

Trends in Naturalization Rates

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INTRODUCTION

The naturalization rate of legal permanent residents (LPRs) may be considered a measure of assimilation and adaptation in the United States. Naturalization rates vary by demographic characteristic, legal basis for immigration, and the period during which LPR status was obtained. This Office of Immigration Statistics Fact Sheet illustrates that variation and shows how naturalization rates have changed over time.

DATA AND METHODS

Matched immigration and naturalization data for 1973¹ through 2005 were obtained from administrative records maintained by the Department of Homeland Security. These records were restricted to immigrants at least 18 years of age at the time LPR status was obtained to exclude children who may have derived citizenship from their parents. Naturalization rates were calculated as the proportion of LPRs becoming U.S. citizens by a given date or within a given period of time. These rates were calculated separately for each cohort of immigrants obtaining LPR status in the same year, and no adjustments were made for emigration or mortality.

FINDINGS

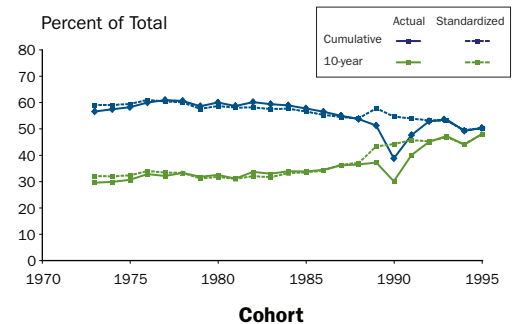
Through 2005, cumulative naturalization rates for the 1973 through mid-1980's cohorts approached 60 percent (see Figure 1). Rates were lower for the more recent cohorts, partly reflecting the lesser amount of time these immigrants have had to naturalize. Cumulative rates were particularly low for the 1989-1991 cohorts, which consisted disproportionately of Mexican immigrants who obtained LPR status under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986; Mexican immigrants have historically had lower naturalization rates than other immigrants (see Figures 2 and 3). Standardized rates, the rates that would have been expected if each cohort exhibited the same birth region² distribution of LPRs as the 1995 cohort, were reasonably consistent with the crude rates for most cohorts and were much higher than the crude rates for the 1989-1991 cohorts.

¹ Years refer to calendar years (January 1 to December 31).

² Birth regions included Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Central American, Europe, Mexico, Oceania, South America, and other.

The timing of naturalization has shifted with more recent cohorts becoming U.S. citizens sooner than earlier cohorts. Naturalization rates for the first 10 years in LPR status ranged from 30-35 percent for the 1973 to mid-1980's cohorts and were generally higher for more recent cohorts. After standardizing, the 10-year rates were consistently higher for more recent cohorts compared to earlier cohorts.

Figure 1.
Naturalization Rates for 1973-1995 LPR Cohorts Through 2005 and within 10 Years of Obtaining LPR Status



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Asian immigrants had the highest cumulative naturalization rates and Mexican immigrants had among the lowest (see Figure 2). Asian immigrants naturalized at a rate of approximately 70 percent for the 1973 to mid-1980's cohorts and 60-65 percent for the later cohorts. Mexican immigrants naturalized at a rate of 45-50 percent for the 1970's cohorts, 35-40 percent for the 1980's cohorts, and 20-30 percent for the 1990's cohorts. The higher rate for the 1989 cohort of Mexican LPRs and the subsequent lower rate for the 1990 cohort reflect naturalization propensities of different classes of IRCA-based LPRs. Europeans naturalized at a rate of approximately 40-50 percent for the 1970's and 1980's cohorts and 50-60 percent for the 1990's cohorts. The higher rates for more recent cohorts of European LPRs reflect compositional changes, most notably the increase in refugees associated with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

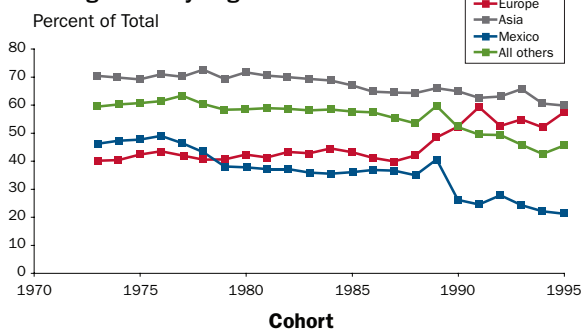


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Figure 2.

