

New American Voters in Wisconsin

Building the Electoral Power of Naturalized Voters



Naturalize 2 Million by 2022 Press Conference, Photo Courtesy of Voces de la Frontera



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NPNA
NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP
FOR NEW AMERICANS



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May Day March in Milwaukee, 2022
Photo Courtesy of Voces de la Frontera

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 Wisconsin, 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.

With a competitive Senate election (rated “toss up” by the [Cook Political Report](#)) and a contested gubernatorial election (rated “toss up” by the [Cook Political Report](#)), Wisconsin will be one of the most critical states during the November 2022 midterm elections and New American Voters can sway the outcome. Wisconsin ranks 7th 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.

- Wisconsin is home to 20,953 citizens naturalized between 2016 and 2020. This number exceeds the state’s 20,682-vote margin of victory in the 2020 presidential election.
- Newly naturalized citizens in Wisconsin are racially and ethnically diverse, with approximately 44 percent from Asia, 30 percent from the Americas, approximately 14 percent from Europe, and approximately 11 percent from the African continent.
- Approximately 65 percent of Wisconsin’s newly naturalized citizens are under the age of 45 and more than 53 percent were women.
- The Chicago-Naperville-Elgin metropolitan area, which includes Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, has the state’s highest concentration of naturalized citizens, at over 960,000, followed by the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington metropolitan area, which includes Wisconsin and Minnesota, with over 250,000, and then the Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis metropolitan area with approximately 74,000.

Wisconsin’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 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 750,000 pending citizenship applications nationwide, with 3,570 applications backlogged in USCIS’ offices in Wisconsin. While the national average processing delay is around 11 months, approximately 80 percent of applications are processed¹ within 13.5 months in USCIS’ Milwaukee 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.

Wisconsin-based organizations, including [Voces de la Frontera](#), 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.” October 1, 2021 - December 31, 2021.
https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/reports/N400_performancedata_fy2022_qtr1.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 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

WHY WISCONSIN IS SO IMPORTANT

There are more than 140,000 naturalized citizens in Wisconsin, nearly 2.5 percent of the population. As Figure 2 shows, approximately 15 percent of all naturalized citizens in Wisconsin 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

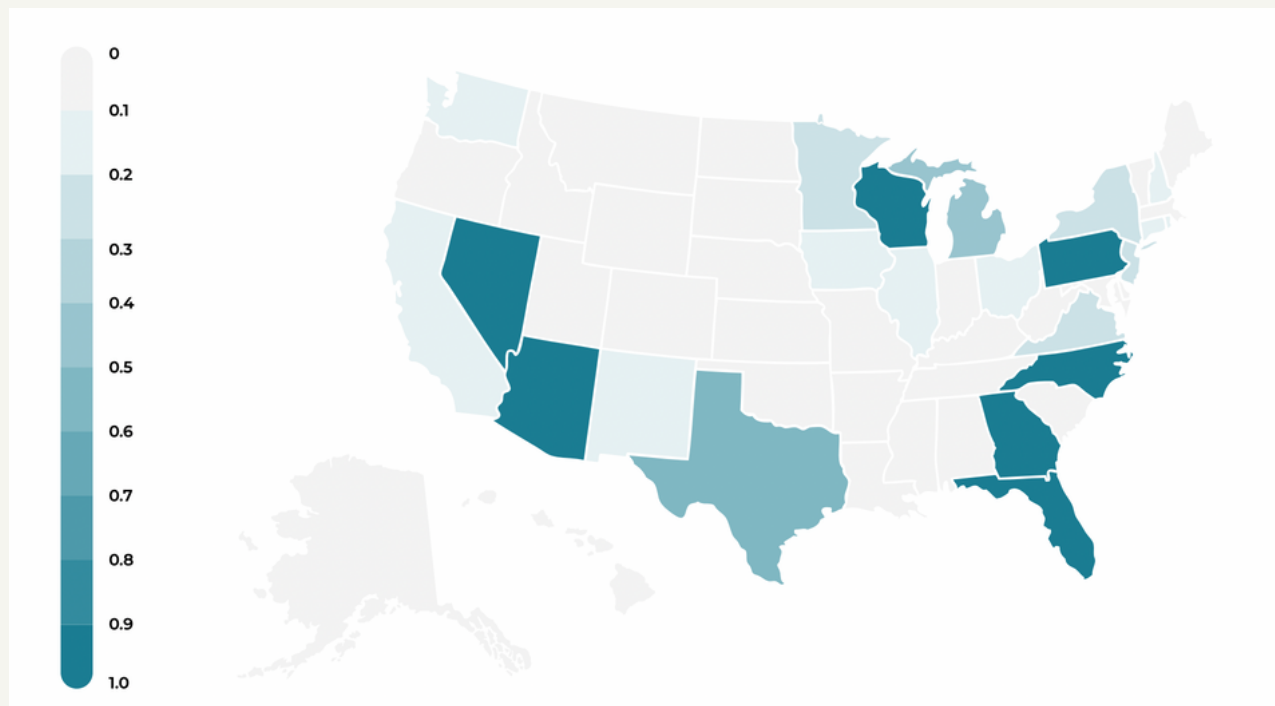


Figure 2: Wisconsin State Population Figures 2022

TOTAL POPULATION	REGISTERED VOTERS	ALL NATURALIZED CITIZENS	NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS, 2016-2020
5,838,186	3,525,574 ⁶	144,824	20,953

