

WASHINGTON STATE HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH PROJECT

Washington State's Immigrant Population: 2010-17

Research Brief No. 90
March 2019

Wei Yen
OFM Health Care Research Center

Introduction

Washington state's population includes a significant share of first-generation immigrants that consist of naturalized citizens, legal immigrants and undocumented immigrants. Between 2010 and 2017, the share of the population who are immigrants stayed relatively stable at approximately 14 percent, or one in seven Washingtonians. In terms of the 2017 population, this share means there are approximately one million immigrants in Washington.

The purpose of this research brief is to assess the size and characteristics of the state's population in four immigrant status groups: (1) US-born citizen, (2) naturalized citizen, (3) legal immigrant and (4) undocumented immigrant. The American Community Survey 1-year Public Use Micro Sample files for 2010-17 were used as the data source. A description of the method to assign immigrant statuses to the ACS data is provided in the appendix along with other data notes and tables of data used in the charts.

Immigrant Population in 2010-17

In the eight years between 2010 and 2017, Washington's total population increased from 6.7 million to 7.4 million (Table 1). The US-born population increased from 5.9 million to 6.3 million and the immigrant population from 894,000 to one million. Among the immigrant population, the number of naturalized citizens increased from 411,000 to 515,000, legal immigrants from 236,000 to 288,000 and undocumented immigrants from 247,000 to 264,000.

Highlights

One in seven Washingtonians are first generation immigrants as naturalized citizens, legal immigrants or undocumented immigrants.

Shares of immigrant population groups are relatively stable from 2010 to 2017.

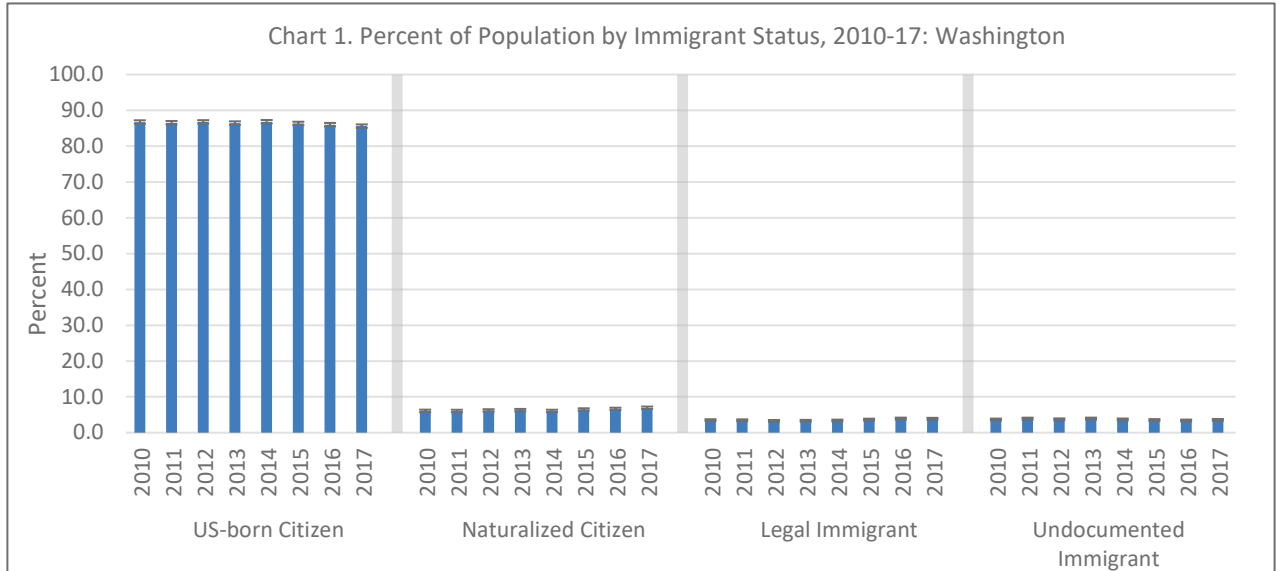
Demographic and socio-economic differences:

- *There are more females (55 percent) in the naturalized citizen group and the legal immigrant group than in the US-born citizen group (50 percent) and the undocumented immigrant group (below 50 percent).*
- *Over 70 percent in immigrant groups are adults age 18-64, compared to 60 percent in the US-born citizen group.*
- *Shares of Hispanic ethnicity increased slightly to 10 in the US-born citizen group and decreased to mid-40 percent in the undocumented immigrant group.*
- *The naturalized citizen group have the highest and increasing share (33 to 37 percent) in having a 4-year college education or higher.*
- *The naturalized citizen group also have the highest share of employment (nearly 80 percent).*
- *Percentages of low-income are in the low 20 percent in the two citizen groups and are more than ten percentage points higher in the two non-citizen groups.*

