

# New American Voters in New Mexico

## *Building the Electoral Power of Naturalized Voters*



Photo courtesy of El Centro, 2021.



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Citizenship Ceremony, 2021.  
Photo Courtesy El Centro.

# Executive Summary

New Mexico is an increasingly critical state when it comes to local, state, and federal elections and New American Voters can sway the outcomes.

The efforts of NPNA members Somos Un Pueblo Unido, El Centro de Igualdad y Derechos, partners like NM Comunidades en Acción y de Fé (CAFé) and other grassroots organizations' engagement with newly naturalized citizens, can greatly increase participation of new citizens into becoming lifelong voters. Our organizations are connecting with new citizens in language and in culturally competent ways. The impact that New American Voters have also depends on overcoming obstacles to voting.

This electoral season presents many challenges, including the need for organizations to adapt their voter engagement work to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, language access issues that can affect New American Voters from the point of voter registration all the way through attempting to vote, 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 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 1,038 applications backlogged in USCIS' office in Albuquerque, New Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

From 2016 through 2020, New Mexico added an estimated 15,064 newly naturalized citizens who are now potential new voters. Of the total number of persons who naturalized in New Mexico from 2016 to 2020, approximately 72 percent are from the Americas, which includes Latin America and the Caribbean, approximately 18 percent are from Asia, which includes Asian and Pacific Islander countries, approximately 5 percent are from Europe, and approximately 3 percent are from the African continent.

Most of the persons in New Mexico who naturalized from 2016 to 2020 are originally from Mexico, at about 63 percent. Approximately 51 percent are under the age of 45 years old and around 58 percent are women. Most of this report analyzed data from people who naturalized in recent years, however we also zoom out to look at New Mexico's total naturalized population (see page 9 for more details).

When looking at the total naturalized population, naturalized citizens largely reside in the Albuquerque, Las Cruces, and Santa Fe metropolitan areas (61,271 in total), there are large concentrations of naturalized citizens in other, more rural areas of New Mexico (15,659 in total). These are the potential New American Voters who can have an outsized role in what happens in New Mexico during the November 2022 midterm elections.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 4, 2022, [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/N400\\_performancedata\\_fy2022\\_qtr3.pdf](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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 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>

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

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

<sup>5</sup> National Partnership for New Americans, Service Employees International Union, U.S. Immigration Policy Center at the University of New Mexico 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](https://newamericanvoters.org/assets/2022/07/NPNA_2022-New-American-Voters-Report.pdf)

# WHY NEW MEXICO IS SO IMPORTANT

New American Voters in New Mexico can play a critical role in the November 2022 midterm elections. New Mexico ranks 15th according to the New American Voters Impact Model, which was created by the National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA) and is based on factors like the 2020 presidential election margin of victory; the average margin of victory during the last three presidential elections; the size of the foreign-born population in a state; and the presence of competitive senatorial or gubernatorial races.

