

Ethnocultural diversity in Canada: Prospects for 2017

by Alain Bélanger and Éric Caron Malenfant

This article is adapted from *Population projections of visible minority groups, Canada, provinces and regions: 2001-2017* (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 91-541-XIE), published in March 2005. The report is available free from the Statistics Canada website at www.statcan.ca/cgi-bin/downpub/listpub.cgi?catno=91-541-XIE2005001.

Canada's ethnic and cultural makeup is undergoing rapid change, especially in major urban centres. Sustained immigration from non-European countries has increased Canada's cultural diversity in recent decades. Statistics from the 2001 Census of Population show an increase in the number and proportion of immigrants, people whose mother tongue is neither English nor French, members of visible minority groups, and people whose religion is non-Christian.

These developments present decision-makers with a number of challenges, particularly in the areas of urban development, labour market integration, health and social services, and public institutions. It is understandable that one would want to consider how the country's ethnocultural landscape is likely to evolve over the next several years.

This article uses Statistics Canada's most recent population projections for visible minority groups to draw a picture of the possible ethnocultural composition of the country when Canada celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2017.¹ It focuses on a number of issues: How many Canadians might belong to a visible minority group in the near future?

GST What you should know about this study

The data in this article were taken from Statistics Canada's most recent population projections for visible minorities for the period 2001 to 2017. These projections are designed to produce plausible scenarios based on assumptions about the evolution of the demographic components of the population. They are not to be regarded as predictions, but rather as one of several aids available to program planners and policy-makers.

Five scenarios were developed for analytical purposes. One of the scenarios, the so-called low-growth scenario, uses the assumptions of relatively low immigration and fertility, along with internal migration levels consistent with those observed in the 2001 Census. A high-growth scenario is based on relatively high fertility and immigration assumptions. A third scenario, *the reference scenario*, reflects the impact that recent trends in the components of demographic change have on the projected population, while the fourth scenario uses slightly different assumptions about internal migration. The fifth scenario illustrates the effect that higher immigration levels (equivalent to 1% of the total population) might have on the size, age structure and ethnocultural composition of the Canadian population.

Visible minority: Under the *Employment Equity Act*, members of visible minorities are "persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour". The 10 visible minority groups included are the Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Japanese and Korean groups.

How many landed immigrants might there be? What are the predominant visible minority groups likely to be? Is

diversity likely to remain concentrated in Canada's major urban centres?

One Canadian in five could be a visible minority person in 2017

Depending on the projection scenario used, Canada's visible minority population could number between 6.3 million and 8.5 million in 2017; that is, it could be anywhere from 56% to 111% larger than in 2001. Under the *reference scenario*, the visible minority population would grow by 76%, to 7.1 million persons. In contrast, the rest of the population would increase by only 1% to 7%. This scenario continues the trends evident between 1981 and 2001, when the visible minority population increased from 1.1 to 4.0 million.

By 2017, about one Canadian in five could be a member of a visible minority group. This contrasts with 13% in 2001 and less than 5% of the Canadian population in 1981. A number of factors account for this increase. Certainly the most important is sustained immigration because visible minority persons make up a high percentage of newcomers.² Other factors include a higher fertility³ and higher life expectancy,⁴ as well as a younger age structure resulting in fewer deaths and more births among visible minority groups than the rest of the population.

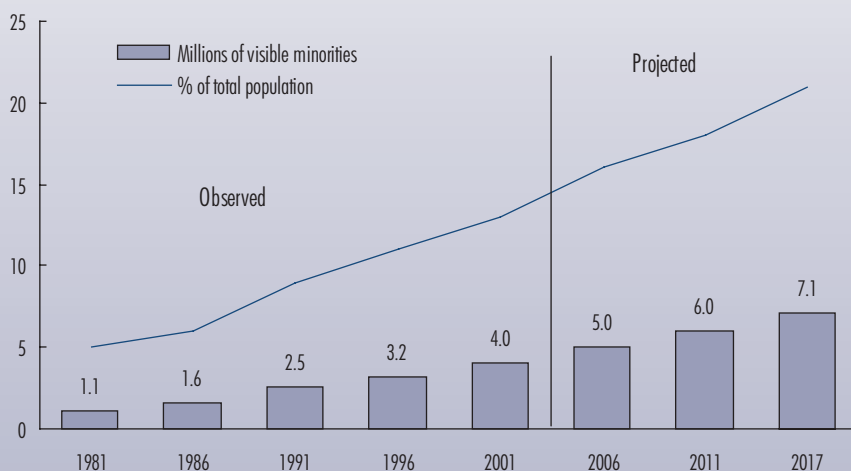
Under the reference scenario, visible minority groups would account for about 85% of overall population growth in 2017. They would account for most of the increase attributable to migratory growth (which will be the primary driver of population growth) as well as the largest share of growth due to natural increase.

