



# Canada at a Glance

**Diversity**





Photo: MCpl Paz Quillés , Rideau Hall

**'OUR COUNTRY IS VAST AND IT IS BLESSED WITH A WEALTH OF COLOURS AND THE VARIED MUSIC OF ITS TONGUES AND ACCENTS'.**

— **THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
MICHAËLLE JEAN  
GOVERNOR GENERAL OF CANADA**

With nearly 10 million square kilometres of land, 10 provinces, three territories and six time zones, Canada is the second largest country in the world. Most of Canada's population lives within a thin strip along the southernmost border; the remainder lives in small towns and rural areas, some of which are remote from the major urban centres. Canada's two official languages are English and French. However, nearly 200 other languages are spoken in Canada on a daily basis – including 61 Native languages. In order of significance, Chinese, Punjabi, Italian, German and Spanish are the most widely spoken foreign languages in Canada.

One of the greatest challenges facing every society today is how to live in a culturally diverse world. Over the past 500 years, nations around the globe have come into ever-closer contact with each other, and this process has accelerated dramatically in the past century. Today, there is no part of the world that remains untouched by outside events, and no culture that can consider itself isolated from the rest of humanity. We live, in the words of Canada's Marshal McLuhan, in a truly global village.

Recent history has shown, however, that this village is not necessarily destined to be a peaceful one. The horrors of World War II served as a warning of the consequences of ultranationalism and racial intolerance; and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the London and Madrid bombings remind us that fanaticism and hatred did not die with end of the 20th century.



Tolerance and understanding – far from being things we can take for granted – are values that we must actively strive for if we are to address the collective problems of humankind in the 21st century. Learning how to live with differences is a challenge every culture and every country must face.

## **Embracing Diversity**

Both by historical accident and by design, Canada finds itself uniquely well-equipped to meet this challenge. By any measure, Canada is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse countries on the planet. It is also one of the most harmonious. Canadian society has, over the past 50 years, transformed itself into an ethnic kaleidoscope while still maintaining a very high degree of social stability and cohesion.

Canada's success in managing this transformation is rooted in its approach to ethnic diversity. Canadians have chosen to embrace diversity, actively encouraging the expression of cultural differences within a social democratic framework. It has done so partly for practical reasons: the challenge of integrating large numbers of immigrants from very different parts of the world demands an understanding and tolerance of differences. Yet it has also done so as political response to the changing world in which we live.

Diversity enhances Canada's ability to engage with other countries and cultures in a rapidly shrinking world. A culturally and ethnically diverse population can 'open more doors' than a homogenous one, and Canada is using its diversity to widen its access to the

'We are fashioning the world's first truly cosmopolitan society. The result is nothing less than a miracle. Certain cities in Canada are becoming places where no race is dominant. In the process we have inculcated a myth, even a joke of being fanatically polite. Politeness is not some accidental quality of being Canadian. It is at the core of what we are. It is the means by which we accommodate each other. It is the secret recipe for a nation of different cultures, languages and customs whose citizens all get along.'

— JOHN IBBITSON, *THE POLITE REVOLUTION: PERFECTING THE CANADIAN DREAM*



rest of the planet. By fostering a culture of openness at home, Canada is preparing its citizens for engagement with diversity abroad, recognising that cultural understanding is the key to strengthening scientific, economic and diplomatic ties between nations. It is also the key to living peacefully and co-operatively.

## Canada's Diverse Origins

Canada draws on three chief sources for the remarkable diversity of its contemporary makeup: its Aboriginal population, the founding of the country by the French and the British, and immigration.

### **Aboriginal Peoples**

While diversity is rightly viewed as a hallmark of contemporary Canada, it is important to recognise that it has always been a characteristic of the country – even before its founding in 1867.



The Aboriginal peoples who first settled Canada exhibited a remarkable cultural and linguistic variety, facilitated by Canada's enormous size. As the first Native peoples migrated across the Bering Strait from Asia, they became isolated from each other and split into different linguistic and cultural groups. Thus when Europeans ultimately arrived in Canada, there were hundreds of distinct peoples already living in the country, and they have contributed to Canada's current diverse cultural makeup.

Today there are 61 Aboriginal languages spoken in Canada, belonging to 11 different language groups. The population of First Nations, Inuit and Métis (descendants of mixed marriages between Europeans and Aboriginals) comprises approximately 1 million people, and Aboriginals constitute the fastest-growing segment of the Canadian population.

An important aspect of this population is its distribution across the country. Aboriginals are highly concentrated in the northern territories and the Prairie Provinces, where they



will have the greatest impact on the future development of Canadian society. While the Aboriginal population in many parts of the country (e.g., Atlantic Canada) is comparatively small, in Saskatchewan nearly 14 per cent of the population is Aboriginal, and this proportion is expected to grow to roughly 33 per cent by the year 2050. There are also significant concentrations of Aboriginal peoples in some of Canada's western cities, reaching between 8 per cent and 9 per cent in Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg, and in the territory of Nunavut, 85 per cent of the population is Inuit.

