

New American Voters in New Jersey

Building the Electoral Power of Naturalized Voters



Make the Road New Jersey Rally, 2021



September
2022

Table of Contents

3

Executive Summary

4

Methodology

5

Why New Jersey is So Important in 2022

6

Who are New Jersey's New American Voters?

9

Where are New Jersey's New American Voters?

11

Engaging New Jersey's New American Voters



SEIU 32BJ Member, Voter Registration Event.
Courtesy of SEIU 32BJ.

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 New Jersey, 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.

New Jersey will be one of the most critical states for New American Voters during the November 2022 midterm elections, as they can significantly sway the outcome. New Jersey ranks 12th 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.

- New Jersey is home to 177,890 citizens naturalized between 2016 and 2020. The state ranks behind only California, Florida, New York, and Texas when it comes to the highest number of newly naturalized citizens in the country.
- Newly naturalized citizens in New Jersey are racially and ethnically diverse, with approximately 44 percent from the Americas, 36 percent from Asia, 11 percent from Europe, and 9 percent from the African continent.
- Approximately 59 percent are under the age of 45 years old and more than 55 percent are women.
- The New York-Newark-Jersey City metropolitan area, which includes New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, has the state's highest concentration of naturalized citizens, at nearly 3.9 million naturalized, followed by the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington metropolitan area, which includes New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, with approximately 450,000, and then the Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton metropolitan area, which includes New Jersey and Pennsylvania, with approximately 48,000.

New Jersey'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 750,000 pending citizenship applications nationwide, with 41,058 applications backlogged in USCIS' offices in New Jersey.¹ While the national average processing delay is around 11 months, approximately 80 percent of applications are processed within 16 months in USCIS' Mount Laurel office and approximately 80 percent of applications are processed within 16.5 months in USCIS' Newark 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.

New Jersey-based organizations, including Make the Road New Jersey and SEIU 32BJ, 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 "Number of Form N-400 Application for Naturalization by Category of Naturalization, Case Status and USCIS Field Office Location, January 1, 2022-March 31, 2022," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed September 21, 2022, https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/N400_performancedata_fy2022_qtr2.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 NEW JERSEY IS SO IMPORTANT

There are approximately 1.2 million naturalized citizens in New Jersey, accounting for more than 13 percent of the state population. As Figure 2 shows, approximately 17 percent of all naturalized citizens in New Jersey 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

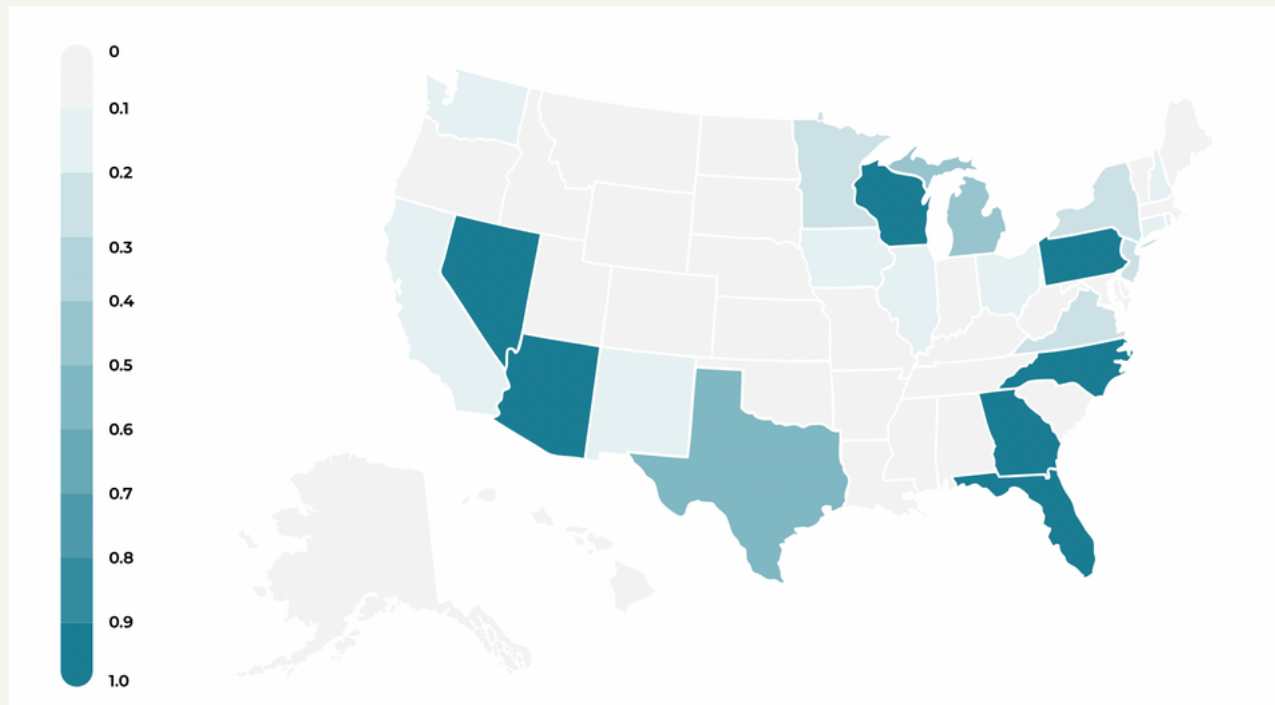


FIGURE 2: NEW JERSEY STATE POPULATION FIGURES 2022

TOTAL POPULATION	REGISTERED VOTERS	ALL NATURALIZED CITIZENS	NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS 2016-2020
8,866,369	6,447,383 ⁶	1,165,569	177,890

