



RURAL RESEARCH NOTE

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Canadian rural population trends

Highlights

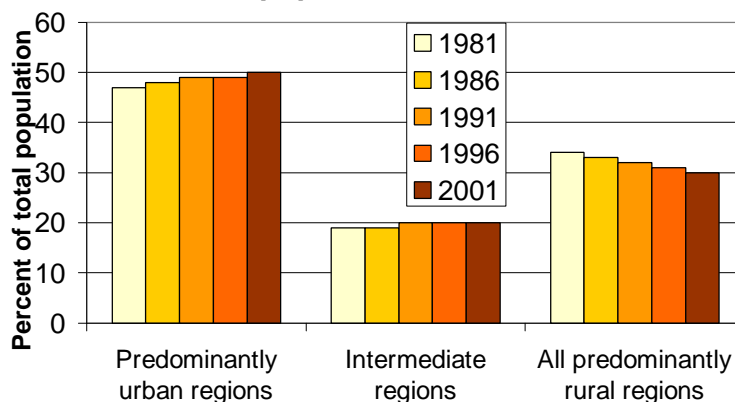
In 2001, 30.4 percent of Canada's population lived in predominantly rural regions.

Each Atlantic province, Saskatchewan, the Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories had more than half of their population living in predominantly rural regions.

More than half of the population living in predominantly rural regions lived in rural metro-adjacent regions.

In 2001, more than 9 million Canadians lived in predominantly rural regions¹. This represented 30.4 percent of the population, a decrease of one percent from 1996. Figure 1 shows the slow shift in population structure toward predominantly urban regions and away from predominantly rural regions.

Figure 1. The population of rural regions in Canada has steadily declined as a share of total population since 1981



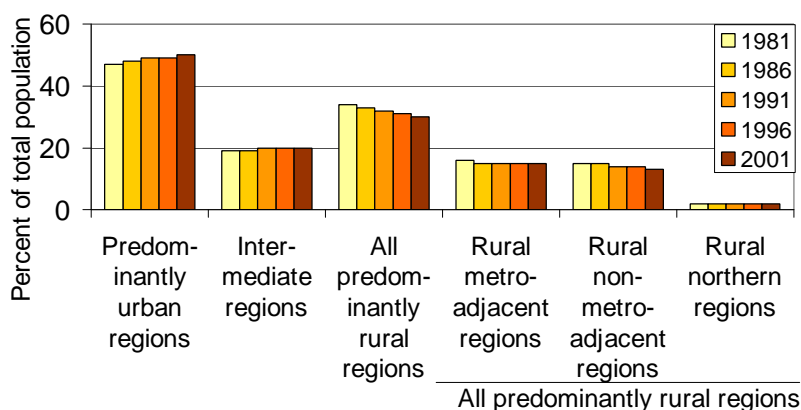
Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population, 1981 - 2001.

¹ Rural regions can be defined in a few different ways. In this work, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) definition of rural is used (Box 1).

A distinguishing factor between different regions of rural Canada is distance from a major city. This note examines three types of predominantly rural regions: rural metro-adjacent regions, rural non-metro-adjacent regions, and rural northern and remote regions².

In 2001, 15 percent of the total Canadian population lived in rural metro-adjacent regions. Fourteen percent of Canadians lived in rural non-metro-adjacent regions and 2 percent in rural northern and remote regions (Figure 2).

Figure 2. In 2001, 15% of Canada's population lived in rural metro-adjacent regions



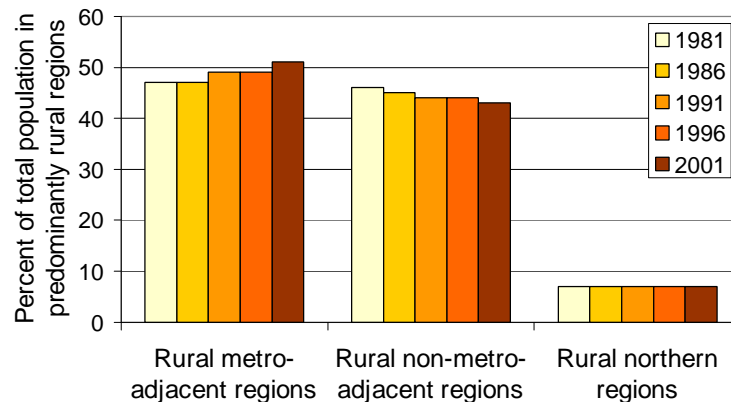
Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population, 1981 - 2001.

