



Italian Americans by the Numbers: Age, Gender & Generations

Tom Verso (August 07, 2009)



This is the third report in the series “Italian Americans by the Numbers”. The series presents demographic data about Italian Americans based on the US Census Departments “2005-2007 American Community Survey (ACS)”. This article reports: numbers of Italian Americans in various gender/age groups; compares percentages of Italian Americans with total American population;



dependency age ratios; and approximate Italian American generation numbers.

Series Preface

This blog series “Italian Americans by the Numbers” presents demographic data about Italian Americans based on the US Census Departments “2005-2007 American Community Survey (ACS)”. The ACS collects and produces population and housing information every year instead of every ten years. The 2005-2007 ACS three-year estimates are based on data collected between January 2005 and December 2007.”

For a more detailed introduction to the ACS, please see the first article in this series “Italian Americans by the Numbers - Comparative ethnic population totals and percentages” located at

- [i-Italy.org – Bloggers- “South of Rome West of Ellis Island”](#)
- or click on the link in this article

If there are any questions comments or requests for particular information, please place them in the comments section below or write to me directly at Tomverso@yahoo.com [2].

Introduction:



Below are tables and charts describing the following:

- I. Numbers and percentages of Americans and Italian Americans in various Age and Gender cohorts, and comparisons of percentages of Italian Americans in each cohort with the American population as a whole.

- II. “Child and old age dependency ratios”.

- III. Based on the ACS age cohorts, I present an ‘approximate’ division of the Italian American population into generations.

I. Age and Gender Table below shows:

A. Population Totals

- “Total American Population” – At the top of the chart, highlighted in green, Column B / Row 5 (i.e. 298,757,310)

 - “Italian American Population” - Column C / Row 5 (i.e. 17,765,915)
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B. Age/Gender Cohorts

Starting with Row # 10, each row represents an 'Age' and/or 'Gender' cohort (group). Column B identifies the cohort, columns C, D and F provides the information (row 8 column headings) about each cohort. Thus, for example,

- Row 13 presents information about the cohort of people "Under 5 years".
- Column C tells us that 6.9% of the "Total American population" is in that cohort (i.e. 6.9% of all Americans are under the age of 5).
- Column D tells us that 7.3 % of the "Italian American" population falls into that cohort (i.e. 7.3 % of Italian Americans are under the age of 5)
- Column F tells us 'how many' Italian Americans are under the age of 5. This number is calculated by multiplying the % number in column D by the total number of Italian Americans in Column C / Row 3. Thus: $7.3\% * 17,765,915 = 1,296,912$ Italian Americans are under 5 years of age.

C. Median Ages and corresponding population numbers are presented in Rows 57-58, and explanatory note in rows 60-65.



In Row 50-53 is “NOTE” drawing attention to the similarities between percentages in the Italian American population and the American population as a whole (i.e. similarities in % numbers in Columns C & D), and Median Age. In percentage terms, there does not seem (to me) to be a significant difference between Italian Americans and the American population as a whole. As this series progresses, I will direct the readers attention to such percentage comparisons in terms of Education, Family Structure, etc.

If there are not significant quantitative differences between Italian Americans and the American population as a whole, then the question arises: “What does it mean to be an Italian American? This is a question about culture and may not be quantifiable.





II. AGE dependency ratios:

There are three Age Dependency Ratios:

- Child dependency ratio

“A measure derived by dividing the population ‘under 18 years’ by the ‘18 to 64 years’ population and multiplying by 100. (American Community Survey and Population Estimates Program)”

- Old age dependency ratio

“A measure derived by dividing the population ‘65 years and over’ by the ‘18 to 64 years’ population and multiplying by 100. (American Community Survey and Population Estimates Program)”

- Combined Age dependency ratio

“A measure derived by dividing the combined ‘under 18 years’ and ‘65 years and over’ by the ‘18-64 years’ population and multiplying by 100. (American Community Survey and Population Estimates Program)”



The Age Dependency Ratio Table below reports these three ratios.

