

New American Voters in Washington

Building the Electoral Power of Naturalized Voters



Citizenship ceremony, photo courtesy of OneAmerica



Seattle
Office of Immigrant
and Refugee Affairs



**US IMMIGRATION
POLICY CENTER**

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Citizenship Volunteer, photo courtesy of OneAmerica

Executive Summary

The high stakes of the 2022 U.S. midterm elections showcase the urgency of engaging all eligible voters to ensure a fully participatory, representative democracy. In Washington, a bloc of New American Voters — recently naturalized citizens that have earned the right to vote — has the potential to play an outsized role in the outcomes of critical federal and state races. This voting bloc is multiracial, multigenerational, geographically diverse, and majority female. New American Voters hold distinct ideologies, experiences, and viewpoints, and will be motivated by a variety of issues this November.

Washington will be one of the most critical states during the November 2022 midterm elections and New American Voters can sway the outcome. Washington ranks 17th in the nation according to the New American Voters Impact Model, which was created by the National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA) and the U.S. Immigration Policy Center (USIPC) at the University of California, San Diego to showcase the potential of this critical voting bloc to influence the outcome of midterm elections in 50 states. This report offers data that illustrates how New American Voters can have an outsized impact.

- Washington is home to 86,909 citizens naturalized between 2016 and 2020, approximately 20 percent of the state's total number of naturalized citizens.
- Newly naturalized citizens in Washington are racially and ethnically diverse, with approximately 48 percent from Asia, 22 percent from the Americas, 17 percent from Europe, and 12 percent from the African continent.
- Approximately 62 percent of Washington's newly naturalized citizens are under the age of 45 and around 55 percent are women.
- The Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan area has the state's highest concentration of naturalized citizens, at over 470,000, followed by the Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro metropolitan area, which includes parts of Washington and Oregon, with over 186,000, and then the Yakima metropolitan area with approximately 17,000.

Washington's cohort is part of an estimated 5.19 million newly naturalized citizens across the U.S., according to [New American Voters 2022: Harnessing the Power of Naturalized Citizens](#), a report released by NPNA, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), APIAVote, and USPIC. The power of this potential voting bloc is determined by individuals' ability to both register and vote this November.

This electoral season presents many challenges, including the need for organizations to adapt their voter engagement work to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, language access issues, and ongoing efforts to tighten and restrict access to voting, particularly targeting voters of color. Another challenge that has emerged in recent years is the increasing backlog and processing delays of citizenship applications.

According to the latest data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), there are over 672,000 pending citizenship applications nationwide, with 23,385 applications backlogged in USCIS' three offices in Washington.¹ While the national average processing delay is around 11 months, approximately 80 percent of applications are processed within 14.5 months in USCIS' Yakima office and approximately 80 percent of applications are processed within 19.5 months in USCIS' Seattle office. This means that immigrants who are eligible for citizenship and who would have otherwise naturalized and have had time to register to vote in this year's elections may not be able to do so given the naturalization application backlog.

Washington-based organizations [OneAmerica](#) and the [Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs](#) are partnering with NPNA's [New American Voters Campaign](#), a non-partisan nationwide effort to address naturalization barriers and encourage newly naturalized citizens to register and vote.

¹ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Number of Form N-400 Application for Naturalization by Category of Naturalization, Case Status and USCIS Field Office Location, April 1, 2022 - June 30, 2022," accessed October 18, 2022, https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/N400_performancedata_fy2022_qtr3.pdf.

Methodology

This report is based on USCIS data on naturalizations that occurred from Fiscal Year 2016 through FY 2020 and naturalization applications that the agency approved in FY 2021.² Estimates for naturalizations during FY 2021 are based on previous spikes in naturalizations between FY 2019 and FY 2020, right before the presidential election.

“Newly naturalized citizens” are defined as those who have naturalized since FY 2016. “New American Voters” are defined as those who have naturalized since FY 2016 and can subsequently register to vote.

