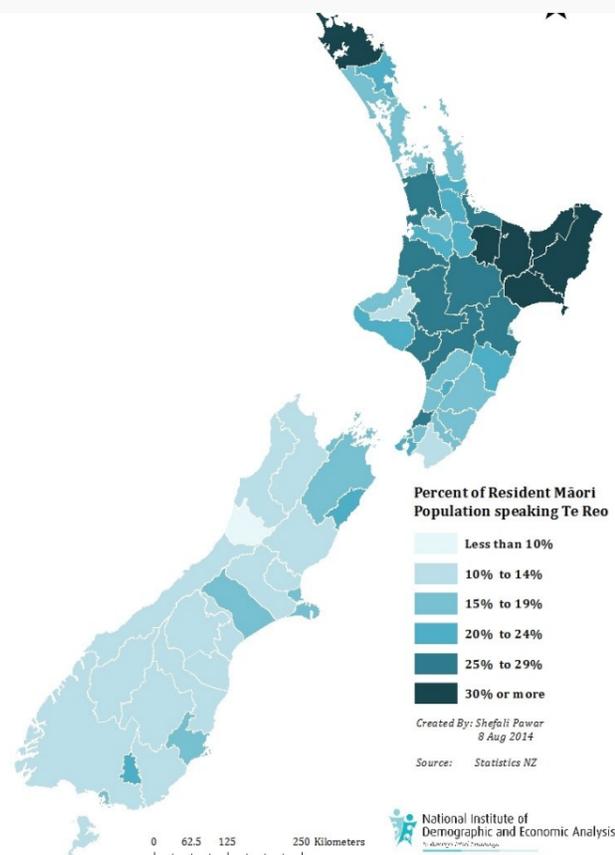


## Spatial variation in te reo

Although strategies to revive te reo are driven largely at the national level, the implementation of te reo revitalisation occurs within the context of community. Because different communities have different characteristics and capabilities—and these have been shaped as much by history as by circumstance—it is important to understand how the health of te reo varies sub-nationally. Figure 4 thus maps the spatial variation in te reo speakers for the country's 67 territorial authorities. The darker the area, the higher the proportion of te reo speakers.

In 2013 the share of te reo speakers was highest in Te Tai Tokerau (Far North), Ikaroa-Rāwhiti (Gisborne, Wairoa), and Waiariki (Ōpōtiki, Whakatāne, Kawerau). These are also areas with a high Māori population share. In Ōpōtiki district for example, 38.3 per cent of Māori reported being able to hold a daily conversation in te reo; 54 per cent of the population also identified as Māori. By contrast, most of the TAs in Te Wai Pounamu (South Island) had a very low relative share of te reo speakers (less than 15%); the TA with the highest share of te reo speakers was Kaikoura district at around 20 per cent. That said, the highest proportionate growth in te reo speakers since 1996 has been in Te Waipounamu, particularly in Nelson (46%), Canterbury (15%), Otago (12%) and Tasman (10%). However, because the number of speakers in those areas was relatively small to start with, this has not translated into a large share of te reo speakers.

Figure 4: Per cent of Māori able to hold a daily conversation in te reo, by Territorial Authority, 2013



## TE AO HURIHURI: TE REO MĀORI IN THE CENSUS

Tahu Kukutai, Moana Rarere, and Shefali Pawar

*"Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori" (Tā Hēmi Henare)*  
*Te reo Māori is the life force of mana Māori*

This brief provides an overview of the Māori language, te reo Māori, using data from the New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings. Te reo is a crucial component of collective Māori identity and is part of what makes Māori as a people, and Aotearoa New Zealand as a country, unique. Te reo is protected under the Treaty of Waitangi and, since 1987, has been recognised as an official language (the others being English and New Zealand sign language). Once the mother tongue of all Māori, the use of te reo diminished rapidly in the 20th century as cultural assimilation policies actively discouraged Māori from speaking te reo, most notably in schools. In 1913 about 90 per cent of all Māori children could speak te reo. By 1923 it had declined to 80 per cent, then to 55 per cent in 1950, 26 per cent in 1953-58 and 5 per cent in 1975 (Waitangi Tribunal 2011, p. 394). Concerned about the dire state of te reo, Māori leaders and communities pursued a range of measures to revitalise the language including kohanga reo pre-schools, total immersion kura kaupapa schools, and broadcasting in te reo.

