
Visible Minority and Population Group Reference Guide

Census of Population, 2021



Release date: February 8, 2023



Statistics
Canada

Statistique
Canada

Canada

How to obtain more information

For information about this product or the wide range of services and data available from Statistics Canada, visit our website, www.statcan.gc.ca.

You can also contact us by

Email at infostats@statcan.gc.ca

Telephone, from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the following numbers:

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| • Statistical Information Service | 1-800-263-1136 |
| • National telecommunications device for the hearing impaired | 1-800-363-7629 |
| • Fax line | 1-514-283-9350 |

Standards of service to the public

Statistics Canada is committed to serving its clients in a prompt, reliable and courteous manner. To this end, Statistics Canada has developed standards of service that its employees observe. To obtain a copy of these service standards, please contact Statistics Canada toll-free at 1-800-263-1136. The service standards are also published on www.statcan.gc.ca under “Contact us” > “[Standards of service to the public](#).”

Note of appreciation

Canada owes the success of its statistical system to a long-standing partnership between Statistics Canada, the citizens of Canada, its businesses, governments and other institutions. Accurate and timely statistical information could not be produced without their continued co-operation and goodwill.

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada as represented by the Minister of Industry, 2023

All rights reserved. Use of this publication is governed by the Statistics Canada [Open Licence Agreement](#).

An [HTML version](#) is also available.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.

Release date: February 8, 2023

Catalogue number 98-500-X, issue 2021006

ISBN 978-0-660-42453-8

Table of Contents

Definitions and concepts	4
Questions	4
Classifications	6
Visible minority	6
Population group	7
Concepts over time	7
Changes to the population group question	8
Changes to the visible minority and population group variables	8
Collection and processing methods	8
Data quality	8
Variability due to sampling and total non-response	9
Non-response bias	9
Data quality indicators	9
Certification of final counts	11
Data quality for population group	12
Comparability over time	12
Comparability with other data sources	13

Definitions and concepts

The 2021 Census of Population question on population group is used to produce two main variables: the [visible minority](#) variable and the [population group](#) variable.

The primary purpose of the population group question on the census is to derive counts for the visible minority population.¹ Visible minority refers to whether a person is a visible minority or not, as defined by the *Employment Equity Act*. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” The main groups designated as visible minorities are South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

Information on the visible minority population is required under federal employment equity legislation for programs, which promote equal opportunity for everyone. The Census of Population provides benchmark data on each of the designated employment equity groups (women, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and the visible minority population). Federal employment equity programs are the responsibility of Employment and Social Development Canada and other government departments.

Data on Canada's visible minority population are used by governments, businesses, community groups, health care providers, researchers and a variety of organizations throughout the country to ensure equal opportunity for everyone. Data on the visible minority population can be used by employers to compare the characteristics of their workforce with the characteristics of the people who live in the same area.

The population group question is also used to produce the population group variable. The population group variable includes data on groups such as White, Chinese, South Asian and Black, generally mirroring the response categories used in the population group question on the Census of Population questionnaire. It also includes a large number of multiple-response categories that are not included in the visible minority variable. Because of these additional multiple-response categories, the population group variable is much larger than the visible minority variable, with over 80 detailed categories, compared with 13 for the visible minority variable. More information on these response categories is included in the [Questions](#) and [Classifications](#) sections of this document.

For additional information, please see the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-301-X.

Questions

The 2021 Census of Population data on visible minority and population group were obtained primarily from Question 25 on form [2A-L](#) and form [2A-R](#). For the 2021 Census, the [2A](#) short-form questionnaire was used to enumerate all usual residents of 75% of private dwellings. The 2A-L long-form questionnaire, which also includes the questions from the 2A short-form questionnaire, was used to enumerate a 25% sample of private households in Canada. For private households in First Nations communities, Métis settlements, Inuit regions and other remote areas, the 2A-R questionnaire was used to enumerate 100% of the population.

In both versions of the questionnaire, response categories in the population group question included 11 mark-in circles and one write-in space. Respondents were asked “Is this person:”

1. Increasingly, the “visible minority population” is being referred to as the “racialized population” by media, academia and other groups. For 2021, Statistics Canada has chosen to continue to use the term “visible minority” in published data tables and reference materials because this is the term currently used by the federal *Employment Equity Act*.