This report utilizes United Nations regional classifications to specify newly naturalized citizens' region of origin.³ These classifications are Americas, Asia, Europe, Africa, and Oceania. All of the tables referenced throughout this report are based on USCIS data from 2016–2020. Additionally, data on naturalization gaps is based on the 2020 1-Year ACS.⁴

The New American Voters Impact Model (Figure 1) ranks states' relative “political importance” based on six factors: (1) newly naturalized citizens from 2016 to 2020 as a multiple of the state’s 2016 presidential vote margin; (2) the average presidential election margin in 2012, 2016, and 2020; (3) group density; (4) the presence of a competitive U.S. Senate race; (5) the presence of a competitive gubernatorial race; and (6) the presence of a competitive race for control of state legislative chambers. All of these factors are multiplied by each other in order to arrive at a raw score. That raw score is standardized on a 1 to 99 scale. The 15 highest-scoring states are termed “politically important states” throughout this report. A more in-depth explanation of the model factors can be found in NPNA’s companion national report.⁵

² See “Naturalizations,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/naturalizations>. “Immigration and Citizenship Data,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://www.uscis.gov/tools/reports-and-studies/immigration-and-citizenship-data>

³ See “Countries or Areas,” United Nations Statistics Division, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/#geo-regions>

⁴ See “American Community Survey,” United States Census Bureau, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>

⁵ National Partnership for New Americans, Service Employees International Union, U.S. Immigration Policy Center at the University of Washington San Diego, and APIA Vote, “New American Voters 2022: Harnessing the Power of Naturalized Citizens,” July 2022, https://newamericanvoters.org/assets/2022/07/NPNA_2022-New-American-Voters-Report.pdf

WHY WASHINGTON IS SO IMPORTANT

There are more than 566,000 naturalized citizens who live in Washington, more than 7 percent of the state’s population. As Figure 2 shows, approximately one-fifth of all naturalized citizens in Washington have naturalized since the 2016 presidential election.

Figure 1: Politically Important States, according to the New American Voters Impact Model, 2022
This map shows how states score in the NPNA New American Voters Impact Model