In the last 20 years, considerable effort has gone into monitoring the health of te reo. Since 1996 every census has included a question about the language(s) in which individuals can converse about a lot of everyday things. The strength of the census question is that it provides a consistent time series of the number and proportion of te reo speakers across the entire Māori population. The drawback is that it lacks a definition about what constitutes an everyday conversation in te reo. Surveys such as *Te Kupenga* and *Health of the Māori Language* provide richer insights into the quality of te reo but are also subject to sampling errors and inconsistencies in methodology (Bauer 2008; Statistics NZ 2014). Here we focus solely on the census but note that other sources may yield different results.

Table 1: Language profile, Māori ethnic group, 1996-2013

Language Indicator	1996	2001	2006	2013
Māori	129,045	130,482	131,406	125,154
Other languages (not Māori)	364,635	371,055	407,484	450,285
No language	23,043	17,193	15,462	12,828
Not elsewhere included (NEI)	6,648	7,551	10,974	10,335
Total usual resident Māori	523,371	526,281	565,329	598,602
% Speaking te reo (ex. NEI & none)	<b>26.1</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>24.4</b>	<b>21.7</b>

Source: NZ Census of Population & Dwellings

Table 1 shows that the number of Māori who reported that they could hold an everyday conversation in te reo increased between 1996 and 2006, then dropped significantly in 2013. Indeed, the number of te reo speakers reported in the 2013 census was even lower than in 1996. In the intervening period, however, the Māori population increased by 14 per cent (from 523,371 to 598,602). The decline in te reo speakers combined with the increase in the overall number of Māori resulted in a much lower proportion of te reo speakers — 21.7 per cent in 2013 compared to 26.1 per cent in 1996. Our rates exclude those too young to speak and those that were not elsewhere included (e.g., 'don't know', not stated, unidentifiable). If these responses were included, the proportion of te reo speakers would be lower still.

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### Summary

- The share of Māori able to hold a daily conversation in te reo has declined every census period since the question was introduced in 1996. The 2013 census was the first in which the overall number of te reo speakers also declined, from 131,406 in 2006 to 125,154 in 2013.
- Between 1996 and 2013 the percentage of te reo speakers declined in every five-year age group, except at 25-34 years. The decline was especially apparent at ages 65 years and older.
- While the share of te reo speakers in most age groups has declined, the number of te reo speakers at the middle and older ages has increased. This reflects numerical ageing with a rapid increase in the number of older Māori.
- In 2013 Māori girls and women were more likely to speak te reo than Māori boys and men at every age group under 40-44 years,
- Migration and mortality have complex effects on the loss of te reo speakers within birth cohorts, with the impact of migration more apparent at the younger ages and mortality at the older ages.
- Being able to speak te reo varies by Territorial Authority. The share of te reo speakers is highest in TAs with a high Māori population share.

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## Changes in the percentage of te reo speakers at different ages

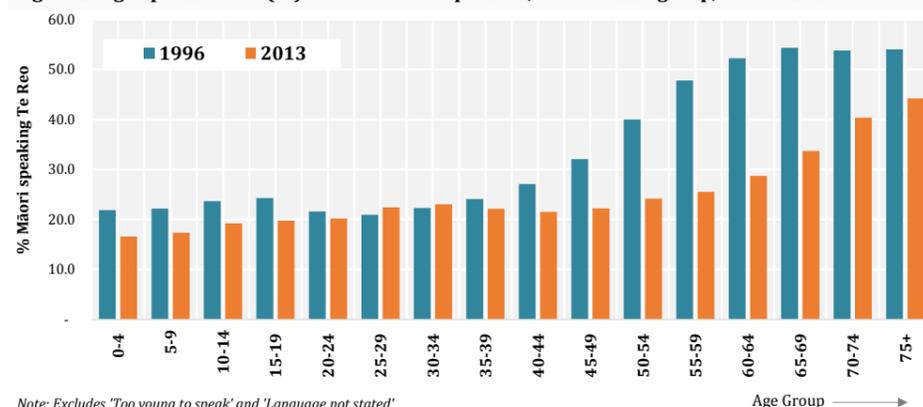
The ability to speak te reo is influenced by a range of factors including whānau capability, ease of access, and attitudes towards the value and use of te reo. These factors shift over time and across individual lifecycles, producing complex variations in te reo speaker rates by age and cohort. Figure 1 shows age-specific te reo rates in 1996 and 2013. In both years the likelihood of speaking te reo generally increased with age, although there were some exceptions. In 1996, for example, the share of te reo speakers was higher amongst tamariki and taiohi (0-19 years) than among adults aged 20-39 years.

