

# The Canadian census: A rich portrait of the country's religious and ethnocultural diversity

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Canada is known for its ethnocultural and religious diversity, a characteristic of the country valued by the vast majority of Canadians. According to the 2020 General Social Survey, 92.0% of the population aged 15 and older agreed that ethnic or cultural diversity is a Canadian value. Everyone plays a fundamental role: you, your parents, your grandparents and your ancestors all contribute to shape the diverse landscape of the country.

The origins and religions of the population have been measured by the Canadian census since 1871. This mosaic has been evolving since it was first captured. To reflect the changing and complex nature of diversity in the country, Statistics Canada has conducted extensive engagement and research to improve the collection and measurement of the ethnocultural and religious diversity of the population as well as the terminology used to describe it.

Statistics Canada has modernized the technology used to collect, process and disseminate census data. For example, the 2021 Census electronic questionnaire included links to pages with hundreds of examples of ethnic or cultural origins and religions. For the ethnic or cultural origins question in particular, the extensive list of examples helped respondents answer the question without prompting them to report the origins that had been provided directly on the questionnaire in previous censuses. As a result, the 2021 Census provides more detail on the ethnocultural and religious facets of society than ever before. In fact, more than 450 ethnic and cultural origins, 200 places of birth, 100 religions and 450 languages have been included in this census.

Each person has a unique set of characteristics that sets them apart from others. This can be observed in the long list of ethnic or cultural origins reported in the 2021 Census, including groups related to the Indigenous peoples of Canada (First Nations, Métis, Inuit); to the first Europeans to settle in the country (such as the French, English, Scottish and Irish); and to subsequent waves of immigration (such as Italians, Germans, Ukrainians, Chinese, Indians (India) and Filipinos).

Canadians' understanding of ethnocultural concepts evolves over time and is shaped by current events. The related terminology also changes, which is why Statistics Canada has adapted its terminology on these concepts for the 2021 Census (see the box "Measuring racialized groups").

The 2021 Census took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has affected everyone differently and has exacerbated the inequalities that existed before its onset. Issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion garnered increased attention. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on residential schools, and anti-Asian discrimination stemming from the pandemic became the subject of much discussion. Given this context, the data published today on ethnocultural and religious diversity reflect how we see ourselves as Canadians.

The results can be used by public decision-makers, employers and service providers in health care, education and justice to better meet the needs of all groups in Canadian society and to foster an inclusive society and social cohesion.



## Highlights

More than 450 ethnic or cultural origins were reported in the 2021 Census. The top origins reported by Canada's population, alone or with other origins, were "Canadian" (5.7 million people), "English" (5.3 million), "Irish" (4.4 million), "Scottish" (4.4 million) and "French" (4.0 million).

In 2021, over 19.3 million people reported a Christian religion, representing just over half of the Canadian population (53.3%). However, this proportion is down from 67.3% in 2011 and 77.1% in 2001.

Approximately 12.6 million people, or more than one-third of Canada's population, reported having no religious affiliation. The proportion of this population has more than doubled in 20 years, going from 16.5% in 2001 to 34.6% in 2021.

While small, the proportion of Canada's population who reported being Muslim, Hindu or Sikh has more than doubled in 20 years. From 2001 to 2021, these shares rose from 2.0% to 4.9% for Muslims, from 1.0% to 2.3% for Hindus and from 0.9% to 2.1% for Sikhs.

Racialized groups in Canada are all experiencing growth. In 2021, South Asian (7.1%), Chinese (4.7%) and Black (4.3%) people together represented 16.1% of Canada's total population.

The portrait of racialized groups varies across regions. For example, the South Asian, Chinese and Black populations are the largest groups in Ontario, while the largest groups are Black and Arab people in Quebec, Chinese and South Asians in British Columbia, and South Asians and Filipinos in the Prairies.

## More than 450 ethnic or cultural origins reported in the 2021 Census

Canada has a long-standing, ongoing and widespread demand for information on the ethnic and cultural diversity of the population's ancestors. In fact, even before Confederation, a question on origins was included in the census.

This information is used today to support the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. It is used by governments, businesses, universities and researchers throughout the country with an interest in ethnic and cultural diversity. Finally, many ethnic and cultural associations use these data to get information on the size and characteristics of their community.

Today, Statistics Canada is publishing data on more than 450 ethnic or cultural origins, as reported by the population in the 2021 Census. The origins reported by respondents are subjective in nature and multidimensional, reflecting the image Canadians have of themselves, as well as the knowledge and understanding of their family's ethnic and cultural heritage at a given moment. The ethnic or cultural origins that respondents choose mirror the predominant characteristics of the history of ethnic or cultural groups that can be linked to a country, a region, a language, a religion or a culture.

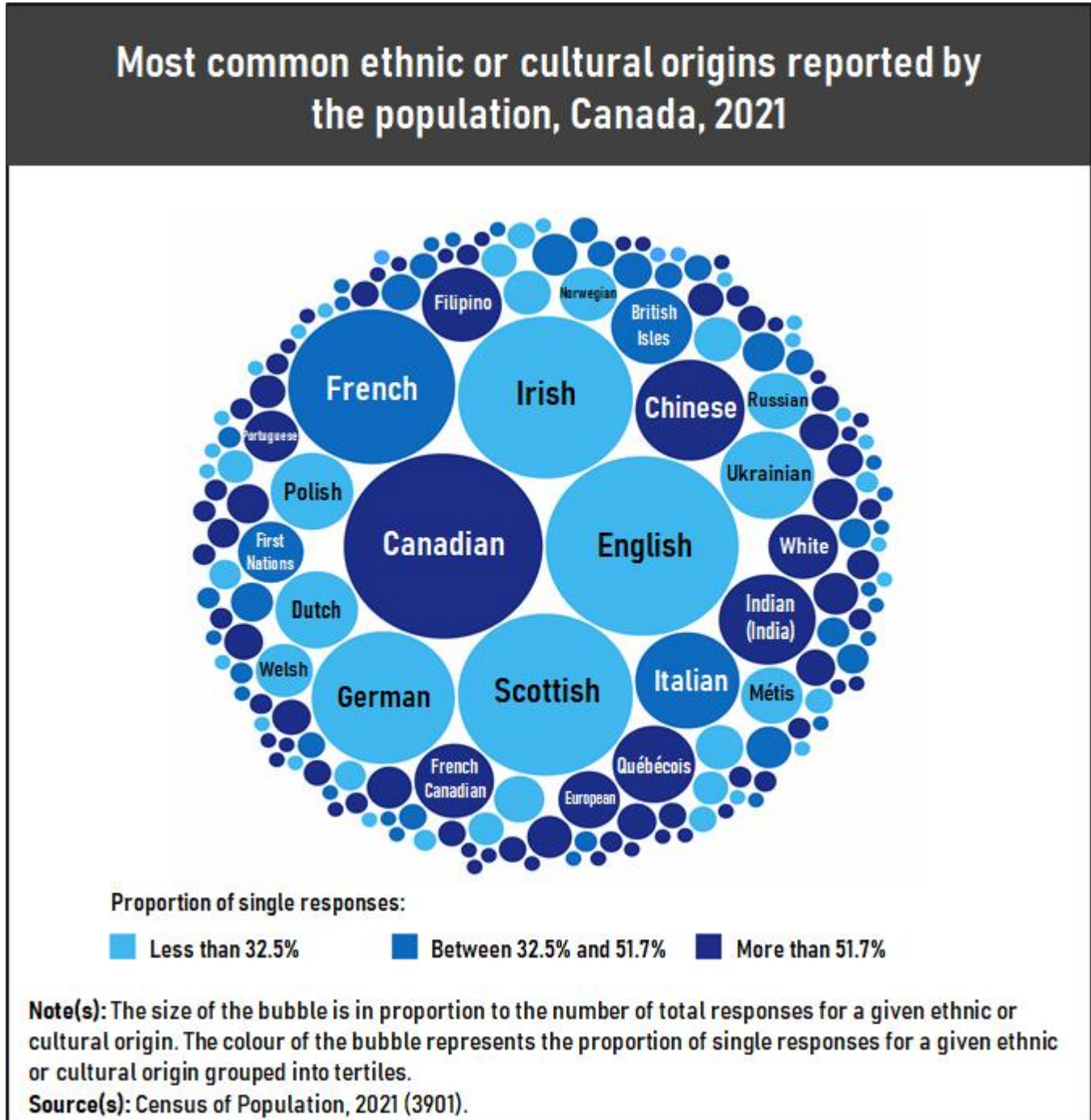
The level of importance placed on one's ethnic or cultural origin varies. For some, it is an important aspect of their lives, while for others, it is less important. According to data from the 2022 Canadian Social Survey, immigrants (79.5%) are much more likely than non-immigrants (47.6%) to place importance on their ethnic or cultural origins.

