

State of American Indian/Alaska Native Children and Families, Part 1:



NICWA

National Indian Child Welfare Association
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How Is the American Indian/Alaska Native Child Population Defined?

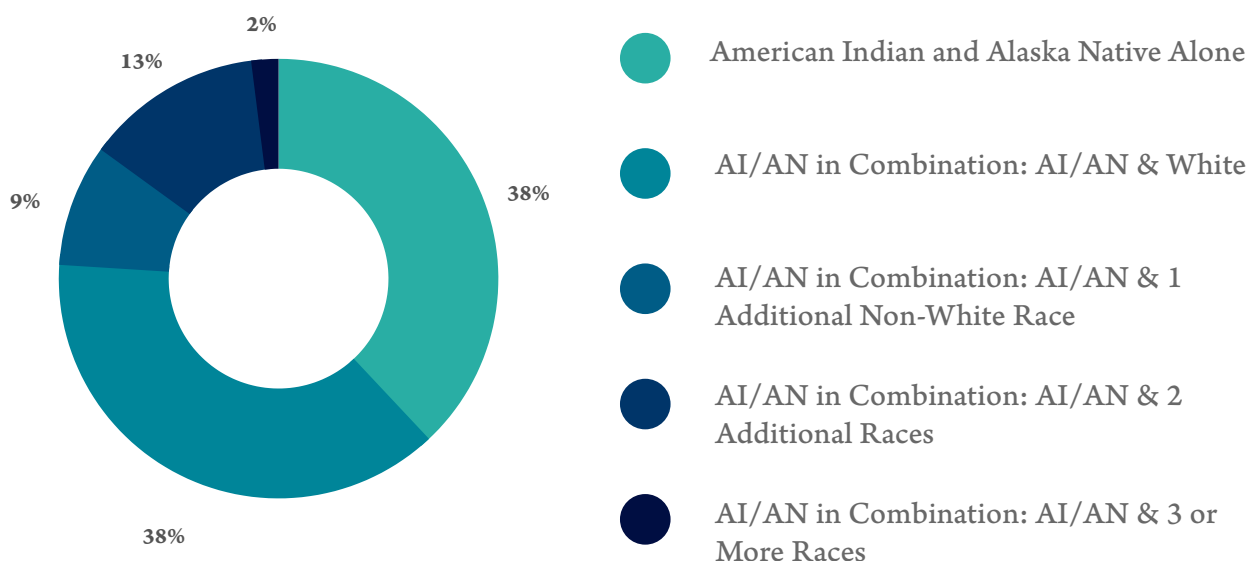
Creating any data profile about the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children is complicated by the complexity of defining the AI/AN child population. American Indians and Alaska Natives occupy a unique political status in the U.S. due to the establishment of treaties with Indigenous groups (Akee & Simeonova, 2017). A myriad of policies define AI/AN as a political identity; for example, like other governments, each AI/AN tribe sets its own criteria for determining citizenship, while the federal government applies an array of its own legal definitions (set by Congress, courts, and other political entities) in statute and policy, independent of racial or ethnic classification (Garrouette, 2001). In addition, individuals may also self-identify and maintain community membership based on racial or ethnic characteristics or affinity, regardless of their legal status as an AI/AN citizen. Data available about AI/AN children may be based on any number of definitional criteria.

U.S. Census Bureau American Indian and Alaska Native Child Population Statistics

According to early releases of 2020 decennial census data, American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children make up about 3.7% of the child population of the United States. Children identified as racially “American Indian Alone” constitute about 1.4% out of that 3.7%. More than half of the children classified in any way as AI/AN in 2020 census data were entered as biracial (47%) or multiracial (16%). The graph in Figure 1 shows how AI/AN children were categorized in 2020 census results (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b).

The high percentage of biracial and multiracial AI/AN children in the U.S. population has implications for racial classification and recording in data systems, especially

Figure 1
AI/AN Child Racial Classification 2020



Note: Adapted from Table P1: Race, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a, and Table P3: Race for the population 18 years and over, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b.

those that report data for “multiracial” as a distinct category. In addition, disproportionality calculations, which depend on comparing the number of people meeting specific criteria (e.g., children in foster care) to their number in the overall population, will differ depending on how population is defined.

Deciding which figure (Alone or Any AI/AN) to use may vary by context. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the AI/AN in Combination [with another race] population overall increased by 160% from 2010 to 2020, while the AI/AN Alone population grew by 27.1%. In addition, the White and AI/AN Combination group was the second largest multiracial combination chosen in the 2020 census (Jones et al., 2021). Understanding what this “multiracial” status means with regard to American Indian identity is difficult. A Pew Research Center survey including 1,555 people who identified as multiracial found that while 68% chose American Indian as one of their racial classifications,

only 19% indicated they had a lot of contact with their AI/AN relatives (Cohn, 2015).

In absolute numbers, California has the largest population of AI/AN children (with 155,422 AI/AN Alone and 364,826 Alone or in Combination), followed by Oklahoma (with 101,584 Alone and 210,639 Alone or in Combination). Texas and Arizona also have large populations of both Alone and Alone and in Combination categories. As a proportion of a state’s child population, AI/AN children (Alone or Alone and in Combination) in the 16 states in the table below exceed the national averages.