Same proportion of immigrants as in the early 20th century

Canada, along with Australia, is different from most other Western countries in that immigrants comprise a much larger share of its population. In 2001, 18% of Canada's population was foreign-born, a far higher proportion than in the United States and most European countries.⁵



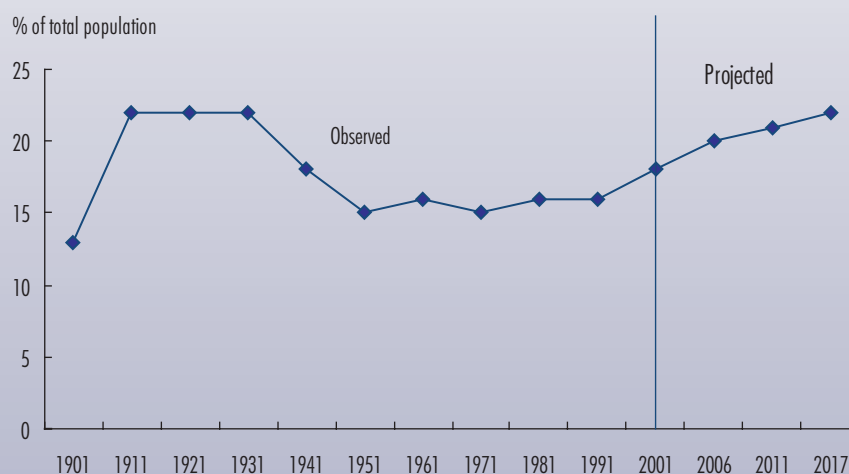
One Canadian in five could be a visible minority in 2017



Note: Projections are based on the reference scenario, which uses assumptions based on trends observed in the 2001 Census and preceding years. See "What you should know about this study" for details.
Sources: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, and Catalogue no. 91-541-XIE.



In 2017, the proportion of immigrants in Canada could equal that observed in the early 20th century



Note: Projections are based on the reference scenario, which uses assumptions based on trends observed in the 2001 Census and the preceding years. See "What you should know about this study" for details.
Sources: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, and Catalogue no. 91-541-XIE.

Subject to the immigration levels set for the projection scenario, Canada's immigrant population would be between 7.0 million and 9.3 million in 2017. This represents an increase of 24% to 65% over 2001, when immigrants numbered 5.4 million. Over the same period, the non-immigrant population in Canada would grow much more modestly, a rate ranging from 4% to 12%. Under the reference scenario, immigrants would account for 22% of the total population in 2017. The last time immigrants comprised such a high percentage of the Canadian population was in the early decades of the 20th century, between 1911 and 1931.

In 2001, a little more than two-thirds of the visible minority population had been born outside Canada. In 2017, according to the reference scenario, this proportion would remain about the same, with 4.8 million of 7.1 million visible minority persons being immigrants. However, the number of visible minority persons born in Canada could almost double between 2001 and 2017, to reach 2.3 million people.

South Asians and Chinese would remain the largest visible minority groups

Visible minority populations vary a great deal in terms of origin, linguistic characteristics and religious affiliations. There is also considerable variation in the size of visible minority groups in Canada. In 2001, the Chinese and South Asians were the two largest groups; in 2017, they are projected to remain the largest and to account for almost half of all visible minority persons.

But while the Chinese were more numerous than the South Asian group in 2001, the latter may catch up by 2017. The South Asian group has a higher fertility rate than the Chinese and almost as large a share of immigration. Consequently, it is projected that the South Asian population could grow by 72% to 137% between 2001 and 2017,

compared with 51% to 111% for the Chinese population (depending on the projection).

The third and fourth largest visible minority groups in 2017 would be the Black and the Filipino populations. Under the projection scenarios, Blacks would number 950,000 to 1.2 million and Filipinos between 476,000 and 650,000, both populations up sharply compared with 2001.