In the census, respondents could report more than one ethnic or cultural origin for their ancestors. Up to six origins were retained per person. In total, 35.5% of the population reported more than one origin in the 2021 Census.

Given the fluid nature of this concept and the changes made to this question, 2021 Census data on ethnic or cultural origins are not comparable to data from previous censuses and should not be used to measure the growth or decline of the various groups associated with these origins (see the box entitled "The importance and comparability of data on ethnic or cultural origin").

"Canadian," British Isles and French origins were the most common origins reported

Infographic 1 – "Canadian" tops the more than 450 ethnic or cultural origins reported by the population of Canada



In 2021, "Canadian" was the top origin reported, alone or with other origins. Nearly one in six people (15.6%) or 5.7 million persons in Canada reported this origin.

Origins from the British Isles were the next most common. In particular, "English" (5.3 million people), "Irish" (4.4 million) and "Scottish" (4.4 million) were reported most often by Canadians.

"French" (no further clarification) (4.0 million people) was ranked fifth among origins most often reported. "French Canadian" (0.9 million) was also on the list of most frequently reported origins.

**"German," "Italian," "Ukrainian," "Chinese" and "Indian" were each reported by at least 1 million people in Canada**

In 2021, three other European origins were reported, alone or with other origins, by at least 1 million people, namely, "German" (3.0 million), "Italian" (1.5 million), and "Ukrainian" (1.3 million). And two other European origins were reported by close to 1 million people, namely, "Dutch" and "Polish". In total, 52.5% of the population reported European origins.

"Chinese" (1.7 million people), "Indian (from India)" (1.3 million) and "Filipino" (0.9 million) were also among the ethnic or cultural origins reported most often.

## The importance and comparability of data on ethnic or cultural origin

Data on ethnic or cultural origin provide a snapshot of how Canadians report their ethnic or cultural ancestries on Census Day and contribute to writing a new chapter in Canada's history.

Many factors can influence responses to the question on ethnic or cultural origin over time, including respondents' knowledge of their family history and their understanding of, and views on, the topic. For these reasons, two people with the same ancestors may answer this question differently.

The understanding respondents have of ethnocultural concepts and of the social environment at the time of the census can also influence their responses. For instance, in recent years, the discussions that were generated from the Black Lives Matter movement have led to growing interest in racialization issues.

Over time, changes have been made to the wording, format, instructions and examples for the census question on ethnic or cultural origin in order to improve data measurement and quality. For example, the instructions for this question were modified for the 2021 Census. The short list of examples of ethnic or cultural origins that had been provided directly in the questionnaire in previous censuses was also removed so that these examples would not influence the origins reported.

At the same time, it has been shown in testing that, for some respondents, it is more difficult to answer the question without any examples provided. Given the fact that the vast majority of respondents complete the questionnaire online, for the 2021 Census, the list of 28 examples was replaced with a link to a [list of over 500 examples](#). This approach leverages the growing use of electronic questionnaires by Canada's population and would not have been possible in previous censuses.

The results for the "Canadian" origin are among those most affected by these changes. In the 2016 Census, "Canadian" was the first example of ethnic or cultural origin in the list of examples provided directly on the questionnaire. That list of examples was based on the most common responses given in the 2011 National Household Survey. In the 2016 Census, 11.1 million people, representing 32.3% of the population, had reported "Canadian" as their origin, alone or with other origins. In 2021, when "Canadian" was just one example in a list of over 500, it was reported by 5.7 million people, representing 15.6% of the population. This decline in the "Canadian" ethnic or cultural origin is consistent with the results anticipated following the quantitative tests conducted in 2019.

As well, responses to the question on ethnic or cultural origin in 2021 are more diverse than in the past. For example, some regional North American origins saw a significant increase, such as "Québécois," which was reported by 982,000 people in 2021, compared with 195,000 in 2016.

In the 2021 Census, nearly 95,000 people reported "Black" as their origin, alone or with other origins; in 2016, roughly 30,000 people reported this origin. Moreover, nearly 700,000 people reported "White" as their origin in 2021.

While some people reported Jewish as their *religion*, some reported "Jewish" as their *ethnic or cultural origin*. In 2021, 282,000 people reported "Jewish" as their ethnic or cultural origin, compared with [144,000 in 2016 when "Jewish" was not an example listed with the question](#).

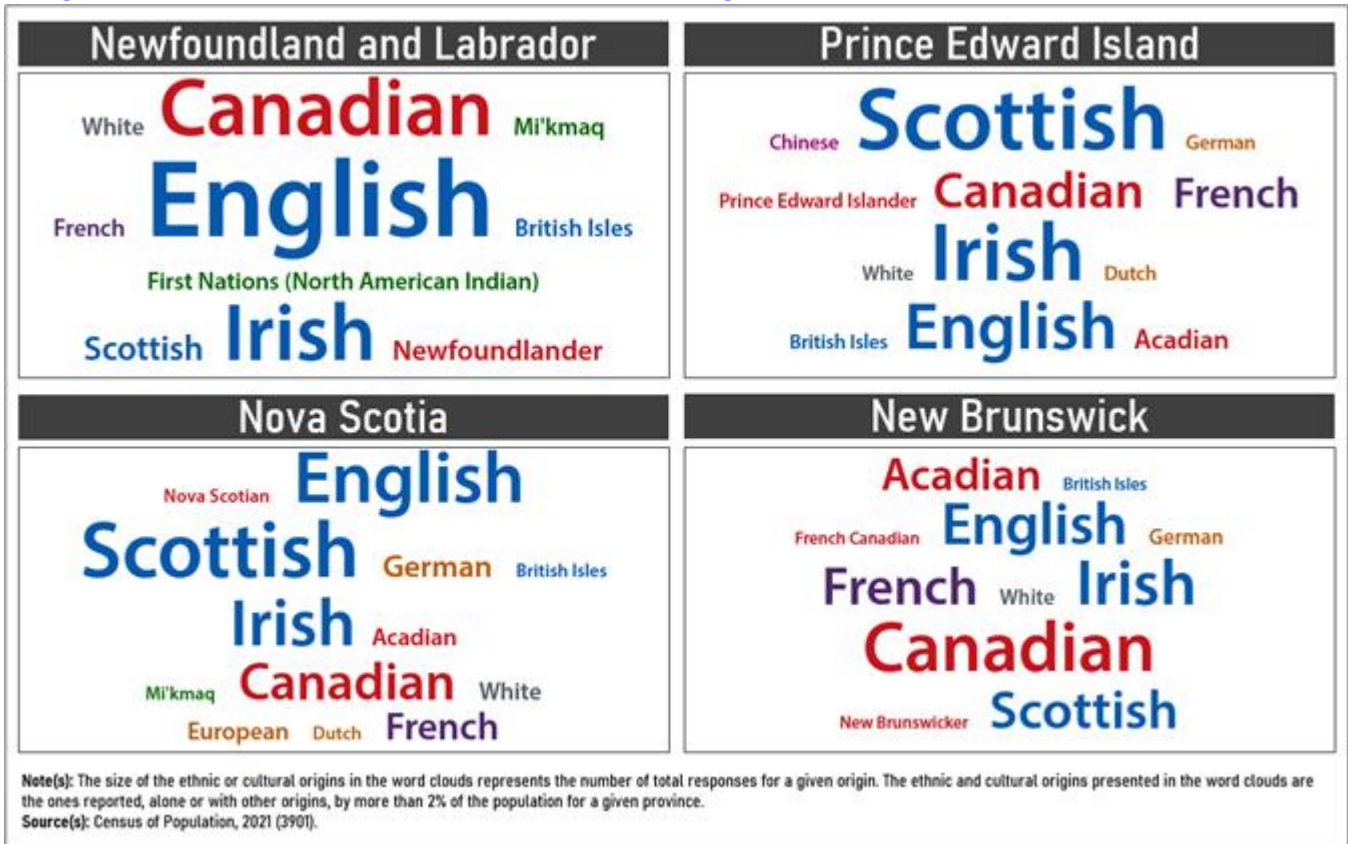
In light of the aforementioned factors, the 2021 Census data on ethnic or cultural origin are not comparable with data from previous censuses and should not be used to measure the growth or decline of the various groups associated with these origins.

For more information on the changes to the question on ethnic or cultural origin in the 2021 Census, please consult the reference document "[Ethnic or cultural origins: Technical report on changes for the 2021 Census](#)."

The [Ethnic or Cultural Origin Reference Guide](#) can also be consulted for more information on this concept.