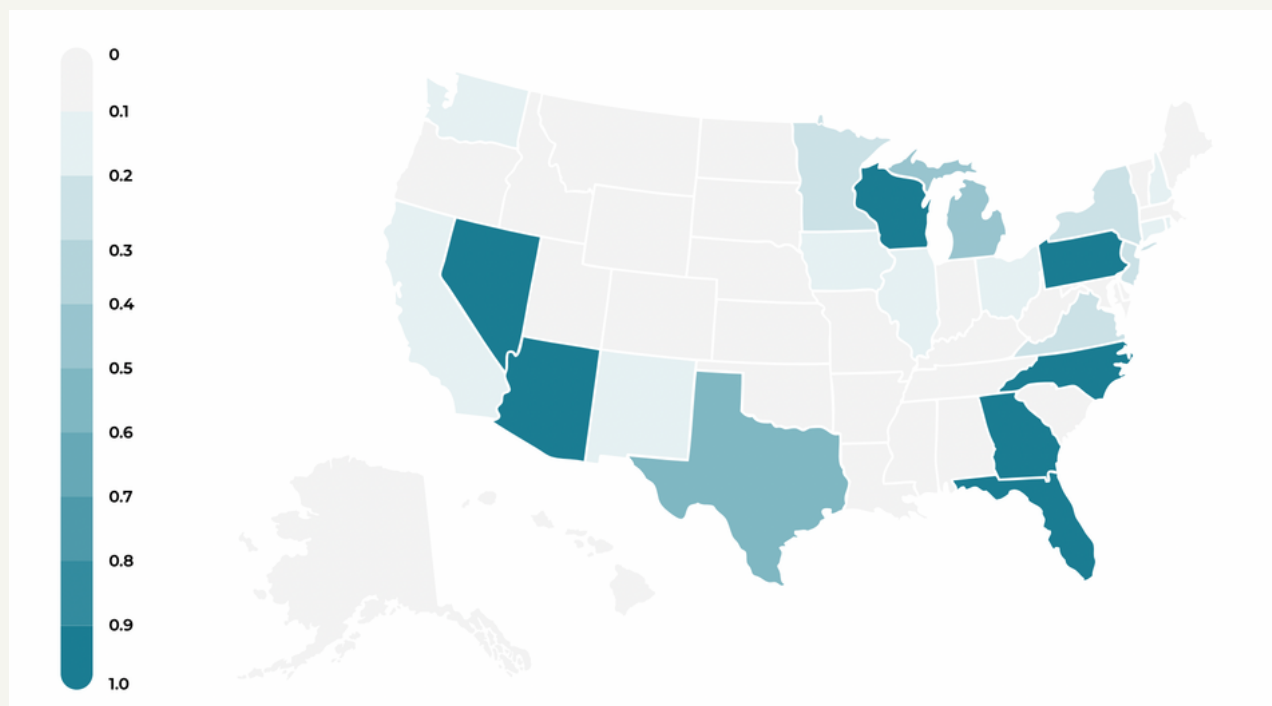
From 2016 through 2020, New Mexico added an estimated 15,064 newly naturalized citizens. This estimate of newly naturalized citizens is based on USCIS data on naturalizations that occurred between Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 and FY 2020.

These estimates were made in NPNA's report, *The Power of Newly Naturalized Citizens in the 2022 Elections*, released in 2022. Nationally, the report calculated that from FY 2016 through FY 2022, there were 5.1 million newly naturalized citizens.

There are more than 76,930 naturalized citizens who live in New Mexico. However, and acknowledging that not all immigrants can naturalize due to immigration status and other reasons, only about 39 percent of all foreign-born persons in New Mexico have become citizens. This speaks to a naturalization gap in New Mexico. But as the table below shows, nearly one-fourth of all naturalized citizens in New Mexico have naturalized since the election of Donald Trump in 2016, which suggests that Trump may have had a catalyzing effect on naturalization.

**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*



# WHY NEW MEXICO IS SO IMPORTANT

Figure 2: New Mexico State Population Figures 2022

TOTAL POPULATION	REGISTERED VOTERS	ALL NATURALIZED CITIZENS	NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS 2016-2020
2,103,947	1,278,953 <sup>6</sup>	76,930	17,988

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sos.state.nm.us/voting-and-elections/data-and-maps/voter-registration-statistics/2020-voter-registration-statistics/>

# WHO ARE NEW MEXICO'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS?

Of the total number of persons who naturalized in New Mexico from 2016 to 2020, approximately 72 percent are from the Americas, which includes Latin America and the Caribbean, approximately 18 percent are from Asia, which includes Asian and Pacific Islander countries, approximately 5 percent are from Europe, and approximately 3 percent are from the African continent. (See Figure 3.)

