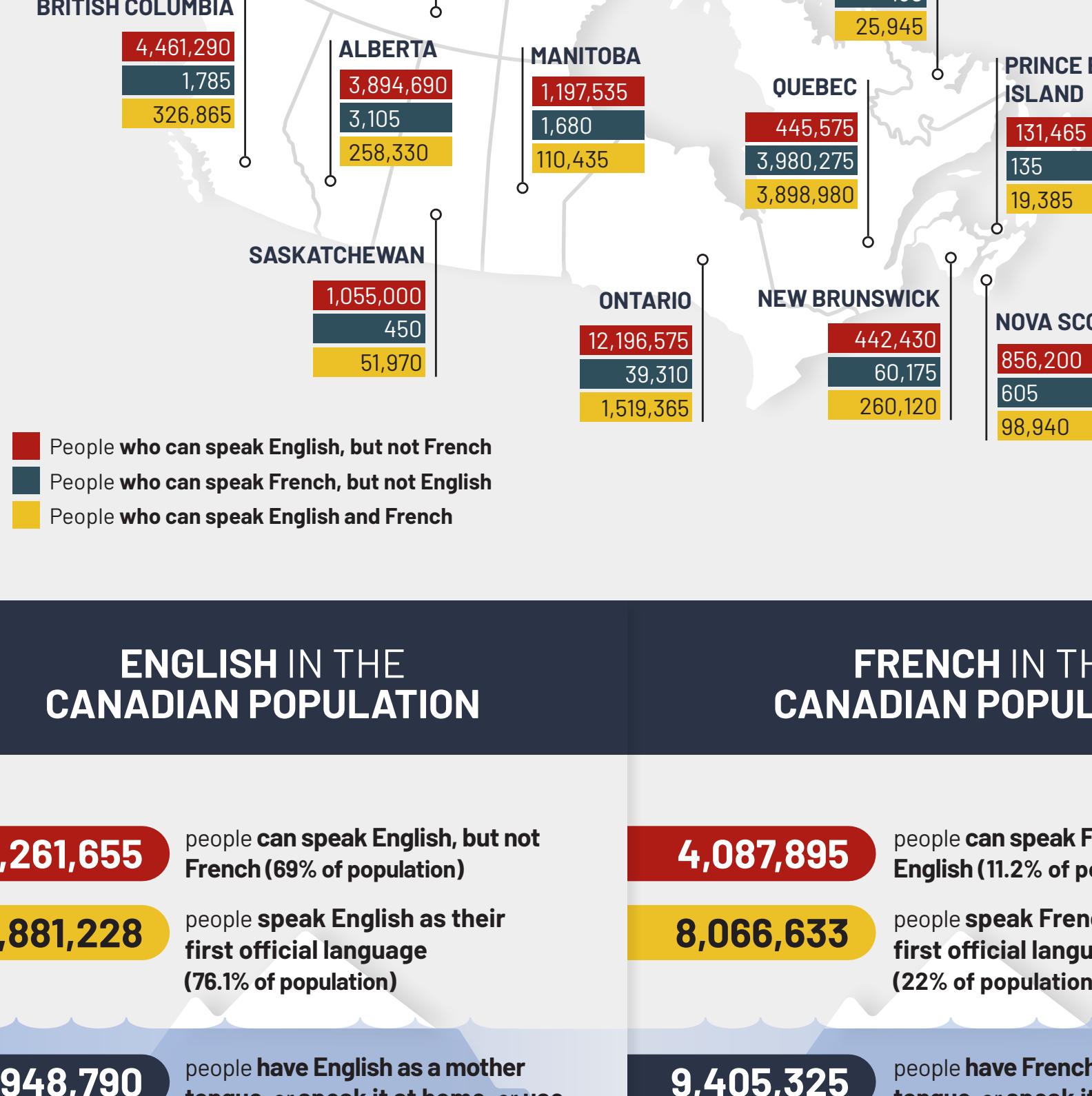


Official Languages in CANADA

**People who can speak English:
31.8M (87% of population)**

**People who can speak French:
10.7M (29% of population)**



ENGLISH IN THE CANADIAN POPULATION

25,261,655 people can speak English, but not French (69% of population)

27,881,228 people speak English as their first official language (76.1% of population)

28,948,790 people have English as a mother tongue, or speak it at home, or use it at work or have it as a language of instruction at school (79.7% of population)²

31,843,335 people can speak English (86.9% of population), including 6,581,680 who can speak both English and French (18% of population)

FRENCH IN THE CANADIAN POPULATION

4,087,895 people can speak French, but not English (11.2% of population)

8,066,633 people speak French as their first official language (22% of population)

