



Nearly 65 Million U.S. Residents Spoke a Foreign Language at Home in 2015

Up 5.2 million since 2010 and up 1.5 million since 2014

By Steven A. Camarota and Karen Zeigler

Newly released Census Bureau data shows that a record 64.7 million U.S. residents five years of age and older spoke a language other than English at home in 2015. The number is up 5.2 million since 2010 and increased by 1.5 million in just the last year.¹ The largest percentage increases from 2010 to 2015 were for speakers of Arabic, Hindi (an Indian language), 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 2015, a record 64.7 million U.S. residents (native-born, legal immigrants, and illegal immigrants) age five and older spoke a language other than English at home. The number has more than doubled since 1990, when 31.8 million spoke a language other than English.
- Taking a longer view, the 64.7 million foreign-language speakers in 2015 is almost triple the number in 1980.
- As a share of the population, 21.5 percent of U.S. residents speak a foreign language at home — nearly double the 11 percent in 1980.
- The largest percentage increases from 2010 to 2015 were among speakers of Arabic (up 34 percent), Hindi (up 33 percent), Urdu (up 24 percent), Chinese (up 19 percent), French Creole (up 16 percent), Gujarati (up 14 percent), and Persian (up 13 percent). Hindi and Gujarati are languages of India; Urdu is spoken in Pakistan; French Creole is spoken in Haiti; and Persian is the national language of Iran.
- The largest numerical increases from 2010 to 2015 were among speakers of Spanish (up 3.1 million), Chinese (up 525,000), Arabic (up 292,000), Hindi (up 203,000), Tagalog (up 163,000), French Creole (up 117,000), and Urdu (up 92,000). Tagalog is spoken in the Philippines.
- Languages with more than a million speakers in the United States in 2015 were: Spanish (40 million), Chinese (3.3 million), Tagalog (1.7 million), Vietnamese (1.5 million), French (1.3 million), Arabic (1.2 million), and Korean (1.1 million).
- Although all the data has not been released for 2015, what has been released indicates that nearly one in four public school students now speaks a language other than English at home.²
- Many of those who speak a foreign language at home are not immigrants. In fact, half of the growth in foreign-language speakers since 2010 is among those born in the United States. Overall, 44 percent (28.5 million) of those who speak a language other than English at home are U.S.-born.³

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- Of those who speak a foreign language at home, 26 million (40 percent) told the Census Bureau that they speak English less than very well. This figure is entirely based on the opinions of the respondents; the Census Bureau does not directly measure language skills.
- States with the largest share of their populations speaking a foreign language at home in 2015 were: California (45 percent), Texas (35 percent), New Mexico (34 percent), New York (31 percent), New Jersey (31 percent), Nevada (30 percent), Florida (29 percent), Arizona (27 percent), Hawaii (26 percent), Illinois (23 percent), and Massachusetts (23 percent).
- States with the largest percentage increases in the number of foreign-language speakers from 2010 to 2015 were: North Dakota (up 30 percent); Wyoming (up 24 percent); Maryland (up 17 percent); West Virginia (up 16 percent); Oklahoma and Delaware (both up 15 percent); Florida, Nevada, and Utah (each up 14 percent); and Georgia, Minnesota, and Kentucky (each up 13 percent).
- States with the largest percentage increases in foreign-language speakers from 1980 to 2015 were: Nevada (up 1,005 percent), Georgia (up 916 percent), North Carolina (up 729 percent), Virginia (up 460 percent), Tennessee (up 414 percent), Arkansas (up 408 percent), Washington (up 386 percent), Florida (up 356 percent), South Carolina (up 339 percent), Oregon (up 336 percent), and Maryland (up 335 percent).