Table 1. Washington State Population (in thousands) by Immigrant Status, 2010-17

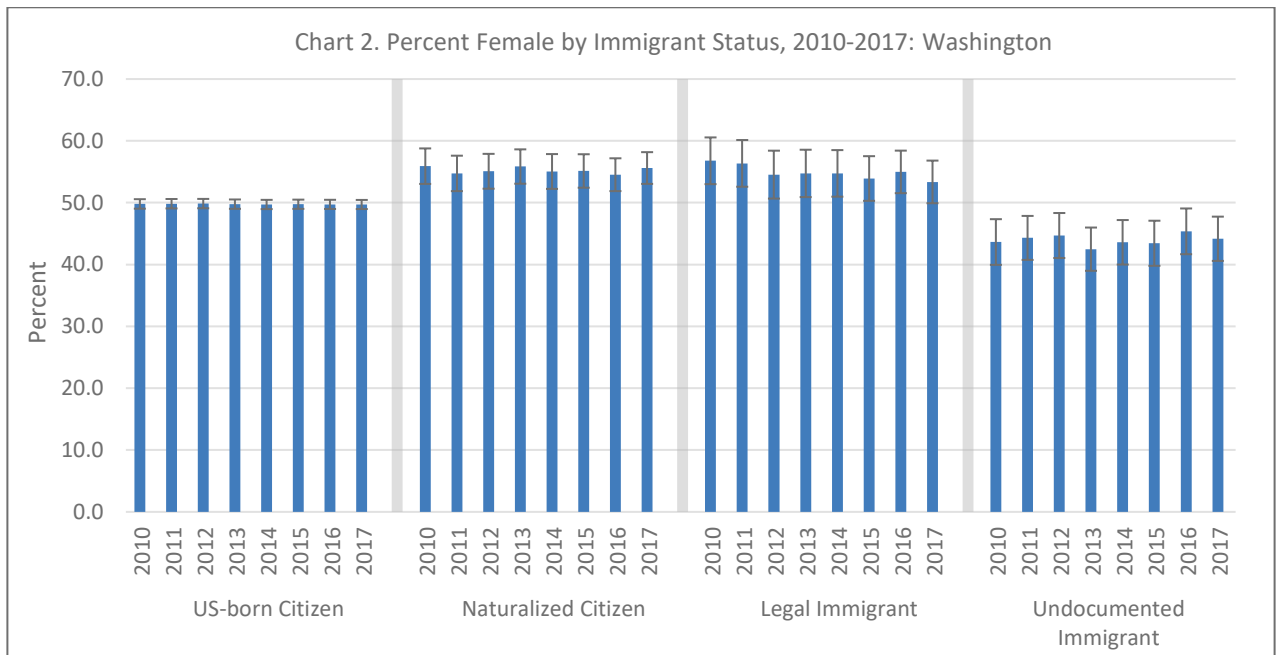
Immigrant Status	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2010-2017 change (percent)
State Total Population	6,744	6,830	6,897	6,971	7,062	7,170	7,288	7,406	9.8
US-born Citizen	5,850	5,912	5,985	6,027	6,132	6,191	6,269	6,339	8.4
Immigrant	894	918	912	944	930	979	1,019	1,067	19.3
Naturalized Citizen	411	414	428	439	429	464	483	515	25.3
Legal Immigrant	236	237	227	232	240	262	287	288	21.9
Undocumented Immigrant	247	268	257	274	261	254	249	264	6.9

The distribution of these population groups remained relatively stable over time. The US-born citizen group had the largest share at about 86.5 percent, followed by 6.5 percent of naturalized citizens, 3.5 percent of legal immigrants and 3.5 percent of undocumented immigrants (Chart 1). The approximately 14 percent of all immigrants means that they accounted for one in seven Washingtonians.