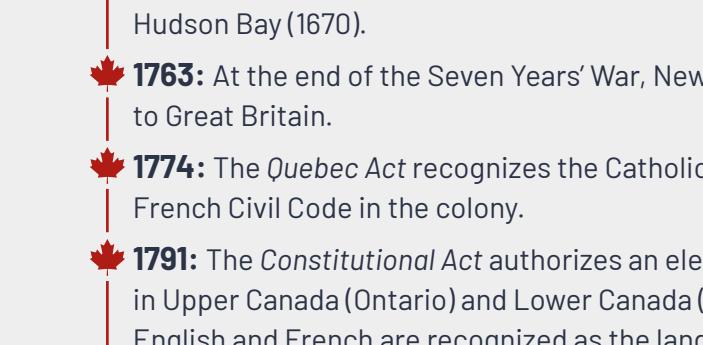
9,405,325 people have French as a mother tongue, or speak it at home, or use it at work or have it as a language of instruction at school (25.9% of population)³

10,669,575 people can speak French (29.1% of population), including 6,581,680 who can speak both French and English (18% of population)

TOTAL POPULATION BY FIRST OFFICIAL LANGUAGE SPOKEN

Canada

36,620,955 (100%)



Quebec

8,406,905 (100%)



Canada outside of Quebec

28,214,050 (100%)



HISTORY

- From time immemorial, Indigenous peoples have been present in the land that we now call Canada. Their languages, the first spoken in this territory, number more than 70 today.
- 1400s and 1500s:** With the arrival of European fishers, traders and explorers, English, French and other European languages are spoken on the east coast of the territory.
- 1599–1608:** A lasting French presence is established in what will become Canada, notably in Tadoussac (1599), Acadia (1605) and Québec City (1608).
- 1610–1670:** A lasting English presence is established in what will become Canada, notably in Newfoundland (1610) and Hudson Bay (1670).
- 1763:** At the end of the Seven Years' War, New France is ceded to Great Britain.
- 1774:** The Quebec Act recognizes the Catholic faith and the French Civil Code in the colony.
- 1791:** The Constitutional Act authorizes an elected assembly in Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec), and English and French are recognized as the languages of the legislature of Lower Canada.
- 1848–1849:** The English and French languages are affirmed in the legislature of the Province of Canada (Quebec and Ontario) and in the council of Assiniboia (Manitoba).
- 1867:** The British North America Act is passed. It recognizes English and French as the languages of Parliament and the courts of the new federation of Canada.
- End of the 19th century:** The residential school system, which aimed to assimilate Indigenous peoples by eliminating their languages and cultures, expands across Canada. These institutions, operated primarily in English, though also in French, have a devastating effect on Indigenous languages across the country.

- Beginning of the 20th century:** An increasing number of immigrants who speak other languages come to Canada.
- 1920s and 1930s:** Modest measures are adopted in recognition of federal bilingualism, including bilingual stamps and currency.
- 1969:** Following the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the Canadian government passes the *Official Languages Act*, which recognizes English and French as the official languages of Canada, affirms their equality in Parliament and the federal courts, gives public servants the right to work in the official language of their choice and creates the position of Commissioner of Official Languages, among other things. New Brunswick passes a similar Act.
- 1982:** The Canadian Constitution is repatriated, with a charter of rights and freedoms that constitutionally recognizes English and French as the official languages of Canada and affirms education language rights for English speakers and French speakers across the country. The new constitution also affirms Indigenous rights and multiculturalism.
- 1988:** The federal *Official Languages Act* is modernized.
- 1990s:** Following the Supreme Court's decision in the *Mahe v Alberta* case, official language minorities across the country are guaranteed control over their schools.
- 2003:** The first action plan for official languages introduces the Government of Canada's five-year strategy on official languages.
- 2019:** The *Indigenous Languages Act* is passed. Its aim is to maintain, revitalize and promote Indigenous languages, including by creating the position of Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. The new Act also affirms that the rights of Indigenous peoples set out in the 1982 Constitution include rights related to their languages.
- 2023:** The federal government again modernizes the *Official Languages Act*.

Sources and notes:

Unless indicated otherwise, all data is from Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001, Ottawa.

¹ Population based on knowledge of Canada's official languages

² Data provided by Statistics Canada, from 2021 Census of Population (2A-L). Includes all individuals having English alone or in combination with another language as a mother tongue, or a language spoken at home, or a language used at work or, among school-aged children who could speak English, reside outside Quebec and had never attended a regular French-language school or reside in Quebec and had attended a regular English-language school.

³ Data provided by Statistics Canada, from 2021 Census of Population (2A-L). Includes all individuals having French alone or in combination with another language as a mother tongue, or a language spoken at home, or a language used at work or, among school-aged children who could speak French, reside outside Quebec and had never attended a regular French-language school or a French immersion program or reside in Quebec and had never attended a regular English-language school.

For additional information, please see our [Snapshots of official languages in Canada \(2021\)](#).