



One in Five U.S. Residents Speaks Foreign Language at Home

Record 63.2 million; Arabic and Urdu are the fastest growing

By Steven A. Camarota and Karen Zeigler

Newly released Census Bureau data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) shows that a record 63.2 million U.S. residents five years of age and older speak a language other than English at home. The number is up 3.6 million since 2010. The largest percentage increases from 2010 to 2014 were for speakers of Arabic and Urdu (Pakistan's national language). As a share of the population, more than one in five U.S. residents now speaks a foreign language at home.

Among the findings:

- In 2014, a record 63.2 million U.S. residents (native-born, legal immigrants, and illegal immigrants) spoke a language other than English at home. That number is up 16.2 million since 2000, up 3.6 million since 2010, and up 1.4 million just since 2013.
- Taking a longer view, since 1990 the number of foreign language speakers has roughly doubled; the number has almost tripled since 1980.
- As a share of the population, 21 percent of U.S. residents speak a foreign language at home.
- The largest percentage increases from 2010 to 2014 were among speakers of Arabic (up 29 percent), Urdu (up 23 percent), Hindi (up 19 percent), Chinese and Hmong (both up 12 percent), and Gujarati and Persian (both up 9 percent). Urdu is spoken in Pakistan; Hindi and Gujarati are languages of India; Hmong is spoken in Laos; Persian is spoken in Iran.
- The largest numerical increases from 2010 to 2014 were among speakers of Spanish (up 2.3 million), Chinese (up 331,000), Arabic (up 252,000), Tagalog (up 115,000), Hindi (up 114,000), and Urdu (up 89,000). Tagalog is spoken in the Philippines.
- Languages with more than a million speakers in 2014 were Spanish (39.3 million), Chinese (3.1 million), Tagalog (1.7 million), Vietnamese (1.5 million), French (1.2 million), and Korean and Arabic (1.1 million each).
- Of school-age children (five to 17), 22 percent speak a foreign language at home.
- Many of those who speak a foreign language at home are not immigrants. Of the more than 63 million foreign language speakers, 44 percent (27.7 million) were actually born in the United States.¹
- Of those who speak a foreign language at home, 25.6 million (41 percent) told the Census Bureau that they speak English less than very well.
- States with the largest share of their populations speaking a foreign language in 2014 were California (44 percent), New Mexico (37 percent), Texas (36 percent), Nevada and New Jersey (both 31 percent), New

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York (30 percent), Florida (28 percent), Arizona (27 percent), Hawaii (25 percent), Illinois and Massachusetts (both 23 percent), Connecticut (22 percent), and Rhode Island (21 percent).

- States with the largest percentage increase in foreign language speakers 2010 to 2014 were: North Dakota (up 18 percent); Wyoming (up 15 percent); Nevada (up 14 percent); Oklahoma and Tennessee (both up 13 percent); Delaware and Oregon (both up 12 percent); Kentucky and Utah (both up 11 percent); Virginia up 10 percent; Texas, Florida, and Georgia (all up 9 percent); and Minnesota, Michigan, North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Washington state (all up 8 percent).
- States with the largest percentage increase in foreign language speakers from 1980 to 2014 were: Nevada (up 1,001 percent), Georgia (up 875 percent), North Carolina (up 702 percent), Virginia (up 446 percent), Tennessee (up 416 percent), Arkansas (up 380 percent), Washington state (up 367 percent), Oregon (up 340 percent), South Carolina (up 338 percent), Florida (up 337 percent), Utah (up 316 percent), and Maryland (up 300 percent).

Data Source. On September 18, the Census Bureau released some of the data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS). The survey reflects the U.S. population as of July 1, 2014. The ACS is by far the largest survey taken by the federal government each year and includes over two million households.² The Census Bureau has posted some of the results from the ACS to American FactFinder.³ It has not released the public-use version of the ACS for researchers to download and analyze. However a good deal of information can be found at FactFinder. Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this analysis comes directly from FactFinder.

There are three language questions in the ACS for 2010 and 2014. The first asks whether each person in the survey speaks a language other than English at home. For those who answer “yes”, the survey then asks what language the person speaks. Third, the survey asks how well each person speaks English. Only those who speak a language at home other than English are asked about their English skills. The 1980, 1990, and 2000 decennial censuses (long form) asked almost the exact same questions.