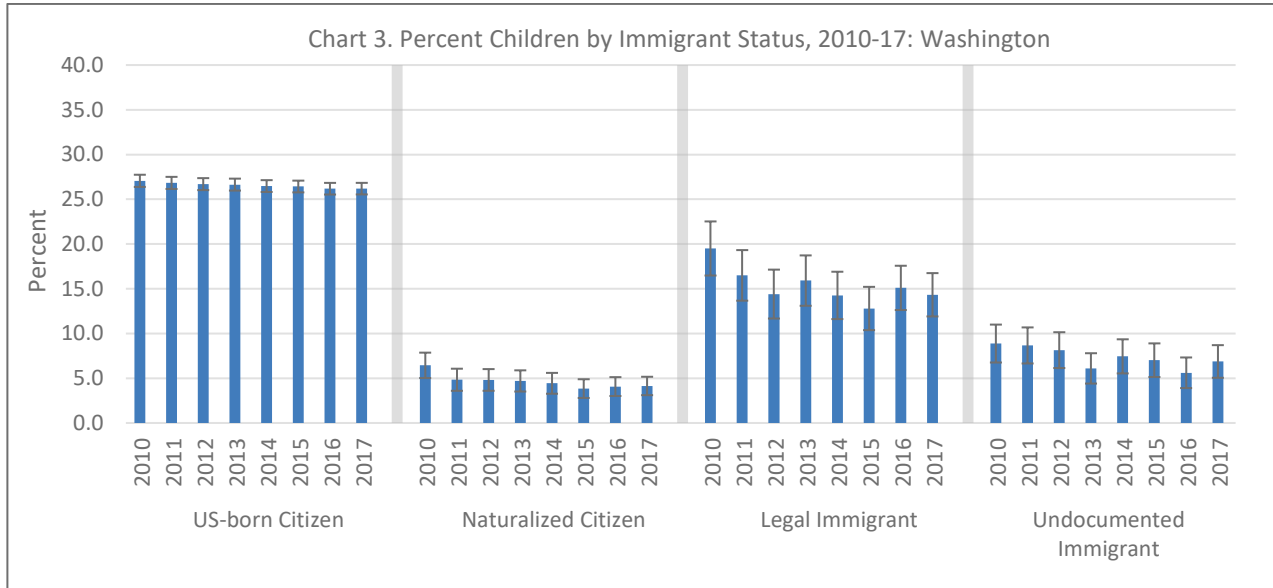


Changes in Demographic Characteristics from 2010 to 2017

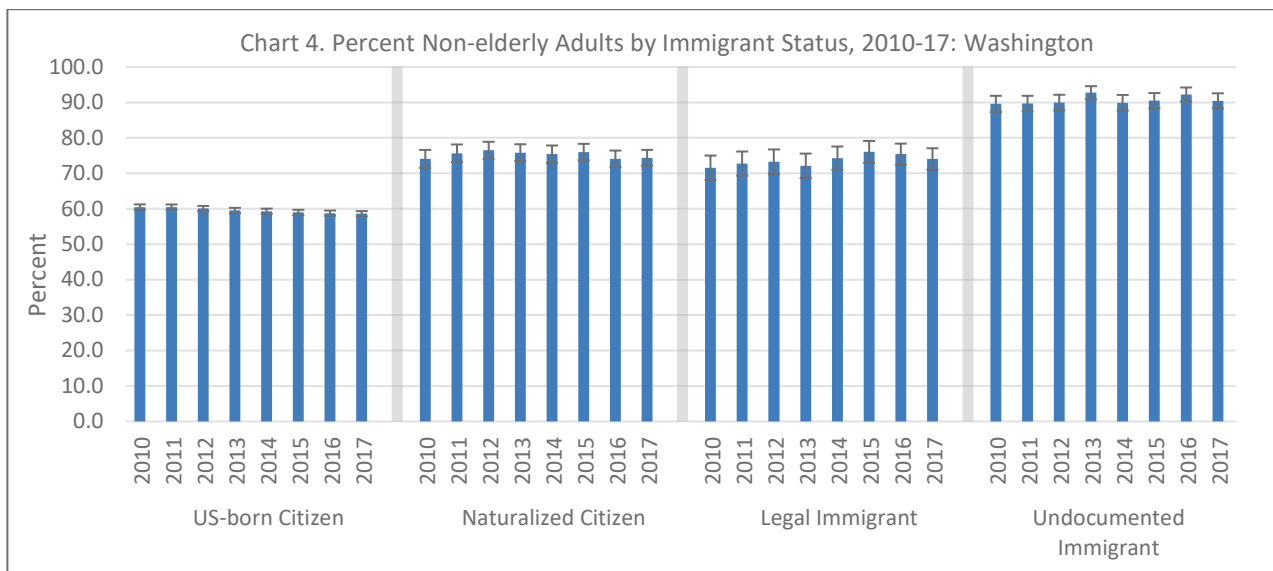
Sex. Overall, there were no discernable changes of sex distribution over time within any of the population groups. However, the shares of females in the naturalized citizen and legal immigrant groups (around 55 percent) were significantly higher than the shares of females in the other two groups for any given year (Chart 2). In the US-born citizen group, the share of females remained constant at 50 percent. The undocumented immigrant group had the lowest shares of females, around 45 percent.



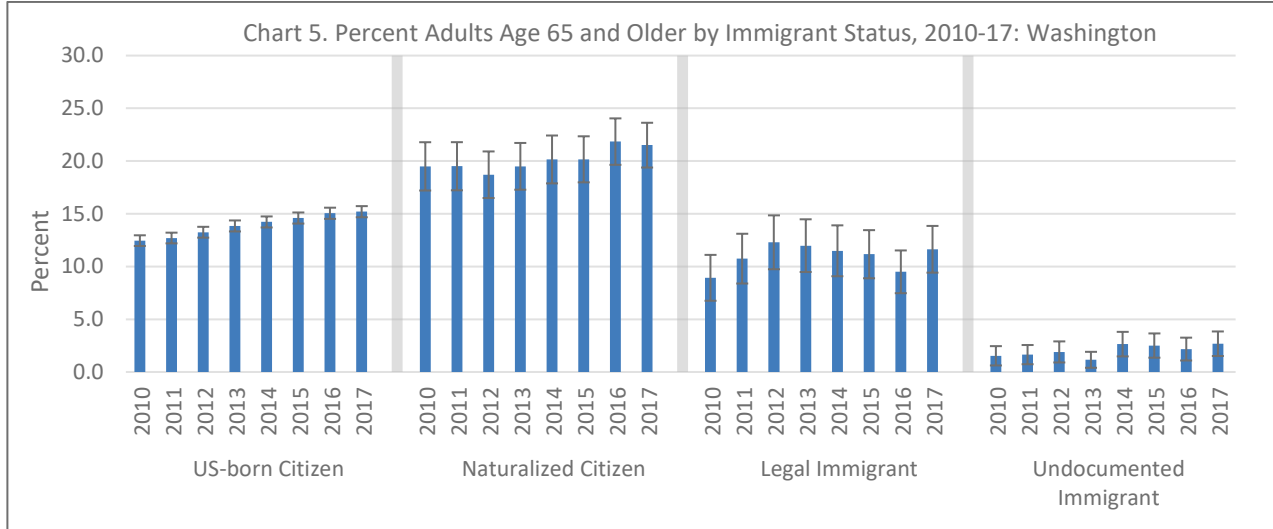
Children under age 18. The share of children under age 18 in the US-born citizen group was 27 percent in 2010 and declined to 26 percent in 2017, though the decline was not statistically significant (Chart 3). Shares of children in the three immigrant groups were much lower. In most of the years, the share was less than 15 percent in the legal immigrant group, less than 10 percent in the undocumented immigrant group and less than five percent in the naturalized citizen group. As in the US-born citizen group, the shares of children in all three immigrant groups from 2010 to 2017 declined but the declines were not statistically significant.