A varying portrait of diversity across the provinces and territories

Infographic 2 – Most common ethnic or cultural origins reported in the Atlantic provinces



Infographic 3 – Most common ethnic or cultural origins reported in Quebec

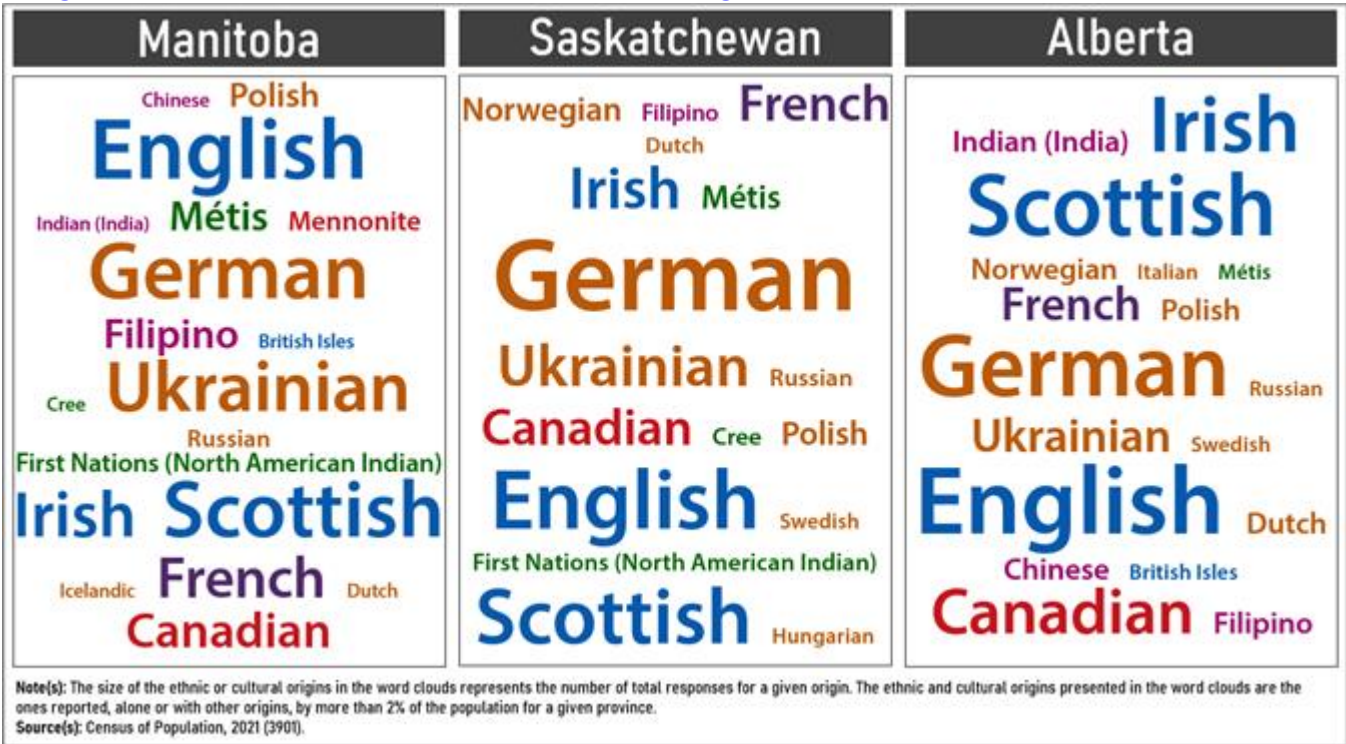


Infographic 4 – Most common ethnic or cultural origins reported in Ontario





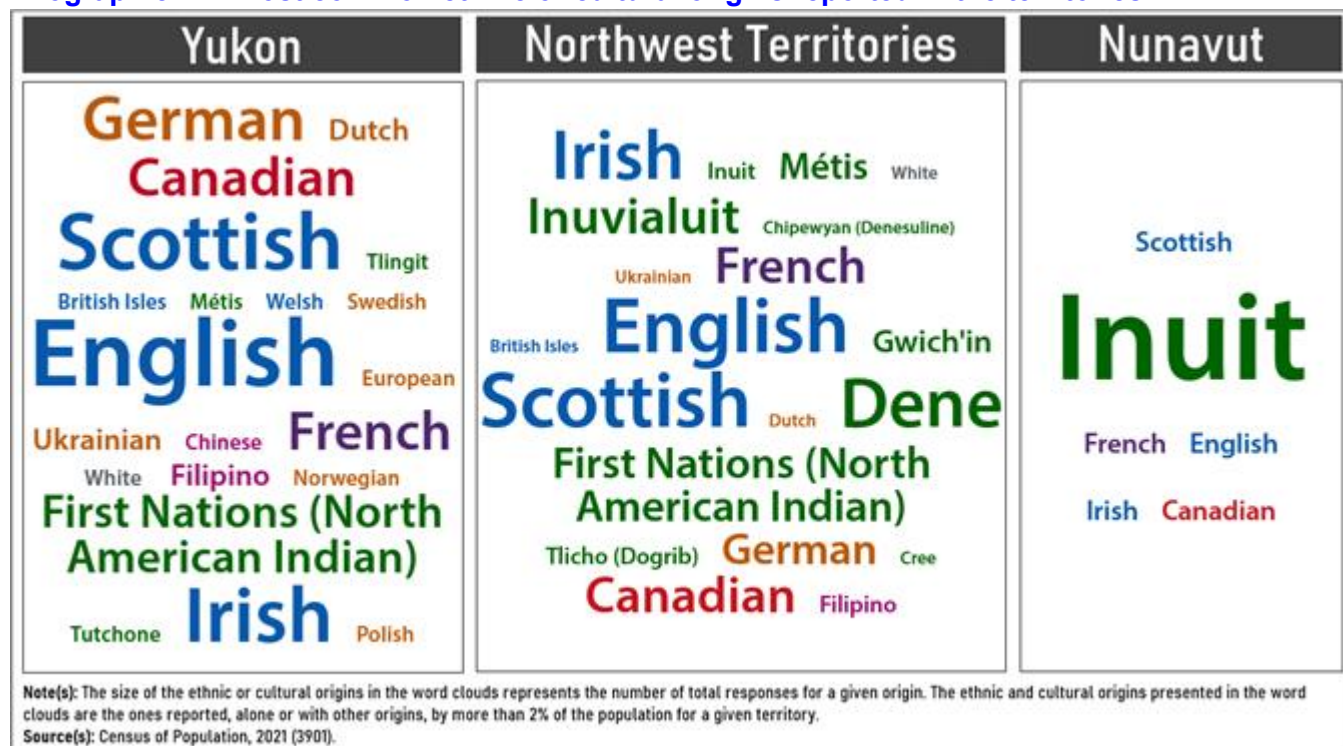
Infographic 5 – Most common ethnic or cultural origins reported in the Prairie provinces



Infographic 6 – Most common ethnic or cultural origins reported in British Columbia



**Infographic 7 – Most common ethnic or cultural origins reported in the territories**



Diversity based on ethnic or cultural origins differs across the country. In every province and territory, "Canadian", "English", "Irish", "Scottish" and "French" are among the origins most often reported, alone or with other origins. Aside from this constant factor, many other origins stand out in the various regions of the country.

**Approximately 2.2 million people report Indigenous ancestry**

In the 2021 Census, approximately 2.2 million people reported [Indigenous ancestry](#), alone or with other ancestries, representing 6.1% of the population of Canada.

Of these, approximately 1.4 million people reported at least one of 104 First Nations (North American Indian) ancestries, more than half a million (560,000) reported "Métis" ancestry, and 82,000 people reported "Inuit" ancestry.

The most common First Nations ancestries reported were "Cree" (250,000 people), "Mi'kmaq" (122,000), "Ojibway" (92,000) and "Algonquin" (56,000). In addition, about 632,000 people reported "First Nations (North American Indian)" ancestry without any additional clarification.

In the census, a separate set of questions were asked to identify the First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations—the three Indigenous groups recognized in the *Constitution Act, 1982*. Based on these questions, there were 1.8 million Indigenous people in the country in 2021, representing 5.0% of the total population. For more information on the Indigenous population in the 2021 Census, see the [Daily](#) article entitled "[Indigenous population continues to grow and is much younger than the non-Indigenous population, although the pace of growth has slowed](#)," published on September 21, 2022.

**Religion: another facet of diversity in Canada**

Another long-standing and ongoing need for diversity data is on religious affiliation. This information has been collected every 10 years since 1871.

Information on the religion of the population is often used by governments, religious organizations and researchers in Canada. For example, data on religion are used to plan programs and help determine where to build churches, synagogues, mosques and temples. They are also used to understand diversity in Canada and the different experiences of religious groups.