In this study, we report some statistics for the immigrant population, referred to as the foreign-born by the Census Bureau. The foreign-born were not U.S. citizens at birth and include naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents (green card holders), temporary workers, and foreign students. Not included are those born to immigrants in the United States, including to illegal immigrant parents, and those born in outlying U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico. Prior research by the Department of Homeland Security and others indicates that some 90 percent of illegal immigrants respond to the ACS.⁴

End Notes

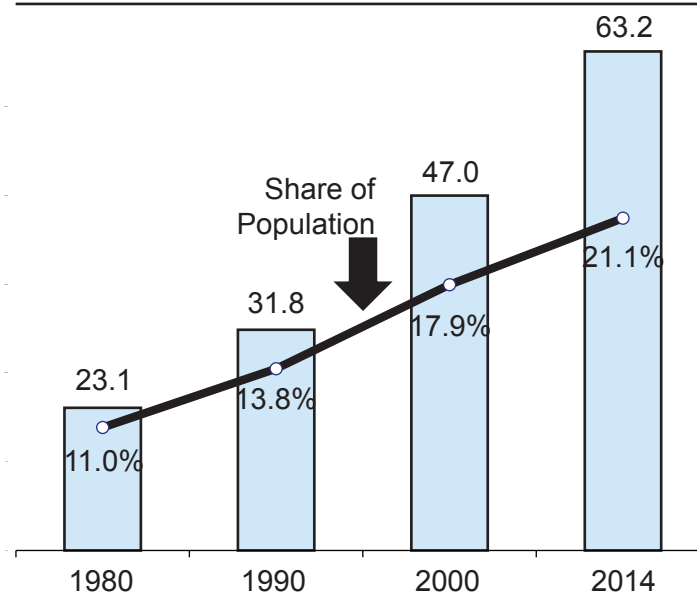
¹ Of the native-born who speak a language other than English at home, 10.0 million (36.1 percent) are under age 17; the remaining 63.9 percent (17.7 million) are adults.

² Detailed information on the American Community Survey methodology, questions, and other topics on the can be found [here](#).

³ FactFinder can be found [here](#).

⁴ The Department of Homeland Security uses the ACS as the basis for its estimates of the illegal immigrant population. See Bryan Baker and Nancy Rytina, [“Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2012”](#), Department of Homeland Security, March 2013.

Figure 1. Number & Percentage of U.S. Residents Speaking a Language other than English at Home has Grown Dramatically, 1980 to 2014 (millions)



Source: Data for 2000 and 2014 are from [American FactFinder](#) for the American Community Survey and 2000 census. Figures for 1990 are from the [1990 census](#). Figures for 1980 are from the [1980 census](#).

Table 1. Number and Share Speaking Language Other than English at Home 1980-2014

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2014
Speaking a Language Other than English at Home	23,060,040	31,844,979	46,951,595	59,542,596	63,178,487
Share Speaking Foreign Language	11.0%	13.8%	17.9%	20.6%	21.1%
Immigrant	9,729,337	15,430,434	25,497,023	33,621,360	35,443,131
Native-Born	13,330,703	16,414,545	21,454,572	25,921,236	27,735,356
Speaks English Less than "Very Well"*	10,181,036	13,982,502	21,320,407	25,223,045	25,592,758

Source: Data for 2000, 2010, and 2014 is from [American FactFinder](#) for the American Community Survey and the 2000 Census. Figures for 1990 are from [1990 census tables](#). Figures for 1980 are from the [1980 census](#).

* Based on respondents' self-assessment.

