

## **Voting Behavior of Naturalized Citizens: 1998-2006**

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As of 2006, approximately 37.5 million foreign-born persons live in the United States, 15.8 million of which are naturalized citizens (American Community Survey, 2006). Naturalized citizens have the opportunity to participate in the political process by voting in elections, but research suggests that they are less likely to register and to actually vote than native-born Americans (Bass and Casper, 1999; Casper and Bass, 1998; Day and Holder, 2004; DiSipio, Masouka, and Stout, 2006; Holder, 2006; Jamieson, Shin, and Day, 2002). The general theoretical framework for political participation suggests that citizens who are more connected to and invested in society are more likely to vote. Therefore, explanations for this nativity gap in voting behaviors include socioeconomic characteristics, cultural factors, and barriers to participation (such as language).

Bass and Casper (1999) addressed the registration and voting behaviors of naturalized citizens using the 1996 Current Population Survey. Since these baseline estimates, the U.S. population has added over 5 million new naturalized citizens (Rytina and Saeger, 2005). Furthermore, the political debate about immigration has become increasingly heated in recent years.

Given these changes in the population and the centrality of the immigration issue, our research seeks to extend Bass and Casper's (1999) findings to more recent elections. Specifically, we address whether, net of other predictors of voting behavior, naturalized citizens continue to be less likely to register and to vote. Furthermore, our research explores whether the effect of nativity status is consistent in both presidential and congressional elections. Nativity may have an even stronger effect on participation in congressional elections since voter turnout is generally lower than in presidential elections, and is especially low for groups with large naturalized citizen populations (Cassel, 2002).

To explore these questions, we use data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) for the election years 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2006. The CPS is a national survey administered monthly with a main focus to collect data on labor force participation, and includes different monthly supplements to gather information on specific topics. Since 1964, the November CPS has included a supplement on voting and registration for voting age household members. We use data from this supplement to assess voting behavior for the civilian, non-institutionalized population.

Our analyses will involve a series of multivariate models predicting voter registration and voting, focusing on the effect of nativity status while controlling for other demographic, social and economic characteristics associated with these outcomes. We compare the nativity status effect across years, first comparing the results from the presidential elections in 2000 and 2004 to the Casper and Bass (1999) findings from 1996. Second, we compare these same models for the congressional election years 1998, 2002, and

2006. These analyses address biannual variation in the influence of nativity status, and allow comparisons of the magnitude of the nativity status effect between presidential and congressional election years.

Preliminary findings suggest that native citizens have consistently registered at higher rates than naturalized citizens in elections since 1996. Figure 1 displays registration rates by nativity for congressional elections in 1998, 2002, and 2006. Although the *native-born* citizen registration rate was highest in 2006, registration rates for *naturalized citizens* were not statistically different for any of the congressional election years of our analysis. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

Figure 2 displays registration rates by nativity for presidential elections in 1996, 2000, and 2004. Registration rates are once again highest for native-born citizens in the most recent year of the analysis (2004). Registration rates for naturalized citizens were lowest in 2000 compared to the previous and subsequent election, however 1996 and 2004 were not significantly different from one another.

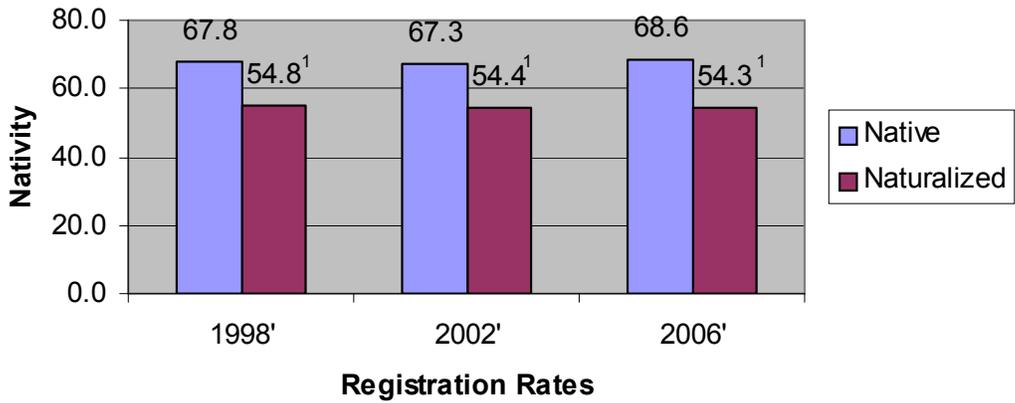
Preliminary analyses also suggest that native citizens have consistently voted at higher rates than naturalized citizens. Figure 3 displays voting rates by nativity status for congressional elections. Voting rates for native citizens are highest for the most recent year of the analysis (2006), while rates for naturalized citizens during this period are not statistically different.

Figure 4 displays voting rates for presidential election years. Similar to the results discussed above, voting rates among native citizens are once again highest in the most recent year of the analysis (2004). Meanwhile, the picture for naturalized citizens is once again not so clear, as voting rates are higher in 2004 than 2000, but not statistically different between 2004 and 1996.