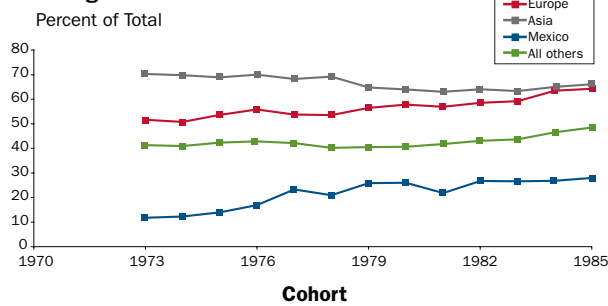
Naturalization Rates for 1973-1995 LPR Cohorts Through 2005 by Region of Birth



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Figure 4.

Ratios of Naturalizations within 10 years of Obtaining LPR Status to All Naturalizations through 2005 for 1973-1985 LPR Cohorts



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Across all regions, immigrants comprising the more recent cohorts were more likely to naturalize within 10 years of obtaining LPR status than were their earlier counterparts. Asian LPRs were the most likely to naturalize within 10 years, with approximate rates of 40-50 percent for the 1970's and 1980's cohorts and 50-60 percent for the 1990's cohorts. Mexican LPRs were the least likely to naturalize within 10 years, with approximate rates of 5-10 percent for the 1970's through mid-1980's cohorts and 15-30 percent for the more recent cohorts. Although Mexican LPRs were least likely to naturalize within ten years, they also exhibited the greatest relative increase in rates between the earliest and latest cohorts.

CONCLUSION

The timing of naturalization has changed among cohorts of immigrants who obtained LPR status between 1973 and 1995. Recent immigrants, regardless of region of origin, were more likely to naturalize within 10 years of obtaining LPR status than earlier cohorts. These findings suggest that the cumulative lifetime naturalization rates of recent LPRs may exceed those of earlier cohorts as well. Future analysis will examine the upper bound on lifetime cumulative naturalization rates taking into account emigration and mortality.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Cornwell, Derek, D.F., 2006. "Naturalization Rate Estimates: Stock vs. Flow," Fact Sheet, Office of Immigration Statistics, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_naturalizations_fs_2004.pdf

Rytina, Nancy, 2002. "IRCA Legalization Effects: Lawful Permanent Residence and Naturalization through 2001," Office of Policy and Planning, Statistics Division, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, <http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/irca0114int.pdf>

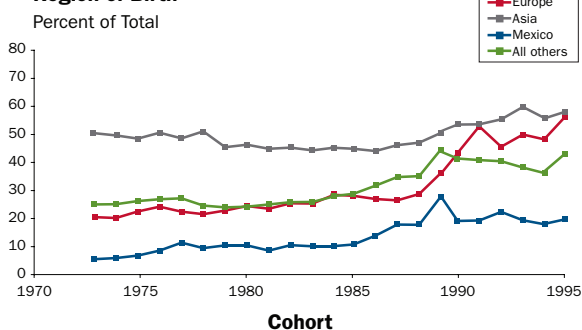
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2007. "A Guide to Naturalization," <http://www.uscis.gov/files/article/M-476.pdf>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

Figure 3.

Naturalization Rates for 1973-1995 LPR Cohorts within 10 Years of Obtaining LPR Status by Region of Birth



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The comparison of 10-year naturalization rates to cumulative rates reveals that Mexican LPRs were slower to naturalize than European or Asian LPRs (see Figure 4). For the 1973 through mid-1980's cohorts, the proportion of LPRs naturalizing within 10 years of obtaining LPR status out of all those naturalizing by the end of 2005 was approximately 10-30 percent for Mexicans, 50-65 percent for Europeans, and 65-70 percent for Asians.