

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

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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.

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>.

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.

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Table 1.

Most Common Native North American Languages and Residence in American Indian or Alaska Native Areas for the Population 5 Years and Over

Language spoken	Speakers of Native North American languages			
	Estimate	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Residence in American Indian or Alaska Native area ²	
			Estimate	Margin of error ¹ (±)
All Native North American language speakers . . .	372,095	4,897	237,391	3,465
Navajo	169,471	3,571	112,482	2,628
Yupik	18,950	687	16,019	502
Dakota	18,616	1,201	9,592	795
Apache	13,063	928	10,664	785
Keres	12,945	932	9,979	685
Cherokee	11,610	967	4,685	541
Choctaw	10,343	870	6,546	747
Zuni	9,686	1,280	8,647	1,280
Ojibwa	8,371	622	3,298	390
Pima	7,270	726	5,363	648
Inupik	7,203	517	5,707	450
Hopi	6,634	967	4,570	676
Tewa	5,176	569	3,649	402
Muskogee	5,064	598	3,054	389
Crow	3,705	511	2,816	434
Shoshoni	2,211	385	1,319	267
Cheyenne	2,156	427	1,167	179
Eskimo	2,076	262	1,492	216
Tiwa	2,009	474	1,466	323
American Indian language (not specified)	8,298	696	2,025	346
Other Native North American language	47,238	1,713	22,851	996

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.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2010 American Community Survey, 2006–2010 Puerto Rico Community Survey.

Table 2.

Language Spoken by Age for the Population 5 Years and Over Living in an American Indian or Alaska Native Area¹

Age	Total		Language spoken at home					
			Native North American language		English only		Other language	
	Estimate	Margin of error ² (±)	Percent	Margin of error ² (±)	Percent	Margin of error ² (±)	Percent	Margin of error ² (±)
All ages	4,397,906	8,638	5.4	0.1	87.0	0.1	7.6	0.1
5 to 17 years	911,252	3,251	5.1	0.2	87.5	0.2	7.5	0.2
18 to 64 years	2,880,509	6,646	5.6	0.1	86.2	0.1	8.2	0.1
65 years and over	606,145	2,157	5.1	0.1	90.0	0.2	4.9	0.2

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.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2010 American Community Survey, 2006–2010 Puerto Rico Community Survey.

Table 3.

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

Age and race	Total		Language spoken at home					
			Native North American language		English only		Other language	
	Estimate	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Percent	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Percent	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Percent	Margin of error ¹ (±)
All ages								
AIAN alone ²	2,290,257	13,186	14.8	0.2	71.9	0.3	13.3	0.3
AIAN in combination	2,100,625	12,508	0.7	–	88.0	0.2	11.4	0.2
5 to 17 years								
AIAN alone	540,973	5,457	11.0	0.4	78.3	0.6	10.7	0.5
AIAN in combination	542,913	5,998	0.7	0.1	89.8	0.4	9.5	0.4
18 to 64 years								
AIAN alone	1,574,932	9,747	15.2	0.2	70.3	0.3	14.4	0.3
AIAN in combination	1,381,959	9,096	0.7	0.1	86.9	0.2	12.4	0.2
65 years and over								
AIAN alone	174,352	2,153	22.3	0.5	66.4	0.6	11.3	0.5
AIAN in combination	175,753	2,099	0.4	0.1	90.5	0.5	9.2	0.5

– 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.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2010 American Community Survey, 2006–2010 Puerto Rico Community Survey.

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

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.

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.