Data Sources. In September of this year, the Census Bureau released some of the data from the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS). The survey reflects the U.S. population as of July 1, 2015. The ACS is by far the largest survey taken by the federal government each year and includes over two million households.⁴ The Census Bureau has posted some of the results from the ACS to American FactFinder on the Census Bureau website.⁵ 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 2015. The first asks whether each person in the survey speaks a language other than English at home. The second, for those who answer “yes”, asks what language the person speaks. The third asks how well the 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 report we report some statistics for the immigrant population, referred to as the foreign-born by the Census Bureau. The foreign-born population is comprised of those individuals who were not U.S. citizens at birth. It includes naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents (green card holders), temporary workers, and foreign students. It does not include those born to immigrants in the United States, including to illegal immigrant parents, nor does it include 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.⁶

Table 1. Number and Share Speaking Language Other than English at Home 1980-2015

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015
Speaking a Language Other than English at Home	23,060,040	31,844,979	46,951,595	59,542,596	64,716,079
Share Speaking Foreign Language	11.0%	13.8%	17.9%	20.6%	21.5%
Immigrant	9,729,337	15,430,434	25,497,023	33,621,360	36,237,344
Native-Born	13,330,703	16,414,545	21,454,572	25,921,236	28,478,735
Speaks English Less than "Very Well"*	10,181,036	13,982,502	21,320,407	25,223,045	25,867,044

Source: Figures for 1980 to 2000 are from the decennial censuses; figures for 2010 and 2015 are from the American Community Survey. [American FactFinder](#) provides the figures for 2000, 2010, and 2015. Figures for 1990 can be found [here](#). Figures for 1980 can be found [here](#).

* Based on respondents' self-assessment.

Table 2. Foreign Languages Spoken at Home, 2000-2015

Language	Language Other than English, 2000	Language Other than English, 2010	Language Other than English, 2015	Pct. Increase, 2010-2015
Arabic	614,582	864,961	1,156,908	34%
Hindi	317,057	609,395	812,818	33%
Urdu	262,900	388,909	481,391	24%
Chinese	2,022,143	2,808,692	3,333,588	19%
French Creole	453,368	746,702	863,449	16%
Gujarati	235,988	356,394	404,831	14%
Persian	312,085	381,408	429,510	13%
Tagalog	1,224,241	1,573,720	1,737,186	10%
Yiddish	178,945	154,763	169,814	10%
Spanish	28,101,052	36,995,602	40,045,795	8%
Hmong	168,063	211,500	228,721	8%
Vietnamese	1,009,627	1,381,488	1,468,251	6%
Russian	706,242	854,955	905,149	6%
Thai	120,464	150,885	159,208	6%
Portuguese	564,630	688,326	717,643	4%
Japanese	477,997	443,497	446,084	1%
Cambodian	181,889	220,900	219,817	0%
Hebrew	195,374	204,593	200,632	-2%
Armenian	202,708	240,402	235,526	-2%
Korean	894,063	1,137,325	1,108,798	-3%
Laotian	149,303	158,847	152,139	-4%
French	1,643,838	1,322,650	1,266,366	-4%
Greek	365,436	307,178	289,291	-6%
Navajo	178,014	172,873	159,995	-7%
Serbo-Croatian	233,865	284,077	253,604	-11%
Polish	667,414	608,333	541,914	-11%
German	1,383,442	1,067,651	933,441	-13%
Hungarian	117,973	90,453	78,877	-13%
Italian	1,008,370	725,223	605,651	-16%
All Others	2,960,522	4,390,894	5,309,682	21%
Total	46,951,595	59,542,596	64,716,079	9%

Source: See Table 1 for data sources.

Table 3. Number Speaking a Language other than English at Home by State, 1980-2015, Ranked by Percentage Growth, 2010-2015

