Languages of India

How many languages are spoken in India?
The Census of India 2011 names 273 languages. Other sources list up to 780. The difference between counts is explained by the difficulty in defining a language versus a dialect.

What is the national language?
India has no national language, but 22 languages are named in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India. The status of scheduled obligates the government to promote these languages.

This map shows where each of the scheduled languages is spoken as a mother tongue, according to the 2011 census.

What is the official language?
Each state or territory can name its own official languages. The official language of India is Hindi in Devanagari script, but English may also be used for official purposes. This use of English was tentatively planned to end in 1965, but the change was met with resistance from parts of the country that did not speak Hindi natively.

Districts of India
Percent of the population that speaks this language as their mother tongue:

0%
100%
No data

Shajapur is the only district in India with only one mother tongue language: Hindi.

The census defines mother tongue as "the language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person." In the absence of a mother, the main language spoken in the childhood home is listed as the mother tongue.

Kashmiri
Dogri
Punjabi
Hindi
Nepali
Maithili
Bodo
Assamese
Sindhi
Santali
Manipuri
Bengali
Gujarati
Odia
Marathi
Konkani
Telugu
Kannada
Malayalam
Tamil

New Delhi
Delhi
Jaipur
Kanpur
Patna
Ahmedabad
Kolkata
Surat
Nagpur
Mumbai
Pune
Hyderabad
Bangalore
Chennai

Dimapur records 44 mother tongue languages, the most of any district. The language with the largest share is Other, a category that includes any language with fewer than 10,000 speakers.

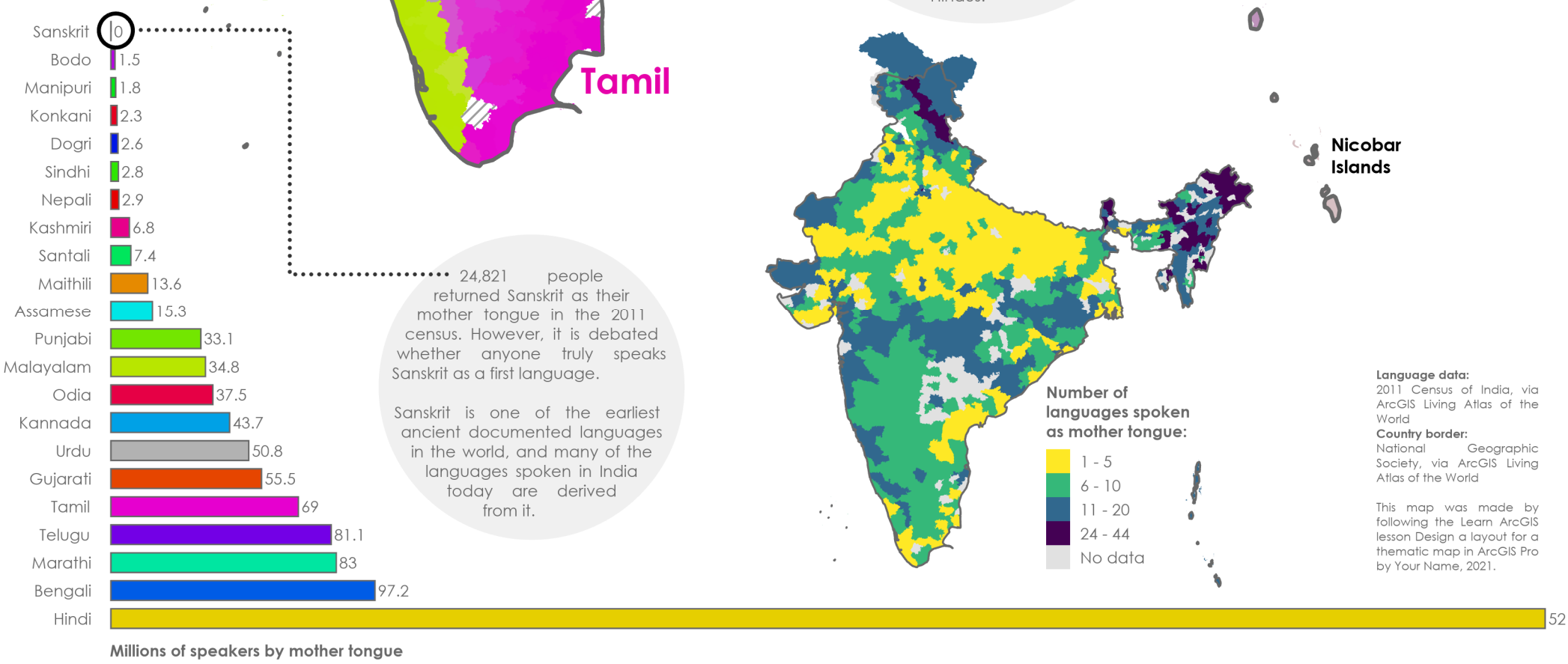
Mountainous terrain and river density are high predictors of language diversity, much as they are for biodiversity. So it is unsurprising that the northeast, dominated by the Himalayas and the Brahmaputra, is India's most linguistically diverse region.

Urdu is spoken by more than 50 million people in India, but is difficult to see on this map, since no district has a dense concentration of this language. Hyderabad is the district reporting the highest rate of Urdu as a mother tongue, at 43.2 percent.

Urdu and Hindi are both standard registers of the Hindustani language and are similar enough that speakers of the two languages can understand one another. Hindi is usually written in the Devanagari script, and Urdu in the Perso-Arabic script. Urdu is mostly spoken by Muslims and Hindi by Hindus.

Andaman Islands

Nicobar Islands



24,821 people returned Sanskrit as their mother tongue in the 2011 census. However, it is debated whether anyone truly speaks Sanskrit as a first language.

Sanskrit is one of the earliest ancient documented languages in the world, and many of the languages spoken in India today are derived from it.

Number of languages spoken as mother tongue:
1 - 5
6 - 10
11 - 20
24 - 44
No data

Language data:
2011 Census of India, via ArcGIS Living Atlas of the World
Country border:
National Geographic Society, via ArcGIS Living Atlas of the World

This map was made by following the Learn ArcGIS lesson Design a layout for a thematic map in ArcGIS Pro by Your Name, 2021.