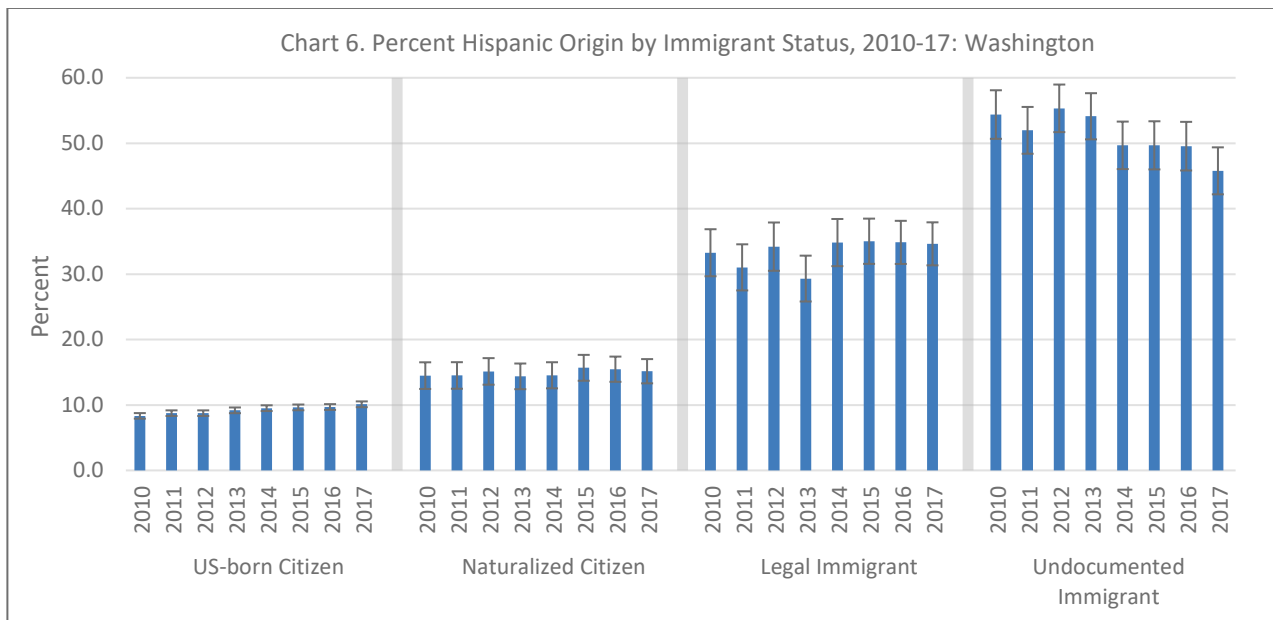
Adults age 18-64. Adults age 18-64 constituted the majority in all groups, with higher shares in the immigrant groups. In the US-born citizen group, the share was 60.5 percent in 2010 and declined to 58.6 percent in 2017 (Chart 4). Among immigrants, the naturalized citizen group had a share of 74 percent in both 2010 and 2017 but had slightly higher shares in most of the years between. The legal immigrant group’s share increased from 71.6 percent to 74 percent. The undocumented immigrant group had the highest shares that had a slight change from 89.6 percent in 2010 to 90.4 percent in 2017. Changes from 2010 to 2017 were not statistically significant within any of the four groups.



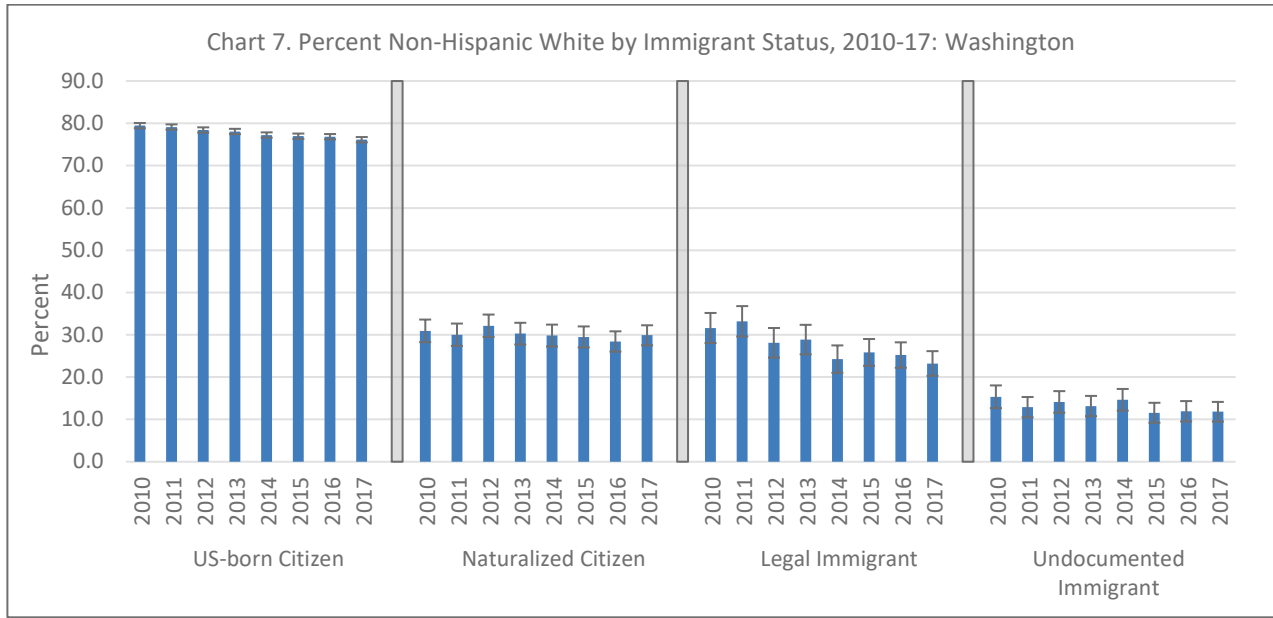
Adults age 65 and older. The naturalized citizen group had the highest share at this age range that increased from 19.5 percent in 2010 to 21.5 percent in 2017, although the change was not statistically significant (Chart 5). The US-born citizen group had the second highest share and its increase from 12.5 percent to 15.2 percent was statistically significant. The legal immigrant group’s share changed, though with no statistical significance, from 8.9 percent in 2010 to 11.6 percent in 2017. Finally, the undocumented immigrant group had the lowest share of adults at this age range. Its shares stayed below 3 percent in all years.



