NATURALIZATIONS, FISCAL YEAR 2002

This report will appear as a chapter in the forthcoming *2002 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (formerly, the *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*). All references to Appendices, Charts, Tables, page numbers, and other sections of the *Yearbook* are subject to change in the final *Yearbook* edition.

7. NATURALIZATIONS

This section presents information on the number and characteristics of persons who naturalize in the United States.

Naturalization refers to the conferring of U.S. citizenship, by any means, upon a person after birth. (See Appendix 2, p. A.2-8.) There are five ways of becoming a U.S. citizen: naturalization in a court ceremony; naturalization through an administrative hearing; derivation through the naturalization of parents; acquisition at birth abroad to citizen parents; and legislation conferring citizenship upon certain groups of persons (see Limitations of Data). As part of the naturalization process, applicants pledge an oath of allegiance to the United States, thereby renouncing allegiance to their former countries of nationality.

U.S. Naturalization Program

To naturalize, an immigrant 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 an alien must: be at least 18 years of age; have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence; 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. In fiscal year 2002, immigrants naturalizing under the general provisions accounted for 92 percent of those for whom the nationality law provision was reported. (Provision of the law was not reported for 4 percent of naturalizations.)

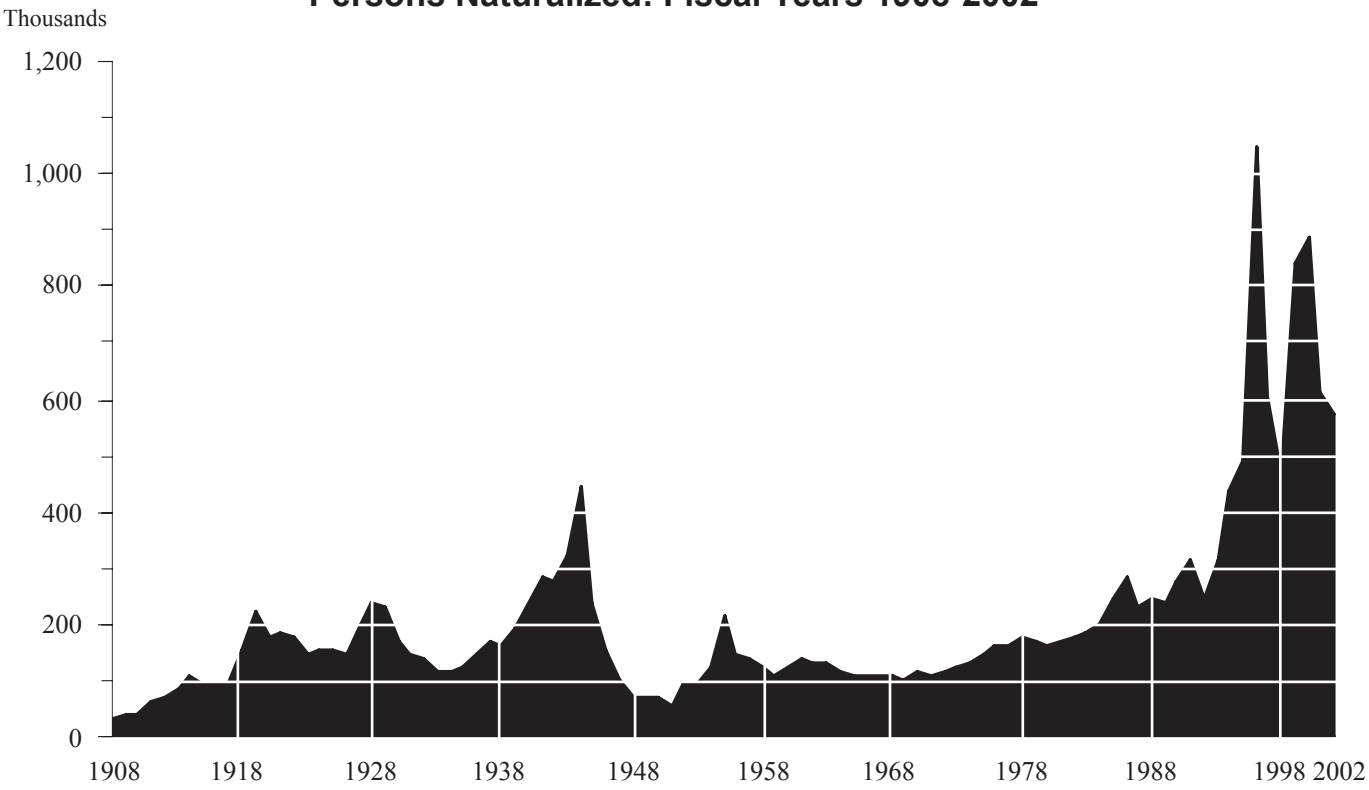
The special provisions of naturalization law exempt aliens from one or more of the requirements of the general provisions. Spouses and children of U.S. citizens and military classes constitute the main categories of special naturalization. The majority of people naturalizing as spouses of U.S. citizens may do so in 3 years rather than the 5 years prescribed under the general provisions. Of all new citizens in 2002 with naturalization law provision reported, 8 percent naturalized under the special 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. Under certain conditions, aliens who served honorably during war time 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 (age 18 and over) must file an application, Form N-400, *Application for Naturalization*. All aliens filing these applications who meet the preliminary documentary requirements must be interviewed by INS officers to determine their eligibility to naturalize. During the interview the officer discerns the applicant's knowledge and understanding of the English language, as well as of the history and government of the United States. Recently, applicants have been allowed to take standardized tests that are used to determine knowledge and reading and writing capabilities. Those applicants found qualified are scheduled for an oath ceremony before a judge or district director.