When predominantly rural regions are disaggregated into rural metro-adjacent, rural non-metro-adjacent and rural northern and remote regions, a tendency towards urbanisation becomes apparent (Figure 3). Rural metro-adjacent regions now have more than half of the predominantly rural population and this share has been increasing over all census periods since 1981 accounting for the decline of other rural regions.

² In this work, the OECD definition of predominantly rural regions is subdivided according to the Ehrensaft and Beeman definitions defined in Box 1.

The share of rural population living in rural non-metro-adjacent regions has been declining. The 2001 Census data show an absolute decline in total population living in rural non-metro-adjacent regions. The share of rural population living in northern and remote regions is more or less constant with a small downward trend (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Rural metro-adjacent regions have seen a steady increase in their share of population in the predominantly rural regions



Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population, 1981 - 2001.

The proportion of Canadians living in rural areas varies by province and territory (see Appendix 1). In all Atlantic provinces, northern territories and Saskatchewan, the predominantly rural population is the majority. Ontario, followed by Quebec, has the smallest share of people living in predominantly rural areas.

Nationally, the share of the population living in predominantly rural areas is falling, but the national population trends hide significant differences among the provinces and territories. Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario had significant population gains in 2001 in rural metro-adjacent and rural non-metro-adjacent regions. Most provinces with rural metro-adjacent regions saw growth in those regions between every census from 1981 and 2001, with the exceptions of Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan. Newfoundland and Labrador had an overall population decline in all their regions in 2001.

BOX 1. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) definition of Rural

An OECD “rural community” refers to individuals in communities with less than 150 person per square kilometre. This includes individuals living in the countryside, towns and small cities inside and outside of the commuting zones of urban centres.

OECD “predominantly rural regions” refer to regions, which have over 50% of their population living in rural communities. In Canada, this includes all census divisions without a major city.

OECD “intermediate regions” have 15% to 50% of their populations living in rural communities.

OECD “predominantly urban regions” refer to regions in which less than 15% of their population living in rural communities.

Source:

OECD (1994) *Creating Rural Indicators for Shaping Territorial Policies* (Paris: OECD).

In this work, the OECD “predominantly rural regions” are further divided into “rural metro-adjacent regions”, “rural non-metro-adjacent regions” and “rural northern and remote regions” developed by Ehrensaft and Beeman (1992).

“Rural metro-adjacent regions” contain census divisions adjacent to metropolitan regions (50,000 or more).

“Rural non-metro-adjacent regions” contain census divisions non-adjacent to any metropolitan region.

“Rural northern and remote regions” designate census divisions that are entirely or in major part above the following lines of latitude by region: Newfoundland, 50th; Quebec and Ontario, 49th; Manitoba, 53rd; Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, 54th; and all of the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Source:

Ehrensaft, Philip and Jennifer Beeman (1992) “Distance and Diversity in Nonmetropolitan Economies.” Chapter 9 in Ray D. Bollman (ed.) *Rural and Small Town Canada* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing).