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, 2015	Pct. Growth 2010 to 2015	Pct. Growth 1980 to 2015
Wash., D.C.	47,320	71,348	90,417	83,073	109,550	32%	132%
North Dakota	67,120	46,897	37,976	31,927	41,504	30%	-38%
Wyoming	26,940	23,809	29,485	33,308	41,177	24%	53%
Maryland	240,100	395,051	622,714	896,006	1,044,558	17%	335%
West Virginia	37,600	44,203	45,895	38,961	45,144	16%	20%
Oklahoma	114,220	145,798	238,532	319,555	368,820	15%	223%
Delaware	29,520	42,327	69,533	101,561	117,007	15%	296%
Florida	1,217,120	2,098,315	3,473,864	4,868,267	5,552,812	14%	356%
Nevada	74,200	146,152	427,972	718,991	819,777	14%	1005%
Utah	95,280	120,404	253,249	357,694	407,694	14%	328%
Georgia	131,720	284,546	751,438	1,181,999	1,337,707	13%	916%
Minnesota	210,460	227,161	389,988	521,350	588,397	13%	180%
Kentucky	59,180	86,482	148,473	195,027	219,792	13%	271%
Virginia	223,320	418,521	735,191	1,112,699	1,251,625	12%	460%
Washington	266,480	403,173	770,886	1,154,249	1,295,606	12%	386%
Tennessee	83,320	131,550	256,516	382,245	428,498	12%	414%
North Carolina	130,640	240,866	603,517	970,435	1,083,113	12%	729%
Texas	2,862,120	3,970,304	6,010,753	8,119,597	9,027,388	11%	215%
Nebraska	69,380	69,872	125,654	175,849	195,505	11%	182%
Michigan	563,380	569,807	781,381	798,760	885,970	11%	57%
Oregon	131,480	191,710	388,669	517,515	572,863	11%	336%
Vermont	33,520	30,409	34,075	33,005	36,327	10%	8%
Massachusetts	701,020	852,228	1,115,570	1,341,035	1,475,670	10%	111%
Colorado	283,620	320,631	604,019	805,147	881,148	9%	211%
Kansas	105,160	131,604	218,655	291,616	319,088	9%	203%
Mississippi	43,740	66,516	95,522	100,380	109,415	9%	150%
Arizona	504,720	700,287	1,229,237	1,592,675	1,732,824	9%	243%
Pennsylvania	757,120	806,876	972,484	1,211,107	1,313,558	8%	73%
Arkansas	39,800	60,781	123,755	187,658	202,329	8%	408%
California	4,969,060	8,619,334	12,401,756	15,232,350	16,325,804	7%	229%
Indiana	207,560	245,826	362,082	487,206	521,887	7%	151%
Iowa	92,440	100,391	160,022	210,430	225,231	7%	144%
Rhode Island	147,360	159,492	196,624	208,445	222,008	7%	51%
Connecticut	421,580	466,175	583,913	717,780	762,388	6%	81%
New Jersey	1,096,600	1,406,148	2,001,690	2,452,031	2,596,031	6%	137%
Wisconsin	250,940	263,638	368,712	445,521	471,088	6%	88%
Hawaii	232,020	254,724	302,125	330,593	349,398	6%	51%
South Carolina	70,920	113,163	196,429	294,918	311,466	6%	339%
Ohio	515,680	546,148	648,493	719,544	759,116	5%	47%
New York	3,304,880	3,908,720	4,962,921	5,464,398	5,747,065	5%	74%
Illinois	1,223,460	1,499,112	2,220,719	2,644,145	2,780,186	5%	127%
Idaho	48,140	58,995	111,879	152,439	158,088	4%	228%
New Hampshire	90,680	88,796	96,088	97,135	99,248	2%	9%
Alabama	68,680	107,866	162,483	230,660	233,295	1%	240%
Alaska	45,480	60,165	82,758	109,244	110,429	1%	143%
Missouri	142,520	178,210	264,281	341,861	341,823	0%	140%
New Mexico	446,260	493,999	616,964	701,672	669,432	-5%	50%
Montana	38,140	37,020	44,331	43,109	41,110	-5%	8%
Louisiana	382,500	391,994	382,364	376,677	356,206	-5%	-7%
South Dakota	51,220	41,994	45,575	56,695	52,914	-7%	3%
Maine	113,880	105,441	93,966	84,052	77,000	-8%	-32%
Total	23,109,600	31,844,979	46,951,595	59,542,596	64,716,079	9%	180%

Source: Figures for 1980 to 2000 are from the decennial censuses; figures for 2010 and 2015 are from the American Community Survey. [American FactFinder](#) provides the figures for 2000, 2010, and 2015. State figures for 1990 can be found [here](#). State figures for 1980 are from the public-use files of the decennial census.