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

REGION	NUMBER OF NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS	PERCENTAGE OF NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS
Americas	10,869	72%
Asia	2,649	18%
Europe	791	5%
Africa	392	3%
Oceania	46	0.31%
Other/Unknown	317	2.10%
Total 2016-2020	15,064	

72%

Newly Naturalized  
Citizens from the  
Americas

18%

Newly Naturalized  
Citizens from Asian  
and Pacific Islander  
Countires



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

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

RANK	COUNTRY	TOTAL
1	Mexico	9,447
2	Philippines	679
3	Vietnam	353
4	India	347
5	Cuba	335
6	China, People's Republic	291
7	Iraq	198
8	United Kingdom	180
9	Canada	157
10	Germany	155
11	Guatemala	133
12	Colombia	128
13	El Salvador	115
14	Korea, South	114
15	Peru	97
16	Pakistan	86
17	Brazil	80
18	Iran	79
19	Kenya	71
20	France	65



# 22%

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

# 21%

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

# 19%

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

# 16%

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

# 6%

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

Approximately 51 percent of persons who naturalized in New Mexico from 2016 to 2020 were below the age of 45 and approximately 58 percent were women. The full breakdown by age and gender is shown in Figure 5.

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

AGE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	Percent of Total
18-24 YEARS	531	464	995	6.6%
25-34 YEARS	1,860	1,311	3,171	21.1%
35-45 YEARS	1,976	1,469	3,446	22.9%
45-55 YEARS	1,749	1,234	2,983	19.8%
55-65 YEARS	1,494	1,034	2,528	16.8%
65 YEARS AND OLDER	1,085	856	1,941	12.8%
TOTAL	8,695	6,368	15,064	

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

# WHERE ARE NEW MEXICO'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS?

Figure 6 shows the total number of naturalized citizens in metropolitan areas in New Mexico. The Albuquerque metropolitan area has just over 35,000 naturalized citizens, followed by the Las Cruces metropolitan area with just over 18,000 naturalized citizens, and then the Santa Fe metropolitan area with approximately 8,000 naturalized citizens.<sup>7</sup> While the American Community Survey (ACS) lists these three metropolitan areas as having 61,271 naturalized citizens, there are large concentrations of naturalized citizens in other, more rural areas of New Mexico, as the ACS data shows 15,659 naturalized citizens in other areas of New Mexico.<sup>8</sup>

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

Metropolitan Area	Total	Africa	Americas	Asia	Europe	Oceania
Albuquerque, NM	35,058	604	18,761	4,910	5,803	0
Las Cruces, NM	18,325	0	16,042	995	671	0
Santa Fe, NM	7,888	83	2,654	1,202	1,713	0

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

<sup>7</sup> Estimates obtained from the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Public Use Microdata (PUM).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



New Mexico resident celebrating the milestone of naturalization. Photo courtesy of Somos un Pueblo Unido.

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

## New Mexico Partners

**Somos Un Pueblo Unido** works to build a community that does not discriminate against people based on their national origin, that institutes humane migration policies, and that protects the human rights of everyone irrespective of where they are born or what documents they carry. Learn More at [www.somosunpueblounido.org](http://www.somosunpueblounido.org)

**El CENTRO** is a grassroots, immigrants' rights and workers' justice organization based in Central New Mexico that works with Latino immigrant communities and allies to defend, strengthen, and advance the rights of our community. [www.elcentronm.org](http://www.elcentronm.org)

**NM Comunidades en Acción y de Fé (CAFé)** Organizes with the people of Southern New Mexico to create better conditions for workers, families, and the future leaders of New Mexico. Their faith based organizing is about people, and CAFé aspires to create a culture of support that empowers New Mexicans to act on their own behalf towards a better quality of life. Learn more at [organizenm.org](http://organizenm.org)

## National Partners

**The National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA)** is a multi-ethnic, multiracial coalition of 60 of the nation's largest immigrant and refugee rights organizations with reach across 40 states. Together with our members, we advance immigrant equity and inclusion policies, build and expand immigration legal services and integration programming capacity, and drive campaigns that strengthen democracy through increased civic participation. Learn more at [www.partnershipfornewamericans.org](http://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](http://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](http://www.usipc.ucsd.edu)