Visible Minority and Population Group Reference Guide

and were instructed to mark more than one of the following response categories, or to specify another group, if applicable:

- White
- South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)
- Chinese
- Black
- Filipino
- Arab
- Latin American
- Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai)
- West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan)
- Korean
- Japanese
- Other group—specify

A note on the census questionnaire informed respondents that “This question collects information in accordance with the *Employment Equity Act* and its Regulations and Guidelines to support programs that promote equal opportunity for everyone to share in the social, cultural and economic life of Canada.” Additional instructions on how to complete the 2021 population group question were provided to respondents via a help button available in the electronic questionnaire:

Select one or more categories from the list provided and/or provide a specific response in the “Specify other group” box. Do **not** provide responses such as “Bi-racial,” “Multi-racial” or “Mixed” in the “Specify other group” box.

The mark-in response categories listed in the 2021 Census population group question, with the exception of “White,” are based on the visible minority groups identified by the *Employment Equity Technical Reference Papers*, published by Employment and Immigration Canada in 1987, and used for federal employment equity programs. The visible minority groups identified by these papers included South Asian; Chinese; Black; Filipino; Latin American; Arab; Southeast Asian; West Asian; Japanese; Korean; and other visible minority groups, such as Pacific Islanders. Data on other visible minority groups, including Pacific Islanders, are collected in the “Other group—specify” area of the 2021 Census population group question. After “White,” population groups were listed on the 2021 Census questionnaire in order of the frequency (largest number) of visible minority counts derived from the 2016 Census.

Three of the population groups included on the 2021 Census questionnaire (South Asian, Southeast Asian and West Asian) were followed by examples in parentheses. Examples were provided for these groups to serve as guidelines and to help respondents who may be more familiar with one term instead of another (e.g., East Indian instead of South Asian, Vietnamese instead of Southeast Asian, Iranian instead of West Asian).

People who identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit on Question 24 (Indigenous group) were not asked the population group question. In accordance with the *Employment Equity Act*, they are included in the “Not a visible minority” category in the visible minority variable, along with people who reported other selected groups such as “White.” However, in the population group variable, they are included in a separate category called “Indigenous peoples.”

For more information on the 2021 Census of Population variables used to define the Indigenous population, please refer to the [Indigenous Peoples Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-500-X.

For more information on the 2021 Census questionnaire, including how census questions are determined, refer to the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X. For more information on the reasons why the census questions are asked, please refer to the five [fact sheets](#) found on The road to the 2021 Census web page.

Classifications

As indicated above, the [visible minority](#) variable provides data on the visible minority population as defined for federal employment equity purposes, whereas the population group variable does not. As a result, similarly named categories in each of the variables have been derived in slightly different ways.

Visible minority

The visible minority variable includes data for 13 derived groups: South Asian; Chinese; Black; Filipino; Arab; Latin American; Southeast Asian; West Asian; Korean; Japanese; Visible minority, not included elsewhere (n.i.e.); Multiple visible minorities; and Not a visible minority. There is also a subtotal provided for the “Total visible minority population,” which aggregates counts for the first 12 groups.

In accordance with *Employment Equity Act* guidelines, the visible minority groups South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese include people who reported either a single mark-in response corresponding to these groups or provided a write-in response corresponding to these groups. For example, the category “South Asian” includes people who provided a single mark-in response of “South Asian” or provided a write-in response such as “Bangladeshi,” “Indian (India),” “Pakistani,” “Punjabi” or “Sri Lankan.”

Responses for seven of these groups—specifically, South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Southeast Asian, Korean and Japanese—found in combination with a mark-in response of “White” or a write-in response associated with White are included in the count for the visible minority group reported. For example, respondents who checked both “South Asian” and “White” are included in the “South Asian” category. In addition, respondents who checked “South Asian” and had a write-in response such as “Swedish” would also be included in the “South Asian” category.

In contrast, responses of Arab, Latin American and West Asian found in combination with “White” or a write-in response associated with White are **not** included in the count for these visible minority groups. Instead, such combinations of responses result in the respondent being included in the category “Not a visible minority.”

The category “Visible minority, n.i.e.” includes respondents who reported a write-in response that is designated as a visible minority, but cannot be classified elsewhere. This includes responses such as “Guyanese,” “Pacific Islander,” “Polynesian,” “Tibetan,” and “West Indian.”

The category “Multiple visible minorities” includes respondents who checked two or more mark-in circles associated with groups designated as visible minorities. For example, respondents who checked both “South Asian” and “Black” are included in the “Multiple visible minorities” category. In addition, this category includes respondents who reported a combination of mark-in or write-in responses associated with two or more visible minority groups. For example, a respondent who checked “South Asian” and had a write-in response of “Nigerian” would be included in the “Multiple visible minorities” category.