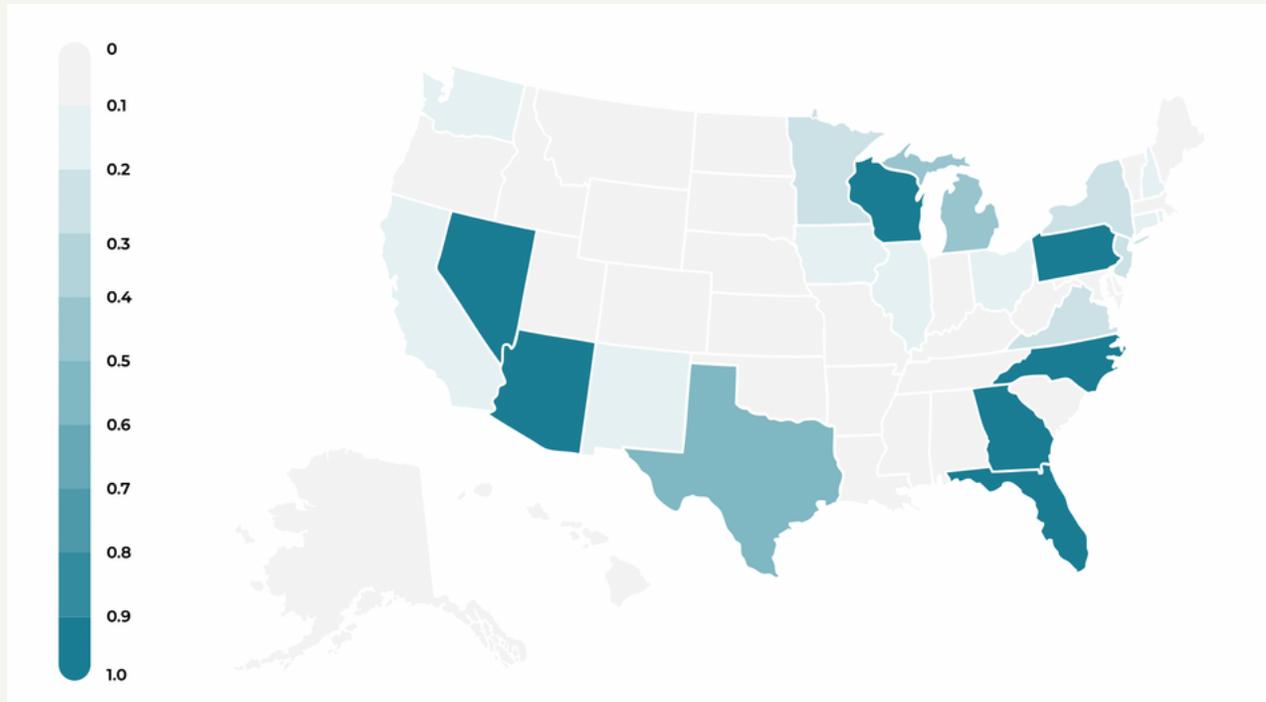


Figure 2: Washington State Population Figures 2022

TOTAL POPULATION	REGISTERED VOTERS	ALL NATURALIZED CITIZENS	NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS 2016-2020
7,697,393	4,612,018 ⁶	566,509	86,909

From 2016 through 2020, Washington added an estimated 86,909 newly naturalized citizens. Washington’s cohort is part of an estimated 5.19 million newly naturalized citizens across the U.S.⁷

⁶ Washington Office of the Secretary of State Elections Division, “2020 Annual Report of Washington State Elections,” accessed September 8, 2022, https://www.sos.wa.gov/_assets/elections/research/2020%20annual%20elections%20report%20with%20eavs%20update.pdf

⁷ National Partnership for New Americans, Service Employees International Union, U.S. Immigration Policy Center at the University of California San Diego, and APIA Vote, “New American Voters 2022: Harnessing the Power of Naturalized Citizens,” July 2022, https://newamericanvoters.org/assets/2022/07/NPNA_2022-New-American-Voters-Report.pdf

WHO ARE WASHINGTON'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS?

Of the total number of persons who naturalized in Washington from 2016 to 2020, approximately 48 percent are from Asia, which includes Asian and Pacific Islander countries, approximately 22 percent are from the Americas, which includes Latin America and the Caribbean, approximately 17 percent are from Europe, and approximately 12 percent are from the African continent. (See Figure 3.)

FIGURE 3: WASHINGTON NATURALIZED CITIZENS BY REGION OF ORIGIN 2016-2020

REGION	NUMBER OF NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS	PERCENTAGE OF NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS
Asia	41,417	48%
Americas	19,185	22%
Europe	14,466	17%
Africa	10,223	12%
Oceania	1,411	2%
Other/Unknown	207	0.2%
Total 2016-2020	86,909	

22%

Newly Naturalized Citizens from the Americas

48%

Newly Naturalized Citizens from Asian and Pacific Islander Countries



Figure 4 shows the top 20 countries of origin for persons who naturalized in Washington from 2016 to 2020. Newly naturalized citizens from Mexico lead the way, followed by India, then the Philippines.

FIGURE 4: WASHINGTON NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, 2016-2020

RANK	COUNTRY	TOTAL
1	Mexico	11,535
2	India	8,090
3	Philippines	6,590
4	China, People's Republic	5,162
5	Vietnam	5,066
6	Ukraine	4,454
7	Ethiopia	3,028
8	Korea, South	2,965
9	Canada	2,763
10	Russia	1,942
11	Iraq	1,770
12	United Kingdom	1,483
13	Somalia	1,410
14	Kenya	1,329
15	Iran	1,215
16	Cambodia	1,082
17	Moldova	1,000
18	Taiwan	983
19	Thailand	952
20	Eritrea	773