From 2016 through 2020, Wisconsin added an estimated 20,953 newly naturalized citizens, which exceeds the 20,682-vote margin of victory during the 2020 presidential election in the state. Wisconsin's cohort is part of an estimated 5.19 million newly naturalized citizens across the U.S.⁷

⁶ Wisconsin Elections Commission, "September 1, 2022 Voter Registration Statistics," Accessed September 7, 2022,

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 WISCONSIN'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS?

Of the total number of persons who naturalized in Wisconsin from 2016 to 2020, approximately 44 percent are from Asia, which includes Asian and Pacific Islander countries, 30 percent are from the Americas, which includes Latin America and the Caribbean, approximately 14 percent are from Europe, and approximately 11 percent are from the African continent. (See Figure 3.)

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

Region of Origin	Number of Newly Naturalized Citizens	Percentage of Total Newly Naturalized Citizens
Asia	9,286	44%
Americas	6,268	30%
Europe	2,864	14%
Africa	2,228	11%
Oceania	94	0.4%
Other/Unknown	213	1.0%
Total 2016-2020	20,953	

30%

Newly Naturalized
Citizens from the
Americas

44%

Newly Naturalized
Citizens from Asian
and Pacific Islander
Countries



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

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

RANK	COUNTRY	TOTAL
1	Mexico	3,921
2	India	1,923
3	Thailand	1,013
4	Laos	908
5	China, People's Republic	863
6	Burma	843
7	Philippines	794
8	Somalia	525
9	Iraq	465
10	Canada	375
11	United Kingdom	368
12	Vietnam	359
13	Pakistan	337
14	Russia	240
15	Nigeria	237
16	Poland	232
17	Germany	221
18	Colombia	210
19	Korea, South	209
20	Brazil	206

31%

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

26%

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

18%

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

10%

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

8%

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

Approximately 65 percent of persons who naturalized in Wisconsin from 2016 to 2020 were under the age of 45 and more than 53 percent were women. The full breakdown by age and gender is shown in Figure 5.

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

AGE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	Percent of Total
18-24 YEARS	908	764	1,672	8%
25-34 YEARS	3,010	2,489	5,499	26%
35-45 YEARS	3,358	3,168	6,526	31%
45-55 YEARS	1,995	1,837	3,832	18%
55-65 YEARS	1,123	961	2,084	10%
65 YEARS AND OLDER	769	571	1,340	6%
TOTAL	11,163 (53.2% of total)	9,790 (46.7% of total)	20,953	

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

WHERE ARE WISCONSIN'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS?

Figure 6 shows the total number of naturalized citizens in metropolitan areas in Wisconsin. The Chicago-Naperville-Elgin metropolitan area, which includes Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, has over 960,000 naturalized citizens, followed by the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington metropolitan area, which includes Wisconsin and Minnesota, with over 250,000 naturalized citizens, and then the Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis metropolitan area with approximately 74,000 naturalized citizens.⁸

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

Metropolitan Area	Total	Africa	Americas	Asia	Europe	Oceania
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	961,087	32,158	317,768	372,626	237,237	1,183
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	250,583	75,685	40,955	112,442	21,177	324
Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, WI	74,292	6,964	21,662	36,463	9,045	158
Racine, WI	7,564	306	2,922	2,520	1,816	N/A
Oshkosh-Neenah, WI	3,888	98	1,009	2,401	380	N/A
Janesville-Beloit, WI	2,931	N/A	1,494	561	876	N/A
Eau Claire, WI	2,578	N/A	176	2,028	374	N/A
Wausau, WI	2,180	138	411	1,028	603	N/A
Sheboygan, WI	2,178	N/A	274	1,560	344	N/A
La Crosse-Onalaska, WI-MN	1,197	115	195	779	108	N/A

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).



ENGAGING WISCONSIN 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 Wisconsin interested in becoming citizens or new voters can connect with the following NPNA member and partner organizations below for more information.

Wisconsin Partners

Voces de la Frontera has been Wisconsin's leading immigrant rights organization for more than 20 years. Voces is a membership-based community organization led by low-wage workers, immigrants, and youth whose mission is to protect and expand civil rights and workers' rights through leadership development, community organizing, and political empowerment. Learn more at www.vdlf.org.

SEIU Local 1 Unites 50,000 working people throughout the Midwest including janitors, security officers, higher education faculty, school custodians, food service workers and more. Local 1 is the founding Local of the Service Employees International Union and was started in Chicago in 1904 by residential maintenance workers. Learn more at: www.seiu1.org

SEIU Wisconsin State Council - Representing over 10,000 health care, public sector+property services employees in WI, SEIU WI State Council coordinates our locals' legislative+political programs. Learn more at: <http://www.seiwi.org/>

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