### The majority of the population is Christian, but their share is decreasing

In 2021, more than 19.3 million people reported a Christian religion, or just over half of the Canadian population (53.3%). However, this percentage is down from 67.3% in 2011 and 77.1% in 2001.

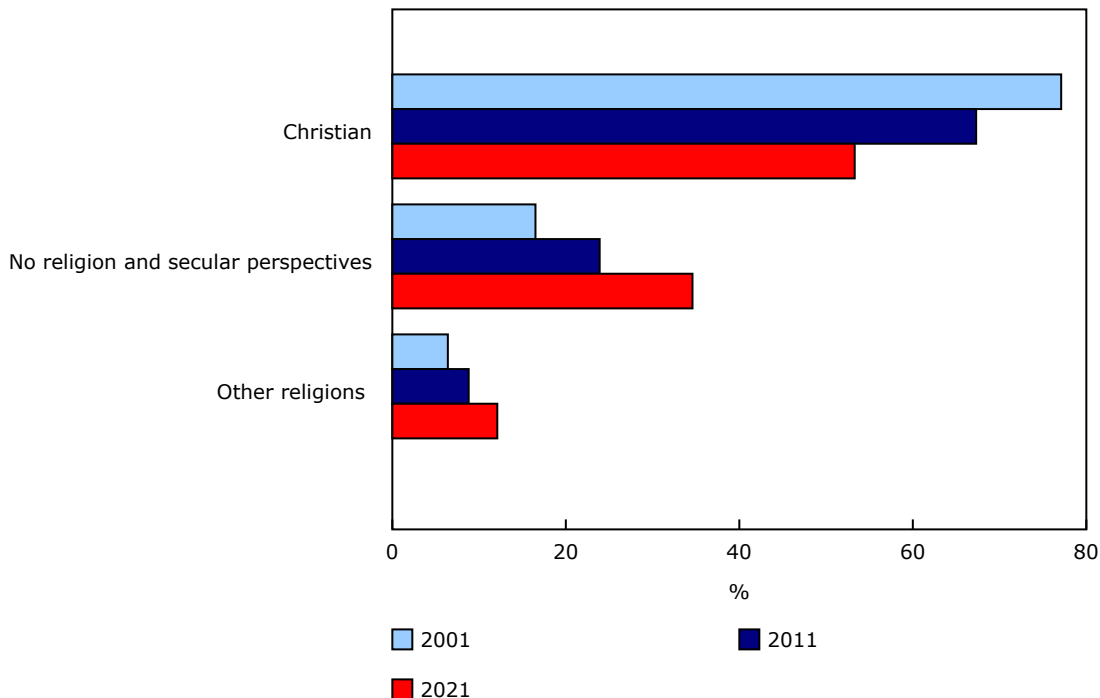
Catholics are the largest Christian denomination in Canada, with 10.9 million people (29.9%) in 2021. The United Church (3.3%) and the Anglican Church (3.1%), two other Christian denominations, each had more than 1 million people in Canada. Orthodox Christians (1.7%), Baptists (1.2%), and Pentecostals and other Charismatics (1.1%) were the other Christian denominations most often reported.

In 2021, just under 2.8 million people, or 7.6% of the population, reported being Christian without further indication of a specific denomination, double the figure from 2011 (1.4 million).

With the exception of Orthodox Christians and people who simply reported being Christian, the proportion of affiliation in every Christian denomination decreased from 2011 to 2021.

#### Chart 1

The share of the population with a Christian religion has been decreasing for 20 years, while the shares for other religions or no religious affiliation have been rising



Source(s): Census of Population, 2001 and 2021 (3901), and National Household Survey, 2011 (5178).

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## More than one in three Canadians reported having no religious affiliation

Approximately 12.6 million people, or more than one-third of Canada's population, reported having no religious affiliation or having a secular perspective (atheist, agnostic, humanist and other secular perspectives). The proportion of this population has more than doubled in 20 years, rising from 16.5% in 2001 to 23.9% in 2011 and to 34.6% in 2021.

Immigration alone cannot account for this increase, since 21.5% of immigrants admitted from 2011 to 2021 had no religious affiliation. This proportion is lower than the proportion of the population with no religious affiliation posted in 2011 (23.9%) and 2021 (34.6%). Part of the growth is due to the number of children under 10 who were born in Canada and have no religious affiliation. The number of children under 10 rose by 597,000 (+55.3%) from 2011 to 2021. The main reason for the growth in the population with no religious affiliation is likely related to the fact that [many people who reported a religious affiliation in the past now report no religious affiliation](#). The decline in religious affiliation is consistent with [other findings that fewer people reported the importance of religious or spiritual beliefs in their lives](#), down from 71.0% in 2003 to 54.1% in 2019.

## While small, the proportions of the population who reported being Muslim, Hindu or Sikh have doubled in the last 20 years

After Christianity, Islam was the second most commonly reported religion in Canada in 2021, with nearly 1.8 million, or 1 in 20, people. In 20 years, the share of the Muslim population in Canada has more than doubled—from 2.0% in 2001 to 4.9% in 2021.

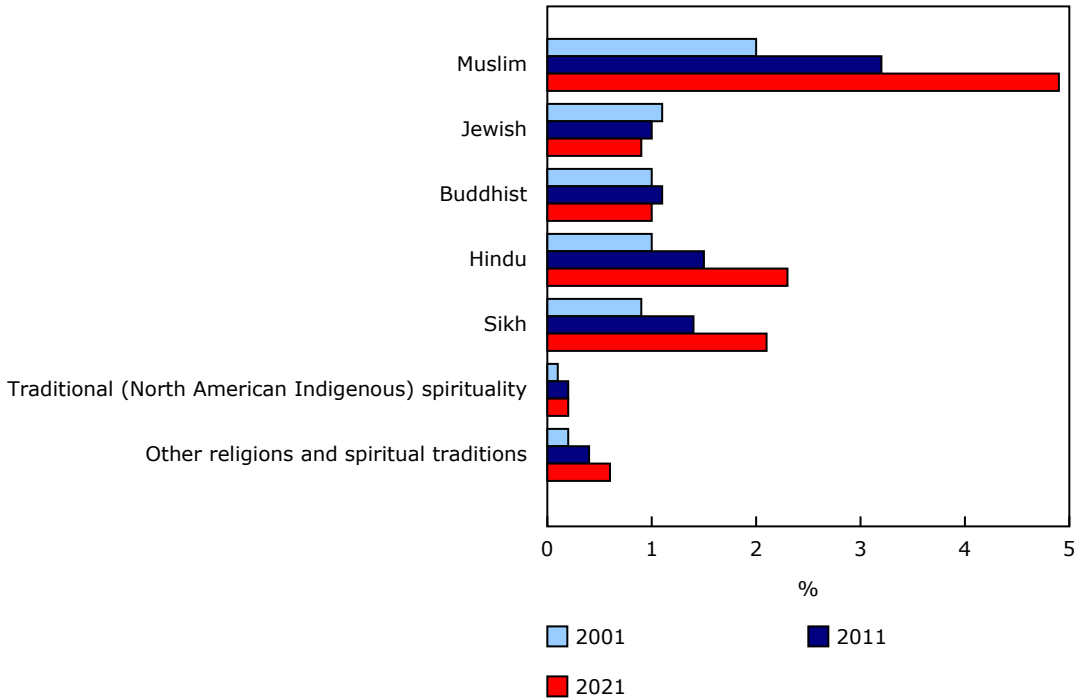
In 2021, close to 830,000 people, or 2.3% of the total population, reported an affiliation to Hinduism. Like Muslims, the proportion of the population with Hinduism as its religion has more than doubled in the last 20 years, and is up from 1.0% in 2001.

### The many facets of religion

The census collects information on people's religious affiliation, regardless of whether or not they practise that religion. Information on various components of religiosity, such as religious affiliation, religious practice and the importance of religion, are available in Statistics Canada's General Social Statistics Program.

For example, a recent study revealed that, over the last three decades, [the religious landscape in Canada has undergone significant transformations, including a decline in the practice of religious activities, both collectively and individually, and in the importance of religious and spiritual convictions in how people live their lives](#).

**Chart 2**  
**In 20 years, the proportions of the population who reported being Muslim, Hindu or Sikh have doubled**



Source(s): Census of Population, 2001 and 2021 (3901), and National Household Survey, 2011 (5178).

Moreover, the share of the population who reported Sikhism as its religion also more than doubled since 2001, from 0.9% to 2.1% in 2021. About 770,000 people reported Sikhism as their religion in the 2021 Census.

Approximately 335,000 people reported being Jewish in 2021. This number has changed little over the last 20 years; in 2001, 330,000 reported a Jewish affiliation. Although Canada's total population grew, the proportion of the population with Jewish religious affiliation decreased slightly from 1.1% in 2001 to 0.9% in 2021.

