

# **CHANGING COMPOSITION OF CANADA'S POPULATION: ABORIGINAL AND MINORITY GROUPS\***

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# **CHANGING COMPOSITION OF CANADA'S POPULATION: ABORIGINAL AND MINORITY GROUPS**

- Aboriginals and visible ethnic minorities are growing faster than the general population, causing rapid diversification of Canada's population.
- This presentation outlines key demographic trends associated with this diversification process, and some emerging issues surrounding ethno-cultural demography in Canada.

# **CANADIAN ABORGINALS**

- Aboriginals consist of four identifiable subgroups:
  - Inuit
  - Métis
  - North American Indians: Registered
  - North American Indians: non-Registered
- Many Aboriginals have multiple Aboriginal affiliations.
- “Aboriginal” does not imply a homogeneous population.

- Much research conducted in Canada by demographers on Aboriginal peoples fails to distinguish between the four components of this population.
- Inherently, this practice assumes that there is more homogeneity across these subpopulations than may actually exist.
- *The question of homogeneity needs to be examined systematically across a variety of demographic areas, including the more obvious ones of fertility, mortality, internal migration, and the tangential, yet highly relevant areas of homogamy and exogamy trends.*

- In 2001, 976,305 persons, or 3% of the total Canadian population, reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group.

(Table 1)

- The Inuit are concentrated primarily in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Northern Québec, and Labrador.
- The Métis and Indians live in the urban and periurban areas of the country, with a notable proportion of Registered Indians residing in rural areas, some in what is called “remote reserves.”
- The non-Registered Indians and the Métis tend to be the most urbanized of the Aboriginal population.
- The majority of Métis live in the Prairies, in Ontario and Québec, while the Registered and non-Registered Indians are mostly in Ontario, British Columbia and the Prairie provinces.

(Table 2)

- From the information gathered over the last several Censuses, the number of Canadians reporting Aboriginal identity increased by 22% between 1996 and 2001.
- New Brunswick experienced a 66% increase in the number of people claiming Aboriginal identity, the highest growth rate across provinces and territories.
- Newfoundland & Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Ontario all experienced increases of at least 30%.

(Table 3)

- A problematic feature surrounding these observations is that not everyone who reports having an Aboriginal ancestor (ethnic question) would necessarily identify himself/herself as an Aboriginal person.
- The 2001 Census counted 1,319,890 persons of Aboriginal ancestry, but only 976,305 reported an Aboriginal identity.
- The 1996 census reported that 1,101,960 people in Canada declared an Aboriginal ancestry (ethnic question), but there were only 799,010 persons claiming an Aboriginal identity.

(Tables 4, 5)

- Detailed studies show that change in the demographic components of natural increase and net migration between Census periods cannot explain the large gains in the Aboriginal population, either based on ancestry or identification.
- Research indicates that about half of the increase can be attributed to natural increase, and the other half to the dynamics of ethnic mobility (Guimond, 1999, 2003; Guimond, Kerr and Beaujot, 2004).

## Emerging Issues

- Aboriginal communities (especially the remote ones) continue to experience delayed fertility, mortality, and health transitions.
- Though declining, they maintain above average fertility rates, high overall and infant mortality and lower life expectancy; rising prevalence of major chronic/degenerative, and infectious diseases (e.g., diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular complications, tuberculosis).
- Homicide, suicide, accidents, and other forms of violence, represent serious problems across many Aboriginal communities.
- An important goal in future research is to specify and investigate systematically how the demographic condition acts as a causal agent for deprived social and economic conditions across Aboriginal communities.
  - Is the high rate of natural increase among Aboriginals a causal factor in their high level of poverty and poor social conditions in general? If so, what are the causal mechanisms involved?

- Is rapid population growth responsible for social and economic problems on Reserve communities?
- Is the relatively youthful age structure of the Aboriginal population a causal factor in their high levels of poverty and social disorganization? What are the causal mechanisms for this effect?
- The usual research orientation views the socioeconomic “vulnerability” of Aboriginal populations as the determining causal factor in the explanation of their poor socioeconomic status, their high death rates, and disadvantaged health conditions. The demographic research has tried to explain high fertility and mortality rates of Aboriginals as a function of socioeconomic marginalization.
- The fact remains that the demographic and epidemiological conditions of contemporary Aboriginal populations in Canada resemble conditions found in some of the poorest nations of the world.
- By applying Aboriginal-specific data to UN human development indicators, Indian Affairs revealed that living standards on Reserves rank 63rd in the world, which is below some Third World countries (Anderssen 1998).

- Appropriate effective interventions are needed to rectify this situation.
- Successful formulation and implementation of policies to attain this objective necessitates first and foremost an in-depth appreciation of Aboriginal demographic history and its relationship to their contemporary and projected future population.
- The aim should be to establish an in-depth understanding of the demographic processes and how demographic change is both a cause and consequence of social, cultural, and economic conditions across the Aboriginal populations of Canada.

## **ETHNIC DIVERSIFICATION**

- Current immigration patterns are driving the ethnic diversification of Canada's population.
- Until 1967, Canadian immigration policy contained place of origin preferences.
- These restrictions were designed specifically to preserve Canada's European ethno-cultural heritage, and therefore intended to suppress non-White immigration.
- Before 1981, the majority of immigrants had European ethno-cultural backgrounds,
  - 37% coming from Western and Southern Europe,
  - 21% from the United Kingdom,
  - 9% from Eastern Europe, and
  - 6% from the United States (Statistics Canada, 2003).
  - The remaining 27% of immigrants came from all other regions, with 15% arriving from various Asian countries.