Data Overview

The INS naturalized 573,708 persons in fiscal year 2002. This figure was six percent less than the number of naturalizations in 2001 (608,205) although the number of applications for naturalization received by the INS increased between the two years. Since fiscal year 1996, the trend in the number of persons naturalizing has not

Chart K
Persons Naturalized: Fiscal Years 1908-2002



Source: 1961-2002, Table 34; 1908-60, previous *Yearbooks*.

always tracked the trend in application receipts because of an application backlog and related workflow issues. At the end of 2002, there were 623,000 naturalization applications pending a decision. Because the impact of the backlog with respect to the annual number of naturalizations and demographic composition of new citizens cannot be determined with certainty, caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from the data.

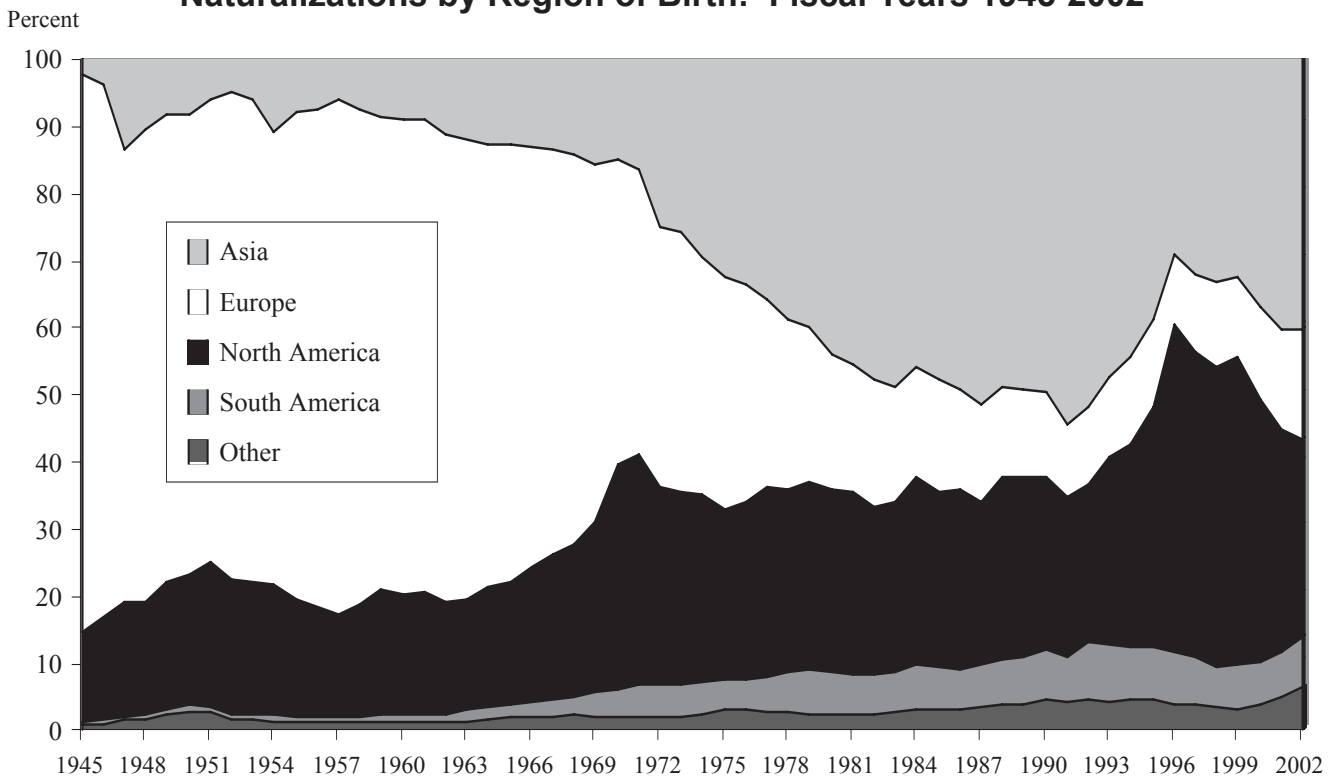
Nearly 574,000 people were naturalized during 2002.

