



One in Five U.S. Residents Speaks Foreign Language at Home, Record 61.8 million Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic speakers grew most since 2010

By Steven A. Camarota and Karen Zeigler

The Census Bureau recently released data from the 2013 American Community Survey (ACS), including languages spoken for those five years of age and older. The new data show that the number of people who speak a language other than English at home reached an all-time high of 61.8 million, up 2.2 million since 2010. The largest increases from 2010 to 2013 were for speakers of Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic. One in five U.S. residents now speaks a foreign language at home.

Among the findings:

- In 2013, a record 61.8 million U.S. residents (native-born, legal immigrants, and illegal immigrants) spoke a language other than English at home.
- The number of foreign-language speakers increased 2.2 million between 2010 and 2013. It has grown by nearly 15 million (32 percent) since 2000 and by almost 30 million since 1990 (94 percent).
- The largest increases 2010 to 2013 were for speakers of Spanish (up 1.4 million, 4 percent growth), Chinese (up 220,000, 8 percent growth), Arabic (up 188,000, 22 percent growth), and Urdu (up 50,000, 13 percent growth). Urdu is the national language of Pakistan.
- Languages with more than a million speakers in 2013 were Spanish (38.4 million), Chinese (three million), Tagalog (1.6 million), Vietnamese (1.4 million), French (1.3 million), and Korean and Arabic (1.1 million each). Tagalog is the national language of the Philippines.
- The percentage of the U.S. population speaking a language other than English at home was 21 percent in 2013, a slight increase over 2010. In 2000, the share was 18 percent; in 1990 it was 14 percent; it was 11 percent in 1980.
- Of the school-age (5 to 17) nationally, more than one in five speaks a foreign language at home. It is 44 percent in California and roughly one in three students in Texas, Nevada, and New York. But more surprisingly, it is now one in seven students in Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Nebraska and Delaware; and one out of eight students in Kansas, Utah, Minnesota, and Idaho.
- Many of those who speak a foreign language at home are not immigrants. Of the nearly 62 million foreign-language speakers, 44 percent (27.2 million) were born in the United States.¹
- Of those who speak a foreign language at home, 25.1 million (41 percent) told the Census Bureau that they speak English less than very well.
- States with the largest share of foreign-language speakers in 2013 include: California, 45 percent; New Mexico, 36 percent; Texas 35 percent; New Jersey, 30 percent; Nevada, 30 percent; New York, 30 percent;

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Florida, 27 percent; Arizona, 27 percent; Hawaii, 25 percent; Illinois, 23 percent; Massachusetts, 22 percent; Connecticut, 22 percent; and Rhode Island, 21 percent.

- States with the largest percentage increases in foreign-language speakers 2010 to 2013 were: North Dakota, up 13 percent; Oklahoma, up 11 percent; Nevada, up 10 percent; New Hampshire, up 8 percent; Idaho, up 8 percent; Georgia, up 7 percent; Washington, up 7 percent; Oregon, up 6 percent; Massachusetts, up 6 percent; Kentucky, up 6 percent; Maryland, up 5 percent; and North Carolina, up 5 percent.
- Taking a longer view, states with the largest percentage increase in foreign-language speakers 2000 to 2013 were: Nevada, up 85 percent; North Carolina, up 69 percent; Georgia, up 69 percent; Washington, up 60 percent; South Carolina, up 57 percent; Virginia, up 57 percent; Tennessee, up 54 percent; Arkansas, up 54 percent; Maryland, up 52 percent; Delaware, up 52 percent; Oklahoma, up 48 percent; Utah, up 47 percent; Idaho, up 47 percent; Nebraska, up 46 percent; Florida, up 46 percent; Alabama, up 43 percent; Texas, up 42 percent; Oregon, up 42 percent; and Kentucky, up 39 percent.

Data Source. On September 18, the Census Bureau released some of the data from the 2013 ACS. The survey reflects the U.S. population as of July 1, 2013. 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 2013. 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 at home. 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 *Backgrounder* we report some statistics for the immigrant population, referred to as the foreign-born by the Census Bureau. The foreign-born are comprised of those individuals who were not U.S. citizens at birth. They include naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents (green card holders), temporary workers, and foreign students. They do not include those born to immigrants in the United States, including to illegal immigrant parents, nor do they 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.⁴

Table 1. Number and Share Speaking Language Other than English at Home 1980-2013

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2013
Speaking a Language Other than English at Home	23,060,040	31,844,979	46,951,595	59,542,596	61,748,740
Share Speaking Foreign Language	11.0%	13.8%	17.9%	20.6%	20.8%
Immigrant	9,729,337	15,430,434	25,497,023	33,621,360	34,527,909
Native-Born	13,330,703	16,414,545	21,454,572	25,921,236	27,220,831
Speaks English Less than “Very Well”*	10,181,036	13,982,502	21,320,407	25,223,045	25,125,132

