

# Immigrants Anxiously Await Citizenship As Processing Times Nearly Double

A report notes that the backlog of naturalization applications has increased by more than 35 percent.



By [Kimberly Yam](#) Huff Post 11/17/17



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For immigrants, the road to U.S. citizenship has always been a long and difficult one. But things could be getting worse.

The average processing time for naturalization applications has almost doubled, from about five months in early 2016 to an average of almost nine months today, according to a [report from the National Partnership With New Americans](#).

The wait has undermined people's access to critical rights, John C. Yang, president and executive director of nonprofit Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, told HuffPost in an email.

Many of these individuals want “to be engaged in the American political process,” Yang said. “We must remember that they are citizens-in-waiting; almost all of them have been in the country for many years and have been fully integrated into American society.”

Immigration experts say the rise in processing times could be due in part to the influx of naturalization applications around the presidential election, which has created a lengthy backlog. Over the past year, 1,028,647 lawful permanent residents have applied for citizenship, according to the National Partnership With New Americans report — an increase of almost 11 percent over the prior year. The backlog has increased by more than 35 percent over last year, the report says.

From fiscal year 2015 to fiscal year 2016, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services had already seen a 7 percent increase in overall application volume, with a 24 percent increase in naturalization applications, the agency told HuffPost in a statement.

Some immigration advocates believe that the rising number of prospective citizens could be spurred by the anti-immigrant rhetoric surrounding the presidential campaign as well as the continued crackdowns on immigration since President Donald Trump was sworn in.

“Because of the anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric during the presidential campaign, individuals felt an urgent need to obtain the benefits and protections of citizenship,” Yang said. “We have seen people who have had green cards for 20-30 years coming out to our citizenship workshops.”

[Pew Research points out](#), however, that other factors have accounted for spikes in applications in the past, including the passage of laws like the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. One of the largest such increases in U.S. history occurred in 2007, ahead of a bump in the application fee for adults: Applications rose by 89 percent over the previous year.

Yang also fears that applicants for citizenship today could be subjected to increased vetting, driving up the wait time even more. He told HuffPost that his staff has seen “inappropriate requests” for follow-up information often involving family relationships or prior association with employers. Those associations can stretch back decades. In the cases that AAAJ-ALC has observed, the questionable follow-up queries are particularly common for people in the Middle Eastern and South Asian communities.

“Because each citizenship application is different, it’s hard to conclude that there definitely is increased vetting,” Yang said. “But we certainly believe, based on our

experiences, that some applications seem to have been subjected to increased vetting. We certainly are concerned that such increased and unnecessary scrutiny will become the new norm.”