

Catalogue no. 11-630-X
ISBN 978-0-660-25922-2

Canadian Megatrends

Canada goes urban



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- . not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- ^P preliminary
- ^r revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- ^E use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- * significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

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Canada goes urban

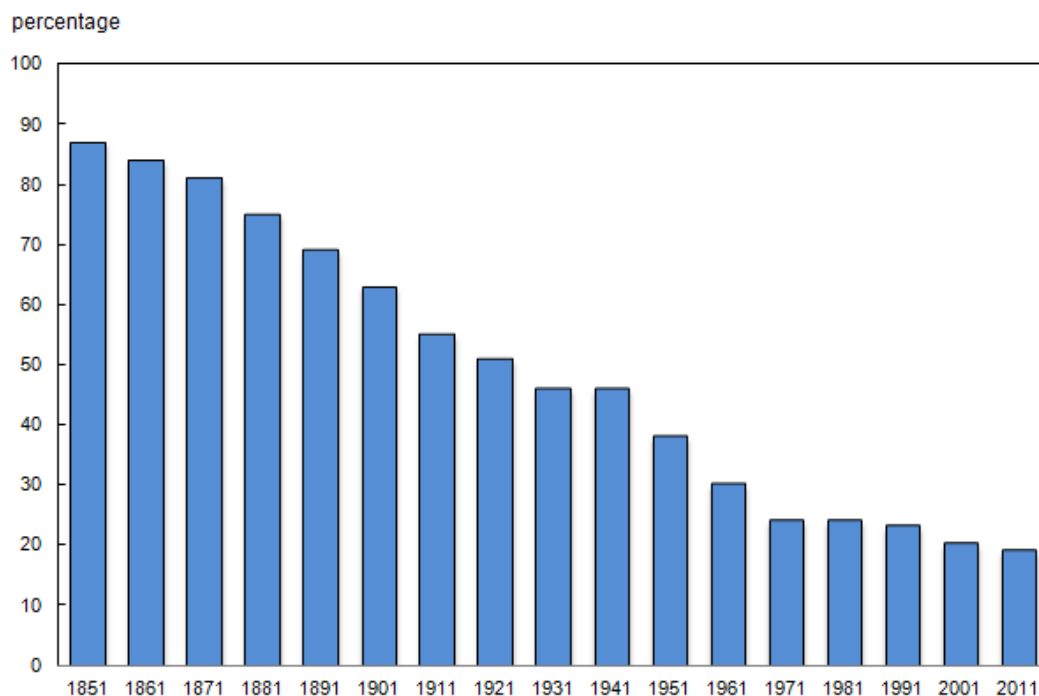
CANADIAN MEGATRENDS

The 1861 Census, conducted a few years before Confederation, contained questions on the acres of land attached to a dwelling, the number and type of animals owned as well as the horsepower of the equipment used on the property.

At that time, 3.2 million people lived in Canada, of whom 2.7 million (84%) lived in a rural area. Canada's economy was based mainly on the primary sector—chiefly agriculture—but also on natural resources such as wood and coal.

By 2011, fewer than one in five (18.9%) people lived in a rural area. This shift reflected major changes in Canada's economy and society over several decades.

Chart 1
Proportion of the population living in rural areas, Canada, 1851 to 2011



Note: The data presented for the censuses from 1851 to 1951 are based on the definition of rural areas in use at that time.

Source: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1851 to 2011.

The proportion of Canadians living in a rural area has steadily declined over the past 160 years, falling below the 50% threshold between 1921 and 1931, mainly as a result of economic changes. Following a pause in the 1930s, probably as a result of the Great Depression, the proportion of Canadians living in a rural area continued to decrease from the 1940s to the early 1970s.

Since then, the decline has been less pronounced between censuses. While the number of Canadians living in rural areas has been relatively stable, the population living in population centres has been rising steadily. Consequently, the proportion of Canadians who live in rural areas has fallen.

The proportion of Canadians living in a rural area is the third lowest among the G8 countries following the United Kingdom and the United States. More than 30% of the population of Japan and Italy lived in a rural area in 2010 or 2011, compared with 50% of the population in the emerging economies of South Africa and China and 70% in India.

Fewer young adults in rural areas

The age composition of the population also differs greatly between rural areas and population centres.

Seniors do not necessarily represent a larger share of the rural population compared with other areas. In fact, small and medium population centres often have a large share of seniors. For example, 15% of people living in rural Canada were 65 years of age and older in 2011, a proportion equal to the national average, while 17% lived in small and medium centres.