In 2021, close to 360,000 people, or 1.0% of Canada's population, reported Buddhism as their religion, the same percentage as in the 2001 Census.

Immigration is one of the key drivers of non-Christian religions. Immigrants represented the majority of Buddhists (68.9%), Muslims (63.1%), Hindus (62.9%) and Sikhs (53.8%). By comparison, immigrants represented nearly one-quarter (23.0%) of the Canadian population in 2021. In addition, a large proportion of immigrants admitted from 2011 to 2021 reported a non-Christian religion: 18.9% reported being Muslim, followed by Hindu (9.0%) and Sikh (5.8%). These proportions are higher than the ones observed in the total population.

For more information on immigration in Canada, consult the *Daily* article entitled "[Immigrants make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians.](#)"

## International comparisons of religion

According to [studies by the Pew Research Center](#) and studies based on other data sources (e.g., World Values Survey), a similar trend is observed in other predominantly Christian countries (United States, Australia and several European countries), namely a decline in Christianity and an increase in other religions and the number of people with no religious affiliation.

For example, [the share of the United States population with no religious affiliation rose from 16% in 2007 to 29% in 2021](#). [Data from the 2021 Australian census](#) reveal that 38.9% of the country's population reported no religious affiliation, more than double the rate from 2001 (16.7%).

## Approximately 81,000 people reported a traditional Indigenous spirituality

Approximately 81,000 people, or 0.2% of the total population, reported a traditional Indigenous spirituality in the 2021 Census. The vast majority (90.2%) of people who reported this religious affiliation were First Nations people.

Of the 1.8 million people with an Indigenous identity in Canada, nearly half (47.0%) reported having no religious affiliation and more than one-quarter (26.9%) reported being Catholic.

The proportion of Catholics varies from one Indigenous group to another: 31.6% among Métis, 24.5% among First Nations and 17.4% among Inuit. Meanwhile, the share of Anglicans (37.4%) is much higher among Inuit than among the entire Indigenous population (6.1%).

## The importance of Christian denominations varies greatly from region to region

The religious portrait varies greatly from one province and territory to another. With the exception of Nunavut, Catholicism is the religious affiliation reported most often in all provinces and territories, representing 29.9% of Canada's population.

Quebec is the only province or territory where more than half the population reported being Catholic (53.8%). However, the proportion of the population who reported being Catholic has fallen considerably over the last 10 years in Quebec, as three-quarters (74.7%) of the Quebec population reported it as their religion in 2011.

People affiliated with the United Church represent larger shares of the population in the Atlantic provinces, namely Newfoundland and Labrador (12.1%), Prince Edward Island (9.7%), Nova Scotia (7.5%), as well as in Saskatchewan (7.4%). In contrast, this Christian denomination represents 3.3% of Canada's population as a whole.

There were higher shares of people who reported the Anglican religion in Nunavut (39.1%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (21.5%), compared with 3.1% for Canada as a whole.

## The majority of the population of Yukon and British Columbia reported having no religious affiliation

Yukon and British Columbia stand out with regard to their population reporting no religious affiliation. Close to three in five (59.7%) of Yukon's population and slightly over one-half (52.1%) of British Columbia's population reported no religious affiliation in 2021, compared with 34.6% for Canada as a whole.

## Ontario and British Columbia have the largest proportions of the population who reported a religious affiliation other than Christian

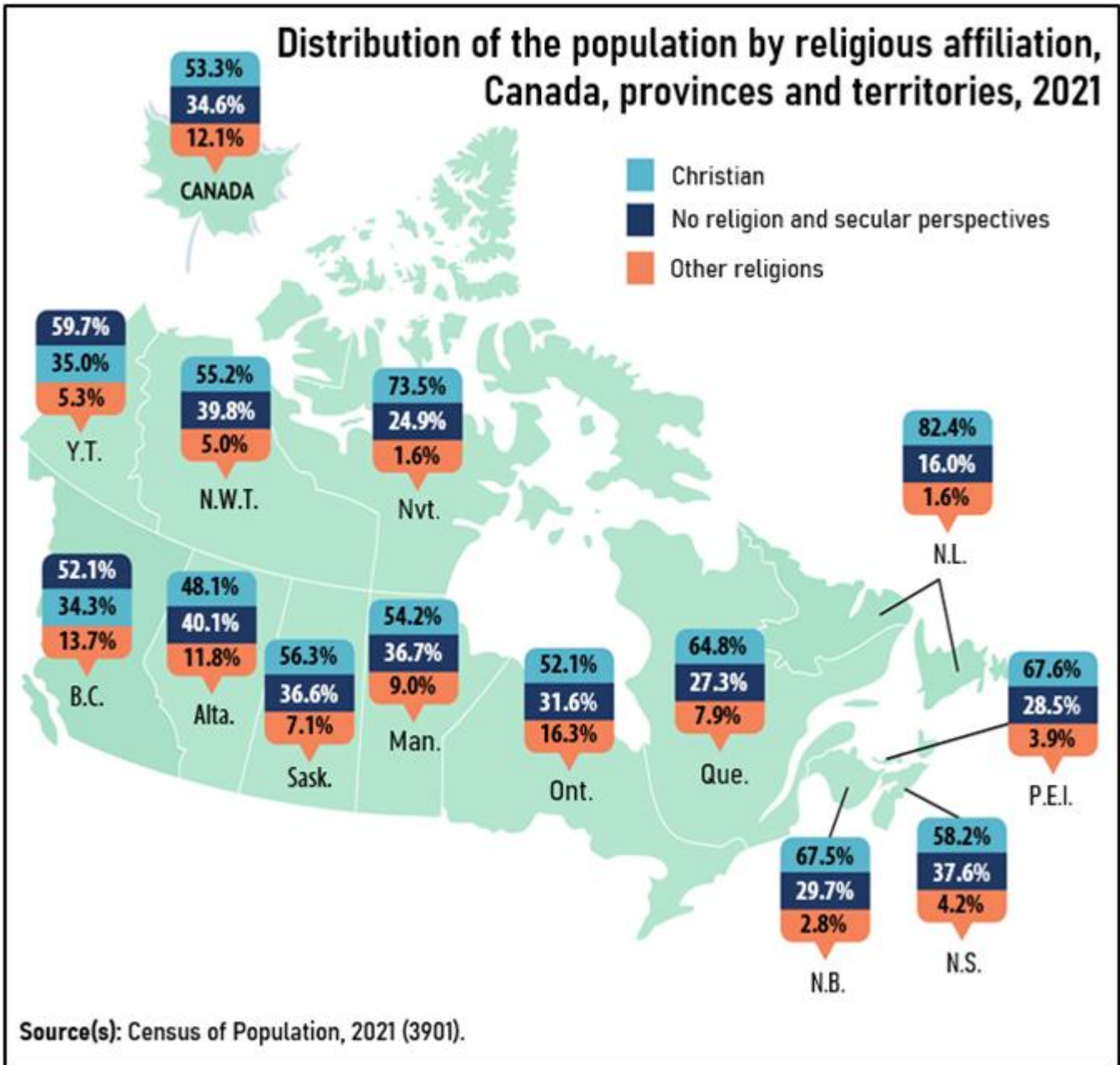
In Ontario, 16.3% of the population reported being affiliated with a non-Christian religion, the highest proportion in Canada. In particular, Ontario posted the highest percentage of Muslims (6.7%) and Hindus (4.1%).

British Columbia ranked second among provinces and territories, with a large non-Christian population (13.7%). More specifically, it had the highest proportion of people affiliated with a Sikh religion (5.9%).

**The proportion of the population who reported a non-Christian religion was seven times higher in large urban centres than in rural areas**

The proportion of the population who reported a religion other than Christianity was much higher in large urban centres (15.4%) than in small urban centres (3.2%) and rural areas (2.2%).

**Map 1 – In 2021, more than half of the population of British Columbia and Yukon reported having no religion, while the Christian religion was predominant in the other provinces and territories**





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## One in four people in Canada is part of a racialized group

In addition to information on religion and ethnic or cultural origins, the census collects data on the main racialized groups in Canada: the South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese populations.

Different data sources shed light on the specific experiences of the country's racialized groups. For example, the results of the 2020 General Social Survey on Social Identity revealed that these groups [were more than twice as likely as the rest of the population to report having experienced discrimination since the beginning of the pandemic](#) and that this difference was more pronounced than in the five years preceding the pandemic. According to data from the Labour Force Survey, [some racialized groups have higher unemployment rates than the rest of the population](#). Lastly, data on police-reported crime statistics in Canada have shown that racialized groups had [higher homicide rates than the rest of the population as a whole](#).