Table 4. Share of Population Speaking a Language Other than English at Home by State, 1980-2015

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, 2015
California	22.6%	31.5%	39.5%	43.7%	44.6%
Texas	21.9%	25.4%	31.2%	34.8%	35.4%
New Mexico	37.4%	35.5%	36.5%	36.5%	34.3%
New York	20.1%	23.3%	28.0%	30.0%	30.9%
New Jersey	15.9%	19.5%	25.5%	29.7%	30.8%
Nevada	9.9%	13.2%	23.1%	28.6%	30.2%
Florida	13.2%	17.3%	23.1%	27.4%	29.0%
Arizona	20.2%	20.8%	25.9%	26.7%	27.1%
Hawaii	26.0%	24.8%	26.6%	25.9%	26.1%
Illinois	11.5%	14.2%	19.2%	22.0%	23.0%
Massachusetts	13.0%	15.2%	18.7%	21.7%	23.0%
Connecticut	14.4%	15.2%	18.3%	21.3%	22.4%
Rhode Island	16.5%	17.0%	20.0%	20.9%	22.2%
Washington	7.0%	9.0%	14.0%	18.3%	19.3%
Maryland	6.1%	8.9%	12.6%	16.5%	18.5%
Wash., D.C.	7.8%	12.5%	16.8%	14.5%	17.4%
Colorado	10.6%	10.5%	15.1%	17.1%	17.2%
Alaska	12.4%	12.1%	14.3%	16.5%	16.2%
Virginia	4.5%	7.3%	11.1%	14.8%	15.9%
Oregon	5.4%	7.3%	12.1%	14.4%	15.1%
Utah	7.5%	7.8%	12.5%	14.2%	14.8%
Georgia	2.6%	4.8%	9.9%	13.1%	14.0%
Delaware	5.4%	6.9%	9.5%	12.0%	13.1%
Kansas	4.8%	5.7%	8.7%	11.0%	11.8%
North Carolina	2.4%	3.9%	8.0%	10.9%	11.5%
Minnesota	5.6%	5.6%	8.5%	10.5%	11.5%
Nebraska	4.8%	4.8%	7.9%	10.4%	11.1%
Pennsylvania	6.8%	7.3%	8.4%	10.1%	10.9%
Idaho	5.7%	6.4%	9.3%	10.5%	10.2%
Oklahoma	4.1%	5.0%	7.4%	9.1%	10.1%
Michigan	6.6%	6.6%	8.4%	8.6%	9.5%
Wisconsin	5.8%	5.8%	7.3%	8.3%	8.7%
Indiana	4.1%	4.8%	6.4%	8.0%	8.4%
Louisiana	9.9%	10.1%	9.2%	8.9%	8.2%
New Hampshire	10.6%	8.7%	8.3%	7.8%	7.8%
Iowa	3.4%	3.9%	5.8%	7.4%	7.7%
Wyoming	6.3%	5.7%	6.4%	6.4%	7.5%
Arkansas	1.9%	2.8%	5.0%	6.9%	7.3%
Ohio	5.2%	5.4%	6.1%	6.7%	6.9%
Tennessee	2.0%	2.9%	4.8%	6.4%	6.9%
South Carolina	2.5%	3.5%	5.2%	6.8%	6.8%
South Dakota	8.1%	6.5%	6.5%	7.5%	6.6%
Vermont	7.0%	5.8%	5.9%	5.6%	6.1%
Maine	10.9%	9.2%	7.8%	6.7%	6.1%
Missouri	3.1%	3.8%	5.1%	6.1%	6.0%
North Dakota	11.2%	7.9%	6.3%	5.1%	5.9%
Kentucky	1.8%	2.5%	3.9%	4.8%	5.3%
Alabama	1.9%	2.9%	3.9%	5.2%	5.1%
Montana	5.2%	5.0%	5.2%	4.6%	4.2%
Mississippi	1.9%	2.8%	3.6%	3.6%	3.9%
West Virginia	2.1%	2.6%	2.7%	2.2%	2.6%
Total	11.0%	13.8%	17.9%	20.6%	21.5%

Source: Figures for 1980 to 2000 are from the decennial censuses; figures for 2010 and 2015 are from the American Community Survey. [American FactFinder](#) provides the figures for 2000, 2010, and 2015. State figures for 1990 can be found [here](#). State figures for 1980 are from the public-use files of the decennial census.

