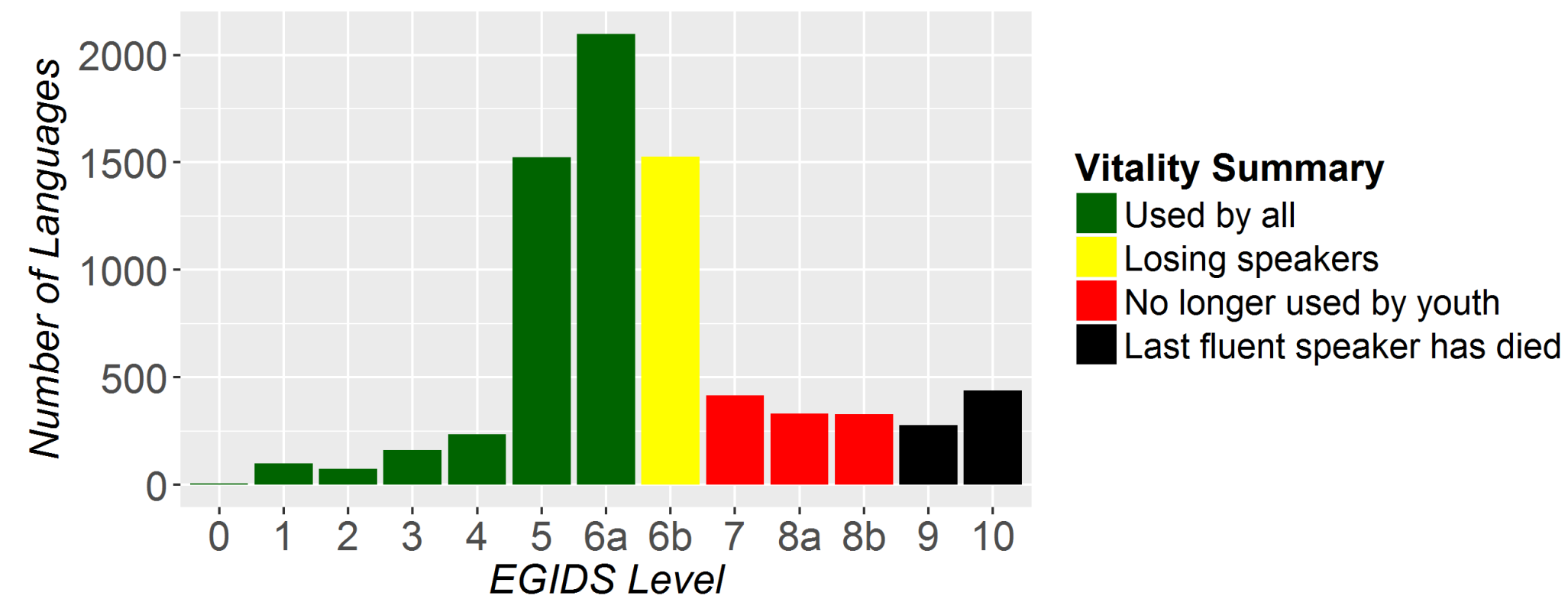


## A Global Dataset on Language Vitality

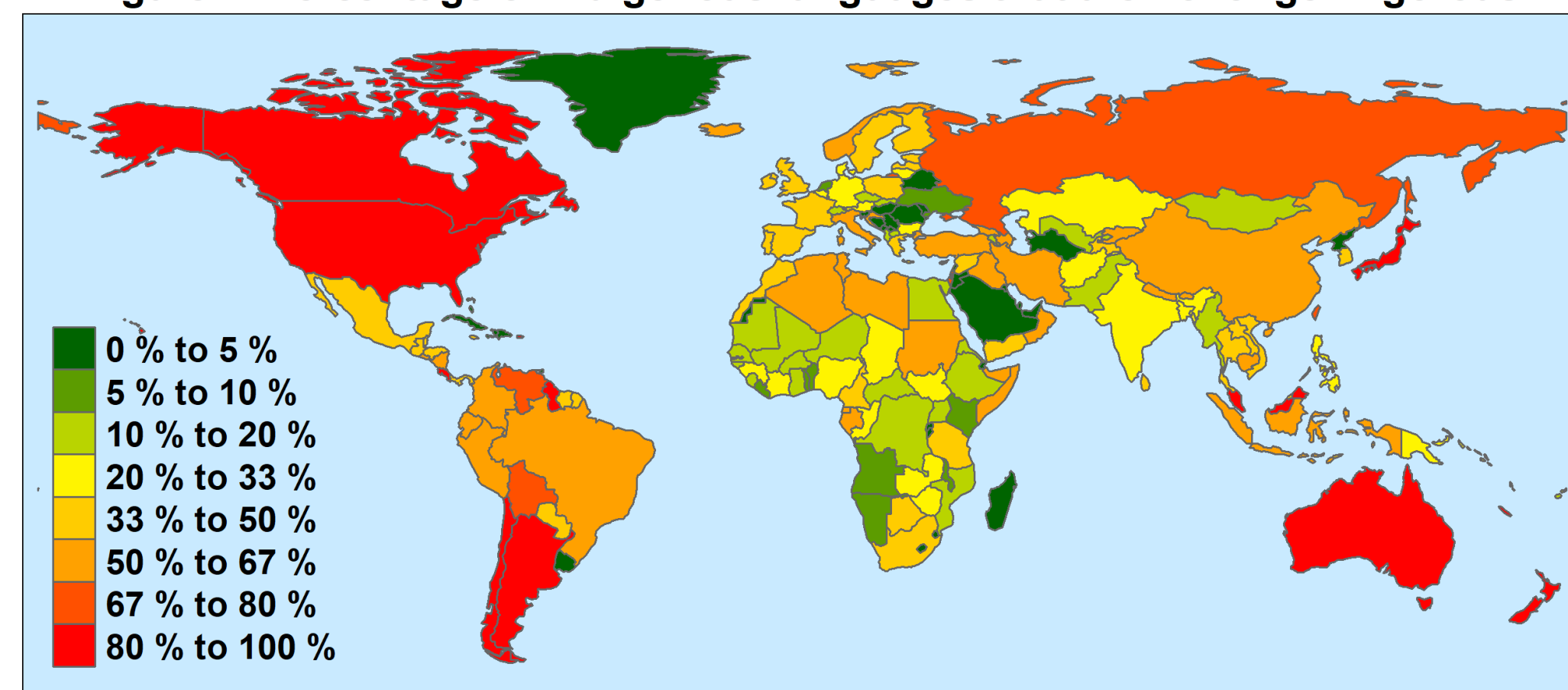
*Ethnologue*<sup>1</sup> provides a global dataset on language vitality as assessed via the Extended GIDS.<sup>2</sup> This study looks at all languages identified in ISO 639-3 that were in use in 1700 ( $n = 7,517$ ). Figure 1 shows their vitality distribution by present-day EGIDS level.

Figure 1: Present-day vitality of languages known to be living in 1700



4,199 languages (or 56%) are still vigorous today (i.e., green in Fig. 1). Figure 2 shows where in the world languages are mostly vigorous (green) versus not (red).

Figure 2: Percentage of indigenous languages that are no longer vigorous



1. Simons, Gary F. and Charles D. Fennig, eds. 2018. *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*, 21<sup>st</sup> edition. Dallas: SIL International. Online: <http://www.ethnologue.com>
2. Lewis, M. Paul and Gary F. Simons. 2010. Assessing endangerment: Expanding Fishman's GIDS. *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* 55(2):103–120.

## The Rate of Language Loss

Krauss gave a warning in 1992:<sup>3</sup>

- “The coming century will see either the death or the doom of 90% of mankind’s languages.”

Crystal moderated this in 2000:<sup>4</sup>

- “50% loss ... cannot be very far from the truth,” which would require that “at least one language must die, on average, every two weeks or so.”