### ***Two Founding Nations***

Canada's cultural diversity is further enriched by its unique European origins. Having been founded by the British and the French, the country evolved two major cultural communities and has two official languages.

French is the predominant language in Quebec, and English in the other provinces, although there are also significant French-speaking communities in New Brunswick (which is officially bilingual), Ontario and Manitoba. All federal services are provided in both English and French.

The presence of these two linguistic groups has proved an advantage to Canada in developing cultural, economic and diplomatic ties with both the francophone and anglophone countries of the world. It has also broadened the perspectives of Canadians by requiring them to acknowledge and accommodate differences since the country's birth in 1867.

### ***Immigration as Nation-Building***

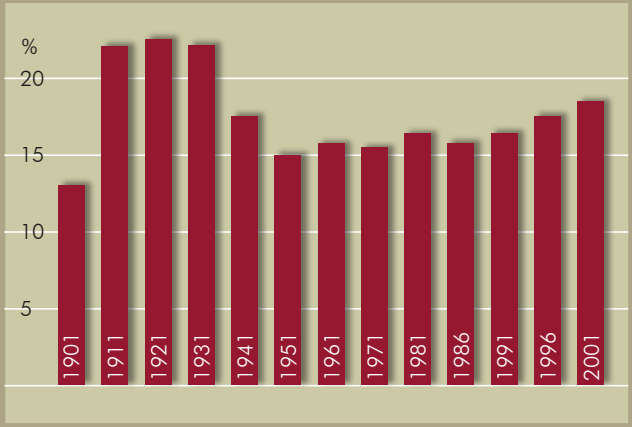
The final element in determining Canada's current demographic and cultural profile has been immigration. Canada has been built by successive waves of immigrants, and their contribution to the country is central to its identity and history.

The first phase of immigration after the end of hostilities between the British and French in 1759 consisted almost entirely of settlers from the United States and the British Isles.

The opening of the Canadian West and growing industrialisation changed this pattern, however. By the middle of the 19th century, immigrants increasingly came



**People born outside Canada as a percentage of the population, 1901-2001**



from other parts of Europe – notably Italy, Germany and Ukraine – and the building of the transcontinental railway in the 1860s brought in manual labourers from China.

Immigration peaked in the early part of the 20th century, and revived again after the Second World War. In the 1960s Canada changed its method for selecting immigrants to include economic criteria. By the 1980s Asia and the Middle East had overtaken Europe as the primary source for new arrivals to Canada. In the 1990s the top source countries were China (11 per cent), India (9 per cent) and the Philippines (7 per cent). Today, about half of Canada's immigrants are coming from Asia and the Middle East.

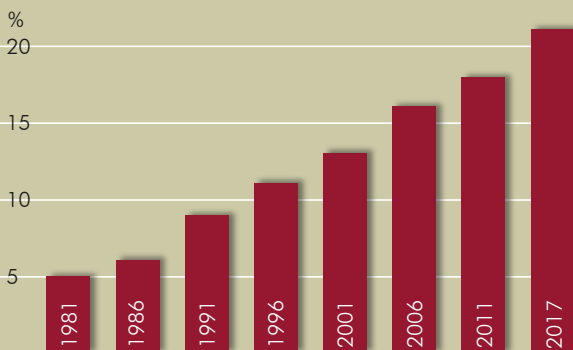
### **Diversity Today**

Ethnic and cultural diversity in Canada has increased significantly over the past two decades, as a result of rising immigration levels.

Today Canada is home to people of more than 200 different ethnic and cultural groups. Almost 6.5 million, or 20 per cent of Canada's population, were born outside the country, and this trend is expected to continue in the future, as Canada relies more and more on immigration to grow its population and economy.



### By 2017, one in five Canadians will be a visible minority



During the 1990s, 220,000 immigrants were admitted annually, on average, compared to about 126,000 per year during the previous decade. Immigration currently accounts for about half of net population growth. It is projected that by the third decade of the new century all net population growth will be the result of immigration.

Immigrants from the UK and Europe still make up the largest number of foreign-born people in Canada, accounting for 42 per cent of that population. Those from Asia and the Middle East represented 37 per cent, with a further 11 per cent from the Caribbean or Central and South America, 5 per cent from Africa and 4 per cent from the United States.

Not surprisingly, the ethnic diversification of Canada's population has been accompanied by a corresponding growth in the country's linguistic diversity. While virtually all Canadians can converse in at least one official language, almost 3 million, or 10 per cent, speak a language other than English or French at home. Chinese heads this list, with close to 725,000 home speakers, followed by Punjabi, Italian, German and Spanish. In addition, more than 100,000 Canadians spoke one of Arabic, Tagalog, Portuguese, Polish or Vietnamese most often in their home.