### Measuring racialized groups

In this release, racialized groups are based on and measured using the detailed "visible minority" variable, in accordance with existing Statistics Canada standards. Information on "visible minorities" was first collected to apply the provisions of the *Employment Equity Act*, which defines "visible minorities" as "persons, other than Aboriginal persons, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." Racialized groups include, among others, South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

As part of [ongoing efforts to modernize the national statistical system](#), the "visible minorities" standard is currently under review. Statistics Canada has committed to [consulting partners, stakeholders and the general public](#) to establish a suitable terminology and classification to describe the population and to meet data needs.

To date, Statistics Canada has received feedback on the sensitivity and use of the term "visible minorities" when disseminating data. A number of alternative terms have been proposed by stakeholders. A commonly-proposed alternative is "racialized groups," with various definitions and classifications.

There is also growing demand for more detailed data on "visible minorities," beyond a yes/no answer, in order to get a better idea of the diversity of this population and the unique experiences of the racialized groups in it. At the same time, many data users have stressed the importance of data quality, historical comparability and comparability between data sources.

These data are particularly relevant for developing policies to fight racism and discrimination and to ensure equal opportunities for all. They are used by governments, businesses, communities, health care providers, researchers and various organizations across the country.

Through the Disaggregated Data Action Plan, Statistics Canada continues to explore other ways of measuring different population groups. Any changes to the standard on visible minorities must factor in updates to the law, new needs, findings from consultative engagement, and tests to assess the effect of changes to terminology and classifications. Statistics Canada is currently launching consultative engagement activities to modernize its ethnocultural concepts. For more information or to take part in the consultative engagement, please consult the webpage on the [Visible minority concept consultative engagement](#). To consult more data products related to gender, diversity, and inclusion, visit the [Centre for Gender, Diversity, and Inclusion Statistics hub](#).

In the meantime, and following 2021 Census consultations and tests, Statistics Canada used the same question on population groups for the 2021 Census as in previous censuses. Using the same question helps establish benchmark data on the visible minority population in conformity with the *Employment Equity Act*, while maintaining data quality and historical comparability. The results can also be compared with different sources (e.g., Labour Force Survey, General Social Survey, Canadian Community Health Survey), which use the harmonized question on population groups.

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Note that for data collection, neither the census question nor the harmonized question on population groups for social surveys include the term "visible minorities."

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## The South Asian, Chinese and Black populations all top the 1 million mark

In 2021, three racialized groups represented 16.1% of Canada's total population: South Asians (2.6 million people; 7.1%), Chinese (1.7 million; 4.7%) and Black people (1.5 million; 4.3%), with each population topping 1 million. In 2016, these groups represented 13.6% of Canada's total population.

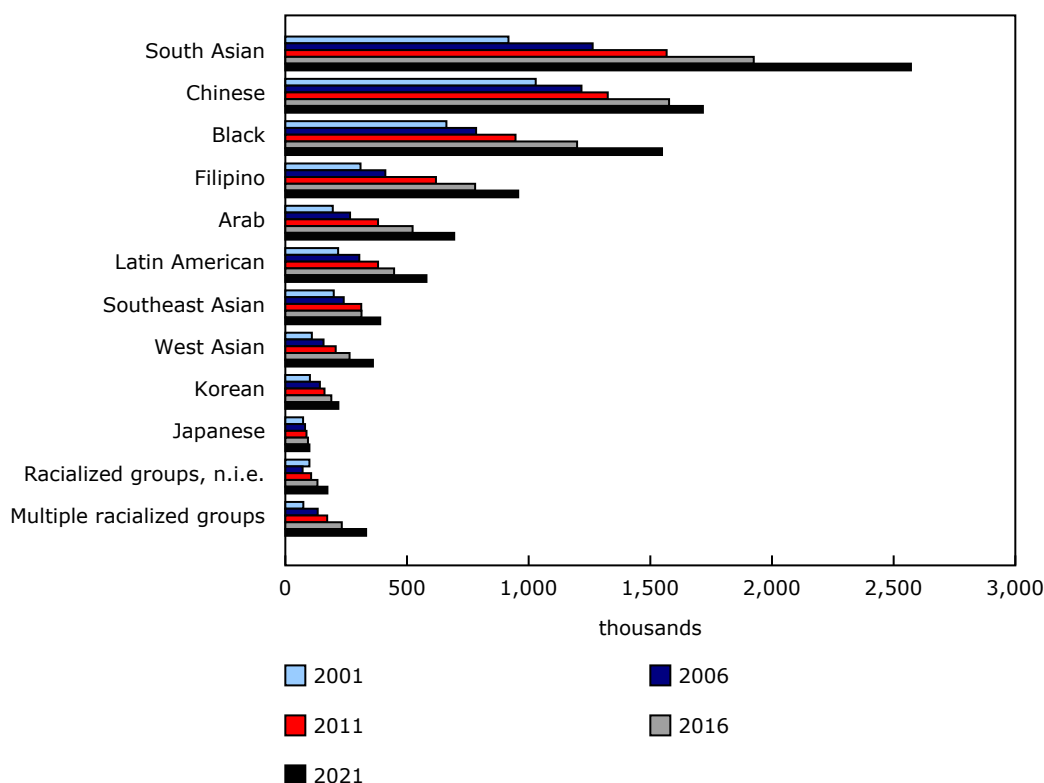
Filipinos (960,000 people; 2.6%), Arabs (690,000; 1.9%), Latin Americans (580,000; 1.6%), Southeast Asians (390,000; 1.1%), West Asians (360,000; 1.0%), Koreans (220,000; 0.6%) and Japanese (99,000; 0.3%) are the other main groups.

The population of each group has continued to grow with each census. The South Asian (+647,000 people), Black (+349,000), Filipino (+177,000) and Arab (+171,000) populations saw the biggest increases from 2016 to 2021, while the Japanese (+6,000) group posted the lowest growth over this same period.

According to the [most recent population projections](#), the racialized population could continue to increase. In 2041, the South Asian group could top 5 million people, the Chinese and Black populations could each exceed 3 million, and the Filipino population could go over 2 million.

Individuals who reported more than one racialized group represented 0.9% of the total Canadian population in 2021. More detailed data on individuals reporting multiple groups are now available through the "[population group](#)" variable.

**Chart 3**  
**All racialized groups in Canada have been growing from 2001 to 2021**



**Note(s):** In this chart, the concept of "racialized group" is derived directly from the concept of "visible minority." 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 abbreviation "n.i.e." means "not included elsewhere." This category includes people who provided written responses such as "Guyanese," "Pacific Islander," "Polynesian," "Tibetan" or "West Indian."  
**Source(s):** Census of Population, 2001, 2006, 2016 and 2021 (3901), and National Household Survey, 2011 (5178).

Immigration continues to be the main driver of population growth of each racialized group. Racialized groups accounted for 69.3% of the immigrant population in 2021, and the proportion is even higher among recent immigrants who were admitted since 2016 (83.0%). By comparison, the proportion is significantly smaller for non-immigrants (11.4%).

For several racialized groups, part of their population growth also comes from Canadian-born children. For example, the population of children under the age of 5 born in Canada rose for the West Asian (+39.6%), South Asian (+21.6%), Black (+21.5%), Filipino (+18.7%) and Arab (+14.7%) groups.

For more information on immigration in Canada, consult the *Daily* article entitled "[Immigrants make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians.](#)"

### The South Asian group is very diverse in terms of ethnic or cultural origins, mother tongue and religion

According to the 2021 Census, 7.1% of the Canadian population reported being **South Asian**. Most of the people in this group were born in South Asia, including India (44.3%), Pakistan (9.2%), Sri Lanka (5.4%) and Bangladesh (3.0%), while 28.7% were born in Canada and 2.1% in Africa. Among South Asian immigrants, 21.4% immigrated to Canada recently (from 2016 to 2021) and 43.4% immigrated from 2001 to 2015. Lastly, 35.2% of South Asians were admitted in to Canada before the 2000s.

The diversity of the South Asian group can also be observed in the broad range of mother tongues reported in the 2021 Census, with English (36.4%), Punjabi (29.4%), Urdu (11.3%), Hindi (8.2%), Tamil (7.1%) and Gujarati (6.4%) the most commonly reported, alone or with other languages.

Finally, the top three religions reported by South Asians are Hinduism (29.9%), Sikhism (29.6%) and Islam (23.1%).

### **East and Southeast Asians are characterized by their different immigration stories and broad religious and linguistic diversity**

In 2021, a large majority of the 1.7 million people who reported being **Chinese** in the census indicated a "Chinese" ethnic or cultural origin (86.6%) and no religious affiliation (71.7%). This group stands out more for its linguistic diversity: 41.8% reported Mandarin, 33.9% reported Yue (Cantonese) and 24.5% reported English as their mother tongue.