Table 2. Foreign Languages Spoken at Home, 2000-2014

Language	2000	2010	2014	Pct. Increase, 2010-2014
Arabic	614,582	864,961	1,117,304	29.2%
Urdu	262,900	388,909	477,701	22.8%
Hindi	317,057	609,395	723,829	18.8%
Chinese	2,022,143	2,808,692	3,139,432	11.8%
Hmong	168,063	211,500	236,377	11.8%
Gujarati	235,988	356,394	388,871	9.1%
Persian	312,085	381,408	416,119	9.1%
Tagalog	1,224,241	1,573,720	1,688,494	7.3%
French Creole	453,368	746,702	795,521	6.5%
Spanish	28,101,052	36,995,602	39,254,342	6.1%
Vietnamese	1,009,627	1,381,488	1,458,173	5.6%
Thai	120,464	150,885	157,421	4.3%
Hebrew	195,374	204,593	213,185	4.2%
Russian	706,242	854,955	890,120	4.1%
Armenian	202,708	240,402	240,623	0.1%
Yiddish	178,945	154,763	154,660	-0.1%
Korean	894,063	1,137,325	1,131,339	-0.5%
Portuguese	564,630	688,326	680,563	-1.1%
Japanese	477,997	443,497	437,541	-1.3%
Cambodian	181,889	220,900	216,522	-2.0%
Navajo	178,014	172,873	164,363	-4.9%
Greek	365,436	307,178	289,389	-5.8%
French	1,643,838	1,322,650	1,219,825	-7.8%
Laotian	149,303	158,847	146,156	-8.0%
Italian	1,008,370	725,223	641,352	-11.6%
Polish	667,414	608,333	533,942	-12.2%
German	1,383,442	1,067,651	934,438	-12.5%
Serbo-Croatian	233,865	284,077	246,196	-13.3%
Hungarian	117,973	90,453	78,175	-13.6%
All Others	2,960,522	4,390,894	5,106,514	16.3%
Total	46,951,595	59,542,596	63,178,487	6.1%

Source: Data is from [American FactFinder](#) for the American Community Survey for 2010 and 2014; data for 2000 is from the decennial census.

Table 3. Number Speaking a Language other than English at Home by State, 1980-2014, Ranked by Growth, 2010-2014

State	Language Other than English at Home, 1980	Language Other than English at Home, 1990	Language Other than English at Home, 2000	Language Other than English at Home, 2010	Language Other than English at Home, 2014	Pct. Growth 2010 to 2014	Pct. Growth 1980 to 2014
D.C.	47,320	71,348	90,417	83,073	109,910	32.3%	132.3%
North Dakota	67,120	46,897	37,976	31,927	37,723	18.2%	-43.8%
Wyoming	26,940	23,809	29,485	33,308	38,153	14.5%	41.6%
Nevada	74,200	146,152	427,972	718,991	816,769	13.6%	1,000.8%
Oklahoma	114,220	145,798	238,532	319,555	360,688	12.9%	215.8%
Tennessee	83,320	131,550	256,516	382,245	430,208	12.5%	416.3%
Delaware	29,520	42,327	69,533	101,561	114,054	12.3%	286.4%
Oregon	131,480	191,710	388,669	517,515	578,901	11.9%	340.3%
Kentucky	59,180	86,482	148,473	195,027	216,160	10.8%	265.3%
Utah	95,280	120,404	253,249	357,694	395,981	10.7%	315.6%
Virginia	223,320	418,521	735,191	1,112,699	1,219,010	9.6%	445.9%
