

Census in Brief

Generations in Canada



Age and sex, 2011 Census

Generations in Canada

In 2011, the Canadian population was composed of many different generations, with the baby boom generation probably the most well-known.

Defining a generation can be challenging, as the term can have several different meanings. In general, a generation is a group of individuals who are about the same age and have experienced, most often as children or young adults, specific historical events, such as an economic crisis, an economic boom, a war, or significant political changes. These events may influence their views of the world.

In the field of demography, however, the definition of a generation does not depend on social, economic or political factors; instead, it is based exclusively on the year(s) in which a group of individuals is born.

Generations can vary greatly in size depending on the number of births that occurred during a given period. The size of a generation can have a significant impact on the life course of individuals who belong to it, as well as on those who belong to other generations. Moreover, the size of a generation can affect a country's economy and society as a whole.

Among the Canadian population in 2011, three large generations can be identified using demographic criteria:

- the baby boom generation
- parents of the baby boomers
- children of baby boomers, sometimes referred to as Generation Y or 'echo of the baby boom' generation.

Other generations in Canada can be further identified, such as 'World War II' and Generation X.

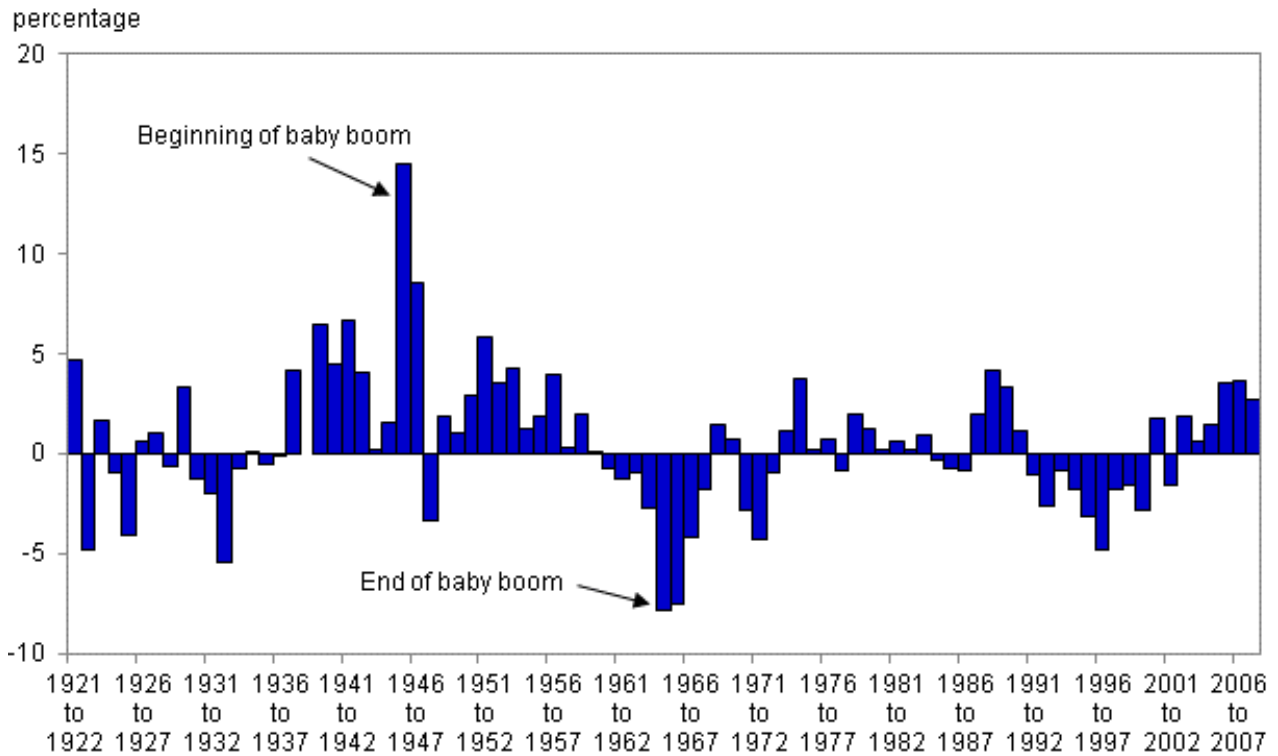
The baby boomers (1946 to 1965)

A baby boom, by definition, is a sudden rise in the number of births observed from year to year. It ends when a sudden drop in the number of births is observed.