Source: Data for 2000, 2010, and 2013 are 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, 2000-2013

Language	2000	2010	2013
Spanish	28,101,052	36,995,602	38,417,235
Chinese	2,022,143	2,808,692	3,029,042
Tagalog	1,224,241	1,573,720	1,612,465
Vietnamese	1,009,627	1,381,488	1,428,352
French	1,643,838	1,322,650	1,251,815
Korean	894,063	1,137,325	1,100,881
Arabic	614,582	864,961	1,052,938
German	1,383,442	1,067,651	984,669
Russian	706,242	854,955	895,902
French Creole	453,368	746,702	783,017
Portuguese	564,630	688,326	677,329
Hindi	317,057	609,395	654,101
Italian	1,008,370	725,223	641,267
Polish	667,414	608,333	549,661
Japanese	477,997	443,497	454,997
Urdu	262,900	388,909	439,129
Persian	312,085	381,408	399,048
Gujarati	235,988	356,394	372,104
Greek	365,436	307,178	294,476
Serbo-Croatian	233,865	284,077	255,573
Armenian	202,708	240,402	236,580
Hmong	168,063	211,500	228,965
Cambodian	181,889	220,900	220,921
Hebrew	195,374	204,593	210,908
Navajo	178,014	172,873	160,301
Yiddish	178,945	154,763	157,165
Laotian	149,303	158,847	153,062
Thai	120,464	150,885	151,061
Hungarian	117,973	90,453	82,739
All Others	2,960,522	4,390,894	4,853,037
Total	46,951,595	59,542,596	61,748,740

Source: Data are from [American FactFinder](#) for the ACS and the 2000 Census.

Table 3. Number and Share of Population Speaking a Language other than English at Home by State, 2000, 2010, 2013

State	Language Other than English at Home, 2000	Percent of State Population in 2000	Language Other than English at Home, 2010	Percent of State Population in 2010	Language Other than English at Home, 2013	Percent of State Population in 2013	Numerical Growth 2000 to 2013	Percentage Growth 2000 to 2013
California	12,401,756	39.5%	15,232,350	43.7%	15,700,957	43.8%	3,299,201	27%
Texas	6,010,753	31.2%	8,119,597	34.8%	8,517,040	34.7%	2,506,287	42%
New York	4,962,921	28.0%	5,464,398	30.0%	5,569,940	30.1%	607,019	12%
Florida	3,473,864	23.1%	4,868,267	27.4%	5,066,966	27.4%	1,593,102	46%
Illinois	2,220,719	19.2%	2,644,145	22.0%	2,738,740	22.7%	518,021	23%
New Jersey	2,001,690	25.5%	2,452,031	29.7%	2,546,289	30.4%	544,599	27%
Arizona	1,229,237	25.9%	1,592,675	26.7%	1,660,866	26.8%	431,629	35%
Massachusetts	1,115,570	18.7%	1,341,035	21.7%	1,416,467	22.4%	300,897	27%
Pennsylvania	972,484	8.4%	1,211,107	10.1%	1,273,070	10.6%	300,586	31%
Georgia	751,438	9.9%	1,181,999	13.1%	1,266,835	13.6%	515,397	69%
Washington	770,886	14.0%	1,154,249	18.3%	1,235,928	18.9%	465,042	60%
Virginia	735,191	11.1%	1,112,699	14.8%	1,152,286	14.9%	417,095	57%
North Carolina	603,517	8.0%	970,435	10.9%	1,020,903	11.0%	417,386	69%
Maryland	622,714	12.6%	896,006	16.5%	944,204	17.0%	321,490	52%
Michigan	781,381	8.4%	798,760	8.6%	837,977	9.0%	56,596	7%
Colorado	604,019	15.1%	805,147	17.1%	825,754	16.7%	221,735	37%
Nevada	427,972	23.1%	718,991	28.6%	792,039	30.3%	364,067	85%
Connecticut	583,913	18.3%	717,780	21.3%	733,569	21.5%	149,656	26%
Ohio	648,493	6.1%	719,544	6.7%	720,393	6.6%	71,900	11%
New Mexico	616,964	36.5%	701,672	36.5%	701,604	36.0%	84,640	14%
Oregon	388,669	12.1%	517,515	14.4%	550,545	14.9%	161,876	42%
Minnesota	389,988	8.5%	521,350	10.5%	536,205	10.6%	146,217	37%
Indiana	362,082	6.4%	487,206	8.0%	501,627	8.2%	139,545	39%
Wisconsin	368,712	7.3%	445,521	8.3%	468,051	8.7%	99,339	27%
Tennessee	256,516	4.8%	382,245	6.4%	394,472	6.5%	137,956	54%
Utah	253,249	12.5%	357,694	14.2%	372,862	14.1%	119,613	47%
Louisiana	382,364	9.2%	376,677	8.9%	357,710	8.3%	-24,654	-6%
Oklahoma	238,532	7.4%	319,555	9.1%	353,391	9.8%	114,859	48%
Missouri	264,281	5.1%	341,861	6.1%	330,768	5.8%	66,487	25%
Hawaii	302,125	26.6%	330,593	25.9%	329,817	25.1%	27,692	9%
South Carolina	196,429	5.2%	294,918	6.8%	308,396	6.9%	111,967	57%
Kansas	218,655	8.7%	291,616	11.0%	292,437	10.9%	73,782	34%
Alabama	162,483	3.9%	230,660	5.2%	231,706	5.1%	69,223	43%
Rhode Island	196,624	20.0%	208,445	20.9%	212,512	21.3%	15,888	8%
Iowa	160,022	5.8%	210,430	7.4%	209,742	7.2%	49,720	31%
Kentucky	148,473	3.9%	195,027	4.8%	205,955	5.0%	57,482	39%
Arkansas	123,755	5.0%	187,658	6.9%	190,231	6.9%	66,476	54%
Nebraska	125,654	7.9%	175,849	10.4%	183,366	10.5%	57,712	46%
Idaho	111,879	9.3%	152,439	10.5%	163,922	10.9%	52,043	47%
D.C.	90,417	16.8%	83,073	14.5%	108,360	17.9%	17,943	20%
Alaska	82,758	14.3%	109,244	16.5%	105,402	15.5%	22,644	27%
Delaware	69,533	9.5%	101,561	12.0%	105,357	12.1%	35,824	52%
New Hampshire	96,088	8.3%	97,135	7.8%	105,184	8.4%	9,096	9%
Mississippi	95,522	3.6%	100,380	3.6%	102,838	3.7%	7,316	8%
Maine	93,966	7.8%	84,052	6.7%	79,173	6.3%	-14,793	-16%
South Dakota	45,575	6.5%	56,695	7.5%	50,745	6.5%	5,170	11%
West Virginia	45,895	2.7%	38,961	2.2%	39,742	2.3%	-6,153	-13%
North Dakota	37,976	6.3%	31,927	5.1%	36,158	5.3%	-1,818	-5%
Montana	44,331	5.2%	43,109	4.6%	35,705	3.7%	-8,626	-19%
Wyoming	29,485	6.4%	33,308	6.4%	34,480	6.3%	4,995	17%
Vermont	34,075	5.9%	33,005	5.6%	30,054	5.0%	-4,021	-12%
Total	46,951,595	17.9%	59,542,596	20.6%	61,748,740	20.8%	14,797,145	32%