- In 1967, the “points system” replaced the place of origin preferences.
- The ethnic composition of migration in-flows changed radically with the introduction of the points system as “non-traditional” source countries supplied the majority (57%) of immigrants between 1971 and 1980.
- Approximately 80% immigrants came from non-traditional source countries between 1991 and 2001.
- Of recent immigration, the top five source countries are China, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Iran.
- The 2001 Census indicates that the Canadian population is very ethnically diverse.
- Canadians report belonging to over 90 different ethnic groups, with many having mixed ethnic backgrounds, and 50 of these ethnic groups are non-European.
- In 2001, the three most numerous ethnic groups were Canadian, English, and French. Canadians having Canadian, English, or French origins cumulatively accounted for three-quarters of the general population in 2001.

- The Chinese (1.1 million), South Asians (920,000), and Blacks (662,000) represent Canada's predominant visible minority groups, and these three groups cumulatively account for two-thirds of the total visible minority population.
- Other large visible (100,000+) ethnic minority groups include Filipinos, Arabs and West Asians, Latin Americans, Southeast Asians, and Koreans.

(Table 6)

- Visible minorities – who Statistics Canada defines as all non-Caucasian or non-White persons other than Aboriginals – composed over 13% of the total national population in 2001, amounting to 4 million individuals, a very significant increase from the 5% recorded 20 years earlier.
- From 1996 to 2001, this population's growth rate exceeded the general population's growth rate by a six-fold margin. This differential growth pattern is largely attributable to current immigration trends.

(Table 7)

- In 1991, British Columbia and Ontario contained the highest concentrations of visible minorities, which is consistent with immigration patterns. Both British Columbia and Ontario increased their share of the national visible minority population between 1991 and 2001; the visible minority population in BC rose from 14% to 22%, and from 13% to 19% in Ontario.
- On the other hand, Newfoundland & Labrador, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick appear to have comparatively few visible minorities, accounting for just 3% of the visible minority population. But this is not a particularly disproportionate share considering that these provinces account for just 4% of the general population.

(Table 8)

- The influence of immigration trends on changes to Canada's ethno-demographic structure is most visible in census metropolitan areas. Of 1990s immigrants, 94% settled in a census metropolitan area.
- Vancouver's visible minority population grew to 37% in 2001 from 24% in 1991 and 14% in 1981. About 40% of Vancouver's population is foreign-born. One-in-three Vancouver residents is Asian, with 18% of the city's population having Chinese and 8% South Asian ethnic backgrounds. By contrast, people with Canadian and English backgrounds, Vancouver's two largest ethnic groups, respectively account for 24% and 19% of the area's population.

- Almost 80% of immigrants who arrived in Toronto during the 1990s are visible minorities. As of 2001, visible minorities account for 37% of Toronto's population, an increase from 26% in 1991 and 14% in 1981, with Chinese, Black, and South Asian peoples being the most numerous.

(Table 9)

- Table 10 shows the 25 Canadian municipalities with the highest proportions of visible minorities. A growing Canadian literature demonstrates that visible minority neighborhoods are mushrooming across Canada's metropolitan areas. For example, Hou and Picot (2004) point out that the number of visible minority neighborhoods in Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver increased from 6 in 1981 to 254 in 2001.
- Several prominent demographers suggest that the rapid migration of visible minorities into urban areas is going to increase racial and ethnic segregation within cities, and thus stimulate various social problems through patterns of exclusion and isolation (e.g., Massey & Fischer, 2000). For example, the spatial concentration of poverty exposes residents of poor neighborhoods to multiple disadvantages. At the community-level, high aggregate levels of low-income and unemployment restrict the economic resources (taxation base) available for schools, parks and recreational facilities, and other desirable community resources and institutions.

- The “white flight” phenomenon, however, is not a distinctive characteristic of ethno-demographic transition in Canadian cities. Visible minority neighborhoods are becoming more prevalent, to be sure, but the general trend is toward ethnic diversification of Canada’s urban neighborhoods. Regardless of income status, many US Blacks are confined to ghettos, but Canadian visible minorities appear to have much better residential opportunities. Myles and Hou (2004) indicate that long-term and affluent Blacks and South Asians tend to reside in predominately White neighborhoods with higher quality socioeconomic environments.

## SUMMARY

- Both Aboriginals and visible minorities represent fast growing populations in Canada.
- The national Aboriginal population increased 22% nation-wide between the 1996 and 2001 Census periods. About half of this growth is attributable to natural increase, but the other half is due to ethnic mobility, the phenomenon through which individuals and families experience changes in their ethnic affiliation.
- Given the ethnic mobility phenomenon, it may be best to view the Aboriginal population as an “open population,” subject to continuous renewal, not only through the traditional demographic processes of births and deaths (net international migration is inconsequential), but as importantly, through shifts in self-identification.
- The visible minority population grew from about 5% of the national population in 1981 to over 13% in 2001, largely because of immigration from non-traditional sources countries.

- As seven-in-ten recent immigrants choose to settle in urban areas, the most striking ethno-demographic changes are occurring in Canada's cities.
- Compared to earlier immigrants, recent arrivals to Canada are facing greater difficulties with socioeconomic integration, with significant numbers encountering labor market problems, unemployment, and low-income.
- Recent immigrants appear to achieve socioeconomic integration on par with national averages over time, but the initial difficulties they encounter warrant some concern. For example, the residential settlement and economic patterns of recent immigrants suggest a spatial concentration of poor immigrants.

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