Table 5. Number & Share of School-Age (5-17) Children Speaking Language Other than English at Home, 1990, 2000, 2010, & 2015; States Ranked by Pct. in 2015

State	Speak Language Other than English, 1990		Speak Language Other than English, 2000		Speak Language Other than English, 2010		Speak Language Other than English, 2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
California	1,878,957	35.0%	2,879,695	42.6%	3,098,013	45.7%	2,954,319	44.7%
Texas	974,282	28.2%	1,380,888	32.4%	1,775,318	35.8%	1,861,983	35.5%
Nevada	24,055	11.8%	93,637	25.6%	159,090	33.3%	156,844	31.9%
New York	700,788	23.3%	928,518	26.9%	908,316	28.7%	912,301	30.1%
New Jersey	245,795	19.4%	366,687	24.1%	422,614	27.7%	423,808	28.8%
Florida	360,452	17.8%	637,410	23.6%	819,003	27.9%	861,415	28.7%
Arizona	156,782	22.8%	284,061	28.8%	353,085	30.0%	341,009	28.6%
New Mexico	94,719	29.5%	118,218	31.2%	120,625	32.2%	104,070	28.5%
Illinois	302,087	14.4%	460,661	19.5%	543,533	23.7%	531,751	24.4%
Rhode Island	25,970	16.3%	38,726	21.0%	39,241	23.5%	36,460	23.2%
Massachusetts	143,528	15.3%	207,155	18.8%	223,333	21.3%	228,393	22.4%
Washington	78,267	8.8%	161,751	14.5%	246,402	21.5%	260,001	22.3%
Connecticut	78,041	14.9%	108,362	17.5%	120,092	19.6%	122,444	21.2%
Hawaii	29,600	14.9%	39,558	18.2%	37,614	17.3%	45,483	20.8%
Oregon	36,776	7.0%	87,636	14.1%	121,730	19.3%	129,393	20.5%
Colorado	51,202	8.4%	115,992	14.5%	176,872	20.0%	185,048	20.0%
Wash., D.C.	9,444	11.8%	12,223	14.9%	8,683	12.7%	13,837	18.5%
Maryland	67,904	8.4%	113,726	11.4%	156,700	15.9%	181,160	18.5%
Georgia	55,976	4.5%	148,700	9.4%	256,050	14.1%	292,839	15.8%
Virginia	74,634	7.0%	134,306	10.5%	203,120	15.1%	209,551	15.4%
North Carolina	54,382	4.7%	117,463	8.2%	228,200	13.8%	249,283	14.8%
Delaware	7,403	6.5%	13,318	9.3%	20,233	13.5%	20,868	14.0%
Minnesota	42,163	5.1%	93,472	9.8%	121,731	13.1%	129,663	13.9%
Kansas	25,036	5.3%	49,553	9.5%	68,944	13.2%	72,653	13.9%
Utah	25,434	5.5%	52,587	10.4%	81,687	13.4%	90,317	13.6%
Nebraska	11,256	3.6%	28,137	8.4%	46,379	14.1%	44,710	13.2%
Alaska	11,158	9.5%	18,541	12.9%	18,733	13.9%	17,297	13.1%
Oklahoma	28,351	4.6%	50,497	7.7%	69,303	10.4%	84,356	12.1%
Wisconsin	51,171	5.5%	86,905	8.5%	105,804	10.8%	107,089	11.2%
Pennsylvania	136,203	6.8%	189,885	8.7%	232,026	11.3%	221,454	11.2%
Michigan	95,963	5.4%	150,818	7.8%	166,568	9.6%	174,384	10.7%
Idaho	13,241	5.8%	26,582	9.8%	39,124	12.7%	32,671	10.2%
Indiana	51,651	4.9%	72,821	6.3%	116,073	9.9%	114,437	9.9%
Arkansas	13,587	3.0%	26,906	5.4%	47,801	9.3%	49,866	9.6%
Iowa	20,740	3.9%	35,640	6.5%	51,668	9.8%	51,162	9.6%
Wyoming	3,940	3.9%	5,265	5.4%	6,206	6.5%	9,667	9.5%
Tennessee	28,694	3.2%	46,673	4.6%	77,953	7.1%	98,264	9.0%
South Carolina	23,346	3.5%	36,725	4.9%	63,440	8.1%	63,638	7.9%
Ohio	100,589	5.0%	119,711	5.6%	141,080	7.0%	143,565	7.4%
Louisiana	49,382	5.5%	51,109	5.7%	48,362	6.0%	55,700	6.9%
Missouri	33,731	3.6%	53,576	5.1%	69,689	6.8%	69,496	6.8%
New Hampshire	8,561	4.4%	12,522	5.4%	14,629	6.7%	13,458	6.7%
Kentucky	20,063	2.8%	28,832	4.0%	44,078	5.9%	48,796	6.6%
Alabama	23,122	3.0%	31,159	3.8%	46,682	5.6%	51,561	6.3%
South Dakota	5,849	4.1%	9,066	6.0%	13,131	9.1%	8,583	5.7%
Maine	9,886	4.4%	9,630	4.2%	9,720	4.7%	9,996	5.2%
Vermont	3,212	3.1%	5,095	4.5%	5,481	5.6%	4,568	5.1%
Montana	6,382	3.9%	8,419	4.8%	7,958	5.0%	8,012	4.8%
North Dakota	3,456	2.7%	5,046	4.1%	5,137	4.8%	5,267	4.4%
Mississippi	16,594	3.0%	18,647	3.3%	18,734	3.4%	21,783	4.0%
West Virginia	9,129	2.7%	7,256	2.4%	6,542	2.3%	6,300	2.3%
Total	6,322,934	13.9%	9,779,766	18.4%	11,782,530	21.8%	11,930,973	22.2%