The key point to note from Figure 1 is that the percentage of te reo speakers declined in every five-year age group, except at ages 25-34 years. The decline was most rapid at younger and older ages. In 1996, more than 21 per cent of Māori pre-schoolers were able to hold a daily conversation in te reo; by 2013 this had dropped to around 16 per cent. Early childhood education enrolment data from the Ministry of Education shows that the number and

proportion of Māori pre-schoolers enrolled in kōhanga reo also decreased from the early 2000s onwards (Ministry of Education 2015).

The decline in the share of te reo speakers is even more apparent among kaumātua. In 1996 more than half of all Māori aged 65-69 years could speak te reo but by 2013 it had dropped to one third. As older generations of te reo speakers have passed away, they have been succeeded by cohorts with much lower levels of te reo. This shift reflects the different experiences of different generations. Māori born in the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s encountered very strong pressures to assimilate. Rapid urbanisation made it difficult to sustain ties to hapū and iwi, and Māori identity and culture were heavily stigmatised. The opportunities to learn te reo outside of the home were also very limited before the mid-1980s. The low percentage of te reo speakers among middle-aged Māori (35-49 years in 2013) suggests that the te reo profile of older Māori will continue to decline for some decades yet.

Figure 1: Age-specific rates (%) of te reo Māori speakers, Māori ethnic group, 1996 & 2013



Note: Excludes 'Too young to speak' and 'Language not stated'

## Changes in the number of te reo speakers at different ages

Table 2: Number of te reo speakers, Māori ethnic group, 1996 and 2013

Age Group	Number of Māori speaking te reo		Inter-censal change	
	1996	2013	Number	%
0-4	10,494	9,396	-1,098	-10.5
5-9	14,712	11,400	-3,312	-22.5
10-14	13,374	12,108	-1,266	-9.5
15-19	12,417	11,385	-1,032	-8.3
20-24	10,092	9,627	-465	-4.6
25-29	8,910	8,184	-726	-8.1
30-34	9,252	7,803	-1,449	-15.7
35-39	8,655	7,800	-855	-9.9
40-44	7,500	8,022	+522	+7.0
45-49	7,080	7,632	+552	+7.8
50-54	6,366	7,827	+1,461	+23.0
55-59	6,540	6,297	-243	-3.7
60-64	5,235	5,436	+201	+3.8
65-69	3,864	4,296	+432	+11.2
70-74	2,310	3,642	+1,332	+57.7
75+	2,235	4,293	+2,058	+92.1

Although the share of te reo speakers in most age groups has declined since the census language question was first asked in 1996, it is important to note that the number of te reo speakers at the middle and older ages has increased. This is largely due to the process of 'numerical ageing' - simply put, there are many more older Māori now than in the past (see Jackson 2011). In 1996, for example, there were only 7,215 Māori aged 65-69 years old but in 2013 the number was much higher at 12,957. In terms of te reo speakers at those ages there were 3,864 in 1996, which increased to 4,296 by 2013. The distinction between the relative share and absolute number of te reo speakers is useful. The former provides an important indicator of te reo capability within a group, regardless of changes in size. The latter indicates the potential 'supply' of te reo speakers at particular ages—for example, the number of older te reo speakers who could potentially fulfil speaker roles on marae.