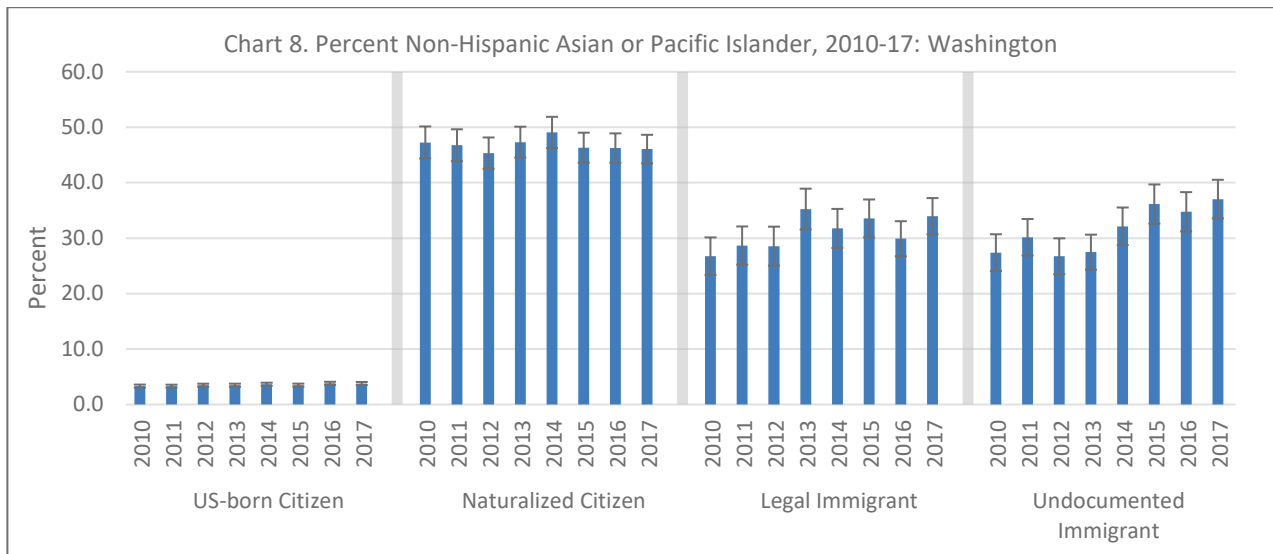
Hispanic origin. Compared to shares in the two citizen groups, the shares with Hispanic origin in the two non-citizen groups were significantly higher. However, while the share of people with Hispanic origin among the US-born citizens increased gradually but significantly from 2010 to 2017 (8.3 percent to 10.1 percent), the Hispanic share among the undocumented immigrant group declined, also significantly, from 54.4 percent to 45.8 percent. These two groups had the lowest and highest shares of people with Hispanic origin, respectively. The second highest share belonged to the legal immigrant group, at about 35 percent in most years with no significant change from 2010 to 2017. The naturalized citizen group’s shares were between 14.5 percent and 15.2 percent, also with no significant change.



Non-Hispanic white. Shares of non-Hispanic white persons had gradual but significant declines among the US-born citizens and legal immigrants from 2010 to 2017 and no significant change among the naturalized citizen and undocumented immigrant groups. However, while the share of non-Hispanic white in the US-born citizen group remained above 75 percent, the shares among the other three groups were much smaller (Chart 7). In the naturalized citizen group, the share stayed around 30 percent. In the legal immigrant group, it declined from 31.6 percent to 23.2 percent and in the undocumented immigrant group, it dropped from 15.4 percent to 11.8 percent.

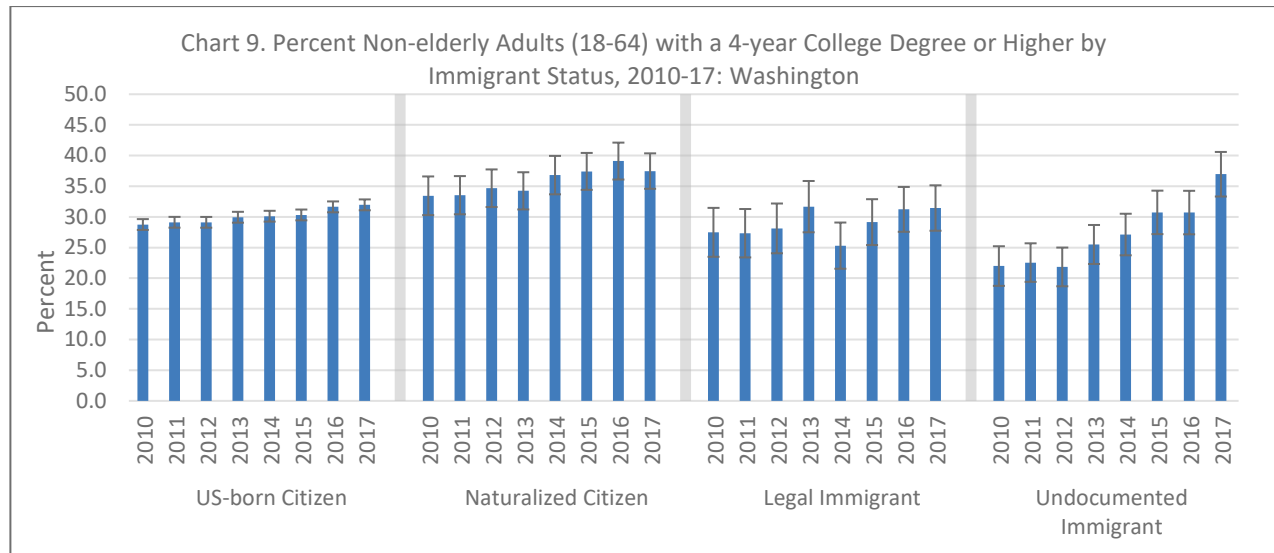


Non-Hispanic Asian and Pacific Islander. Non-Hispanic Asians and Pacific Islanders (API) constituted a small share of the US-born citizen group, below four percent in all years observed (Chart 8). Shares of non-Hispanic API increased in the legal immigrant group (from 26.8 percent to 34 percent) and the undocumented immigrant group (from 27.4 percent to 37 percent). The changes from 2010 to 2017 were statistically significant in both groups. The naturalized citizen group had the highest shares of non-Hispanic API, above 45 percent, although with no significant changes from 2010 to 2017.