Thus, the annual variation in the number of births can be used to define the post World War II baby boom in Canada. Since 1921,¹ the largest annual increase in the number of births occurred between 1945 and 1946, with an increase of about 15% (Figure 1). This marked the start of the baby boom period.

1. Birth registration records from Vital Statistics are available for births since 1921 in Canada.

Figure 1 Percentage growth in the annual number of births, Canada, 1921 to 2008



Source: Statistics Canada, Health Statistics Division, Vital Statistics.

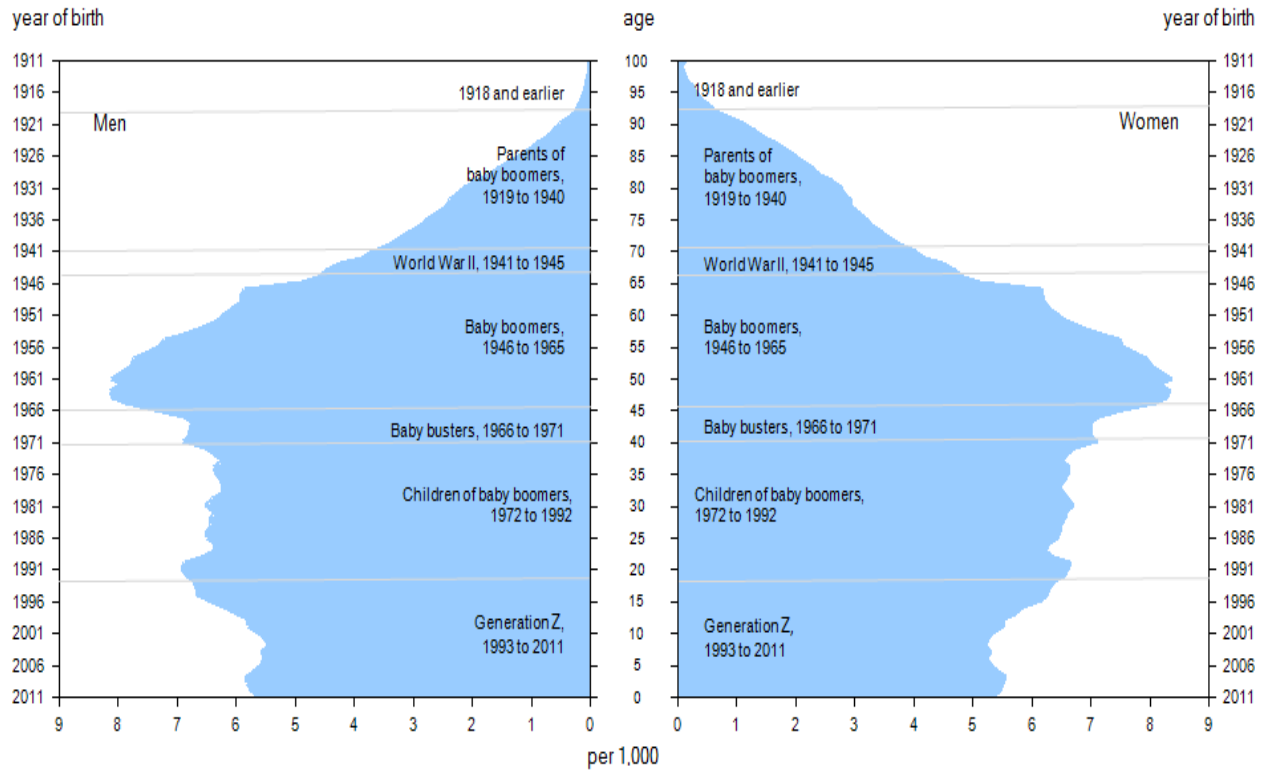
Although the number of births had been steadily decreasing since 1961, the largest relative decrease (-8%) occurred between 1964 and 1965, marking the end of the baby boom period.

