

Paths to Citizenship:

Using Data to Understand and Promote Naturalization

The total number of eligible-to-naturalize immigrants in the United States is slowly rising each year as the number of people gaining lawful permanent residency is increasing faster than the number naturalizing. This is due to varying issues including the backlog in application processing as well as individual drivers. With the many benefits that come with citizenship and the recent spotlight placed on immigrant populations, we explore:

- (1) who is naturalizing in the U.S.;
- (2) the factors that aid or inhibit eligible adults from naturalization; and
- (3) the spatial distribution of eligible adults with different probabilities of naturalizing.

CSII's (Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration) latest report, Paths to Citizenship: Using Data to Understand and Promote Naturalization, examines the individual and place-level factors impacting naturalization among eligible adults in the U.S. Our results help to identify three distinct groups of eligible adults: those with low, medium, and high probabilities of naturalization.

Key Characteristics of All Eligible-to-Naturalize Adults

In order to examine the interplay of the determinants of naturalization, we conducted analyses in which we varied one variable at a time (for example, looking at the impact of English ability on naturalization for individuals of the same gender, nationality, family situation).

English Fluency

Those who report speaking English "well" or "very well" experience an **increase of 133 percent and 153 percent**, respectively, in their odds of naturalization compared to those who report speaking English "not at all."

Marital Status

Being married to a non-U.S. citizen **decreases** the odds of naturalization by **42 percent**, while being married to a U.S. citizen **increases** the odds of naturalization by **31 percent**.

Educational Attainment

Completing at least "some college" can produce up to **35 percent higher** odds of naturalization compared to those with less than a high school degree.

Status of Family Members

Being in a mixed-status family (i.e., having a family member who is an undocumented immigrant) **decreases** the odds of naturalization by **49 percent**.

Gender

Eligible adults who are male have **12 percent lower** odds of naturalization compared to their female counterparts.

Country of Origin

Coming from a country that allows dual citizenship or is historically a refugee-sending country **increases** the odds of naturalization by **20 percent and 43 percent**, respectively.

Home-ownership

Homeowners have **30 percent higher** odds of naturalization compared to non-homeowners.

Place of Residence

Living in a "blue" state or in a sub-county area with a 10-percent-age-point higher concentration of the immigrant population **increases** the odds of naturalization by **15 percent and 7 percent**, respectively.

Table 1 below gives a brief summary of each category of probability, including a description, key findings, and examples of organizations whose naturalization services may benefit individuals in each probability group.

Table 1. An overview of the low, medium, and high probabilities of naturalization

Category	Low	Medium	High
Description	Probability of naturalizing less than 9.7% May need comprehensive support throughout the naturalization process	Probability of naturalizing 9.7 to 21.7% May need some support throughout the naturalization process	Probability of naturalizing greater than 21.7% May need a nudge to expedite the naturalization process
Key findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40% of total ETN adults • 60% report speaking English “not well” or “not at all” • 54% do not have a high school diploma • 71% are Latino • 43% live in mixed-status families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35% of total ETN adults • 70% report speaking English “well” or better • 71% have a high school diploma • 53% are Latino, higher numbers of Asian American Pacific Islander and Black individuals • 17% live in mixed-status families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% of total ETN adults • 88% report speaking English “well” or better • 67% have completed “some college” or more • 34% are Asian American Pacific Islander • 5% live in mixed-status families
Naturalization in action	Asian Americans Advancing Justice – LA	CASA	Citizenshipworks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free naturalization services • Legal help hotline • Multilingual assistance • Legal representation • Text messaging platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$35 membership fee • Micro-loan programs • Bilingual application assistance • Referrals to attorneys • Post-naturalization support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free online tool • Eligibility screenings • Do-it-yourself application • Online legal help • Connection to other organizations

Conclusion and Implications

Citizenship creates greater access to government benefits, higher wages, security, and voting power. Our results allow service providers and policymakers to support people of all probabilities by strategically advocating for different naturalization measures, including lowering fees and addressing the application backlog. As part of this strategy to improve the livelihood of immigrants through naturalization, we will also need to consider location to maximize the effectiveness of our efforts. Spatially examining the distribution of eligible adults and their probabilities of naturalization can help foster equity, for example, by focusing on areas with higher proportions of low-probability eligible adults. This spatial tool is available at <https://dornsife.usc.edu/csii/map-eligible-to-naturalize-puma/>. Service providers can use this tool to determine where comprehensive or more limited services are needed, and which demographic and socioeconomic characteristics are associated with eligible adult populations in particular areas. By better understanding the specific needs of the eligible-to-naturalize population, services can be better matched to yield equitable and effective results.