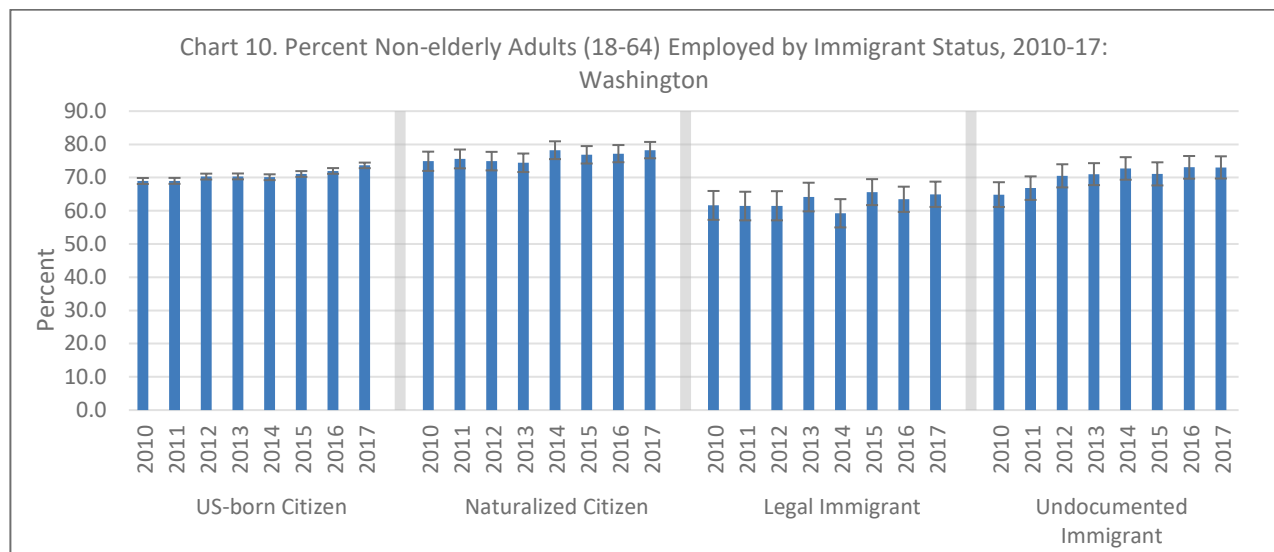


Changes in Socio-economic Characteristics of Adults Age 18-64 from 2010 to 2017

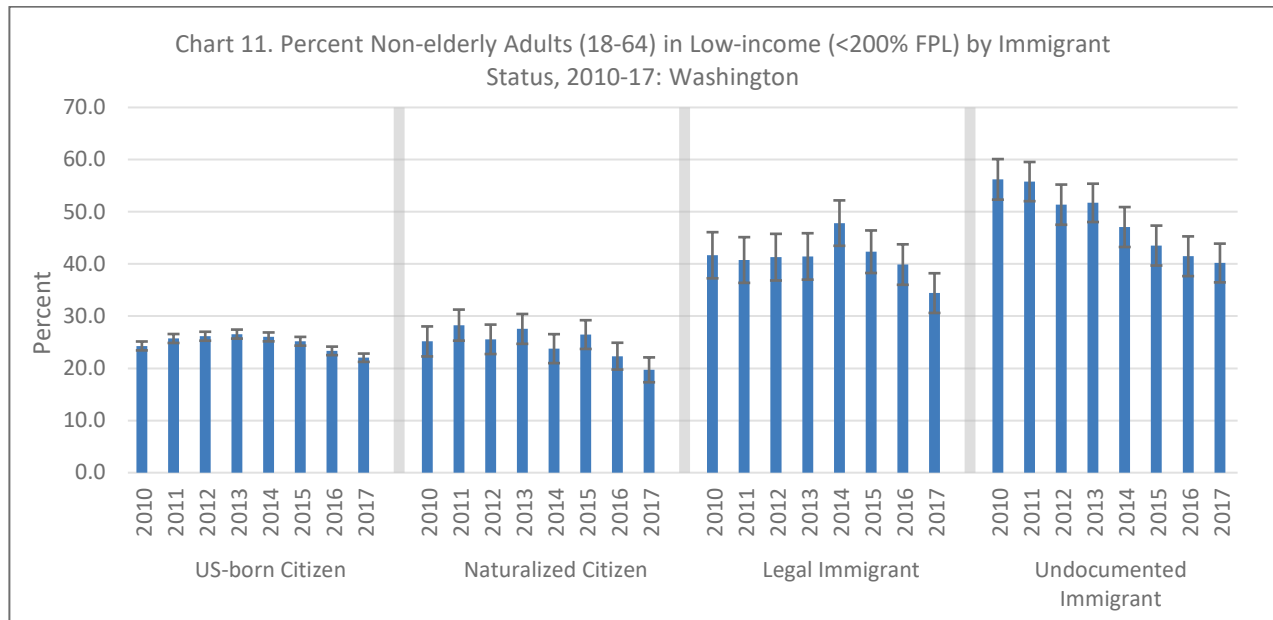
Education. The share of the US-born group with a 4-year college degree or higher increased significantly from 2010 to 2017 from 28.8 percent to 32 percent. The naturalized citizen group and the legal immigrant group did not show a statistically significant change, though their shares in the last two years were higher than their shares in the first two years of the observed period. The naturalized citizen group had the highest share (between 33 and 39 percent) of all groups in all years observed. The change in the undocumented immigrant group was significant and the most dramatic. Its share was the lowest in the first three years at about 23 percent and in the fourth year at 25.5 percent, but by 2017, it increased to 37 percent, almost as high as the highest of 37.5 percent in the naturalized citizen group.