Texas	2,862,120	3,970,304	6,010,753	8,119,597	8,883,715	9.4%	210.4%
Florida	1,217,120	2,098,315	3,473,864	4,868,267	5,321,710	9.3%	337.2%
Georgia	131,720	284,546	751,438	1,181,999	1,283,764	8.6%	874.6%
Minnesota	210,460	227,161	389,988	521,350	565,153	8.4%	168.5%
Michigan	563,380	569,807	781,381	798,760	862,423	8.0%	53.1%
North Carolina	130,640	240,866	603,517	970,435	1,047,271	7.9%	701.6%
Massachusetts	701,020	852,228	1,115,570	1,341,035	1,444,923	7.7%	106.1%
Washington	266,480	403,173	770,886	1,154,249	1,243,533	7.7%	366.7%
Colorado	283,620	320,631	604,019	805,147	866,446	7.6%	205.5%
Pennsylvania	757,120	806,876	972,484	1,211,107	1,302,305	7.5%	72.0%
Maryland	240,100	395,051	622,714	896,006	961,022	7.3%	300.3%
Arizona	504,720	700,287	1,229,237	1,592,675	1,697,713	6.6%	236.4%
Wisconsin	250,940	263,638	368,712	445,521	471,530	5.8%	87.9%
Nebraska	69,380	69,872	125,654	175,849	186,071	5.8%	168.2%
South Carolina	70,920	113,163	196,429	294,918	310,629	5.3%	338.0%
New Jersey	1,096,600	1,406,148	2,001,690	2,452,031	2,573,017	4.9%	134.6%
Kansas	105,160	131,604	218,655	291,616	305,040	4.6%	190.1%
California	4,969,060	8,619,334	12,401,756	15,232,350	15,929,300	4.6%	220.6%
Alaska	45,480	60,165	82,758	109,244	113,565	4.0%	149.7%
Connecticut	421,580	466,175	583,913	717,780	742,552	3.5%	76.1%
Illinois	1,223,460	1,499,112	2,220,719	2,644,145	2,733,595	3.4%	123.4%
New York	3,304,880	3,908,720	4,962,921	5,464,398	5,646,710	3.3%	70.9%
Idaho	48,140	58,995	111,879	152,439	157,441	3.3%	227.0%
Maine	113,880	105,441	93,966	84,052	86,749	3.2%	-23.8%
Mississippi	43,740	66,516	95,522	100,380	102,847	2.5%	135.1%
New Mexico	446,260	493,999	616,964	701,672	717,952	2.3%	60.9%
Arkansas	39,800	60,781	123,755	187,658	191,120	1.8%	380.2%
Hawaii	232,020	254,724	302,125	330,593	334,465	1.2%	44.2%
Rhode Island	147,360	159,492	196,624	208,445	209,832	0.7%	42.4%
Indiana	207,560	245,826	362,082	487,206	490,176	0.6%	136.2%
Iowa	92,440	100,391	160,022	210,430	210,226	-0.1%	127.4%
Ohio	515,680	546,148	648,493	719,544	718,489	-0.1%	39.3%
Louisiana	382,500	391,994	382,364	376,677	365,961	-2.8%	-4.3%
New Hampshire	90,680	88,796	96,088	97,135	94,261	-3.0%	3.9%
Alabama	68,680	107,866	162,483	230,660	222,485	-3.5%	223.9%
Missouri	142,520	178,210	264,281	341,861	319,088	-6.7%	123.9%
West Virginia	37,600	44,203	45,895	38,961	35,224	-9.6%	-6.3%
Vermont	33,520	30,409	34,075	33,005	29,558	-10.4%	-11.8%
Montana	38,140	37,020	44,331	43,109	37,718	-12.5%	-1.1%
South Dakota	51,220	41,994	45,575	56,695	45,351	-20.0%	-11.5%
Total	23,109,600	31,844,979	46,951,595	59,542,596	63,178,487	6.1%	173.4%