In 2021, more than one-quarter (28.4%) of Chinese people were born in Canada, while most were born abroad. China (47.8%) was the birthplace most often reported by this group, followed by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (12.8%), Taiwan (4.1%) and Vietnam (1.9%). Of all Chinese immigrants, half (50.1%) came to Canada before the 2000s, 37.9% immigrated from 2001 to 2015, and 12.1% immigrated from 2016 to 2021.

**Filipinos** have a more recent history of immigration to Canada: in 2021, just over 7 in 10 Filipinos (72.6%) had immigrated to Canada in the previous 20 years. Nearly three-quarters of people in the Filipino group were born in the Philippines (73.9%), while most others were born in Canada (24.7%).

A total of 957,000 people living in Canada reported being Filipino, or 2.6% of the country's total population. A large majority of Filipinos reported being Catholic (72.4%). More than half (58.4%) of Filipinos reported Tagalog as their mother tongue, alone or with other languages, and 44.1% reported English.

The vast majority of Filipinos reported "Filipino" as an ethnic or cultural origin (87.0%). Other commonly-reported origins by Filipinos included "Spanish" (5.3%), "Chinese" (3.2%), "Canadian" (3.1%) and "Ilocano" (2.5%).

Approximately 390,000 people reported being **Southeast Asian**. Vietnam (38.6%) was the most common country of birth reported by this group, and more than one-third of Southeast Asians (34.0%) immigrated to Canada from 1980 to 1990. Canada ranked second for country of birth, reported by 34.0% of Southeast Asians, followed by Cambodia (4.5%), Thailand (4.5%), the Philippines (3.9%), Laos (2.9%) and Indonesia (2.6%).

More than one-third (35.8%) of Southeast Asians reported having no religious affiliation, while 33.0% reported being Buddhist and 17.5% reported being Catholic. A little less than half of Southeast Asians (44.7%) reported Vietnamese as their mother tongue, alone or with other languages, 31.3% reported English and 5.3% reported a Khmer (Cambodian) language.

Of the 218,000 people in Canada who reported being **Korean**, a large majority (82.7%) identified Korean as their mother tongue, alone or with other languages, and slightly over one-fifth reported English (21.4%). It should be noted that the vast majority of individuals in this group were born in South Korea (77.0%) or in Canada (19.8%). Among the foreign-born Koreans, nearly one-quarter (21.8%) immigrated permanently to Canada from 2001 to 2010 and 19.3% from 2011 to 2021, while 13.2% are non-permanent residents. In 2021, more than half of Koreans (58.3%) reported a Christian religion, and nearly 4 in 10 Koreans (39.8%) reported having no religion.

In 2021, close to 100,000 people reported being **Japanese**. Of these, two in three (67.7%) reported having no religion and 10.4% reported a Buddhist religion. This group is unique in that it has very few recent immigrants or non-permanent residents. The majority of Japanese (59.2%) were born in Canada, reflecting their longer history of immigration to Canada.

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## The Black population is diverse in terms of birthplaces, ethnic or cultural origins, religions and mother tongues

In 2021, 1.5 million people reported being **Black**. Canada is their main country of birth, with 40.9% of Black people reporting it in the census. Some have had ancestors in the country for several generations, while others are immigrants or the children of immigrants.

Nearly one-third (32.6%) of the Black population was born in Africa, including Nigeria (7.1%), Ethiopia (2.8%) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2.4%), while 21.0% were born in the Caribbean and Bermuda, mostly in Jamaica (8.8%) and Haiti (7.2%).

Among Black immigrants, 23.7% are new immigrants who were admitted in to Canada from 2016 to 2021, while 17.8% immigrated from 2011 to 2015, and 22.3% from 2001 to 2010. The remaining share of Black immigrants (36.1%) came to Canada before the 2000s.

The ancestral diversity of the Black population is a reflection of the different waves of immigration to Canada. In fact, the Black population reported over 300 different ethnic or cultural origins in the census. In addition, one-quarter (25.6%) of the Black population reported more than one ethnic or cultural origin. Some of the most common origins reported were "African (no further clarification)" (15.7%), "Jamaican" (13.0%), "Haitian" (10.8%) and "Canadian" (5.9%).

The Black population is also very diverse in terms of language, with more than 450 mother tongues reported in the census for this population. English (58.9%) and French (21.6%) topped the list.

Various religions were reported by the Black population, the main ones being Christian (no further clarification) (25.9%), Catholic (18.1%), Muslim (11.9%) and Pentecostal (8.0%). Finally, close to one in five (18.0%) Black Canadians reported having no religion.

## Common source regions for Arabs and West Asians, but a different linguistic, ancestral, religious and immigration portrait

The three main regions of birth for **Arabs** are West and Central Asia and the Middle East (40.1%), North Africa (29.4%) and Canada (27.6%).

Most of the 694,000 people who reported being only Arab in the census also reported Arabic (70.8%) as their mother tongue, alone or with other languages, and a large proportion reported another mother tongue, including English (21.9%) and French (17.2%). The most common ethnic or cultural origins reported were "Arab" (29.8%) with no further clarification, "Lebanese" (15.3%), "Egyptian" (9.3%), "Moroccan" (8.8%) and "Syrian" (8.8%), illustrating the main source countries for immigration of this group.

Just over three-quarters of the 360,000 people who reported being **West Asian** were born in West and Central Asia and the Middle East (76.6%), and a smaller share were born in Canada (19.1%). More than half of West Asians were born in Iran (51.1%) and 15.4% were born in Afghanistan.

West Asians and Arabs have different linguistic and ancestral profiles. Persian Iranian (Farsi) (47.4%), reported alone or with other languages, was the most common mother tongue reported by West Asians, followed by English (17.0%) and Dari (15.9%). The three most frequently-reported ethnic or cultural origins by West Asians were "Iranian" (44.1%), "Afghan" (21.5%) and "Persian" (16.2%).

Compared with the overall population, higher proportions of Arabs and West Asians reported being Muslims. Among the Arab population, 73.6% reported being Muslim and 19.5% reported Christianity as their religion (particularly Catholic [7.4%] and Christian Orthodox [5.7%]). Meanwhile, 57.2% of West Asians reported being Muslim and 28.5% reported having no religious affiliation.

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## Latin Americans: One continent and a few common languages

In the 2021 Census, just over half a million people (580,000) reported being **Latin American** only. Of these, the vast majority were born in South America (40.7%), Central America (31.9%) or the Caribbean and Bermuda (4.2%). The remaining 21.0%, or just over one in five Latin Americans, were born in Canada. The ethnic or cultural origins reported most often by Latin Americans, alone or in combination with other origins, were "Spanish" (15.7%), "Mexican" (14.6%) and "Colombian" (13.4%).

Among Latin Americans, almost four in five (78.8%) people reported Spanish as their mother tongue, alone or with other languages, while 16.0% reported English, 6.3% reported Portuguese and 4.0% reported French. More than half of Latin Americans are Catholic (51.9%), but a significant proportion reported a Christian affiliation with no further clarification (13.6%) and nearly one-quarter (24.4%) reported having no religion.

## Close to 70% of Canada's population report being White

In 2021, just over 25 million people reported being **White** in the census, representing close to 70% of the total Canadian population. The vast majority reported being White only, while 2.4% also reported one or more other racialized groups.

A small proportion of people who reported being White only were born abroad (11.1%). Of immigrants who reported being White only, approximately 186,000 are recent immigrants who landed from 2016 to 2021. However, the majority (57.0%) immigrated to Canada before the 1990s and most are from European countries (78.8%) or the United States (7.7%). Of those born in Canada, 16.3% reported having at least one parent born abroad (second generation) and 83.7% reported that both their parents were born in Canada (third generation or more).

The ancestry of the group who reported being White only is very diverse: over 400 ethnic or cultural origins were reported in the census and 40.7% of people in this group reported multiple origins. The most common origins reported, alone or with other origins, included "Canadian" (21.2%), origins from the British Isles (40.4%), French origins (14.8%) and Western European origins (15.8%).

Whites are also a diverse group in terms of language, with English (65.5%) and French (27.2%) being the most common mother tongues reported, alone or with other languages. They were followed by Italian (1.5%), German (1.1%), Russian (0.8%) and Portuguese (0.8%).

Of the total population who reported being White only, 60.3% reported being Christian and 37.5% reported having no religion. Of the 545,000 people who reported being White and who reported a religion other than Christian, Jewish was the most common religion reported (286,000 people).

In numbers, the White population constitutes the majority in almost all regions of the country, except the large urban centres of Vancouver (42.0%) and Toronto (40.7%) and in the Northwest Territories (37.9%) and Nunavut (10.0%).