Source: Data are from [American FactFinder](#) for the ACS and the 2000 Census.

**Table 4. School-Age (5-17)
Pop. Speaking a Language
other than English at
Home by State, 2013**

State	Number	Percent
California	2,976,958	44.6%
Texas	1,790,182	35.0%
Nevada	161,360	33.3%
New Mexico	115,536	31.3%
New York	909,563	29.6%
Arizona	347,811	29.3%
New Jersey	418,826	28.1%
Florida	809,118	27.4%
Illinois	545,012	24.5%
Rhode Island	37,140	23.4%
Washington	256,422	22.2%
Massachusetts	224,853	21.9%
Oregon	134,065	21.2%
Colorado	181,339	20.0%
Connecticut	118,433	19.9%
Hawaii	42,875	19.8%
D.C.	13,627	19.3%
Maryland	163,494	16.7%
Georgia	281,110	15.3%
North Carolina	242,427	14.5%
Virginia	194,573	14.4%
Nebraska	47,464	14.2%
Delaware	20,011	13.6%
Kansas	70,109	13.5%
Alaska	17,860	13.4%
Utah	85,848	13.3%
Minnesota	124,629	13.3%
Idaho	39,813	12.6%
Oklahoma	80,087	11.7%
Wisconsin	112,711	11.7%
Pennsylvania	231,574	11.6%
Michigan	168,738	10.1%
Indiana	112,278	9.7%
Arkansas	47,793	9.2%
Iowa	48,375	9.1%
Tennessee	86,331	7.9%
South Carolina	61,603	7.8%
New Hampshire	14,928	7.3%
Ohio	135,856	6.9%
Missouri	67,305	6.6%
Kentucky	44,227	6.0%
Alabama	48,329	5.9%
Louisiana	47,190	5.8%
South Dakota	8,352	5.6%
Maine	9,186	4.7%
Vermont	3,718	4.0%
Mississippi	21,097	3.9%
West Virginia	6,728	2.4%
Total	11,742,044	21.8%

Source: Data are from [American Fact-Finder](#). Figures are not available for Montana, North Dakota or Wyoming..

End Notes

¹ Of the native-born who speak a language other than English at home, 9.9 million (36 percent) are 17 and under; the remaining 64 percent were born in the United States and are adults who speak a language other than English at home.

² Detailed information on the survey methodology, questions, and other information on the American Community Survey 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 the most recent iteration of the unauthorized immigrant population, [“Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2012”](#).