Appendix 1

Population by type of region, Canada and provinces, 1981 - 2001

	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001
Canada	24,083,540	25,022,000	26,994,035	28,528,115	30,007,094
Predominantly urban regions	11,389,130	11,985,370	13,110,350	13,939,995	14,944,855
Intermediate regions	4,604,615	4,861,585	5,343,675	5,618,015	5,932,162
All predominantly rural regions	8,089,795	8,175,045	8,540,010	8,970,105	9,130,077
Rural metro-adjacent regions	3,783,375	3,875,860	4,146,870	4,415,860	4,615,955
Rural non-metro-adjacent regions	3,714,745	3,711,875	3,785,405	3,921,120	3,896,493
Rural northern and remote regions	591,675	587,310	607,735	633,125	617,629
Newfoundland/Labrador	563,755	564,005	563,945	547,165	512,930
Intermediate regions	236,470	243,185	250,280	248,785	242,875
All predominantly rural regions	327,285	320,820	313,665	298,380	270,055
Rural non-metro-adjacent regions	270,320	266,270	258,470	246,550	222,100
Rural northern and remote regions	56,965	54,550	55,195	51,830	47,955
Prince Edward Island (1)	121,220	125,095	128,100	132,855	135,294
Rural metro-adjacent regions	59,600	62,395	66,020	69,330	71,619
Rural non-metro-adjacent regions	61,620	62,700	62,080	63,525	63,675
Nova Scotia	839,810	864,150	890,940	899,965	908,007
Intermediate regions	286,085	303,395	327,890	340,165	359,183
All predominantly rural regions	553,725	560,755	563,050	559,800	548,824
Rural metro-adjacent regions	267,575	269,845	270,825	270,860	264,928
Rural non-metro-adjacent regions	286,150	290,910	292,225	288,940	283,896
New Brunswick	689,370	701,840	716,490	729,630	729,498
Predominantly urban regions	84,555	81,190	80,145	78,035	76,501
Intermediate regions	73,755	76,655	81,795	85,220	87,212
All predominantly rural regions	531,060	543,995	554,550	566,375	565,785
Rural metro-adjacent regions	258,145	270,200	281,785	293,060	300,076
Rural non-metro-adjacent regions	272,915	273,795	272,765	273,315	265,709
Quebec	6,369,080	6,454,485	6,810,295	7,045,085	7,237,479
Predominantly urban regions	3,405,440	3,479,070	3,718,070	3,842,210	3,985,936
Intermediate regions	1,307,320	1,341,220	1,435,580	1,492,595	1,536,022
All predominantly rural regions	1,656,320	1,634,195	1,656,645	1,710,280	1,715,521
Rural metro-adjacent regions	653,670	657,145	688,385	727,120	748,456
Rural non-metro-adjacent regions	923,045	899,280	891,345	904,570	889,269
Rural northern and remote regions	79,605	77,770	76,915	78,590	77,796
Ontario	8,534,270	9,001,150	9,977,065	10,642,785	11,410,046
Predominantly urban regions	4,427,050	4,705,955	5,155,915	5,514,185	5,951,711
Intermediate regions	2,311,735	2,470,840	2,809,500	3,003,870	3,249,991
All predominantly rural regions	1,795,485	1,824,355	2,011,650	2,124,730	2,208,344
Rural metro-adjacent regions	1,210,215	1,247,795	1,392,860	1,487,770	1,576,467
Rural non-metro-adjacent regions	430,140	431,285	467,525	481,580	484,861
Rural northern and remote regions	155,130	145,275	151,265	155,380	147,016
Manitoba	1,013,500	1,049,120	1,079,390	1,100,290	1,119,583
Predominantly urban regions	558,430	587,415	610,265	613,205	621,451
All predominantly rural regions	455,070	461,705	469,125	487,085	498,132
Rural metro-adjacent regions	177,530	186,520	198,020	208,485	221,294
Rural non-metro-adjacent regions	216,600	210,810	207,155	210,505	210,216
Rural northern and remote regions	60,940	64,375	63,950	68,095	66,622

Saskatchewan	956,660	996,900	976,020	976,625	978,933
Intermediate regions	389,250	426,290	438,630	447,380	456,879
All predominantly rural regions	567,410	570,610	537,390	529,245	522,054
Rural metro-adjacent regions	243,715	247,160	235,215	231,595	231,617
Rural non-metro-adjacent regions	298,260	297,990	275,465	266,565	258,408
Rural northern and remote regions	25,435	25,460	26,710	31,085	32,029
Alberta	2,213,655	2,340,280	2,519,195	2,669,205	2,974,807
Predominantly urban regions	1,417,580	1,509,425	1,666,560	1,764,815	1,996,537
All predominantly rural regions	796,075	830,855	852,635	904,390	978,270
Rural metro-adjacent regions	509,295	527,470	548,010	584,565	640,206
Rural non-metro-adjacent regions	253,500	265,835	266,995	283,360	295,093
Rural northern and remote regions	33,280	37,550	37,630	36,465	42,971
British Columbia	2,713,610	2,849,600	3,247,505	3,689,740	3,907,738
Predominantly urban regions	1,496,075	1,622,315	1,879,395	2,127,545	2,312,719
All predominantly rural regions	1,217,535	1,227,285	1,368,110	1,562,195	1,595,019
Rural metro-adjacent regions	403,630	407,330	465,750	543,075	561,292
Rural non-metro-adjacent regions	702,195	713,000	791,380	902,210	923,266
Rural northern and remote regions	111,710	106,955	110,980	116,910	110,461
Yukon (2)	23,070	23,360	27,660	30,650	28,674
Northwest Territories (2), (3)	45,540	52,015	57,430	64,120	35,946
Nunavut (2), (3)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	28,159

Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population, 1981 - 2001.

- (1) Since all of Prince Edward Island is classified as "Predominantly rural regions", the total for the province provides the data for "All predominantly rural regions"
- (2) Since all of the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are classified as "Rural northern and remote regions", the total for each territory provides the data for "Rural northern and remote regions".
- (3) In 1999, the Northwest Territories were reorganized into two new areas: Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. In this table, all references to the Northwest Territories include Nunavut before 2001.

This **Rural Research Note** is a partial update of Roland Beshiri and Ray D. Bollman. (2001) "Population Structure and Change in Predominantly Rural Regions." **Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin** Vol. 2, No. 2 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Cat. No. 21-006-XIE). www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/21-006-XIE/free.htm

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