

## **Estimates of the Naturalized Citizen Population: Comparisons between the ACS and Administrative Records**

Becoming a naturalized United States citizen is a measure of assimilation, but estimates of the number of naturalized citizens living in the United States may differ depending on the source. In particular, estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey tend to be substantially higher than estimates derived from decades of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services administrative flow data. The estimates from the two sources differ by more than is reasonable based on sampling error alone. The purpose of this study is to examine the compatibility of the two sets of estimates and to facilitate improvements in the accuracy and reliability of future estimates by identifying demographic subgroups with disproportionately large differences and identifying and assessing plausible explanations for those differences. General classes of explanations include model error, data collection and data management practices for administrative records, survey question specificity or ambiguity, and respondent reporting error.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security converts administrative flow data into population size estimates by surviving the population forward based on National Center for Health Statistics life tables<sup>1</sup> and Census Bureau estimates of emigration rates<sup>2</sup>. Micro-data are available for persons who naturalize, but not for children who derive citizenship from parents from naturalized citizen parents. Both groups would be identified as "citizens by naturalization" in the ACS and in the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS). For compatibility, the comparisons were restricted to the subpopulation of persons who were at least 18 years of age upon entry into the U.S. and therefore ineligible to derive citizenship. After the restriction, the "naturalized citizen" population size for 1980 to 2008 entrants estimated in the ACS was 6.6 million, more than 400,000 larger than the DHS estimate of 6.2 million.

This study assesses the differences within a series of demographic subgroups, and within combinations of subgroups, in an attempt to identify groups that contribute disproportionately to the difference. Subgroups include age (current, upon entry, and upon naturalization), sex, country and world region of birth, year of entry, and year of naturalization. The review of differences within subgroups may suggest or reveal issues with the individual datasets themselves or with comparisons between the datasets. For example, review of the time between entry and naturalization reveals a difference of nearly 600,000 for persons who naturalized within 2 years of entry. Naturalization in less than 3 years after entry is possible for certain military personnel, but is a rare event relative to naturalization in general. Although only 90,000 persons are administratively reported to have naturalized under the special provisions between 1980 and 2008, the ACS estimates that roughly 700,000 people naturalized within 2 years of entry during the same period. Some possible explanations relating to dataset flaws include the

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Health Statistics, 1997. U.S. Decennial Life Tables for 1989-91, Vol. 1, No. 1. Hyattsville, Maryland, U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed, Bashir and J. Gregory Robinson, 1994. "Estimates of Emigration of the Foreign-Born Population: 1980-1990," Technical Working Paper No. 9, U.S. Bureau of the Census, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0009/twps0009.html>

misreporting of citizenship in the ACS, misreporting of year of entry, artifact of survey weighting, and missing or misclassified administrative records. Another explanation is that the survey question, “when did this person come to the U.S. to live,” is lacking in specificity; for example, a circular migrant could truthfully offer different answers in different survey years.

Chart 1: Estimates by Year of Entry

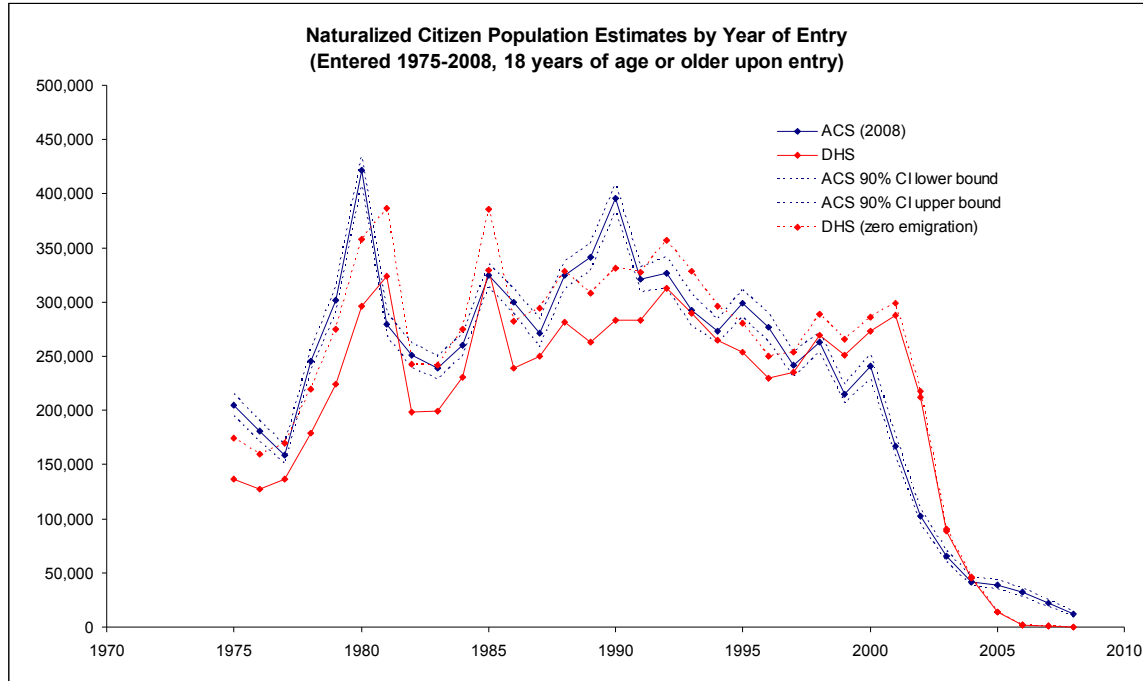


Chart 2: Estimates by Year of Naturalization

Table 1. Differences by Sex

Sex	ACS	DHS	Difference
Male			
Female			

Table 2. Differences by Age Group

Under 18	ACS	DHS	Difference
18-24			
25-34			
34-45			
45-54			
55 and over			

Table 3. Differences by World Region of Birth

World region of birth	ACS	DHS	Difference
North America			
South America			
Europe			
Asia			
Africa			

Repeat of Tables 1-3 by year of entry group (1980-1997 and 1998-2008).