

For Immediate Release
Contact: Max Benavidez
maxbenavidez@gmail.com

March 1, 2011
t. 310-200-2682
latinoeconomicsecurity.org

Fact Sheet #2

The Latino Naturalization Lag: Latino Immigrants Take Longer to Naturalize than Asian Immigrants

Asians naturalize soon after immigration while Latinos take longer, but the lag is smaller for Latinos in Generation X than it was for Latino baby boomers, a change that should improve the financial well being of Latino Gen Xers.

Zachary Gassoumis, Kathleen Wilber, Chon Noriega, Max Benavidez, & Fernando Torres-Gil

The Latino population within the Baby Boom generation includes a large number of immigrants. A recent study authored by the [Latinos & Economic Security](#) research team found that in 2000, 57% of Latino and 88% of Asian boomers had immigrated to the U.S.¹ Among these Latinos, 37% of immigrants had naturalized, compared to 57% of the Asian immigrants.² Our research also found sharp differences in financial well being based on immigration and naturalization status, with the income of naturalized Latino baby boomers being over 60% higher than the income of non-citizen Latino boomers. Previous research has suggested that the act of becoming naturalized improves financial well being³; therefore, understanding of the naturalization patterns of Latinos and promoting the early naturalization of new Latino immigrants is important to ensuring the financial well being of the Latino population. This fact sheet looks at the naturalization patterns of Latino members of the Baby Boom generation (born 1946-1964) and Generation X (Gen X; born 1965-1981), to see if the patterns have changed between generations and

Promoting the early naturalization of new Latino immigrants is important to ensuring the financial well being of the Latino population.

over time. It also compares the Latino populations to their Asian counterparts to assess differences between the two largest minority immigrant groups in these generations.⁴

In 2009, 10% of the baby boomers sampled were Latino, 72% were non-Latino white, 11% were non-Latino black, and 4% were non-Latino Asian. Within Gen X, 18% were Latino, 61% were non-Latino white, 13% were non-Latino black, and 6% were non-Latino Asian. Fifty-eight percent of

Latino boomers were immigrants, compared to 89% of Asian boomers. However, only 26% of Latino boomers were naturalized citizens, whereas 63% of Asian boomers were naturalized citizens. Gen X showed similar trends: 59% of Latino Gen Xers were immigrants, compared to 84% of Asian Gen Xers. Only 13% of Latino boomers were naturalized citizens, but 42% of Asian Gen Xers were naturalized citizens.