Finally, for the most part, the “Not a visible minority” category includes people who reported either a single mark-in response of “White” or provided a write-in response that is not associated with a group designated as a visible minority (e.g., “Algerian,” “Israeli,” “Polish,” “Scottish,” “South African,” “Swedish”). As indicated previously, this category also includes people with responses of Arab, Latin American and West Asian, found in combination with “White” or a write-in response associated with White. Finally, this category also includes people who identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit on the Indigenous group question.

For more information, please refer to the revised standard [Classification of visible minority](#).

Population group

In contrast to the visible minority variable, the [population group](#) variable provides data that more closely match the responses provided by respondents on the census questionnaire.

Single-response categories

The population group variable includes 12 single-response categories counting respondents who reported one population group, specifically White; South Asian; Chinese; Black; Filipino; Arab; Latin American; Southeast Asian; West Asian; Korean; Japanese; and Other population groups, n.i.e.

The single-response categories for the first 11 of these groups include people who reported either a single mark-in response corresponding to these groups or a write-in response associated with them. For example, the category “Black” includes people who provided a mark-in response of Black or provided a write-in response such as “African American,” “Congolese,” “Haitian” or “Nigerian.”

The single-response category for the 12th group, “Other population groups, n.i.e.,” includes people who provided a write-in response that is not associated with any of the previous 11 categories. Some of these responses are classified as “Visible minority, n.i.e.” in the visible minority variable (e.g., “Guyanese,” “Pacific Islander,” “Polynesian,” “Tibetan,” “West Indian”), while others are classified as “Not a visible minority” in the visible minority variable (e.g., “Algerian,” “Israeli,” “South African”).

Multiple-response categories

The population group variable also includes a large number of multiple-response categories counting respondents who reported multiple population groups. Specifically, the variable includes 67 categories, corresponding to each of the possible combinations of two population groups (e.g., “White and South Asian,” “Chinese and Black”). There are also two categories for those who reported three or more population groups (“White and multiple population groups” and “Multiple population groups, n.i.e.”).

As indicated previously, multiple responses are treated differently in the visible minority variable because of the need to derive the variable in accordance with employment equity requirements. As a result, a multiple response of “White” and “South Asian” would be included in the category “South Asian” in the visible minority variable, while it would be included in the multiple response category “White and South Asian” in the population group variable.

Indigenous peoples

The final category in the population group variable, “Indigenous peoples,” includes respondents who reported “Yes” to Question 24 (“Is this person First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit)?”). Even though these respondents were not required to answer the population group question (Question 25), their information was included in the population group variable so that it would reflect the entire Canadian population.

For more information, please refer to the revised standard [Classification of population group](#).

Concepts over time

Since the 1996 Census, the population group question has been used to measure the visible minority population more directly. Over time, there have been differences in the question wording, format, examples and instructions for the population group question used in the census. The historical comparability of visible minority data has been affected by these factors, and by changes in data processing and the social environment at the time of the census.

Changes to the population group question

While the wording of the population group question (“Is this person:”) has remained consistent since 1996, there have been two separate mark-in circles for “Arab” and “West Asian” since 2001. The 1996 Census used a combined category, “Arab/West Asian.”

Furthermore, for each census, the mark-in categories in the question are re-ranked based on their frequencies (from the highest to the lowest) from the previous census. As a result, the mark-in circle for “Arab” was moved above “Latin American” on the 2021 questionnaire based on frequencies observed in the 2016 Census.

Finally, the examples associated with some population groups have been updated in various censuses. For example, “Malaysian” was replaced by “Thai” in the examples associated with the Southeast Asian category in 2016. The examples for “Black” and “Arab” were removed in 2001. For 2021, the examples used were the same as those in 2016.

Changes to the visible minority and population group variables

The 2021 Census visible minority variable includes the same categories as were used for the 2016 Census. The only change to the categories is that the category “Arab” has been moved above “Latin American,” reflecting the same change that was made on the 2021 questionnaire.

In contrast, the population group variable has been updated considerably, with a large number of additional multiple-response categories added to the variable. In 2021, all possible combinations of two population groups are included in the population group variable as separate categories (e.g., “South Asian and Filipino”). In 2016 and previous censuses, the variable included only multiple response categories that included “White” (e.g., “White and South Asian,” “White and Filipino”), while multiple responses that did not include “White” were included in the category “Multiple visible minorities, n.i.e.”