From 2016 through 2020, New Jersey added an estimated 177,890 newly naturalized citizens. New Jersey ranks behind only California, Florida, New York, and Texas when it comes to the highest number of newly naturalized citizens in the country. New Jersey's cohort is part of an estimated 5.19 million newly naturalized citizens across the U.S.⁷

6 Official Site of the State of New Jersey, “Department of State: New Jersey Division of Elections,” accessed September 13, 2022, <https://www.state.nj.us/state/elections/election-information-svrs.shtml>

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 NEW JERSEY'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS?

Of the total number of persons who naturalized in New Jersey from 2016 to 2020, approximately 44 percent are from the Americas, which includes Latin America and the Caribbean, approximately 36 percent are from Asia, which includes Asian and Pacific Islander countries, approximately 11 percent are from Europe, and approximately 9 percent are from the African continent.

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

REGION	NUMBER OF NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS	PERCENTAGE OF NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS
Americas	77,969	44%
Asia	63,996	36%
Europe	19,314	11%
Africa	16,124	9%
Oceania	242	0.1%
Other/Unknown	245	0.1%
Total 2016-2020	177,890	

44%

Newly Naturalized
Citizens from the
Americas

36%

Newly Naturalized
Citizens from Asian
and Pacific Islander
Countries



Figure 4 shows the top 20 countries of origin for persons who naturalized in New Jersey from 2016 to 2020. Newly naturalized citizens from India lead the way, followed by the Dominican Republic, then Colombia.

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

RANK	COUNTRY	TOTAL
1	India	27,473
2	Dominican Republic	19,300
3	Colombia	8,646
4	Philippines	7,832
5	Ecuador	7,012
6	Peru	6,264
7	Korea, South	5,352
8	Egypt	5,290
9	China, People's Republic	5,018
10	Haiti	4,885
11	Jamaica	4,761
12	Poland	3,723
13	Mexico	3,615
14	Pakistan	3,603
15	Brazil	3,422
16	Cuba	2,645
17	Ghana	5,956
18	El Salvador	2,620
19	Bangladesh	2,457
20	Nigeria	2,349

29%

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

22%

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

20%

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

13%

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

8%

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

Approximately 59 percent of persons who naturalized in New Jersey from 2016 to 2020 were below the age of 45 and more than 55 percent were women. The full breakdown by age and gender is shown in Figure 5.

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

AGE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	Percent of Total
18-24 YEARS	7,564	6,436	14,002	8%
25-34 YEARS	22,564	16,508	39,073	22%
35-45 YEARS	27,665	23,099	50,764	29%
45-55 YEARS	18,315	16,767	35,083	20%
55-65 YEARS	12,740	10,264	23,004	13%
65 YEARS AND OLDER	9,300	6,664	15,964	9%
TOTAL	98,148 (55.1% of total)	79,738 (44.8% of total)	177,890	

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

WHERE ARE NEW JERSEY'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS?

Figure 6 shows the total number of naturalized citizens in metropolitan areas in New Jersey. The New York-Newark-Jersey City metropolitan area, which includes New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, has nearly 3.9 million naturalized citizens, followed by the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington metropolitan area, which includes New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, with approximately 450,000 naturalized citizens, and then the Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton metropolitan area, which includes New Jersey and Pennsylvania, with approximately 48,000 naturalized citizens.⁸

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

Metropolitan Area	Total	Africa	Americas	Asia	Europe	Oceania
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	3,859,089	107,750	1,403,754	1,234,526	426,005	3,897
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD	446,154	33,417	101,648	160,527	55,908	715
Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton, PA-NJ	48,179	2,684	22,308	8,801	6,028	276
Trenton, NJ	42,067	3,645	12,700	16,020	4,413	0
Atlantic City-Hammonton, NJ	18,292	393	7,467	5,285	2,511	129
Ocean City, NJ	2,750	0	1,401	183	837	0

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).



Make the Road New Jersey Leaders, 2021

ENGAGING NEW JERSEY'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 New Jersey interested in becoming citizens or new voters can connect with the following NPNA member and partner organizations below for more information.

New Jersey Partners

Make the Road New Jersey was founded in November 2014 in Elizabeth to build the power of immigrant, working-class & Latinx communities to achieve dignity and respect through community organizing, legal, policy innovation and transformative education. Learn more at <https://maketheroadnj.org>

SEIU 32BJ - with more than 175,000 members, we are the largest union of property service workers in the U.S. We are concentrated in the Northeast – in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Northern Virginia, and Washington, D.C. – but our reach extends to southern Florida. We work primarily as cleaners, property maintenance workers, doormen, security officers, window cleaners, building engineers, and school and food service workers, and airport workers. Learn More at www.seiu32bj.org

National Partners

The National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA) is a national multiethnic, multiracial organization that represents 60 of the largest regional immigrant and refugee rights organizations in 40 states. Its members provide large-scale services for the communities, to leverage their collective power and expertise for a national strategy. Learn more at www.partnershipfornewamericans.org

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