The baby boom lasted 20 years in Canada. During that time, more than 8.2 million babies were born, an average of close to 412,000 a year. In comparison, the number of births in 2008, when the population was twice as large as during the baby boom, was only 377,886.

The average number of children per woman was 3.7 during the baby boom period, compared to about 1.7 in recent years.

According to the 2011 Census, 9.6 million persons, or close to 3 Canadians out of 10 (29%), were baby boomers. Besides the number of births between 1946 and 1965, this generation has benefited from sustained immigration levels since the end of the 1980s in Canada. These people were aged between 46 and 65 in 2011 (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Portrait of generations, using the age pyramid, Canada, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011.

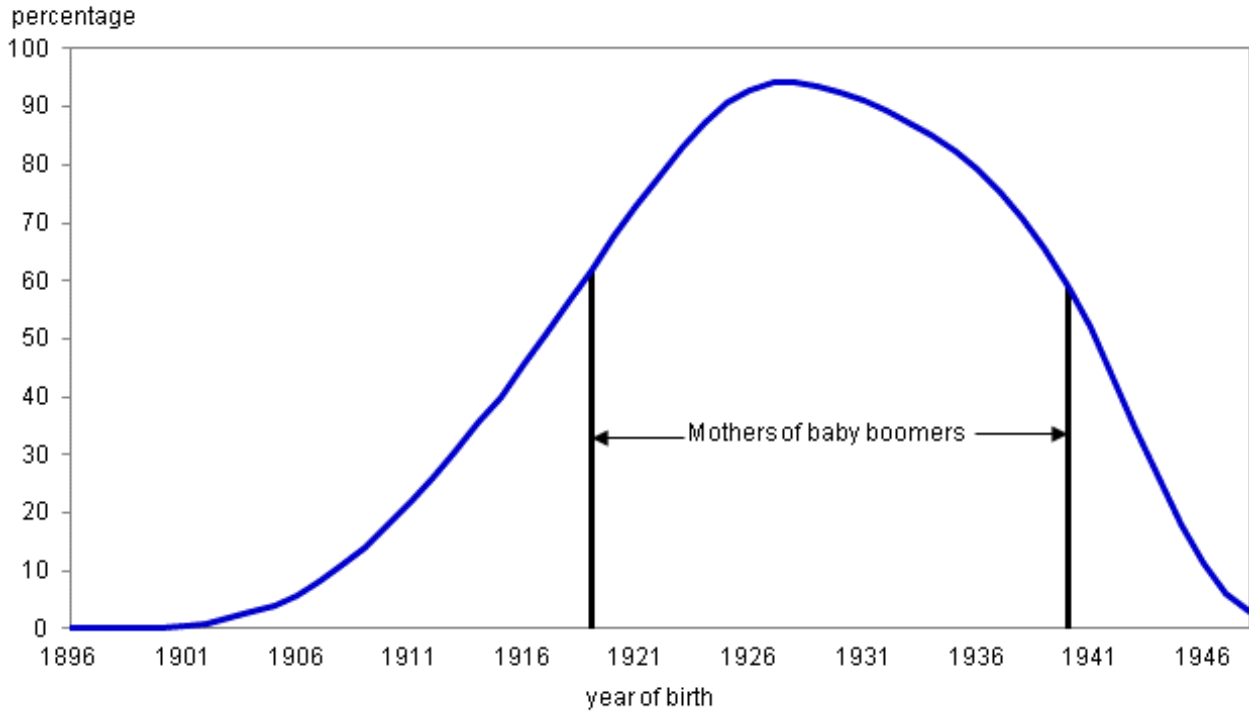
In the coming years, many of them will reach the age of 65, accelerating population aging in Canada. By 2031, all baby boomers will have reached 65, and the proportion of seniors could reach 23%,² compared to 15% in 2011.