Column A list the relevant “Age Cohort”.

Column B list the ‘total number of American’ in the cohort.

Column C list the ‘total number Italian Americans’ in the cohort.

Row #5 (highlighted in green) shows the Child Dependence ratio for “Total American Population” (column B) and “Italian American” population (column C). It is computed by dividing the number in Row 4 (“under 18 years”) by the number in Row 2 (“18 to 64 years) and multiplying the result by 100. Thus, for example the “Child Dependence ratio for Italian Americans is $4,788,413 / 11,010,766 * 100 = 43.5\%$

Row #8 (highlighted in blue) shows the Old Age Dependence ratio for “Total American Population” (column B) and “Italian American” population (column C). It is computed by dividing the number in Row 7 (“65 years and over”) by the number in Row 2 (“18 to 64 years) and multiplying the result by 100. Thus, for example the “Old Age Dependence ratio” for Italian Americans is $1,966,736 / 11,010,766 * 100 = 17.9\%$

Row #11 (highlighted in tan) shows the Total Dependence ratio for “Total American Population” (column B) and “Italian American” population (column C). It is computed by adding ‘under 18’ and ‘65 and over’, dividing the total by ‘18 to 64’ and multiplying the result by 100. Thus, for example the “Total Dependence ratio for Italian Americans is $4,788,413 + 1,966,736 / 11,010,766 * 100 = 61.4\%$



III. GENERATIONS



Generation is one of the most important concepts in cultural studies and the most difficult to define. Culture evolution is measured by inter-generational behavior change. In pre-industrial agricultural societies the change is slow at best. Behaviorally, each succeeding generation closely resembles the previous.

In industrial societies, generational change is rapid; a generation is often very different from the prior generation. In the current post-industrial 'Information Age', change is intra-generational, i.e. change happens 'within' a generation.

There is no absolute definition of what constitutes a generation. Different demographic researchers, depending upon the society being studied, will develop what social scientists call "operational definitions" to suit their research needs.

It is important to distinguish between familial and cultural generations. A familial generation is defined as the average time between a mother's first offspring and her daughter's first offspring. Currently, the familial generation length in the United States is 25.2 years.

Cultural generation refers to the cohort of people whose youth was shaped by a particular set of events and trends. Late 20th and early 21st cultural generations are shorter than familial generations. The following table exemplifies the two types of generations:



Italian American Generations



The table below is a subjective division of Italian American generations based on an approximate 20-year familiar model. ACS data does not break age cohorts into five-year groupings making a 25-year generation division impossible. However, historians use 20-year 'rule of thumb' generation groups when the exact data is not available.

I also assume based on personal experience in a relatively large and representative Italian American community in Rochester, NY, and my readings about Italian American history that the 2nd generation of Italian Americans (i.e. the children of the circa 1900 immigrants are in the 75 years and old category. I use 2010 as the current year to calculate "Birth Years" and 19 year intervals to define the 3rd and 4th generations; 16 years for the 5th because that's the way the data is presented; and the 6th the residual ages.

Column A lists the "Age Cohorts" as presented in the ACS data and in the "Age & Gender Table" above. Column B is the percentage of the Italian American population that falls into the respective cohorts. Column C is the # of Italian Americans in the cohort (i.e. % in Column B times 17,765,915).

Columns D and E form the basis of the generation classifications. For example, Row 16 & 17 represents the 3rd generation. The 3rd Generation begins with births in the year 1936 (i.e. 2010 - 74) and ends with births in the year 1955 (i.e. 2010-55).





The generational structure in this table can be graphically represented as follows.



Again, the above analysis and classification is not meant to be an 'exact model' of the generational structure of the Italian American community. The great historian and methodologist Marc Bloch posits that the essence of "The Historian's Craft" is the ability to reconstruct societies based on incomplete and inaccurate documents. Accordingly, this analysis is an historiographic exercise a la Bloch.

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Links

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