These preliminary cross-tabulations suggest that native citizens have consistently registered and voted at higher rates than naturalized citizens. Furthermore, both registration and voting rates have increased in recent elections, although these increases appear to have been mainly felt amongst the native born population—and have not been consistently significant for naturalized citizens.

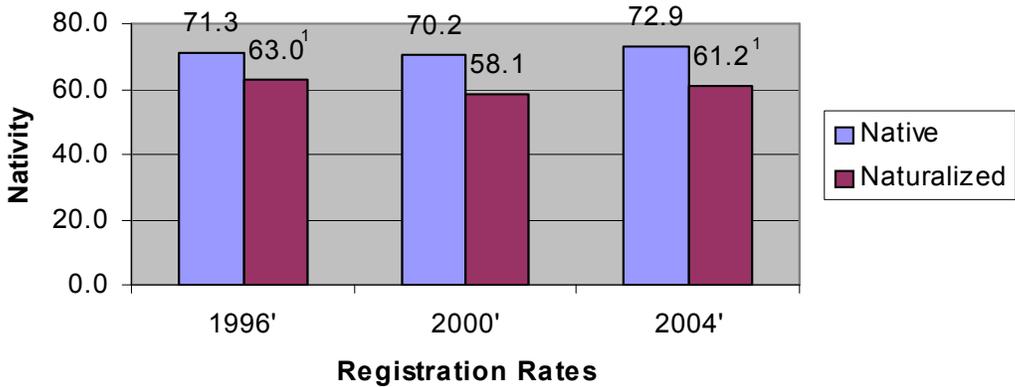
Overall, these initial findings indicate that nativity status continues to influence both registration and voting, and the increasing gap between native and naturalized citizens suggests that the effect of nativity may be increasing since Bass and Casper's (1999) analyses. Furthermore, these findings indicate that nativity status influences voting behavior in both congressional and presidential elections. However, these effects may vary by election type, as there is no difference in naturalized citizen's voting behavior across congressional years but a mixed picture in presidential years. Multivariate analyses will address these questions in more detail.

**Figure 1: Registration By Nativity, Congressional**



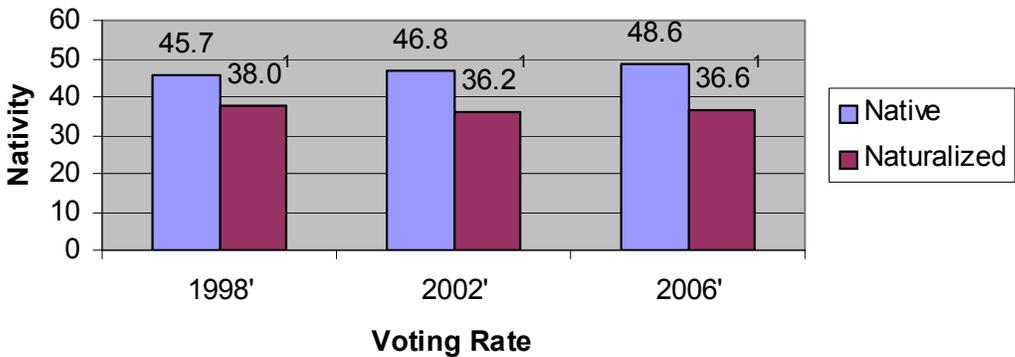
Note: Values with matching superscripts are not statistically different at the 90 percent confidence level.

**Figure 2: Registration By Nativity, Presidential**



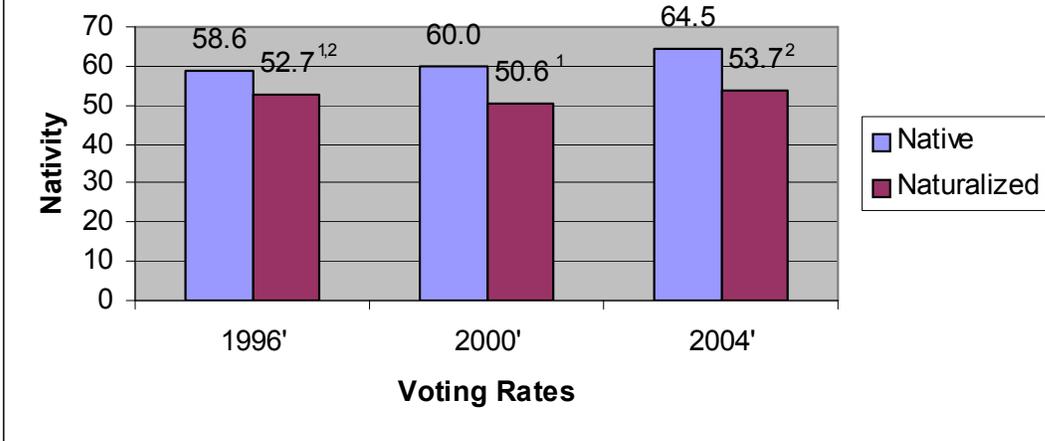
Note: Values with matching superscripts are not statistically different at the 90 percent confidence level.

**Figure 3: Voting By Citizenship, Congressional Elections**



Note: Values with matching superscripts are not statistically different at the 90 percent confidence level.

**Figure 4: Voting By Citizenship, Presidential Elections**



Note: Values with matching superscripts are not statistically different at the 90 percent confidence level.

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