The population group variable also no longer includes the category “Visible minority, n.i.e.,” replacing it with the category “Other population groups, n.i.e.” As indicated previously, this category includes people who provided a write-in response that is not associated with any of the categories based on mark-in responses, regardless of whether they are associated with a group or groups designated as visible minorities.

For more information on comparability between the 2021 and 2016 censuses, please refer to the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

Collection and processing methods

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged in Canada in early 2020 and affected all steps of the 2021 Census process, from data collection to dissemination. Please refer to the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X, for more detailed information on this topic.

Data quality

The 2021 Census of Population underwent a thorough data quality assessment. The different certification activities conducted to evaluate the quality of the 2021 Census data are described in [Chapter 9](#) of the *Guide to the Census of Population, 2021*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

The data quality assessment was conducted in addition to the regular verifications and quality checks completed at key stages of the census. For example, throughout data collection and processing, the accuracy of specific steps such as data capture and coding was measured, the consistency of the responses provided was checked, and the non-response rates for each question were analyzed. As well, the quality of imputed responses was assessed during data editing and imputation.

Visible Minority and Population Group Reference Guide

During the data quality assessment, a number of data quality indicators were produced and used to evaluate the quality of the data. These indicators are briefly described below. Finally, resulting census counts were compared with other data sources and certified for final release.

The main highlights of this assessment of the data pertaining to visible minority and population group are presented below.

Variability due to sampling and total non-response

The objective of the long-form census questionnaire is to produce estimates on various topics for a wide variety of geographies, ranging from very large areas (such as provinces and census metropolitan areas) to very small areas (such as neighbourhoods and municipalities), and for various populations (such as Indigenous peoples and immigrants) that are generally referred to in this document as “populations of interest.” In order to reduce response burden, the long-form census questionnaire is administered to a random sample of households.

This sampling approach and total non-response introduce variability into the estimates that needs to be accounted for. This variability also depends on the population size and the variability of the characteristics being measured. Furthermore, the precision of estimates may vary considerably depending on the domain or geography of interest, in particular because of the variation in response rates. For more information on variability due to sampling and total non-response in long-form census questionnaire estimates, please refer to the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

Non-response bias

Non-response bias is a potential source of error for all surveys, including the long-form census questionnaire. Non-response bias arises when the characteristics of those who participate in a survey are different from those who do not.

In general, the risk of non-response bias increases as the response rate declines. For the 2021 long-form census questionnaire, Statistics Canada adapted its collection and estimation procedures to mitigate the effect of non-response bias to the extent possible. For more information on these mitigation strategies, please refer to the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

Data quality indicators

A number of quality indicators were produced and analyzed during the 2021 Census of Population data quality assessment. Four indicators are available to data users for long-form content: the total non-response (TNR) rate; the confidence interval; as well as the non-response rate and the imputation rate per question.

The **total non-response (TNR) rate** is the primary quality indicator that accompanies each disseminated 2021 Census of Population product, and is calculated for each geographic area. It measures total non-response at the dwelling level. Non-response is said to be total when no questionnaire is returned from a dwelling or when a returned questionnaire does not meet the minimum content. More information on the TNR rate is available in [Chapter 9](#) of the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

The **confidence interval** was selected as a variance-based quality indicator to accompany the 2021 Census of Population long-form estimates because it helps users easily make a statistical inference. This indicator provides a measure of the accuracy of the long-form estimates. Using a science-based approach, research and simulations were done to ensure that confidence intervals are constructed using adequate statistical methods for the Census of Population data and areas of interest.

A confidence interval is associated with a confidence level, generally set at 95%. A 95% confidence interval is an interval constructed around the estimate so that, if the process that generated the sample were repeated many

Visible Minority and Population Group Reference Guide

times, the value of the interest parameter in the population would be contained in 95% of these intervals. The confidence interval consists of a lower bound and an upper bound. These two bounds accompany the long-form estimates in most data tables.

Further details on the different methods used to construct confidence intervals and their assumptions are provided in the [Sampling and Weighting Technical Report, Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-306-X.

The **non-response rate per question** is a measure of missing information due to non-response to a question. It measures only the non-response that is resolved through imputation during data processing (as opposed to weighting when a sample is used). For the long-form questionnaire, the non-response rate per question includes only partial non-response to the question, except for First Nations communities, Métis settlements, Inuit regions and other remote areas where both partial and total non-response are taken into account. Partial non-response is when answers to certain questions are not provided for a respondent household.