Between 1908 and 1990, the number of persons naturalizing each year exceeded 300,000 only twice, in 1943 and 1944, during World War II (Chart K and Table 34). Since 1990, naturalizations have exceeded 300,000 in every year except 1992.

Naturalizations rose sharply during the 1990s due to several factors. A mandatory Green Card Replacement program put into effect in 1992 led some permanent residents to naturalize who otherwise might not have done so. In 1994 the first of the 2.7 million illegal aliens who were granted legal permanent residence under the provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 became eligible to naturalize. Also during the mid 1990s, an unknown number of immigrants naturalized in response to legislative efforts restricting public benefits for the noncitizen population, including Proposition 187 in California (1994), the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (1996), and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA, 1996).

Region and country of birth (Chart L and Table 35)
Until the 1970s, the majority of persons naturalizing were born in Europe because the country quotas in immigration law favored those countries. Once the quotas ended with the INA amendments in 1965, the regional origin of persons immigrating and naturalizing shifted from European to Asian countries. Asian immigrants also had historically higher naturalization rates than other immigrants. Between 1976 and 1995, Asia was the leading region of birth among persons naturalizing. With increased

Chart L
Naturalizations by Region of Birth: Fiscal Years 1945-2002



Source: 1993-2002, Table 35; 1945-92, previous *Yearbooks*.

legal immigration from North American countries, especially due to IRCA, the share of naturalizations from that region increased during the 1990s, peaking at 49 percent in 1996. Since 2001, Asia has been the leading region of naturalizations. In 2002, 41 percent of persons naturalizing were born in Asian countries compared to 30 percent for North American countries. The number of naturalizations of persons born in European and African countries increased between 2001 and 2002 despite the overall decrease in naturalizations between the two years.

Mexico was the leading country of birth of persons naturalizing in 2002. However, the number of new Mexican-born citizens decreased to 76,531 (13 percent of the total) in 2002 from 103,234 (17 percent of the total) in 2001 as the number of IRCA-legalized aliens naturalizing declined (see the Immigration Reform and Control Act section below). Other major countries of birth for persons naturalizing in 2002 were Vietnam (36,835), India (33,774), the People's Republic of China (32,018), the Philippines (30,487), Korea (17,307), the Dominican Republic (15,591), Jamaica (13,973), Poland (12,823) and Ukraine (12,110). These ten sending countries (including Mexico) represented 49 percent of new citizens in 2002.

