Native North American Languages Spoken at Home in the United States and Puerto Rico: 2006–2010

American Community Survey Briefs

INTRODUCTION

This report presents data on the frequency and percentage of the U.S. population aged 5 and over who spoke a Native North American language at home.1 The data are based on 5-year estimates from the 2006–2010 American Community Survey (ACS) and the 2006–2010 Puerto Rico Community Survey. For the first time ever, this aggregation of ACS data over a 5-year period allows us to study small segments of the population, such as speakers of Native North American languages.

These data come from a multipart question addressing language ability. The first part of the question asks "Does this person speak a language other than English at home?" Respondents who answer "Yes" are then asked to write in the name of that language. Data on language ability is used to meet the communication needs of hospitals, schools, and other agencies that serve non-English speakers. In addition, language use data are used for bilingual ballot provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Respondents are also asked to report the one or more race groups they consider themselves to be. Part of this report focuses on people who identify themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native alone or in combination with other races.

What Is the American Community Survey?

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely demographic, social, economic, and housing data for the nation, states, congressional districts, counties, places, and other localities every year. It has an annual sample size of about 3 million addresses across the United States and Puerto Rico and includes both housing units and group quarters (e.g., nursing facilities and prisons). The ACS is conducted in every county throughout the nation, and every municipio in Puerto Rico, where it is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey. Beginning in 2006, ACS data for 2005 were released for geographic areas with populations of 65,000 and greater. For information on the ACS sample design and other topics, visit <www.census.gov/acs/www>.

NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN LANGUAGES SPOKEN

The ACS codes 381 distinct non-English languages, and 169 of these are Native North American languages. Although Native North American languages make up most of the languages coded, the speakers of these languages number less than half a million. The size of the Native North American language speaking population is dwarfed by the 60 million people speaking a different non-English language and the 227 million people who speak English only.

1 For the purposes of this brief, "Native North American languages" does not include languages native to Hawaii, Central America, or South America. For more information on uses of these and other languages in the United States, go to <www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/index.html>.
Table 1.
Most Common Native North American Languages and Residence in American Indian or Alaska Native Areas for the Population 5 Years and Over

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language spoken</th>
<th>Speakers of Native North American languages</th>
<th>Residence in American Indian or Alaska Native area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>Margin of error (±)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Native North American language speakers . . .</td>
<td>372,095</td>
<td>4,897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navajo . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>169,471</td>
<td>3,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yupik . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>18,950</td>
<td>687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dakota . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>18,616</td>
<td>1,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apache . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>13,063</td>
<td>928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keres . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>12,945</td>
<td>932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>11,610</td>
<td>967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choctaw . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>10,343</td>
<td>870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zuni . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>9,686</td>
<td>1,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ojibwa . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>8,371</td>
<td>622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pima . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>7,270</td>
<td>726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inupik . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>7,203</td>
<td>517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopi . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>6,634</td>
<td>967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tewa . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>5,176</td>
<td>569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskogee . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>5,064</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crow . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>3,705</td>
<td>511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoshoni . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>2,211</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheyenne . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>2,156</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eskimo . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>2,076</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiwa . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>2,009</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian language (not specified) . . . . . . .</td>
<td>8,298</td>
<td>696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Native North American language . . . . . . . .</td>
<td>47,238</td>
<td>1,713</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimates, the less reliable the estimate. When added to and subtracted from the estimate, the margin of error forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

2 For the purposes of this brief, American Indian or Alaska Native areas do not include native Hawaiian homelands.


Table 2.
Language Spoken by Age for the Population 5 Years and Over Living in an American Indian or Alaska Native Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Language spoken at home</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Native North American language</td>
<td>English only</td>
<td>Other language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>Margin of error (±)</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>Margin of error (±)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ages . . . . . . .</td>
<td>4,397,906</td>
<td>8,638</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 17 years . . . . . .</td>
<td>911,252</td>
<td>3,251</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 64 years . . . . . .</td>
<td>2,880,509</td>
<td>6,646</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and over . . . . . .</td>
<td>606,145</td>
<td>2,157</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 For the purposes of this brief, American Indian or Alaska Native areas do not include native Hawaiian homelands.

2 Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimates, the less reliable the estimate. When added to and subtracted from the estimate, the margin of error forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

Table 3.
Language Spoken by American Indian or Alaska Native Race Types and Age for the Population 5 Years and Over

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age and race</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Language spoken at home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>Margin of error1 (±)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native North American language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ages</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,290,257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIN alone</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,100,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIN in combination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIN alone</td>
<td></td>
<td>540,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIN in combination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 64 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIN alone</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,574,932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIN in combination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIN alone</td>
<td></td>
<td>174,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIN in combination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

– Represents or rounds to zero.