The non-response rate per question for a question on the long-form questionnaire is defined as the sum of the weights of in-scope units in the population of interest who did not respond to the question divided by the sum of the weights of in-scope units in the population of interest. Here “units” refers to the statistical units for which data are collected or derived (e.g., persons or households, depending on whether the question is about a person-level characteristic or a household-level characteristic). A unit is considered to be in scope for a given question if the question is applicable to that unit and the unit belongs to the population of interest related to the question.

The **imputation rate per question** measures the extent to which responses to a given question were imputed. Imputation is used to replace missing data in the event of non-response or when a response is found to be invalid (e.g., multiple answers are provided when a single answer is expected). Imputation is conducted to eliminate data gaps and to reduce bias introduced by non-response. Imputation is generally done by identifying persons or households in the same geographical area with similar characteristics to the incomplete record and copying their values to fill in the missing or invalid responses.

The imputation rate for a question on the long-form questionnaire is defined as the sum of the weights of in-scope units in the population of interest for which the response to the question was imputed divided by the sum of the weights of in-scope units in the population of interest (see the definition of “units” provided in the above section on the non-response rate per question).

For long-form content, imputation for most areas is done to resolve partial non-response—not total non-response, which instead is treated by weighting. However, in First Nations communities, Métis settlements, Inuit regions and other remote areas, whole household imputation (WHI) is used to resolve total non-response. It first imputes the occupancy status of non-respondent dwellings and further imputes all the data for those dwellings resolved as occupied in the first step. WHI is included in the imputation rate per question, including the use of administrative data to impute non-responding households in areas with low response rates; see [Appendix 1.7](#) of the *Guide to the Census of Population, 2021*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X. As with the non-response rate, a unit is considered to be in scope if the question is applicable to that unit and the unit belongs to the population of interest related to the question.

The non-response and imputation rates per question can be interpreted as the proportion of in-scope units in the population of interest for which information was not reported or was imputed, respectively. The long-form rates are weighted to reflect the fact that the long-form questionnaire is only distributed to a sample of the population, so in this case, the proportion is estimated.

The non-response and imputation rates for a question are often similar, but some differences can be observed for a given question because of additional data processing steps that may have been required. These rates were regularly checked during data assessment, and a detailed analysis was done if there was a difference between the two rates for a question, to ensure the appropriateness of the processing steps taken and the quality of the data.

Visible Minority and Population Group Reference Guide

A difference between the non-response rate and the imputation rate for a question can generally be explained by one of the following two factors:

- Some responses were considered invalid or inconsistent during the edit stage and imputation was needed, which is why the imputation rate is higher than the non-response rate for a question.
- Some non-responses were resolved in a straightforward manner early during data processing because a single resolution was possible based on the answers provided to other questions, making imputation unnecessary. This may explain why the non-response rate is higher than the imputation rate for a question.

Table 1 below presents the non-response and imputation rates per question for Canada and for each province and territory.

The non-response and imputation rates per question at lower levels of geography are also available in 2021 Census data tables presenting data quality indicators. This information is scheduled for release on August 17, 2022, for short-form questions and on November 30, 2022, for long-form questions.

The [2021 Census Data Quality Guidelines](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-26-0006, provides all the information required to understand and interpret the data quality indicators for the 2021 Census, along with guidelines to enable their proper usage. Data quality indicators are provided so that users are informed about the quality of the statistical information and can determine the relevance and the limitations of the data relative to their needs. In general, the quality of the 2021 Census of Population data is very good, but in some cases, data have to be used with caution. It is strongly recommended that users consult all available data quality indicators to get a better sense of the quality of the data products they are interested in.

Certification of final counts

Once data editing and imputation were completed, the data were weighted to ensure that estimates represent the total Canadian population living in private dwellings. Certification of the final weighted estimates was the last step in the validation process, which led to the recommendation to release the data for each level of geography and domain of interest. Based on the analysis of the data quality indicators and the comparison of long-form census questionnaire estimates with other data sources, the recommendation is for unconditional release, conditional release, or non-release (for quality reasons on rare occasions). For conditional release or non-release, appropriate notes and warnings are included in the products and provided to users. Moreover, other data sources were used to evaluate the long-form census questionnaire estimates. However, since the risk of error often increases for lower levels of geography and for smaller populations, and the data sources used to evaluate these counts are less reliable or not available at these lower levels, it can be difficult to certify the counts at these levels.