Arguably the most striking change in Canada's demography over the past 40 years has been the growth of visible minority\* populations. For most of its history, Canada has

\* 'ethnic minority' is the term used in the UK



drawn on people of European ancestry for its immigration pool. In the 1970s, however, its stream of immigrants became increasingly diverse, and brought large groups of people to Canada from every continent. In 1981, visible minorities had already come to represent 5 per cent of the population; in 2001 this figure had risen to 13 per cent; by 2017, visible minorities are expected to make up 20 per cent of the Canadian population. Today, almost three-quarters of this population lives in Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal.

The growth in the visible minority population has also been paralleled by a change in the religious composition of Canadian society. Of the 1.8 million new immigrants who came during the 1990s, Muslims accounted for 15 per cent, Hindus almost 7 per cent and Buddhists and

### **MICHAËLLE JEAN: THE FACE OF A CHANGING CANADA**

In September 2005, Michaëlle Jean became Canada's 27th Governor General. Jean's appointment – widely hailed as an inspired choice – indeed reflects the Canada that is coming into being.

An award-winning journalist, broadcaster and filmmaker, Jean comes from a family that fled Haiti to escape political persecution. She has always stayed close to her immigrant roots, having devoted the earlier part of her career to helping immigrants integrate into Canadian society and working for Employment and Immigration Canada.

Jean is the second person without either a political or military background and the third woman to be appointed Governor General. She is also Canada's first black Governor General and only the second person from a visible minority to hold the post. Having been born abroad (like her husband and her adopted daughter), and yet having achieved the highest ceremonial post in Canadian society, she stands as a living symbol of the integration of immigrants into the Canadian mainstream.

As one observer put it: 'Where else but in Canada would you have a Governor General of Haitian origin wishing the country's Chinese community a happy Chinese New Year, saying: "We join with all Canadians of Chinese descent in wishing you a wonderful Year of the Dog."'





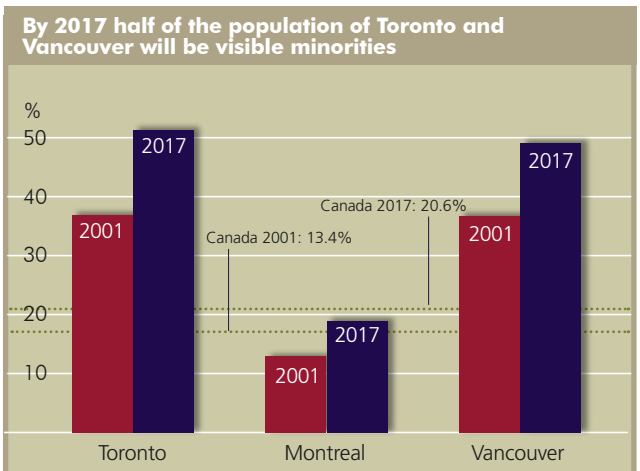
Sikhs each about 5 per cent. In terms of the absolute numbers, Muslims are today the single largest group outside Catholics, Protestants and those with no religion. There are more than 600,000 Muslims in Canada today, adding to the mosaic of world cultures that form the country.

## Multiculturalism and the Future of Canada

Canada recognises that its future depends on maintaining and strengthening its capacity to bring together peoples with many differences. Indeed, the ability to balance unity and diversity has been central to the country's identity since its inception, when English and French came together to form a common country and forge shared institutions.

This challenge has sometimes been a difficult one, but it has prepared Canada for a future that its founding fathers could never have foreseen – one where not two, but hundreds of peoples with different languages, cultures and religions would continue to build the country and reshape its institutions to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

In 1971 this new future was clearly articulated when Canada became the first country in the world to adopt an official Multiculturalism Policy, and again in 1982 when the multicultural character of Canada gained recognition in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Today, the values represented by multiculturalism are preparing





Canada to become an ever-more diverse society, which modestly hopes that it can serve as an example for the whole world of how to accommodate differences and to recognise these as expressions of a shared humanity.

### **TORONTO: HOME TO THE WORLD**

In 2004, the United Nations ranked Toronto second, behind Miami, Florida, among cities with the largest proportion of foreign-born residents, at an astonishing 49 per cent. This would come as no surprise to anyone travelling the Toronto transit system, whose riders are a cross-section of the city's population. A simple trip on a streetcar or subway train in Toronto is guaranteed to bring one face-to-face with a mosaic of ethnicities from around the world. According to the 2001 Canadian census, 43 per cent of the city's population identified themselves as belonging to a visible minority, and by 2012 it is estimated that people of non-European origins will constitute a majority in Toronto. The city features 79 ethnic



publications and is home to over 100 languages and dialects; and more than a third of the city's residents speak a language other than English at home. The largest visible minority groups are those of Chinese origin, who constitute 11 per cent of the city's population, and South Asians, who represent a further 10 per cent. The rich blend of so many groups from all over the planet makes Toronto one of the most multicultural cities in the world, a place which virtually every ethnic group can call home.

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