1 Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimates, the less reliable the estimate. When added to and subtracted from the estimate, the margin of error forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

2 AIAN represents American Indian or Alaska Native.


Table 1 shows the number of people aged 5 and over who spoke a Native North American language for the 20 most frequently spoken of these languages in the United States and Puerto Rico. The table also separates out Native North American language speakers that reside in an American Indian or Alaska Native area (AIANA).\(^2\) Native North American language speakers number 372,000. Most of these speakers (237,000) live in an AIANA.

People spoke Navajo more often than any other Native North American language. Over 169,000 people spoke this language nationally. Most of these Navajo speakers (112,000) lived in an AIANA. Navajo speakers numbered nearly 9 times larger than the second and third most commonly spoken languages of Yupik and Dakota, with both languages having approximately 19,000 speakers. While 84.5 percent of Yupik speakers lived in an AIANA, 51.5 percent of Dakota speakers did.

Although the majority of Native North American language speakers resided in an AIANA, only a small percentage of the people living in these areas actually spoke a Native North American language. Table 2 shows the percentage of people living in these areas who spoke a Native North American language, English only, or some other language, by age. Of people living in an AIANA, 5.4 percent spoke a Native North American language, and this percentage did not vary greatly across age groups.\(^3\) Spanish was the dominant language among the population speaking a non-English and non-Native North American language. In fact, Spanish speakers made up 5 percent of the population living in an AIANA, making them almost as common as speakers of Native North American languages.

Among those who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native alone, older people reported speaking a Native North American language more often than younger people (Table 3). Over 1 in 5 of these people aged 65 and over spoke such a language, while about 1 in 10 people aged 5 to 17 did so. Among those who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native in combination, people aged 65 and over were slightly less likely than other people to speak a Native North American language.

\(^2\) “American Indian or Alaska Native area” is a Census Bureau term referring to these entity types: federally recognized American Indian reservations and off-reservation trust land areas, the tribal subdivisions that can divide these entities, state-recognized American Indian reservations, Alaska Native regional corporations, Hawaiian homelands, Alaska Native village statistical areas, Oklahoma tribal statistical areas, tribal designated statistical areas, and state designated tribal statistical areas. For the purposes of this brief, American Indian or Alaska Native areas do not include native Hawaiian homelands.

\(^3\) The percentage of people aged 5 to 17 speaking a Native North American language did not differ significantly from the percent-age of people aged 65 and over.
Figure 1.
Number of Speakers of Native North American Languages, by County: 2006–2010

although the two younger age
groups were not significantly
different from each other.

**NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN
LANGUAGE USE BY COUNTY**

Figure 1 displays the number of
Native North American language
speakers by county. Speakers of
Native North American languages
concentrated most heavily in the
states of Alaska, Arizona, and
New Mexico. Sixty-five percent of
Native North American language
speakers lived in these three
states. Just nine counties within
these states contained half of the
nation’s Native North American
language speakers.\(^4\) Apache County
in Arizona had 37,000 speak-
ers of a Native North American
language, making it the highest
in the nation. McKinley County,
New Mexico, had the second most
speakers, 33,000. Together, about
20 percent of all Native North
American language speakers in the
nation lived in these two counties.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The Census Bureau Web site pro-
vides more data on language spo-
ken at home in the United States.
Broad categories of languages for
detailed geographies can be found
at the American Factfinder
census.gov](http://factfinder2.
census.gov). Additional tables on
detailed languages, including more
than 100 Native North American
languages, can be found at the
American Community Survey lan-
guage Web site at [www.census.
gov/hhes/socdemo/language/
index.html](http://www.census.
gov/hhes/socdemo/language/
index.html).

\(^4\) These counties were: Bethel Census
Area in Alaska; Apache County, Coconino
County, Maricopa County, and Navajo
County in Arizona; and Bernalillo County,
McKinley County, San Juan County, and
Sandoval County in New Mexico.

**SOURCE AND ACCURACY**

Data presented in this report are
based on people and households
that responded to the ACS between
2006 to 2010. The resulting esti-
mates are representative of the
civilian noninstitutionalized popula-
tion. All comparisons presented in
this report have taken sampling
error into account and are signifi-
cant at the 90 percent confidence
level unless otherwise noted. Due
to rounding, some details may not
sum to totals. For information on
sampling and estimation methods,
confidentiality protection, and
sampling and nonsampling errors,
please see the “ACS Accuracy of the
Data” document located at
[www.census.gov/acs
/www/Downloads/data
_documentation/Accuracy
/MultiyearACSAccuracyofData2010.
pdf](http://www.census.gov/acs
/www/Downloads/data
_documentation/Accuracy
/MultiyearACSAccuracyofData2010.
pdf).