Long-form census questionnaire estimates are also subject to confidentiality rules that ensure non-disclosure of respondent identity and characteristics. For more information on privacy and confidentiality, please refer to [Chapter 1](#) of the *Guide to the Census of Population, 2021*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X. For information on how Statistics Canada balances the protection of confidentiality and the need for disaggregated census data, with specific attention to new 2021 Census content, please refer to [Balancing the Protection of Confidentiality with the Needs for Disaggregated Census Data, Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-26-0005.

For more information on data processing and the calculation of estimates and their level of precision, please refer to the [Sampling and Weighting Technical Report, Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-306-X.

Data quality for population group

The non-response and imputation rates for the population group question in the 2021 Census are shown in Table 1. At the national level, the non-response rate for the population group question was 1.2% and the imputation rate was 1.6%. Across the provinces, the imputation rate ranged from 1.0% in Newfoundland and Labrador to 1.9% in Alberta. It was higher in the territories, particularly in Nunavut (23.9%). In the territories, as well as in First Nations communities, Métis settlements, Inuit regions and other remote areas in the provinces, the COVID-19 pandemic presented some challenges for conducting the Census of Population, including some that affected in-person enumeration, such as travel restrictions and unavailability of local staff.

Table 1
Non-response rate and imputation rate for the population group question, Canada, provinces and territories, Census of Population, 2021

Geography	Non-response rate	Imputation rate
	percent	
Canada	1.2	1.6
Newfoundland and Labrador	0.9	1.0
Prince Edward Island	0.9	1.1
Nova Scotia	1.0	1.2
New Brunswick	1.2	1.4
Quebec	1.3	1.7
Ontario	1.1	1.6
Manitoba	1.3	1.8
Saskatchewan	1.1	1.6
Alberta	1.3	1.9
British Columbia	1.2	1.7
Yukon	3.0	3.7
Northwest Territories	4.7	5.2
Nunavut	23.5	23.9

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Comparability over time

Counts of the visible minority population in Canada were first produced using 1981 Census data. Data on the visible minority population in 1981, 1986 and 1991 were derived primarily from responses to the ethnic origin question, in conjunction with responses to the place of birth and mother tongue questions.

Since the 1996 Census, the population group question has been used to measure the visible minority population more directly. As previously indicated, while the wording of the question (“Is this person:”) has remained consistent from 1996 to 2021, over this period, there have been differences in the question’s format, examples and instructions, affecting the historical comparability of estimates of the visible minority population in Canada.

Some changes in data processing have also been applied for various censuses. In 2001, people with the write-in responses of “Mixed” and “Bi-racial” who did not also have a mark-in box response were included in the category “Visible minority, n.i.e.” In 2006, these write-in responses were coded to multiple mark-in groups. As a result of this change in processing, estimates for specific visible minority groups increased in 2006, as did the count for the category “Multiple visible minorities.” In contrast, estimates for the category “Visible minority, n.i.e.” decreased.

For the 2021 Census, when the categories in the visible minority variable were derived, greater emphasis was placed on any write-in responses provided by respondents in addition to their mark-in responses. In 2016 and previous censuses, a respondent’s mark-in responses generally were given more emphasis, with any write-in

responses also reported considered to be “extra information.” For example, in 2016, if a respondent provided a mark-in response of “South Asian” with a write-in response of “Nigerian,” they would have been included in the “South Asian” category in the visible minority variable. In 2021, with the greater emphasis on the additional write-in response, such a respondent would be included in the category “Multiple visible minorities.”

Given that relatively few people provide such combinations of mark-in and write-in responses (most people provide just one or more mark-in responses, or provide a write-in response without any mark-in responses), changing the derivation of the visible minority variable to place greater emphasis on additional write-in responses has had very little impact on the estimates for most categories. The sole exception is the category “Multiple visible minorities,” which has increased slightly as a result of this change in processing.

Comparability with other data sources

The 2021 Census is currently Statistics Canada’s primary source of data on population groups and the visible minority population. Before 2021, the census collected this information from 1996 to 2016. In 2011, the National Household Survey collected information on these concepts.

Other household surveys (e.g., the General Social Survey, the Labour Force Survey) also collect data on the visible minority population. Statistics Canada has also produced projections, under specific scenarios, of the visible minority population in Canada—for example, [Population projections on immigration and diversity for Canada and its regions, 2016 to 2041: Overview of projection assumptions and scenarios](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 17-20-0001.

Many factors affect comparisons of population group data and visible minority population data across these sources. Among other factors, comparability is affected by

- differences in survey target populations, reference periods, sampling and collection methods
- question wording, questionnaire format, examples and instructions
- approaches to data processing
- the social and political climate at the time of data collection.