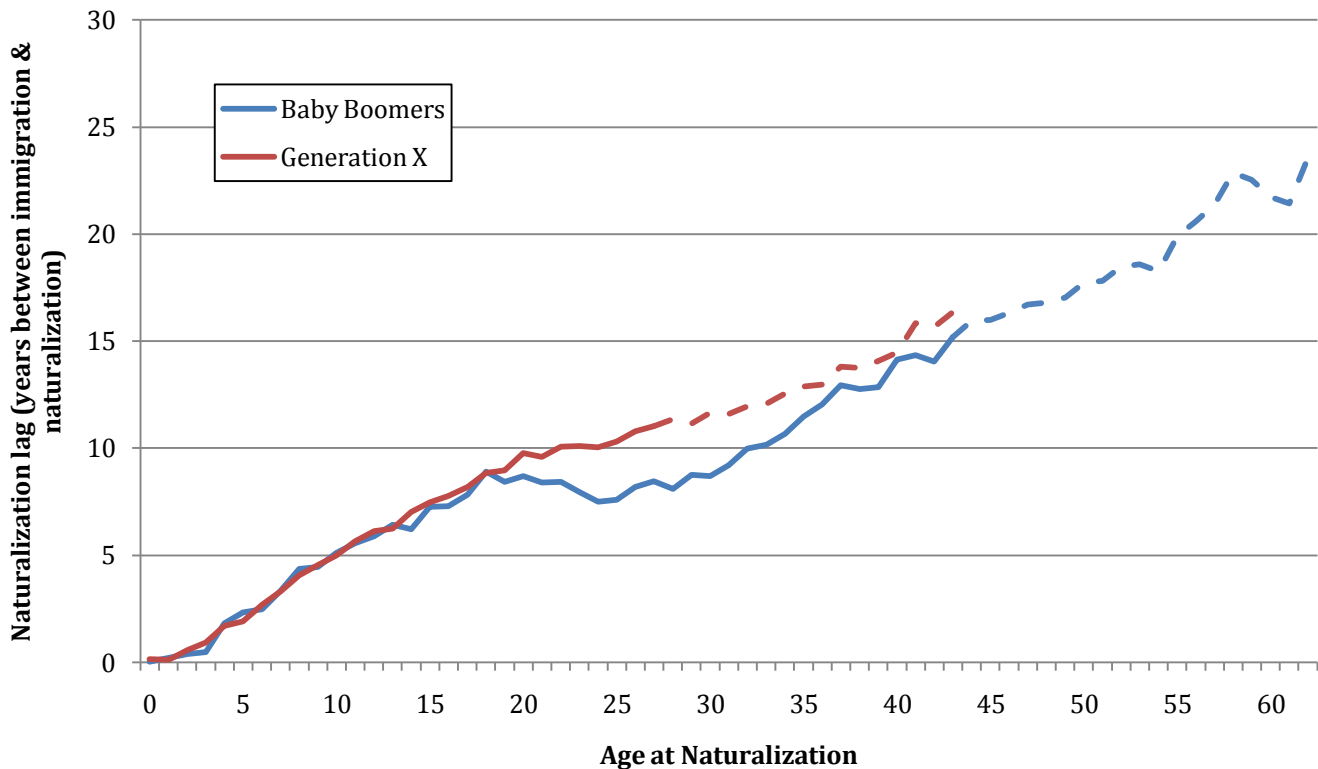
Assuming that becoming naturalized improves financial well being, it stands to reason that faster naturalization would be beneficial for establishing early upward momentum toward gaining financial security. Although Latinos take longer after immigration to naturalize than Asians, the disparity for Gen X is much smaller than for the Baby Boom generation. The time from immigration to naturalization varies based on age at naturalization

(see Figure 1), but with little exception, the pattern for baby boomers and Gen Xers is the same. Baby boomers who naturalized at age 27 (the last age at which there is stable data for both generations) had been in the U.S. for an average of 8.5 years prior to naturalization. This lag was much more for the Latino boomers, however, who had been in the U.S. an average of 11 years prior to naturalization; this compares to an average of 6 years in the U.S. for Asians who naturalized at age 27. Within Gen X, there appears to be a smaller, though still notable, gap between immigration and

naturalization. While the average time in the U.S. prior to naturalization was 11 years for all Gen Xers who naturalized at age 27, the lag was 13 years for Latinos and 10 years for Asian members of this group. Figure 2 shows that, regardless of the age at naturalization, the lag between immigration and