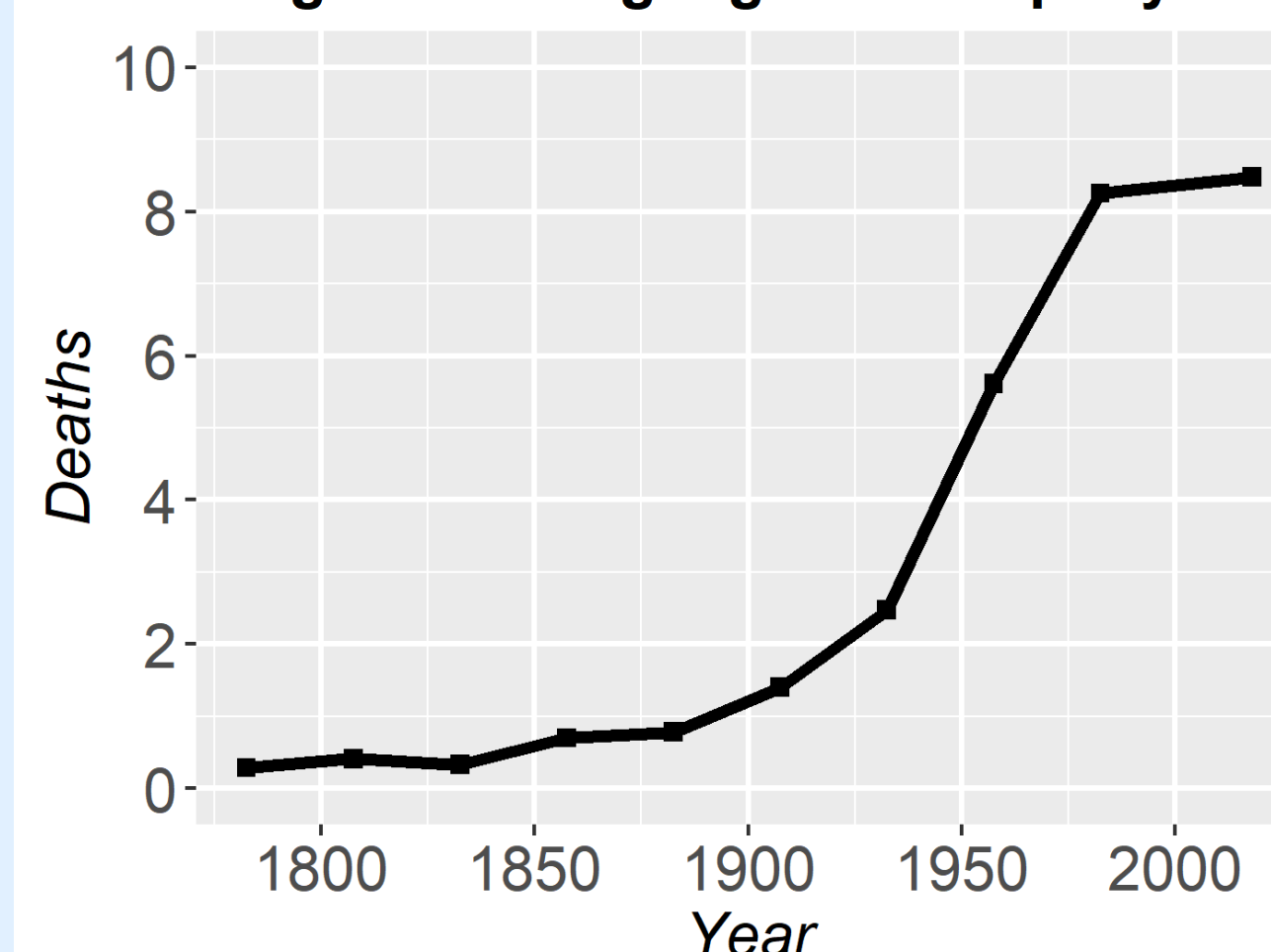
But the press has incorrectly reported this as fact:

- “One language dies every 14 days.”
- There are 3,700 hits for this exact Google search.

## What do the data show?

*Ethnologue* has been able to ascertain approximate year of death for 97% of the 716 languages that are black in Figure 1. Trend line shows a rate approaching 9 per year — or, one every 40 days.

Figure 3: Language deaths per year



3. Krauss, Michael E. 1992. The world’s languages in crisis. *Language* 68.4–10.
4. Crystal, David. 2000. *Language death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## The Spreading Doom of Languages

A language is “doomed” in Krauss’s terms when the youngest speakers are young adults; this is EGIDS 7. A generation later, they are middle-aged (EGIDS 8a). A generation later, they are elderly (EGIDS 8b). A generation later, the last speaker has died (EGIDS 9). Given the year the last speaker died, we can go back 3 generations (e.g., 75 years) to estimate when the language became doomed (i.e., reached EGIDS 7). The sequence of maps in Figure 4 is like a movie that documents the spread of language doom since 1795. Each frame advances 25 years to the next generation.

