of Birth: Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011

(Countries ranked by 2011 persons naturalized)

Region and country of birth	2011		2010		2009	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>REGION</b>						
Total . . . . .	694,193	100.0	619,913	100.0	743,715	100.0
Africa . . . . .	69,738	10.0	64,022	10.3	60,383	8.1
Asia . . . . .	249,940	36.0	251,598	40.6	276,375	37.2
Europe . . . . .	82,209	11.8	78,011	12.6	90,214	12.1
North America . . . . .	217,750	31.4	163,836	26.4	250,209	33.6
Caribbean . . . . .	79,820	11.5	62,483	10.1	84,860	11.4
Central America . . . . .	33,784	4.9	25,706	4.1	43,914	5.9
Other North America . . . . .	104,146	15.0	75,647	12.2	121,435	16.3
Oceania . . . . .	3,734	0.5	3,646	0.6	3,928	0.5
South America . . . . .	70,485	10.2	58,474	9.4	61,666	8.3
Unknown . . . . .	337	—	326	0.1	940	0.1
<b>COUNTRY</b>						
Total . . . . .	694,193	100.0	619,913	100.0	743,715	100.0
Mexico . . . . .	94,783	13.7	67,062	10.8	111,630	15.0
India . . . . .	45,985	6.6	61,142	9.9	52,889	7.1
Philippines . . . . .	42,520	6.1	35,465	5.7	38,934	5.2
China, People's Republic . . . . .	32,864	4.7	33,969	5.5	37,130	5.0
Colombia . . . . .	22,693	3.3	18,417	3.0	16,593	2.2
Cuba . . . . .	21,071	3.0	14,050	2.3	24,891	3.3
Vietnam . . . . .	20,922	3.0	19,313	3.1	31,168	4.2
Dominican Republic . . . . .	20,508	3.0	15,451	2.5	20,778	2.8
Jamaica . . . . .	14,591	2.1	12,070	1.9	15,098	2.0
Haiti . . . . .	14,191	2.0	12,291	2.0	13,290	1.8
El Salvador . . . . .	13,834	2.0	10,343	1.7	18,927	2.5
Korea, South . . . . .	12,664	1.8	11,170	1.8	17,576	2.4
Pakistan . . . . .	10,655	1.5	11,601	1.9	12,528	1.7
Peru . . . . .	10,266	1.5	8,551	1.4	10,349	1.4
Brazil . . . . .	10,251	1.5	8,867	1.4	7,960	1.1
Nigeria . . . . .	9,344	1.3	9,126	1.5	9,298	1.3
Canada . . . . .	9,318	1.3	8,539	1.4	9,753	1.3
Iran . . . . .	9,286	1.3	9,337	1.5	12,069	1.6
United Kingdom . . . . .	9,246	1.3	8,401	1.4	10,060	1.4
Poland . . . . .	8,844	1.3	8,038	1.3	10,604	1.4
All other countries . . . . .	260,357	37.5	236,710	38.2	262,190	35.3

— Figure rounds to 0.0.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011.

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 issued before 1977.

Until the 1970s, the majority of persons naturalizing were born in European countries. The regional origin of new citizens shifted from Europe to Asia due to increased legal immigration from Asian countries, the arrival of Indochinese refugees in the 1970s, and the historically higher naturalization rate of Asian immigrants. Consequently, Asia has been the leading region of origin of new citizens in most years since 1976.

**Table 2.****Persons Naturalized by State of Residence: Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011**

(Ranked by 2011 persons naturalized)

State of residence	2011		2010		2009	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total . . . . .	694,193	100.0	619,913	100.0	743,715	100.0
California . . . . .	151,183	21.8	129,354	20.9	179,754	24.2
Florida . . . . .	87,309	12.6	67,484	10.9	82,788	11.1
New York . . . . .	76,603	11.0	67,972	11.0	88,733	11.9
Texas . . . . .	52,927	7.6	49,699	8.0	54,024	7.3
New Jersey . . . . .	33,826	4.9	33,864	5.5	35,077	4.7
Illinois . . . . .	29,133	4.2	26,180	4.2	28,112	3.8
Massachusetts . . . . .	22,812	3.3	21,095	3.4	21,748	2.9
Georgia . . . . .	17,761	2.6	18,253	2.9	15,408	2.1
Washington . . . . .	17,317	2.5	16,830	2.7	19,853	2.7
Pennsylvania . . . . .	16,162	2.3	16,143	2.6	16,905	2.3
Other* . . . . .	189,160	27.2	173,039	27.9	201,313	27.1

\*Includes unknown, U.S. territories and armed forces posts.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011.

**Region and Leading Countries of Birth**

Thirty-six percent of persons naturalizing in 2011 were born in Asia, followed by 31 percent from North America, and 12 percent from Europe (see Table 1). Mexico was the leading country of birth of persons naturalizing in 2011 (14 percent). The next leading countries of origin of new citizens in 2011 were India (6.6 percent), the Philippines (6.1 percent), the People's Republic of China (4.7 percent), and Colombia (3.3 percent). The 10 countries with the largest number of naturalizations accounted for 48 percent of all new citizens in 2011.

From 2010 to 2011, the number of naturalizations increased among immigrants from all regions except Asia. The decrease in naturalizations of Asian-born persons during this period is partly due to a decline in the number of naturalizations of persons born in India and the People's Republic of China who were granted LPR status under employment-based preference categories.