Table 1 shows the states with the greatest proportion of AI/AN children in their child population. The following table, Table 2, shows the population of AI/AN children recorded in the 2020 census for each U.S. state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b).

Table 1
States with the Greatest Proportion of AI/AN Children in their Child Population

State	American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Alone or in Combination with any other race(s)	Percent of AI/AN or in Combination Children in Child Population	AI/AN Alone	Percent of AI/AN (Alone) Children in Child Population
Alaska	54,550	30.4%	34,861	19.4%
Arizona	134,330	8.3%	92,908	5.8%
California	364,826	4.2%	155,422	1.8%
Idaho	20,027	4.3%	7,180	1.6%
Minnesota	53,304	4.0%	21,581	1.6%
Montana	34,444	14.7%	23,081	9.9%
Nebraska	19,596	4.0%	8,006	1.6%
Nevada	27,711	4.0%	10,525	1.5%
New Mexico	75,138	15.7%	59,178	12.4%
North Carolina	86,920	3.8%	33,306	1.5%
North Dakota	20,746	11.3%	13,909	7.6%
Oklahoma	210,639	22.2%	101,584	10.7%
Oregon	48,995	5.7%	15,427	1.8%
South Dakota	38,224	17.6%	29,074	13.4%
Washington	89,079	5.3%	32,458	1.9%
Wyoming	9,047	6.7%	4,607	3.4%
Total	2,700,689	3.7%	1,012,109	1.4%

Note: Adapted from Table P1: Race, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a, and Table P3: Race for the population 18 years and over, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b.

Table 2*Population of AI/AN Children Recorded in the 2020 Census for Each U.S. State*

State	American Indian and Alaska Native Alone or in Combination with any other race(s)	Percent of AI/AN Children in Child Population	AI/AN Alone	Percent of AI/AN (Alone) Children in Child Population
Alabama	32,916	3.0%	9,073	0.8%
Alaska	54,550	30.4%	34,861	19.4%
Arizona	134,330	8.3%	92,908	5.8%
Arkansas	30,702	4.4%	7,015	1.0%
California	364,826	4.2%	155,554	1.8%
Colorado	56,563	4.5%	17,554	1.4%
Connecticut	16,213	2.2%	4,111	0.6%
Delaware	5,765	2.8%	1,268	0.6%
District of Columbia	2,413	2.1%	639	0.6%
Florida	90,065	2.1%	21,207	0.5%
Georgia	56,156	2.3%	14,160	0.6%
Hawaii	13,399	4.5%	684	0.2%
Idaho	20,027	4.3%	7,180	1.6%
Illinois	76,047	2.7%	26,044	0.9%
Indiana	37,219	2.3%	6,531	0.4%
Iowa	17,241	2.3%	4,133	0.6%
Kansas	33,408	4.7%	7,923	1.1%
Kentucky	22,306	2.2%	2,985	0.3%
Louisiana	28,223	2.6%	8,160	0.8%
Maine	8,697	3.4%	1,865	0.7%
Maryland	35,017	2.6%	7,917	0.6%
Massachusetts	24,104	1.8%	6,009	0.4%
Michigan	67,987	3.1%	14,974	0.7%
Minnesota	53,304	4.0%	21,581	1.6%
Mississippi	14,648	2.1%	5,173	0.8%
Missouri	47,684	3.5%	6,781	0.5%
Montana	34,444	14.7%	23,081	9.9%
Nebraska	19,596	4.0%	8,006	1.6%
Nevada	27,711	4.0%	10,525	1.5%
New Hampshire	6,164	2.4%	572	0.2%
New Jersey	40,220	2.0%	14,012	0.7%
New Mexico	75,138	15.7%	59,178	12.4%
New York	100,684	2.4%	36,258	0.9%
North Carolina	86,920	3.8%	33,306	1.5%
North Dakota	20,746	11.3%	13,909	7.6%

Note: Adapted from *Table P1: Race*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a, and *Table P3: Race for the population 18 years and over*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b.

Table 2 (continued)*Population of AI/AN Children Recorded in the 2020 Census for Each U.S. State*

Ohio	62,811	2.4%	7,162	0.3%
Oklahoma	210,639	22.2%	101,584	10.7%
Oregon	48,995	5.7%	15,427	1.8%
Pennsylvania	52,030	2.0%	7,532	0.3%
Puerto Rico	17,267	3.1%	3,344	0.6%
Rhode Island	6,710	3.2%	1,965	0.9%
South Carolina	28,382	17.6%	29,074	13.4%
South Dakota	38,375	2.5%	6,847	0.4
Tennessee	38,375	2.5%	6,847	0.4%
Texas	209,158	2.9%	71,960	1.0%
Utah	28,460	3.0%	11,661	1.2%
Vermont	4,120	3.5%	423	0.4%
Virginia	48,496	2.6%	9,659	0.5%
Washington	89,079	5.3%	32,458	1.9%
West Virginia	8,642	2.4%	559	0.2%
Wisconsin	44,821	3.5%	17,137	1.3%
Wyoming	9,047	6.7%	4,607	3.4%
Total	2,700,689	3.7%	1,012,109	1.4%

Note: Adapted from *Table P1: Race*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a, and *Table P3: Race for the population 18 years and over*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b.

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