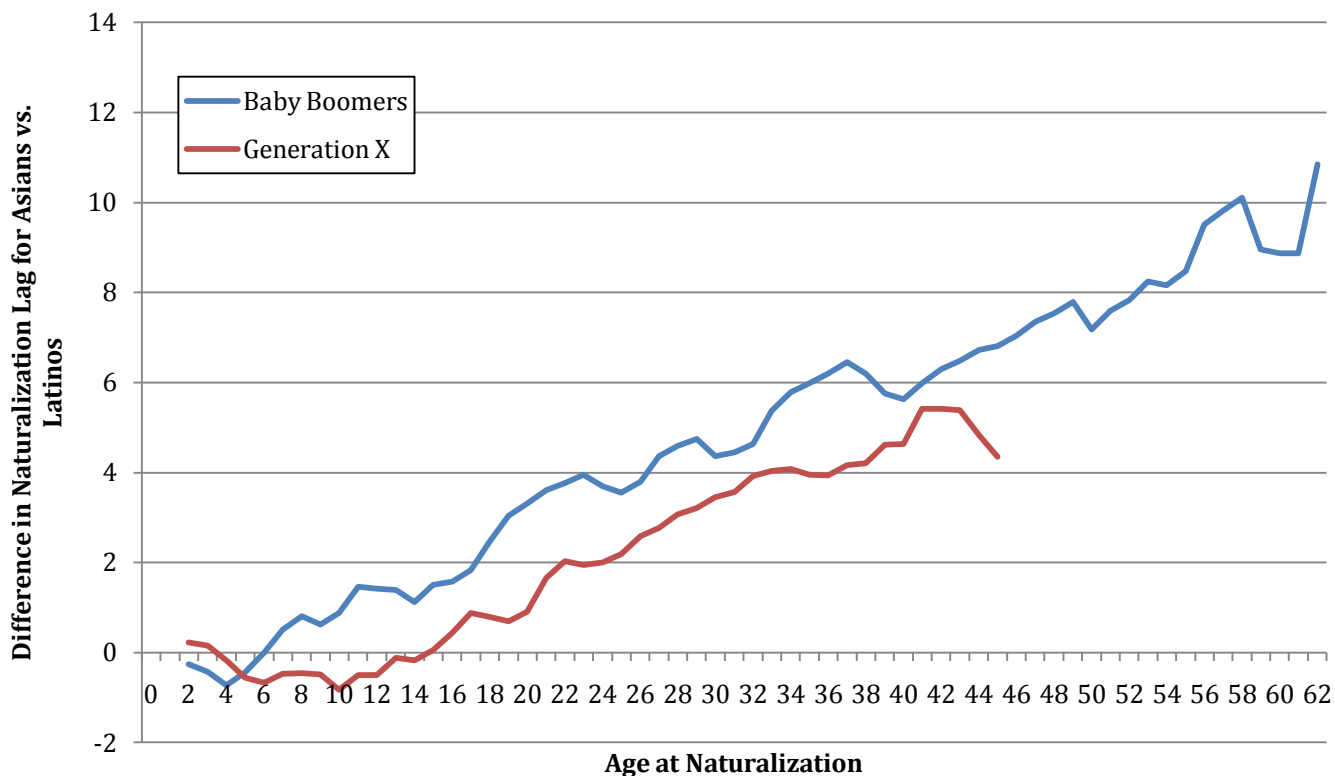
Regardless of the age at naturalization, the lag between immigration and naturalization is consistently less for Asian boomers and Gen Xers than for Latino members of these generations.

Figure 1. Naturalization lag by age at naturalization and generation.



Note: Dashed lines indicate the portions of the curves that, due to the ages of the generations in 2009, may change in future years as more of Gen X naturalizes between the ages of 27 & 43 and more of the Baby Boom generation naturalizes between the ages of 43 & 62.

Figure 2. Difference in naturalization lag for Asians and Latinos by age at naturalization and generation.



Note: Differences are the naturalization lag (i.e., the years between immigration and naturalization) for Latinos minus the naturalization lag for Asians. To smooth the curves, differences presented are 3-year moving averages.

naturalization is consistently less for Asian boomers and Gen Xers than for Latino members of these generations. However, the gap between Asians and Latinos is less among Gen X than among the Baby Boom generation: at age 27, the gap between Asian and Latino boomers is five years, compared to three years between Asian and Latino Gen Xers.

Although legal vs. illegal immigration status likely has a role in this disparity, it is unlikely to tell the whole story. Future research might help delineate the reasons behind the longer naturalization lag among Latinos. If these reasons can be identified and addressed, Latino immigrants could set themselves up sooner for higher levels of income and more financial security.

¹ This fact sheet excludes people born in U.S. territories or born abroad to U.S. parents from the immigrant sample.

² Gassoumis, Z. D., Wilber, K. H., Baker, L. A. and Torres-Gil, F. M. (2010). Who are the Latino baby boomers? Demographic and economic characteristics of a hidden population. *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 22(1), 53-68.

³ Bratsberg, B., Ragan, J. F. Jr., Nasir, Z. M. (2002). The effect of naturalization on wage growth: A panel study of young male immigrants. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 20(3), 568-597.

⁴ This fact sheet presents data from a 2009 U.S. Census Bureau survey, the American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). The ACS provides information about a 1% sample of the U.S. population that has been weighted to be nationally representative; the statistics presented here are rough approximations of the characteristics of the U.S. population.