What makes rural Canada unique, however, is the small proportion of young adults aged 15 to 29 who live there. In 2011, 17% of people living in rural areas were aged 15 to 29, a proportion that was lower than the national average of 20%.

Pursuing postsecondary studies, looking for employment in the labour market and forming a relationship are factors that may be behind the departure of young adults from rural areas.

The Atlantic provinces and the territories have the largest share of rural residents

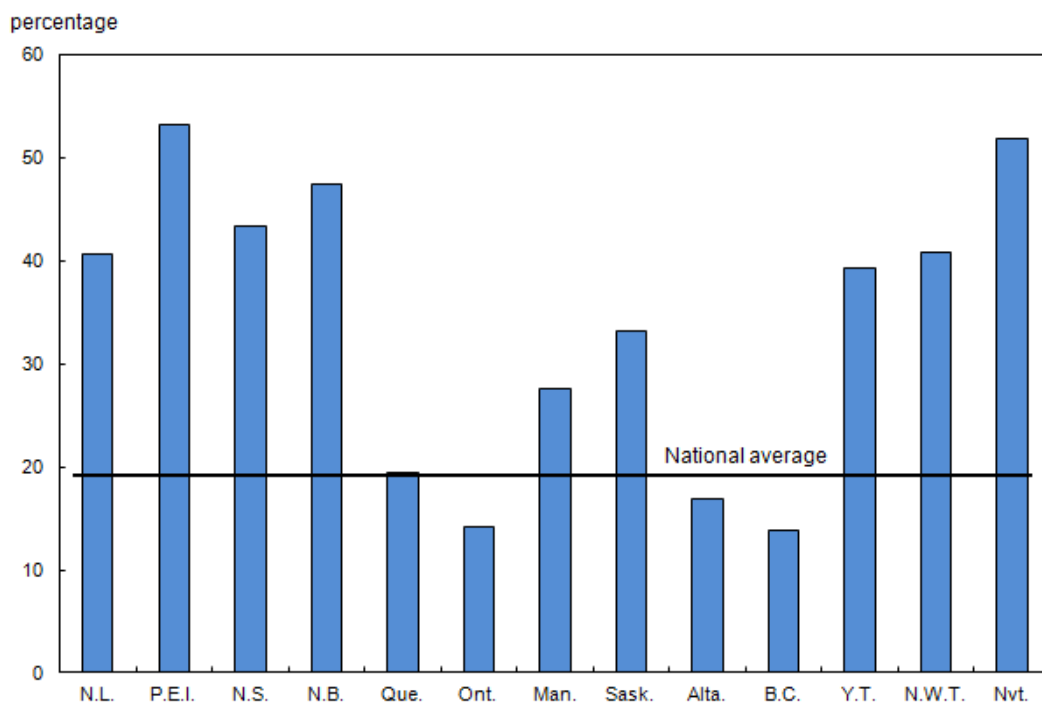
In 2011, 18.9% of Canadians lived in a rural area. However, among provinces and territories the proportion ranged from 14% in British Columbia and Ontario to 53% in Prince Edward Island. The Atlantic provinces and the territories had a larger share of the population living in rural areas than Central Canada or the Prairies.

However, in every province and territory, the share of the population living in a rural area declined between 2006 and 2011 as a result of lower population growth in those areas.

In 2011, the proportion of young adults aged 15 to 29 living in a rural area was below the provincial or territorial average everywhere in Canada except Nunavut.

Regional variations in population composition are likely to have an impact, notably on services and infrastructure needs.

Chart 2
Proportion of the population living in rural areas, by province and territory, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 Census of Population.

Definitions

Rural area: Generally, an area with a population under 1,000, although the definition is slightly different for censuses before 1981.

Population centre: An area with a population of at least 1,000 and a density of 400 or more people per square kilometre. Population centres are classified into three groups, depending on the size of their population:

- small population centres have a population between 1,000 and 29,999
- medium population centres have a population between 30,000 and 99,999
- large population centres have a population of 100,000 or over.

References

Statistics Canada. 2011. Canada's rural population since 1851, *Census in Brief*, Catalogue No. 98-310-X2011003.

Statistics Canada. 2014. Canada's rural population declining since 1851 (www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-003-x/2014001/section01/04-eng.htm) . *Canadian Demography at a Glance*, Catalogue No. 98-003-X.

Contact information

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