## Trends by Region

Figure 4 shows that the Americas and Australia have led the global trend toward language loss. Sub-Saharan Africa (with 2,071 lgs) stands out as the only major region where the rate of loss is still < 10%. Figure 5 plots this in a graph. The trend toward language doom has already peaked in the Americas and Australia, and is little in evidence in sub-Saharan Africa; but elsewhere, the doom of languages has risen at an alarming rate since 1950.

Figure 5: Language doom by region

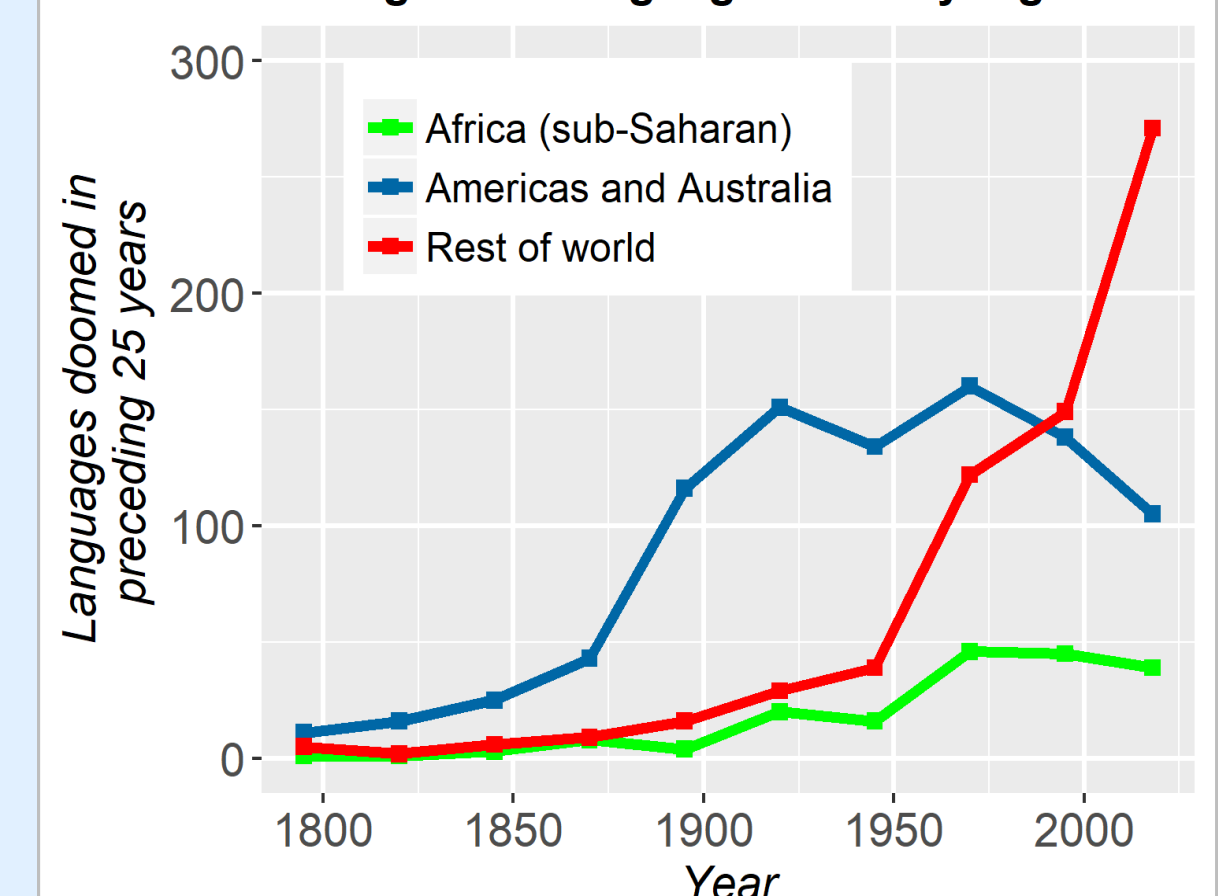
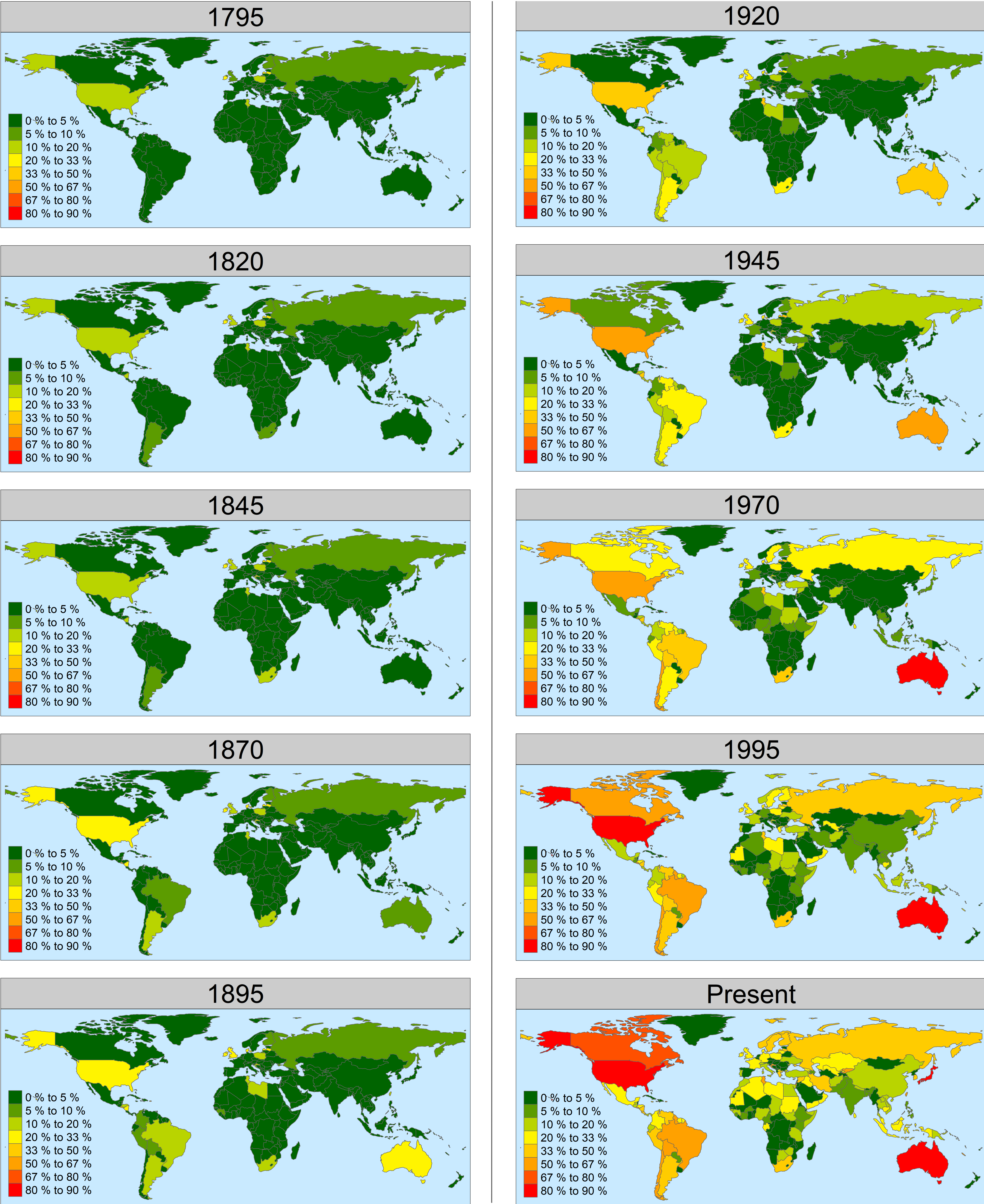




Figure 4: Percentage of doomed or dormant indigenous languages by 25-year generations



The final frame predicts the proportion of “dead” languages in 75 years. The projected rate of language loss at the close of the century is 17 languages per year.