Source: Data is from [American FactFinder](#) for the 2010 and 2014 American Community Survey and the decennial census. Figures for 1990 are from the Census Bureau table found [here](#). Data for 1980 is from the 5 percent public-use file of the decennial census.

Table 4. Share of Population Speaking a Language Other than English at Home by State, 1980-2014

State	Language Other than English at Home, 1980	Language Other than English at Home, 1990	Language Other than English at Home, 2000	Language Other than English at Home, 2010	Language Other than English at Home, 2014
California	22.6%	31.5%	39.5%	43.7%	43.9%
New Mexico	37.4%	35.5%	36.5%	36.5%	36.8%
Texas	21.9%	25.4%	31.2%	34.8%	35.5%
Nevada	9.9%	13.2%	23.1%	28.6%	30.7%
New Jersey	15.9%	19.5%	25.5%	29.7%	30.6%
New York	20.1%	23.3%	28.0%	30.0%	30.4%
Florida	13.2%	17.3%	23.1%	27.4%	28.3%
Arizona	20.2%	20.8%	25.9%	26.7%	27.0%
Hawaii	26.0%	24.8%	26.6%	25.9%	25.2%
Massachusetts	13.0%	15.2%	18.7%	21.7%	22.6%
Illinois	11.5%	14.2%	19.2%	22.0%	22.6%
Connecticut	14.4%	15.2%	18.3%	21.3%	21.8%
Rhode Island	16.5%	17.0%	20.0%	20.9%	21.0%
Washington	7.0%	9.0%	14.0%	18.3%	18.8%
D.C.	7.8%	12.5%	16.8%	14.5%	17.8%
Colorado	10.6%	10.5%	15.1%	17.1%	17.2%
Maryland	6.1%	8.9%	12.6%	16.5%	17.1%
Alaska	12.4%	12.1%	14.3%	16.5%	16.6%
Virginia	4.5%	7.3%	11.1%	14.8%	15.6%
Oregon	5.4%	7.3%	12.1%	14.4%	15.5%
Utah	7.5%	7.8%	12.5%	14.2%	14.7%
Georgia	2.6%	4.8%	9.9%	13.1%	13.6%
Delaware	5.4%	6.9%	9.5%	12.0%	13.0%
Kansas	4.8%	5.7%	8.7%	11.0%	11.3%
North Carolina	2.4%	3.9%	8.0%	10.9%	11.2%
Minnesota	5.6%	5.6%	8.5%	10.5%	11.1%
Pennsylvania	6.8%	7.3%	8.4%	10.1%	10.8%
Nebraska	4.8%	4.8%	7.9%	10.4%	10.6%
Idaho	5.7%	6.4%	9.3%	10.5%	10.3%
Oklahoma	4.1%	5.0%	7.4%	9.1%	10.0%
Michigan	6.6%	6.6%	8.4%	8.6%	9.2%
Wisconsin	5.8%	5.8%	7.3%	8.3%	8.7%
Louisiana	9.9%	10.1%	9.2%	8.9%	8.4%
Indiana	4.1%	4.8%	6.4%	8.0%	7.9%
New Hampshire	10.6%	8.7%	8.3%	7.8%	7.5%
Iowa	3.4%	3.9%	5.8%	7.4%	7.2%
Tennessee	2.0%	2.9%	4.8%	6.4%	7.0%
Wyoming	6.3%	5.7%	6.4%	6.4%	7.0%
Arkansas	1.9%	2.8%	5.0%	6.9%	6.9%
Maine	10.9%	9.2%	7.8%	6.7%	6.8%
South Carolina	2.5%	3.5%	5.2%	6.8%	6.8%
Ohio	5.2%	5.4%	6.1%	6.7%	6.6%
South Dakota	8.1%	6.5%	6.5%	7.5%	5.7%
Missouri	3.1%	3.8%	5.1%	6.1%	5.6%
North Dakota	11.2%	7.9%	6.3%	5.1%	5.5%
Kentucky	1.8%	2.5%	3.9%	4.8%	5.2%
Vermont	7.0%	5.8%	5.9%	5.6%	5.0%
Alabama	1.9%	2.9%	3.9%	5.2%	4.9%
Montana	5.2%	5.0%	5.2%	4.6%	3.9%
Mississippi	1.9%	2.8%	3.6%	3.6%	3.7%
West Virginia	2.1%	2.6%	2.7%	2.2%	2.0%
Total	11.0%	14%	18%	21%	21.1%

Source: Data is from [American FactFinder](#) for the 2010 and 2014 American Community Survey and decennial census. Figures for 1990 are from the Census Bureau table found [here](#). Data for 1980 is from the 5 percent public-use file of the decennial census.

Table 5. School-Age (5-17) Pop. Speaking a Language other than English at Home, 2014

State	Number	Percent
California	2,917,779	43.9%
Texas	1,872,098	36.2%
Nevada	160,383	32.9%
New Mexico	119,785	32.8%
New York	905,657	29.8%
New Jersey	421,096	28.5%
Arizona	337,057	28.3%
Florida	834,507	28.0%
Illinois	527,625	24.0%
Washington	250,806	21.7%
Massachusetts	221,627	21.6%
Rhode Island	33,723	21.4%
Oregon	131,040	20.7%
Colorado	188,683	20.6%
Connecticut	120,684	20.6%
D.C.	14,161	19.6%
Hawaii	42,066	19.4%
Maryland	165,179	16.8%
Virginia	210,764	15.5%
Georgia	282,917	15.4%
Alaska	19,688	14.8%
North Carolina	247,054	14.6%
Delaware	21,457	14.5%
Utah	92,886	14.2%
Minnesota	129,635	13.9%
Nebraska	46,121	13.7%
Kansas	68,703	13.1%
Idaho	38,458	12.0%
Oklahoma	79,842	11.6%
Wisconsin	109,422	11.4%
Pennsylvania	223,789	11.3%
Michigan	168,768	10.2%
Arkansas	49,140	9.5%
Indiana	109,292	9.4%
Tennessee	97,457	8.9%
Iowa	46,591	8.8%
South Carolina	67,839	8.5%
Ohio	136,086	7.0%
Kentucky	47,686	6.4%
New Hampshire	12,688	6.3%
Louisiana	50,466	6.2%
Missouri	61,452	6.0%
South Dakota	8,308	5.5%
Alabama	44,201	5.4%
Vermont	4,115	4.5%
Maine	8,754	4.5%
Mississippi	19,536	3.6%
Montana	5,439	3.3%
Total	11,788,754	21.9%

Source: Data is from [American FactFinder](#) for 2014 American Community Survey. Figures are not available for North Dakota or Wyoming.