State and metropolitan area of residence
(Table 36)

California was the residence of 149,554 or 26 percent of persons naturalizing in 2002 followed by New York with 94,276 or 16 percent. Other top states of residence included Florida, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey. These six states were home to 68 percent of new citizens in 2002. They were the same top destination states for persons naturalizing in 2001.

Ten metropolitan areas accounted for the residence of 48 percent of persons naturalizing in 2002. These areas included New York, NY (81,421), Los Angeles, CA (55,892), Chicago, IL (30,808), Houston, TX (19,641), Miami, FL (18,270), Orange County, CA (15,985), Oakland, CA (14,976), San Jose, CA (13,805), San Diego, CA (13,023), and San Francisco, CA (12,723). These were the same top destination metropolitan areas for new citizens in 2001.

Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)

Naturalization among aliens legalized under IRCA declined from 74,869 (12 percent of the total) to 43,164 (8 percent of the total) in fiscal year 2002. The annual

Table P
Median Years of Residence by Year of Naturalization and Region of Birth: Selected Fiscal Years 1965-2002

Region of birth	2002	2001	2000	1995	1990	1985	1980	1975	1970	1965
Persons naturalized	**8**	**9**	**10**	**9**	**8**	**8**	**8**	**7**	**8**	**7**
Africa	7	10	8	6	7	7	7	6	6	6
Asia	8	8	8	7	7	7	7	6	6	6
Europe	7	7	8	9	10	9	10	8	9	7
North America	11	11	11	14	11	13	11	9	7	9
Oceania	9	10	11	11	10	8	8	7	9	8
South America	8	9	10	10	9	8	9	10	7	7

number of naturalizations among IRCA legalized aliens peaked in 1996 (227,905). Of all IRCA legalized aliens who naturalized in 2002, 68 percent were born in Mexico. By the end of 2002, 932,000 or 35 percent of the total 2,688,000 IRCA legalized aliens had naturalized.

Years in immigrant status (Table P)

The median number of years of residence between the date of legal permanent residence and the date of naturalization was 8 years among aliens who naturalized in 2002. European and African born immigrants spent the least time in immigrant status (7 years), followed by immigrants from Asia and South America (8 years), Oceania (9 years), and North America (11 years).

Gender, age, marital status and occupation (Table 37)

As in previous years, the majority (53 percent) of persons naturalizing in 2002 were female. Nearly 42 percent of new citizens were ages 30-44 years. Two-thirds (65 percent) were married. Among those reporting an occupation, the largest number were operators, fabricators or laborers (10 percent), followed by professionals (8 percent). The former were predominantly male while the latter included nearly equal numbers of men and women.

Understanding the Data

Data Collection

The INS compiles two types of data on naturalizations: workload statistics and demographic statistics on the characteristics of persons who naturalize. Workload data include the number of naturalization applications received, the number of petitions filed, and the number of aliens approved for naturalization during a fiscal year.

Demographic data come from the N-400 application for naturalization for persons ages 18 and over and include: date and country of birth, gender, marital status, state and metropolitan area of residence, occupation, date of admission for permanent residence, and section of naturalization law. These data are obtained from either an automated case-tracking system in operation in the larger INS offices, manually coded records from the smaller offices, and, if not otherwise available, from the Central Index System (CIS) of the INS.

Limitations of Data

The 2002 naturalization data do not necessarily reflect the demand to naturalize because of the backlog of applications pending a decision. The demographic characteristics of aliens whose cases were in the backlog are unknown.

Data prior to 2001 included small numbers of records for persons under age 18, most of which came from the N-600 application for certificate of citizenship. The N-600 form is used to provide evidence of citizenship for children under age 18 who derive or acquire citizenship through their parents. The N-643 form is used for adopted children. Most N-600 records were excluded beginning in 1998. Persons ages 17 and under have been excluded from naturalization *Yearbook* tables since 2001.

Occupation was not reported for more than one-third of all records in 2002. This is somewhat higher than the level of nonreporting in previous years. In addition, data are missing on about 3 percent of all records for state and metropolitan area of residence, marital status, provision of naturalization law, and country of former allegiance. The Central Index System (CIS), which does not maintain information on these variables, was the source of data for these records.