Employment. The share employed among the naturalized citizen group was highest (75-78 percent) in all years, although the increase from 2010 to 2017 was not statistically significant (Chart 10). Neither was the change in the legal citizen group that had the lowest share (59-66 percent) in all years. The other two groups both experienced significant increases in their shares of members being employed. The US-born citizen group started with a share of 69 percent and ended with 73.7 percent while the undocumented immigrant group started with 64.9 percent and ended with 73.1 percent.



Low income (family income below 200 percent of federal poverty level). Shares of low-income members declined in all four groups from 2010 to 2017. However, while there was no statistical difference between the two citizen groups and between the two non-citizen groups in any given year, the non-citizen groups had significantly higher shares than the citizen groups in any given year. In the two citizen groups, the shares were in the mid-20 percent in 2010 and then dropped to low 20 percent or below by 2017. Shares of the two non-citizen groups started much higher in 2010 (above 40 percent in the legal immigrant group and above 50 percent in the undocumented immigrant group); however, both declined to 40 percent or below by 2017.



Summary

Immigrants are a significant part of Washington state's population, with one in seven Washington residents being a first-generation immigrant. The nearly stationary shares of the immigrant population groups to the total population from 2010 to 2017 suggest that growth in the immigrant population groups was similar to the state's overall population growth.

Immigrants differed from the US-born citizens in their demographic and socio-economic characteristics. In many cases, immigrants also differed among themselves in those characteristics based on the three immigrant status groups they were in: naturalized citizen, legal immigrant and undocumented immigrant.

Demographic differences:

- The share of females in both the naturalized citizen group and the legal immigrant group (approximately 55 percent) was higher than the shares in the US-born citizen group (about 50 percent) and undocumented immigrant group (around 45 percent).
- All immigrant groups had lower shares of children under age 18 than the US-born citizen group (over 25 percent). Among immigrant groups, shares of children were all below 20 percent and, in the naturalized citizen group, below 7 percent. Shares of adults age 18-64 in all immigrant groups were all above 70 percent and were significantly higher than shares in the US-born citizen group (about 60 percent).
- The shares for persons of Hispanic origin were higher in the legal immigrant group (approximately 35 percent) and undocumented immigrant group (from 54.4 percent in 2010 to 45.8 percent in 2017) than the shares in the naturalized citizen group (about 15 percent) and the US-born citizen group (8-10 percent).

percent). Over the eight years of data, the US-born citizen group had a slight increase while the undocumented immigrant group experienced a decrease in shares of persons with Hispanic origin.

- Shares of non-Hispanic white population declined slightly in the US-born citizen group and in the legal immigrant group. The shares in immigrant groups (about 30 percent or lower) were much smaller than shares in the US-born citizen group (in high 70 percent).
- The immigrant groups had significantly higher shares of Asians and Pacific Islanders than the US-born citizen group. While the share of API in the US-born citizen group was always below four percent, the shares in the immigrant groups were all higher than 20 percent and in the naturalized citizen group the share was above 45 percent.

Socio-economic characteristics of adults age 18-64:

- In attainment of a 4-year college degree or higher, the naturalized citizen group had the highest share, which increased over time (from 33.4 percent to 37.5 percent). The shares also increased in two other groups: the US-born citizen group (from 28.8 percent to 32 percent) and the undocumented immigrant group (from 22 percent to 37 percent). The increase in the undocumented immigrant group was the largest of all groups. The legal immigrant group's share showed no significant change over time (from 27.5 percent to 31.4 percent).
- Shares with employment were the highest in the naturalized citizen group (mid-high 70 percent) and the lowest in the legal immigrant group (59-66 percent). The US-born citizen group and the undocumented immigrant group both had their shares increased from below 70 percent to slightly above 70 percent.
- All groups experienced declines of low-income shares from 2010 to 2017. However, shares of low-income remained higher in the two non-citizen groups than in the two citizen groups. In 2017, the citizen groups' shares declined to low 20 percent or below and the non-citizen groups the non-citizen groups' shares were more than 10 percentage points higher.

Appendixes

Table A1. Demographic Characteristics by Immigrant Status (in percent): Total Population, 2010-17

