
Feature Article: Indian Reserves in British Columbia

The population of Indian reserves in the province, consisting of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, is of general interest but also of more specific interest in light of the current focus on Aboriginal issues. Information from the 2001 Census on the total population and the number of dwellings on Indian reserves provides our most current count of this component of the provincial population, with socio-economic characteristics to follow over the next year.

Statistics Canada records Indian reserves as geographically distinct individual census subdivisions (CSDs). According to the 2001 Census, British Columbia had 487 Indian reserve CSDs, three Indian settlements (S-Es) and one Indian Government District (IGD). There were also five Nisga'a villages, which had previously been classified as Indian reserves, plus the area surrounding these villages. Many of the almost 500 Indian reserves have very small populations, including some with no population. For purposes of the census, only Indian reserves that are likely to have permanent population are identified, while the many other unpopulated Indian reserves in the province are excluded.

When using Indian reserve population statistics, it is important to note that not all persons residing on reserves are Aboriginal peoples—in 1996 only two-thirds of persons living on reserves in B.C. were of Aboriginal identity. Also the majority of Aboriginal people do not live on reserves—70% of the people reporting Aboriginal identity in the 1996 Census were not living on Indian reserves. Comparable information from the 2001 Census will be available in early 2003.

Provincial Population Living on Indian Reserves

In 2001, only three Indian reserves in B.C. were incompletely enumerated because of the refusal of some residents to participate

in the Census. This is an improvement over the 19 incompletely enumerated reserves in the 1996 Census and 18 reserves in the 1991 Census. One reserve in the Capital Regional District has not participated in the last four censuses.

The 2001 incompletely enumerated population living on B.C. Indian reserves was estimated to be around 200 persons, compared to an estimated 2,350 in 1996.

The population residing on B.C. Indian reserves in 2001 was 68,235, including the estimate for the unenumerated reserves. This represented an increase of 5.0% since 1996. The growth in the reserve population was virtually the same as the growth in the total provincial population over the five-year period.

More than one-third (24,715) of those living on Indian reserves in 2001 resided on large reserves in urban areas. According to the 1996 Census, less than one-quarter of the people on the urban reserves were Aboriginal. The population of the urban reserves grew by 7.6% between 1996 and 2001, more than twice the rate of growth of the rural reserves (3.6%).

Regional Districts

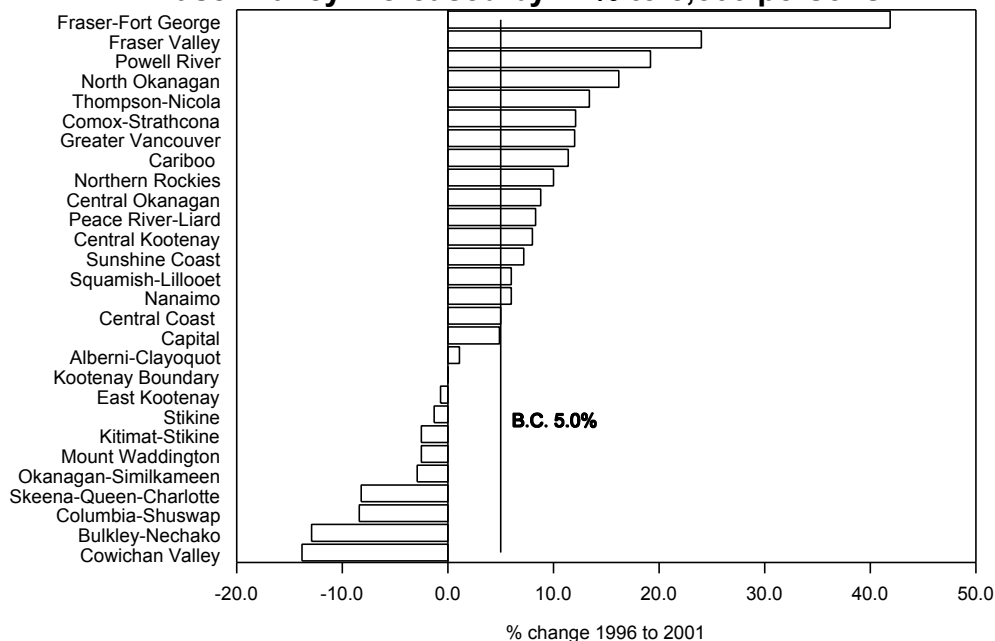
According to the 2001 Census, the Central Okanagan Regional District had 7,857 people living on Indian reserves, the greatest number of any regional district. Kitimat-Stikine Regional District had the second largest number of people (7,126) living on Indian reserves but the ethnic characteristics of the two areas are quite different. The 1996 Census indicated that in Kitimat-Stikine, 96% of the people living on Indian reserves were of Aboriginal identity, as compared to only 8% in Central Okanagan.

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In terms of growth between 1996 and 2001 in the population living on Indian reserves, the Fraser-Fort George Regional District had the largest increase at 41.9%, although its Aboriginal population is very small. Fraser Valley (24.0%), Powell River (19.2%) and North Okanagan (16.2%) regional districts had the next strongest growth over the five-year period.

Nine regional districts experienced declines in the population living on Indian reserves between 1996 and 2001. Cowichan Valley (-13.8%) and Bulkley-Nechako (-12.9%) regional districts recorded double-digit declines, while Columbia-Shuswap (-8.4%) and Skeena-Queen Charlotte (-8.2%) regional districts also had fairly large decreases.

Between 1996 and 2001, the population of the 62 Indian reserves in Fraser Valley increased by 24% to 5,500 persons.



BC STATS

A table of the population of Indian reserves, including the estimates for the incompletely enumerated reserves, is available in the 2001 Census section of the BC STATS web site (<http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca>).

Forthcoming 2001 Census releases over the next year will provide additional information on the social and economic characteristics of the population residing on Indian reserves that have 50 or more people. The release of Aboriginal information is scheduled for January 2003. In addition to the information from the 2001 Census, a sample of the Aboriginal population was selected using the

2001 Census responses and an extensive survey was carried out. The results of the Aboriginal Peoples Survey are expected to be released by Statistics Canada in summer 2003 and will provide a detailed profile of the Aboriginal population. A similar post-censal survey of Aboriginal peoples was last carried out after the 1991 Census.

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