**Leading States and Metropolitan Areas of Residence**

Seventy-three percent of all persons naturalizing in 2011 resided in 10 states (see Table 2). California was home to the largest percentage of persons naturalizing (22 percent), followed by Florida (13 percent) and New York (11 percent). Fifty-one percent of all new citizens in 2011 lived in 10 metropolitan areas (see Table 3).<sup>2</sup> The leading metropolitan areas of residence were New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA (14 percent), Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA (9 percent), and Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL (8 percent).

From 2010 to 2011, naturalizations increased in most leading states and metropolitan areas of residence. Among leading states of residence, the greatest percentage increase in the number of naturalizations occurred in Florida (29 percent) and California (17 percent). Among

leading metropolitan areas of residence, the largest percentage increases occurred in Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL (32 percent) and Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA (20 percent).

**Gender, Age, and Marital Status**

In 2011, females accounted for 54 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 39 years. Persons 65 years and over accounted for more than 8 percent of naturalizations in 2011 (see Table 5). Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of persons naturalizing in 2011 were married, and 22 percent were single (see Table 6).

<sup>2</sup>The most current CBSA definitions are available from OMB at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/fedreg\\_2010/06282010\\_metro\\_standards-Complete.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/fedreg_2010/06282010_metro_standards-Complete.pdf).**Table 3.****Persons Naturalized by Metropolitan Area of Residence: Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011**

(Ranked by 2011 persons naturalized)

Metropolitan area of residence	2011		2010		2009	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total . . . . .	694,193	100.0	619,913	100.0	743,715	100.0
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA . . . . .	99,153	14.3	91,256	14.7	112,797	15.2
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA . . . . .	62,373	9.0	51,977	8.4	84,061	11.3
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL . . . . .	55,560	8.0	42,220	6.8	54,202	7.3
Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL-IN-WI . . . . .	27,607	4.0	25,053	4.0	26,676	3.6
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA . . . . .	22,046	3.2	21,281	3.4	20,954	2.8
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV . . . . .	20,591	3.0	24,861	4.0	32,690	4.4
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH . . . . .	18,834	2.7	17,027	2.7	17,429	2.3
Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX . . . . .	18,467	2.7	18,343	3.0	18,379	2.5
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX . . . . .	16,048	2.3	16,568	2.7	17,423	2.3
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA . . . . .	14,335	2.1	15,519	2.5	12,651	1.7
Other, including unknown . . . . .	339,179	48.9	295,808	47.7	346,453	46.6

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 2009 to 2011.

**Table 4.**

**Persons Naturalized by Gender: Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011**

Gender	2011		2010		2009	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total . . . . .	694,193	100.0	619,913	100.0	743,715	100.0
Male . . . . .	316,561	45.6	290,846	46.9	351,633	47.3
Female . . . . .	377,581	54.4	328,965	53.1	391,807	52.7
Unknown . . . . .	51	—	102	—	275	—

— Figure rounds to 0.0.  
 Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011.

**Table 5.**

**Persons Naturalized by Age: Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011**

Age	2011		2010		2009	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total . . . . .	694,193	100.0	619,913	100.0	743,715	100.0
18 to 24 years . . . . .	67,927	9.8	59,230	9.6	60,955	8.2
25 to 34 years . . . . .	178,247	25.7	165,909	26.8	188,179	25.3
35 to 44 years . . . . .	190,585	27.5	184,781	29.8	215,889	29.0
45 to 54 years . . . . .	124,033	17.9	105,620	17.0	133,538	18.0
55 to 64 years . . . . .	76,912	11.1	61,755	10.0	87,245	11.7
65 years and over . . . . .	56,487	8.1	42,618	6.9	57,908	7.8
Unknown . . . . .	2	—	0	—	1	—
Median age . . . . .	39	X	39	X	40	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 2009 to 2011.

**Table 7.**

**Persons Naturalized by Region of Birth and Median Years in Legal Permanent Resident Status: Selected Fiscal Years 1965 to 2011**

Region of birth	Year														
	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2000	1995	1990	1985	1980	1975	1970	1965
Total . . . . .	6	6	7	9	8	7	8	9	9	8	8	8	7	8	7
Africa . . . . .	5	5	6	6	6	6	7	7	6	7	7	7	6	6	6
Asia . . . . .	6	5	6	7	6	6	7	8	7	7	7	7	6	6	6
Europe . . . . .	6	6	7	7	6	6	6	7	9	10	9	10	8	9	7
North America . . . . .	10	10	11	12	11	10	11	11	14	11	13	11	9	7	9
Oceania . . . . .	7	7	8	9	9	8	9	11	11	10	8	8	7	9	8
South America . . . . .	6	5	6	8	7	7	8	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 2011.

**Years in Immigrant Status**

Persons naturalizing in 2011 spent a median of six years in legal permanent resident status before becoming citizens (see Table 7). Immigrants born in Africa spent the least time in legal immigrant status (5 years), followed by immigrants from Asia, Europe, and South America (6 years), Oceania (7 years), and North America (10 years). The median years spent in LPR status was unchanged

**Table 6.**

**Persons Naturalized by Marital Status: Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011**

Marital status	2011		2010		2009	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total . . . . .	694,193	100.0	619,913	100.0	743,715	100.0
Single . . . . .	151,750	21.9	131,595	21.2	147,270	19.8
Married . . . . .	446,686	64.3	413,194	66.7	497,899	66.9
Other* . . . . .	95,757	13.8	75,124	12.1	98,546	13.3

\* Includes persons who were divorced, separated, widowed, or of unknown marital status.  
 Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, N-400 naturalization data for persons aged 18 and over, Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011.

overall from 2010 to 2011 but increased by one year for persons born in Asia and South America.

**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>.