Source: Figures for 1990 and 2000 are from the decennial censuses; figures for 2010 and 2015 are from the American Community Survey. [American FactFinder](#) provides the figures for 2000, 2010, and 2015. Figures for 1990 are from Table 1 in the Census Bureau's "[Social and Economic Characteristics of Selected Language Groups For U.S. and States:1990](#)".

End Notes

¹ Figures for language use in 2014 can be found in our prior analysis based on the 2014 ACS; see Steven A. Camarota and Karen Zeigler, [“One in Five U.S. Residents Speaks Foreign Language at Home”](#), Center for Immigration Studies, October 2015.

² Unfortunately, the Census Bureau has not released the public-use data for 2015 yet, but we do know from the 2014 public-use ACS data, which has been released, that 22.7 percent of students in public schools spoke a language other than English at home in that year. We also know that in 2014, 21.8 percent of all school-age children ages five to 17 (in public or private schools) spoke a language other than English. The data released so far from the 2015 ACS shows 22.2 percent of all school-age children (in public or private schools) spoke a language other than English. Based on the pattern in 2014, we estimate that 23 percent of public school students in 2015 spoke a language other than English at home. It should be pointed out that immigrants are more likely to send their children to public schools than are natives. As a result, foreign-language students comprise a somewhat larger share of students in public schools than they do of the overall school-age population.

³ Of the native-born who speak a language other than English at home, 10.2 million (35.7 percent) are under age 18, the remaining 18.3 million (64.3 percent) are adults.

⁴ Detailed information on the survey methodology, questions, and other information on the American Community Survey can be found [here](#).

⁵ FactFinder can be found [here](#).

⁶ The Department of Homeland Security uses the ACS as the basis for its estimates of the illegal immigrant population. See their most recent iteration of the unauthorized immigrant population: Bryan Baker and Nancy Rytina, [“Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2012”](#), Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, March 2013.