Characteristic	Immigrant Status	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Female	US-born Citizen	49.8	49.8	49.9	49.8	49.7	49.8	49.7	49.7
	Naturalized Citizen	55.9	54.7	55.1	55.8	55.1	55.1	54.5	55.6
	Legal Immigrant	56.8	56.4	54.5	54.7	54.7	53.9	55.0	53.4
	Undocumented Immigrant	43.6	44.3	44.7	42.5	43.6	43.4	45.4	44.2
Age 0-17	US-born Citizen	27.1	26.8	26.7	26.6	26.5	26.4	26.2	26.2
	Naturalized Citizen	6.4	4.8	4.8	4.7	4.4	3.8	4.1	4.1
	Legal Immigrant	19.5	16.5	14.4	15.9	14.3	12.8	15.1	14.3
	Undocumented Immigrant	8.9	8.7	8.1	6.1	7.4	7.0	5.6	6.9
Age 18-64	US-born Citizen	60.5	60.5	60.1	59.5	59.3	59.0	58.8	58.6
	Naturalized Citizen	74.1	75.7	76.5	75.8	75.4	76.0	74.1	74.4
	Legal Immigrant	71.6	72.8	73.3	72.1	74.3	76.0	75.4	74.0
	Undocumented Immigrant	89.6	89.7	90.0	92.7	89.9	90.5	92.2	90.4
Age 65 and Older	US-born Citizen	12.5	12.7	13.3	13.8	14.2	14.6	15.0	15.2
	Naturalized Citizen	19.5	19.5	18.7	19.5	20.2	20.2	21.8	21.5
	Legal Immigrant	8.9	10.7	12.3	12.0	11.5	11.2	9.5	11.6
	Undocumented Immigrant	1.5	1.6	1.9	1.2	2.6	2.5	2.2	2.7
Hispanic	US-born Citizen	8.3	8.7	8.7	9.2	9.5	9.6	9.7	10.1
	Naturalized Citizen	14.5	14.5	15.1	14.4	14.5	15.7	15.5	15.2
	Legal Immigrant	33.3	31.0	34.2	29.3	34.8	35.0	34.8	34.6
	Undocumented Immigrant	54.4	52.0	55.3	54.1	49.7	49.7	49.5	45.8
Non-Hispanic White	US-born Citizen	79.5	79.1	78.4	78.1	77.2	77.0	76.8	76.1
	Naturalized Citizen	30.9	30.0	32.1	30.3	29.8	29.5	28.4	29.9
	Legal Immigrant	31.6	33.2	28.1	28.9	24.3	25.8	25.2	23.2
	Undocumented Immigrant	15.4	12.9	14.1	13.2	14.6	11.6	11.9	11.8
Non-Hispanic Asian and Pacific Islander	US-born Citizen	3.3	3.3	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.8	3.8
	Naturalized Citizen	47.3	46.8	45.3	47.3	49.1	46.3	46.2	46.1
	Legal Immigrant	26.8	28.7	28.6	35.2	31.8	33.6	29.9	34.0
	Undocumented Immigrant	27.4	30.2	26.7	27.5	32.1	36.2	34.8	37.0

Table A2. Education, Employment and Income by Immigrant Status (in percent): Adults 18-64, 2010-17

Characteristic	Immigrant Status	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
4-year College Education or Higher	US-born Citizen	28.8	29.1	29.1	29.9	30.1	30.3	31.6	32.0
	Naturalized Citizen	33.4	33.5	34.7	34.2	36.8	37.4	39.1	37.5
	Legal Immigrant	27.5	27.3	28.1	31.7	25.3	29.1	31.2	31.4
	Undocumented Immigrant	22.0	22.6	21.8	25.5	27.1	30.7	30.7	37.0
Employed	US-born Citizen	69.0	69.0	70.3	70.4	70.1	71.1	72.0	73.7
	Naturalized Citizen	74.9	75.6	75.0	74.5	78.2	76.9	77.2	78.3
	Legal Immigrant	61.6	61.4	61.5	64.1	59.3	65.6	63.5	65.0
	Undocumented Immigrant	64.9	66.8	70.5	71.0	72.8	71.1	73.1	73.1
Low-income (below 200% of FPL)	US-born Citizen	24.3	25.7	26.2	26.6	26.0	25.2	23.3	22.0
	Naturalized Citizen	25.2	28.3	25.6	27.6	23.8	26.5	22.3	19.7
	Legal Immigrant	41.7	40.8	41.3	41.4	47.8	42.4	39.9	34.4
	Undocumented Immigrant	56.2	55.8	51.4	51.7	47.1	43.5	41.5	40.2

Data Source and Notes

Data source. The original data source for this research brief is the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year Public Use Microdata Sample files for 2010 to 2017. The Health Care Research Center at the Office of Financial Management adjusted the ACS sample weights to correct the undercount of Medicaid enrollment found in ACS beginning in 2014.¹ This adjustment may have resulted in minor changes in estimates besides counts of Medicaid enrollment. Estimates reported in this brief for 2014-17 are based on the adjusted ACS data.

Immigrant status. This brief classifies Washington state's population into four groups according to their immigration statuses: US-born citizen, naturalized citizen, legal immigrant and undocumented immigrant. US-born citizen and naturalized citizen are determined by the citizenship and nativity data fields in the ACS. If a person is a citizen and was born native, that person is classified as US-born citizen. A citizen reported to be a foreign-born is classified as a naturalized citizen. The remainder of the population are non-citizens. The ACS does not have direct data fields that can be used to classify a non-citizen as either legal immigrant or undocumented immigrant. To help make that distinction, an algorithm published in Labor Economics by George Jo. Borjas was applied to the ACS data.² The Borjas algorithm uses existing information in federal surveys such as the Current Population Survey and ACS to approximate an immigrant's legal status. Such information includes arrival in US before 1980, participation in public assistance programs, employment in government positions, veteran or person currently in Armed Forces, etc. Surveys may have sampling and response errors that may result in under-report of non-citizens, probably more so of undocumented immigrants. Estimates of the non-citizen populations in this brief may contain those errors. In addition, there may be an over-report of naturalized citizens in this brief as persons born outside the US but to parents who are US citizens are classified as naturalized citizens in the brief's analysis.

Missing income. The ACS data include a small number of records that have no income information. Those records were excluded in the calculation of the percentage of population in low income.

¹ For a description of the rationale and methodology for the adjustment, see https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/legacy/healthcare/healthcoverage/pdf/undercount_medicaid.pdf.

² Borjas, GJ. *The Labor supply of undocumented immigrants*. Labor Economics 46(2017):1-13.