30%

Newly naturalized U.S. citizens
35-45 years old

24%

Newly naturalized U.S. citizens
25-34 years old

18%

Newly naturalized U.S. citizens
45-55 years old

11%

Newly naturalized U.S. citizens
55-65 years old

8%

Newly naturalized U.S. citizens
18-24 years old

Approximately 62 percent of persons who naturalized in Washington from 2016 to 2020 were below the age of 45 and approximately 55 percent were women. The full breakdown by age and gender is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Washington Newly Naturalized Citizens By Age and Gender* 2016-2020

AGE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	Percent of Total
18-24 YEARS	3,402	3,152	6,554	8%
25-34 YEARS	11,931	8,736	20,667	24%
35-45 YEARS	14,276	12,039	26,315	30%
45-55 YEARS	8,464	7,345	15,809	18%
55-65 YEARS	5,416	4,397	9,813	11%
65 YEARS AND OLDER	4,590	3,161	7,751	9%
TOTAL	48,079 (55.3% of total)	38,830 (44.6% of total)	86,909	

*USCIS does not collect data on transgender or non-binary individuals.

WHERE ARE WASHINGTON'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS?

Figure 6 shows the total number of naturalized citizens in metropolitan areas in Washington. The Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan area has over 470,000 naturalized citizens, followed by the Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro metropolitan area, which includes parts of Washington and Oregon, with over 186,000 naturalized citizens, and then the Yakima metropolitan area with approximately 17,000 naturalized citizens.⁸

Figure 6: Washington Naturalized U.S. Citizens By Metro Area and Region of Origin, 2022

Metropolitan Area	Total	Africa	Americas	Asia	Europe	Oceania
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	473,825	32,511	58,939	186,520	40,455	10,777
Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA	186,037	8,612	33,009	58,736	25,271	3,454
Yakima, WA	16,898	N/A	13,544	1,446	219	92
Olympia-Tumwater, WA	16,064	291	2,309	4,709	960	514
Spokane-Spokane Valley, WA	14,733	1,129	3,645	3,684	2,766	321
Bellingham, WA	11,737	0	5,225	2,533	822	233

Note: This table includes figures of **all** naturalized citizens in named regions, not just newly naturalized.

⁸ Estimates obtained from the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Public Use Microdata (PUM).



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To help my family
have a better opportunity...



ENGAGING WASHINGTON'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS

The [2022 New American Voters campaign](#) is a non-partisan nationwide effort coordinated by NPNA to encourage newly naturalized citizens to register and vote. Newly naturalized citizens in Washington interested in becoming citizens or new voters can connect with the following NPNA member and partner organizations below for more information.

Washington Partners

OneAmerica builds leadership and organizes grassroots leaders and our allies in key areas in Washington state to push for policy change, mobilize civic engagement in our communities and advocate for systems that welcome and include immigrants at every level. Learn more at weareoneamerica.org

Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs' mission is to improve the lives of Seattle's immigrant and refugee communities by engaging them in decisions about the City of Seattle's future and improving the City's programs and services to meet the needs of all constituents. Learn more at seattle.gov/iandraffairs

National Partners

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) unites 2 million diverse members in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. SEIU members working in the healthcare industry, in the public sector and in property services believe in the power of joining together on the job to win higher wages and benefits and to create better communities while fighting for a more just society and an economy that works for all of us, not just corporations and the wealthy. Learn more at www.seiu.org

The U.S. Immigration Policy Center (USIPC) at UC San Diego was the lead author of this report in partnership with NPNA and SEIU. USIPC conducts and supports rigorous social science research to advance understanding of the foundations and consequences of U.S. immigration policy. Immigration has played an integral role in American history and is sure to feature prominently in America's future. But what should the immigration policies of our nation of immigrants be? The USIPC brings together leading academics, policy analysts, immigrant rights leaders, and policymakers across all levels of government to conceptualize, debate, and design a new U.S. immigration policy agenda that meets the demands of the 21st century. Learn more at www.usipc.ucsd.edu