## Canada's urban centres are home to the vast majority of the racialized population

While most of the country's population lived in large urban centres (also called census metropolitan areas [CMAs]), this is the case for the vast majority of the racialized South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese groups. In 2021, 95.3% of the racialized population called one of the 41 large urban centres home, compared with 73.9% for the total population.

In Canada, the largest populations of South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, West Asian, Latin American, Southeast Asian, and Korean people lived in Toronto. This large urban centre is ranked second in terms of the number of Arabs, behind Montréal, and second in terms of the number of Japanese, behind Vancouver.

The large urban centre of Vancouver is home to the second largest populations of Chinese, South Asians, Filipinos, West Asians and Koreans in the country.

In addition to the 246,145 Arabs who lived in Montréal—the largest share (35.5%) of the Arab population in Canada—this large urban area has the second largest number of the Black (340,135 people), Latin American (137,850) and Southeast Asian (61,255) populations in the country.

In Canada, the third largest Black population (114,230 people) and the third largest Arab population (69,210) lived in Ottawa–Gatineau. The Black population made up 7.8% of the total population of this large urban centre and the Arab population, 4.7%.

South Asians are a prominent group in Alberta, with the largest populations in Calgary (153,205 people) and Edmonton (123,340).

Another common racialized group in the Prairie provinces are Filipinos. In 2021, more than 1 in 4 Filipinos in Canada lived in the CMAs of Calgary (9.3%), Winnipeg (8.8%) and Edmonton (8.4%).

## **The portrait of racialized groups varies across regions**

The South Asian, Chinese and Black groups are the largest racialized groups in Ontario. In 2021, the South Asian population represented 10.8% of Ontario's population, followed by the Chinese population (5.8%) and the Black population (5.5%).

Chinese and South Asians have the largest populations among the 1.7 million racialized people in British Columbia. Chinese accounted for 11.2% of this province's population in 2021, and South Asian, 9.6%.

In Quebec, the largest racialized groups are Black and Arab people. In 2021, the Black population represented 5.1% of Quebec's population, while the Arab population accounted for 3.4%.

South Asians and Filipinos are the two largest racialized groups in the Prairie provinces. South Asians represented 7.1% of Alberta's population, 5.4% of Manitoba's population and 4.1% of Saskatchewan's population, while Filipinos represented, respectively, 5.2%, 7.2% and 4.0%.

The Atlantic provinces generally have smaller populations of racialized groups. However, from 2016 to 2021, more recent immigrants settled in the Atlantic provinces, increasing the size of their South Asian, Black and Filipino populations.

## **Looking ahead**

This article provides an overview of the ethnocultural and religious diversity of the Canadian population. The wealth of data from the census also provides more detailed information on racialized groups based on a large number of characteristics, highlighting all the diversity between and within groups.

Census data can also help us to better identify and understand inequalities and disparities in our social and economic fabric. For instance, a study by Statistics Canada using data from previous censuses on [changes in the socioeconomic situation of Canada's Black population](#) gives a good example of these experiences differentiated by gender, region of birth and generation status.

This information will serve as a foundation for more in-depth analyses of the different groups that make up Canadian society. They will also help to better identify and understand inequalities and disparities in our social and economic fabric. Stay tuned over the coming months, as Statistics Canada will be releasing several other census publications, including one on the socioeconomic outcomes of these various groups.

## Note to readers

We encourage you to download the [StatsCAN app](#) to consult the census results.

### Definitions, concepts and geography

Counts are calculated on rounded data and may not necessarily add up to the total.

The population growth rates presented in this release are calculated by determining the difference in population size between two dates (such as between two censuses), divided by the population of the first date. They are expressed as a percentage change.

All the results presented in this release are based on 2021 geographic boundaries.

In this release, the term "large urban centre" refers to a [census metropolitan area \(CMA\)](#), or an urban centre with a population of 100,000 or more; "small urban centre" refers to a [census agglomeration \(CA\)](#), an urban centre that is not a CMA, but has a population of more than 10,000; and "rural areas" refers to all geographic areas outside CMAs and CAs.

[Ethnic or cultural origin](#) refers to the ethnic or cultural origins of the person's ancestors. Ancestors may have Indigenous origins, origins that refer to different countries or other origins that may not refer to different countries. In this release, in order to facilitate reader comprehension, specific ethnic or cultural origins are placed in quotation marks. When a group of ethnic or cultural origins is collapsed, it is presented without quotation marks.

[Religion](#) refers to the person's self-identification as having a connection or affiliation with any religious denomination, group, body, or other religiously defined community or system of belief. Religion is not limited to formal membership in a religious organization or group. For infants and children, religion refers to the specific religious group or denomination, if any, in which they are being raised. Persons without a religious connection or affiliation can self-identify as atheist, agnostic or humanist, or can provide another applicable answer.

The concept of "[racialized group](#)" is derived directly from the detailed "[visible minority](#)" variable in the census. The variable "visible minority" comes from the Employment Equity Act and refers to whether a person is a visible minority or not. The Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

Data on the "White" group come from the "[population group](#)" variable. Unlike the "visible minority" variable, the "population group" variable provides data that are more aligned with the responses provided by respondents in the census questionnaire.

[Immigrant](#) refers to a person who is or has been a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Such persons have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization are included in this group.

[Period of immigration](#) refers to the period in which the immigrant first obtained landed immigrant or permanent resident status. The period of immigration variable is used to identify recent immigrants. A **recent immigrant** refers to a person who obtained landed immigrant or permanent resident status up to five years prior to a given census year. In the 2021 Census, this period is January 1, 2016 to May 11, 2021.

[Place of birth](#) refers to the name of the geographic location where the person was born. The geographic location is specified according to geographic boundaries current at the time of data collection, not the geographic boundaries at the time of birth.

[Non-permanent resident](#) refers to a person from another country with a usual place of residence in Canada and who has a work or study permit and who has claimed refugee status (asylum claimant). Family members living with work or study permit holders are also included, unless these family members are already Canadian citizens, landed immigrants or permanent residents.

[Generation status](#) refers to whether or not the person or the person's parents were born in Canada.

For a detailed definition of the concepts related to ethnocultural diversity, visible minorities, religion, immigration or to census geography, please consult the [Census Dictionary](#) or see the conceptual videos.

### 2021 Census of Population products and releases

Today, Statistics Canada is releasing a sixth set of results from the 2021 Census of Population.

Several 2021 Census products are now available on the 2021 [Census Program](#) web module. This web module has been designed to provide easy access to census data, free of charge.



The [analytical products](#) comprise two articles in The Daily: this article and one entitled "[Immigrants make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians](#)," and an infographic, "[Overview of Canadian citizenship in 2021](#)." Articles on this topic will be published in the coming months in the Insights on Canadian Society series.

The [data products](#) include results on ethnic or cultural origin, racialized groups and religion for many standard geographic areas and are accessible through the [Census Profile](#), [Highlight tables](#) and [Data tables](#).

Over the coming year, Statistics Canada will also publish a series of data tables that will provide a more comprehensive profile (demographic, linguistic, cultural, educational, labour market) of the various ethnocultural, racialized and religious groups in the country.

The [Focus on Geography](#) series provides data and highlights on key topics found in this census release at various levels of geography.

The [reference materials](#) are designed to help users make the most of census data. They include the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#), the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021](#), the [2021 Census of Population questionnaires](#) and the [2021 Census Data Quality Guidelines](#). The [Place of Birth, Generation Status, Citizenship and Immigration Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#), the [Ethnic or Cultural Origin Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#), the [Religion Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#), the [Visible Minority and Population Group Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#), the [Languages Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#), as well as the reference document [Balancing the Protection of Confidentiality with the Needs for Disaggregated Census Data, Census of Population, 2021](#) are also available.

Geography-related 2021 Census products and services can be found under [Census geography](#). This includes [GeoSearch](#), an interactive mapping tool, and [thematic maps](#), which show data for various standard geographic areas, along with the [Focus on Geography](#) series and the [Census Program Data Viewer](#), which are data visualization tools.

Videos on census concepts can be viewed in the [Census learning centre](#).

Over the coming months, Statistics Canada will continue to release results from the 2021 Census of Population and provide an even more comprehensive picture of the Canadian population. See the [2021 Census release schedule](#) to find out when data and analysis will be released.

**Available tables:** [98-10-0303-01](#), [98-10-0308-01](#), [98-10-0324-01](#) to [98-10-0328-01](#) , [98-10-0332-01](#) to [98-10-0334-01](#) , [98-10-0337-01](#), [98-10-0338-01](#), [98-10-0342-01](#), [98-10-0343-01](#) and [98-10-0355-01](#) to [98-10-0358-01](#) .

**Definitions, data sources and methods:** survey number [3901](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [infostats@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)) or Media Relations ([statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca)).