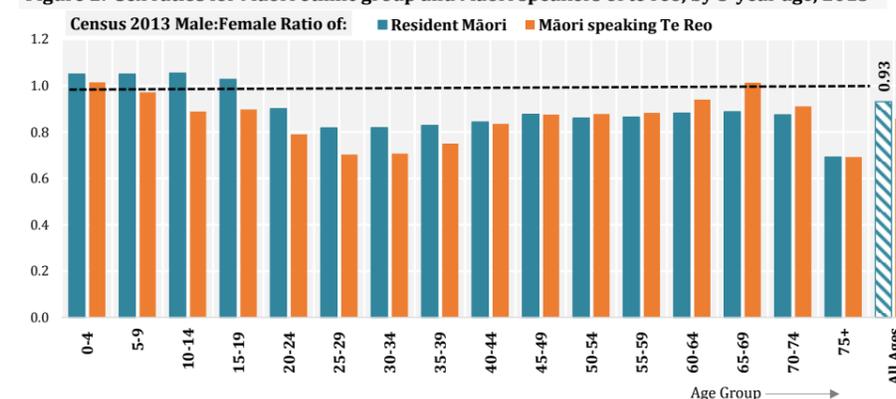


## Wahine Māori nurturing te reo

The prevalence of te reo speakers not only varies by age, but also by sex. Figure 2 compares sex ratios for Māori at each five-year age group, with sex ratios for te reo speakers at the same ages. Ratios below one indicate more females than males. If the sex distribution of te reo speakers mirrored the sex distribution of the Māori population, then both bars would be equal. Instead, we find that at every age group under 40-44 years, the ratio of males to females among te reo speakers is lower than the ratio for Māori generally. To illustrate, in 2013 there were 105 Māori boys for every 100 Māori girls aged 10-14 years. However, among Māori speakers of te reo at those ages there were only 89 boys for every 100 girls. From age 50, the situation reversed with males over-represented among te reo speakers. If we add all ages together we see that Māori females were significantly more likely than Māori males to speak te reo, with a te reo sex ratio of 0.86 compared to an overall Māori sex ratio of 0.93.



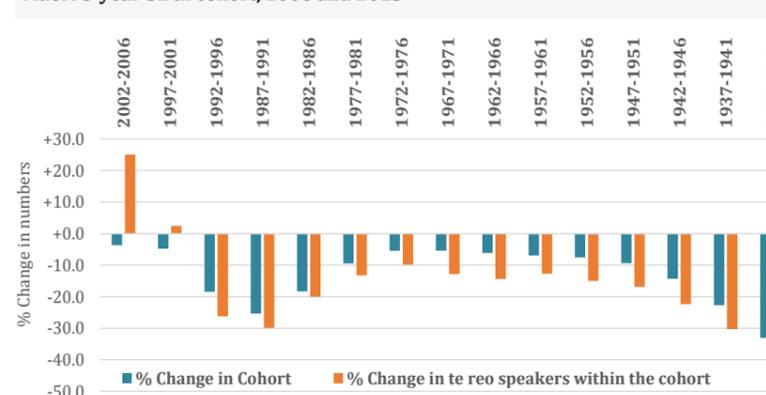
Figure 2: Sex ratios for Māori ethnic group and Māori speakers of te reo, by 5-year age, 2013



## The loss of te reo speakers within cohorts

This section looks at the loss of te reo speakers within birth cohorts. Two major demographic factors can reduce the number of te reo speakers within a birth cohort. One is migration. While it is difficult to measure the impact of migration on te reo, census data show that thousands of te reo speakers have moved to Australia since the 1980s (Hamer 2010). Given the age-specific nature of Māori migration to Australia (Kukutai & Pawar 2012), we would expect the effect of migration on te reo to be greatest at the younger working ages (i.e., under 30 years). The loss of te reo speakers also occurs through mortality and this would be most evident at the older ages. In Figure 3 below the first bar shows the per cent change in each five-year birth cohort between 2006 and 2013; the second bar shows the per cent change only for te reo speakers within each birth cohort. For most birth cohorts the loss of te reo speakers exceeded attrition within the overall cohort. For cohorts born between 1962 and 1996, migration was probably a contributing factor with te reo speakers emigrating at a higher rate than non-te reo speakers. Individual responses to the census reo question may have also changed over time reflecting perceived changes in te reo ability (e.g., reduced use of te reo after leaving school), or a shift from parental reporting to self-completion of the census.

Figure 3: Per cent change in 5-year Māori birth cohort, and te reo speakers within Māori 5-year birth cohort, 2006 and 2013



For older cohorts, there appears to be a differential mortality effect with te reo speakers experiencing higher rates of mortality and thus a higher proportionate loss. The only instances where the number of te reo speakers increased was for cohorts born after 2001. For the cohort born 2001-2006, who were aged 0-4 years in 2006 and 7-11 years in 2013, their number increased by 25 per cent. This is because a significant number of those who were classified as 'too young to speak' in 2006 were subsequently able to have a daily conversation in te reo by the time of the 2013 census.