Parents of baby boomers (1919 to 1940)

Using birth records, it is possible to identify, by birth year of mothers, the proportion of births that occurred during the baby boom period (Figure 3).

2. According to the medium growth scenario of the *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2009-2036*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 91-520.

Figure 3 Proportion (in percentage) of children born during the baby boom period, by birth year of mother, Canada, 1896 to 1948



Source: Statistics Canada, Health Statistics Division, Vital Statistics.

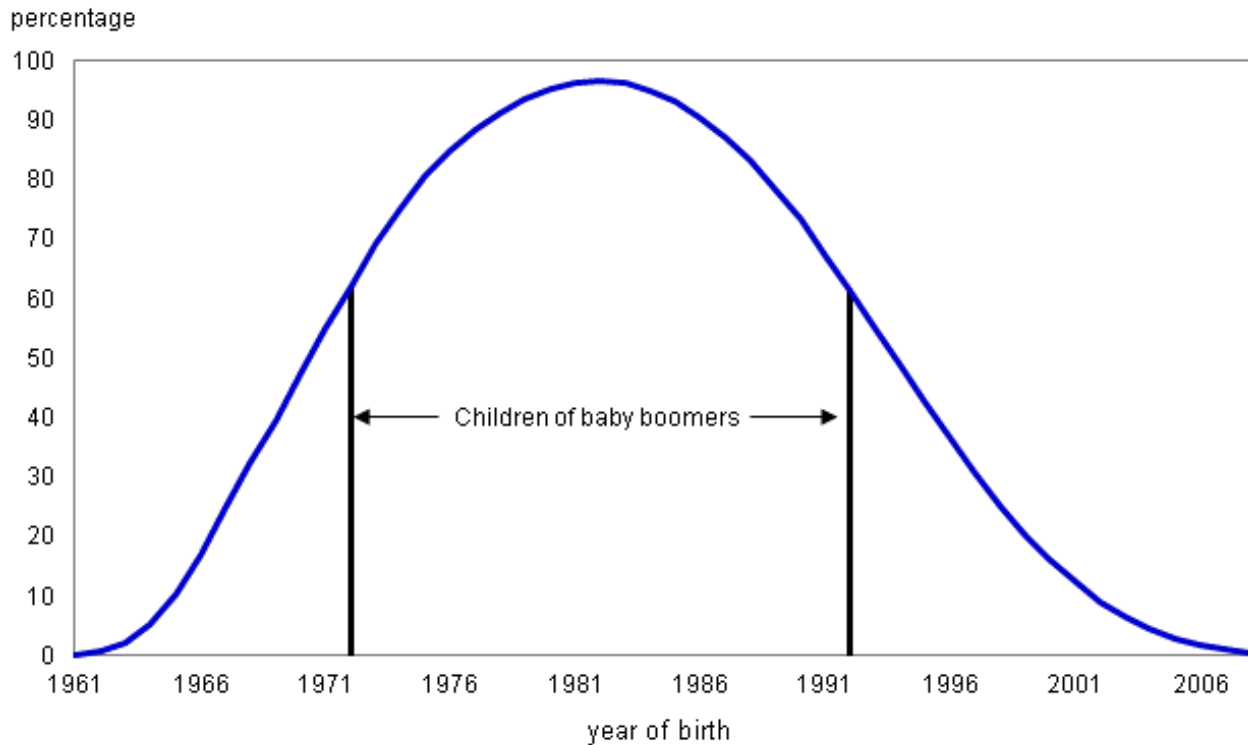
Mothers born between 1919 and 1940 had a high proportion of their children (defined here as at least 60%) during the baby boom. Based on this demographic criterion, the parents of baby boomers generation can be defined as all individuals born during this 22-year inter-war period.

According to 2011 Census data, 3.1 million persons, about 1 in 10 Canadians (9%), were parents of baby boomers. These people were aged between 71 and 92 in 2011 ([Figure 2](#)).