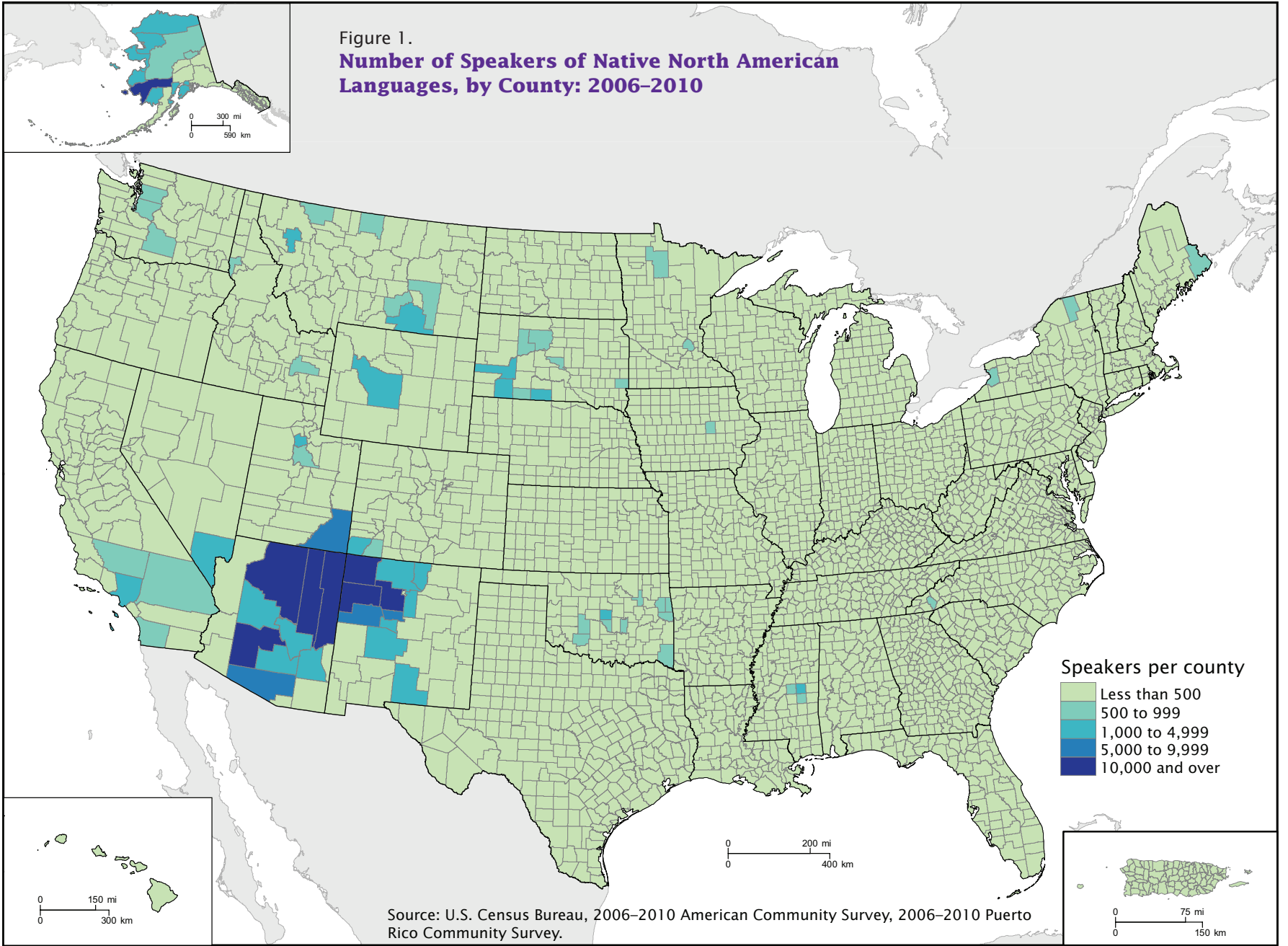
Although the majority of Native North American language speakers resided in an AIANA, only a small percentage of the people living in these areas actually spoke a Native North American language. Table 2 shows the percentage of people living in these areas who spoke a Native North American language, English 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,

³ The percentage of people aged 5 to 17 speaking a Native North American language did not differ significantly from the percentage 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 speakers of a Native North American language, making it the highest

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.

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 provides more data on language spoken at home in the United States. Broad categories of languages for detailed geographies can be found at the American Factfinder Web site <<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 language Web site at <www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/index.html>.

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 estimates are representative of the civilian noninstitutionalized population. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant 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>.