Children of baby boomers (1972 to 1992)

Using the same data and method, it is possible to calculate, by birth year of children, the proportion of those children whose mother is a baby boomer (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Proportion (in percentage) of children with baby boomer mothers, by birth year of children, Canada, 1961 to 2008



Source: Statistics Canada, Health Statistics Division, Vital Statistics.

Between 1972 and 1992, at least 60% of births were to mothers born during the baby boom. The children of baby boomers generation can therefore be defined as all individuals born during this 21-year period.

According to 2011 Census data, 9.1 million people, or 27% of the total population, belong to the children of baby boomers generation. These people were aged between 19 and 39 in 2011 ([Figure 2](#)). This generation is often called Generation Y or 'echo of the baby boom.'

Interestingly, the generation of the children of the baby boomers was smaller (9.1 million) than the baby boomer generation (9.6 million) in 2011. Baby boomers had fewer children than their parents. Fertility dropped from 3.1 children per woman at the end of the baby boom (1965) to 1.6 in the mid-1980s. Immigration still contributes to the increase in the size of the children of baby boomers generation, while it is less the case for the baby-boom generation.

While growing up, many members of the children of baby boomers generation were influenced by changes that affected their parents. These include increases in separation and divorce rates, increases in female labour force participation, increases in institutional day care, and rapid technological change.

Other generations among the Canadian population

Other generations, located between the three generations identified in this document can be described using the age pyramid of the Canadian population in 2011 ([Figure 2](#) and Table 1).

Table 1 Generations in Canada, 2011

| Generation | Age | Population | |
|---|-------------------|------------|------------|
| | | number | percentage |
| 1918 and before | 93 years and over | 91,195 | 0.3 |
| Parents of baby boomers (1919 to 1940) | 71 to 92 years | 3,074,045 | 9.2 |
| World War II generation (1941 to 1945) | 66 to 70 years | 1,444,035 | 4.3 |
| Baby boomers (1946 to 1965) | 46 to 65 years | 9,564,210 | 28.6 |
| Baby busters (1966 to 1971) | 40 to 45 years | 2,823,840 | 8.4 |
| Children of baby boomers (1972 to 1992) | 19 to 39 years | 9,142,005 | 27.3 |
| Generation Z (1993 to 2011) | 18 years and less | 7,337,350 | 21.9 |

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011.

World War II generation includes people born between 1941 and 1945. During that time, the number of births registered every year increased from 255,300 in 1941 to 288,700 in 1945.

About 1.4 million people, or 4% of the total population in 2011, were born between 1941 and 1945. These people were aged between 66 and 70 in 2011.

People born between 1966 and 1971 can be referred to as baby busters. These people were born at a time when fertility rates were rapidly decreasing in Canada. The number of births decreased from 403,855 in 1965 to 349,420 in 1971, a drop of 54,400 in only 6 years.

About 2.8 million people (8% of the total population in 2011) were baby busters, by definition a small generation. These people were aged between 40 and 45 in 2011.

Generation X is another term used to designate the baby busters, although this name sometimes includes more birth years than just those born from 1966 to 1971. For some authors, Generation X includes people born from the end of the baby boom (1960 to 1965) to the late 1970s. Many members of this generation, especially men, experienced difficulty entering the labour market in the 1980s and 1990s. This was due to economic recessions and to the fact that they were following the large baby boom generation.

Finally, people born since 1993 have sometimes been designated as the new Generation Z or the Internet generation since they were born after the invention of the Internet. About 7.3 million people (22% of total population) born between 1993 and 2011 were counted in the 2011 Census. In 2011, these people were aged 18 and under and were just starting to enter the labour market.

Note to readers

Random rounding and percentage distributions: To ensure the confidentiality of responses collected for the 2011 Census, a random rounding process is used to alter the values reported in individual cells. As a result, when these data are summed or grouped, the total value may not match the sum of the individual values, since the total and subtotals are independently rounded. Similarly, percentage distributions, which are calculated on rounded data, may not necessarily add up to 100%.

Due to random rounding, counts and percentages may vary slightly between different census products, such as the analytical document, highlight tables, and topic-based tabulations.

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