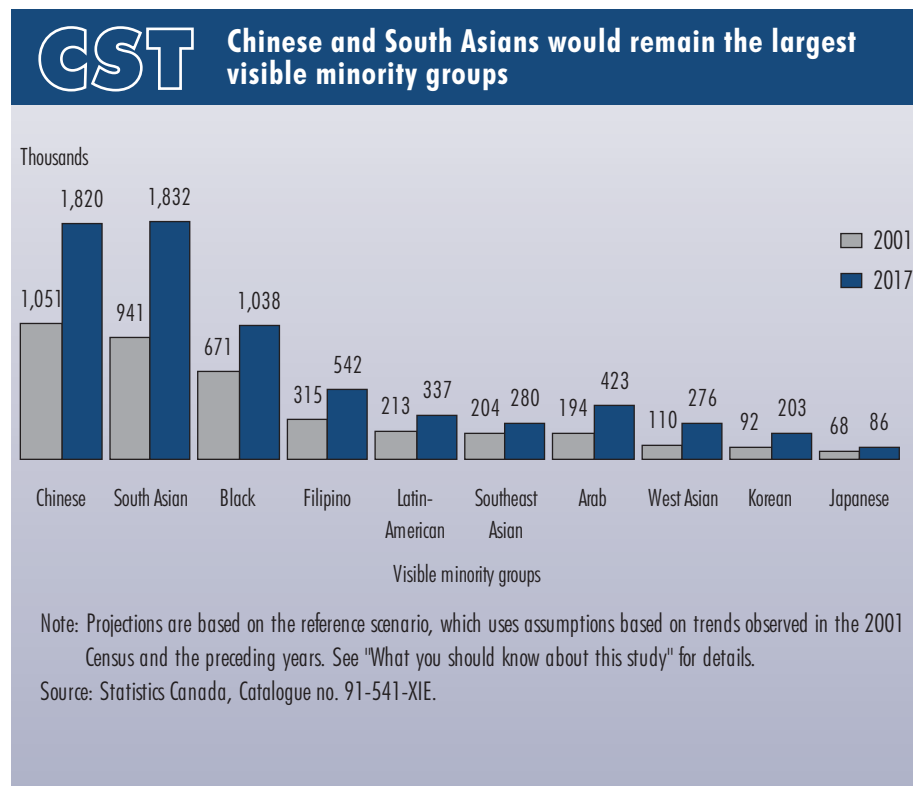
The highest growth rates between now and 2017 are projected for the West Asian, Korean and Arab groups. Under most of the projection scenarios, their populations would more than double over this period. However, in absolute terms, their numbers would remain small relative to the Chinese, South Asian and Black groups.

Continued high concentrations in the major urban areas

The changing ethnocultural characteristics of the Canadian population would continue to be most apparent in Canada's largest urban areas, as this is where most immigrants

settle. Indeed, more than 70% of the immigrants who came to Canada between 1996 and 2001 chose to live in the census metropolitan areas (CMAs) of Montréal, Toronto or Vancouver. For many of these immigrants, the presence of family and friends in these cities was a key reason for their decision to move there.⁶

The concentration of visible minority persons in large urban areas mirrors the pattern among recent immigrants. Nearly 95% of visible minority persons would live in one of Canada's 27 CMAs in 2017, roughly the same proportion as in 2001. Moreover, under the projection scenarios, nearly 75% of visible minorities would live in the CMAs of Montréal, Toronto or Vancouver compared with just over one-quarter of the rest of the population. In 2017, Toronto alone would have 2.8 to 3.9 million visible minority residents, Vancouver 1.1 to 1.5 million, and Montréal between 666,000 and 895,000.



Half of population in Toronto and Vancouver may be visible minority by 2017

Depending on the projection scenario used, the CMA of Toronto would have a population of 5.8 to 7.1 million, about one-half of whom (2.8 to 3.9 million) would be visible minority persons; this compares with 37% in 2001. Vancouver is projected to have a population of 1.1 to 1.5 million visible minority persons in 2017, accounting for 47% to 53% of the population. In 2001, visible minorities accounted for 36% of Vancouver's total population.

Under the reference scenario, visible minority groups are projected to account for between 23% and 28% of the total populations in the CMAs of Ottawa, Abbotsford, Calgary and Windsor. It is worth noting that ethnocultural diversity is not limited to Canada's largest urban centres; even in smaller CMAs such as Windsor and Abbotsford, about one-quarter of the population may be composed of visible minority groups by 2017.

Summary

The population projections discussed in this article point to the changing ethnocultural composition of the Canadian population until 2017. The number of Canadians who belong to a visible minority group would continue to grow more rapidly than the rest of the population. By 2017, visible minority groups would account for about half of the residents in the CMAs of Toronto and Vancouver. Immigration is the driving force behind this development, although differing age structures and fertility rates among different groups play a role as well.



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GST Visible minority groups could comprise half the population of Toronto and Vancouver by 2017

	Number of visible minority persons ('000)		Percent of total population	
	2001	2017	2001	2017
Canada	4,038	7,121	13	21
<i>Census metropolitan area</i>				
Toronto	1,753	3,194	37	51
Vancouver	741	1,261	36	49
Montréal	454	749	13	19
Ottawa–Gatineau*	139	316	17	28
Calgary	166	295	17	24
Edmonton	136	211	14	18
Hamilton	64	125	9	15
Winnipeg	84	115	12	16
Windsor	40	97	13	23
Kitchener	45	79	10	15
<i>Rest of Canada</i>	418	679	3	4

Note: Projections are based on the reference scenario, which uses assumptions based on trends observed in the 2001 Census and the preceding years. See "What you should know about this study" for details.

* Ontario part only.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 91-541-XIE.

1. The method, assumptions and results associated with the projections are described in detail in *Population projections of visible minority groups, Canada, provinces and regions, 2001-2017* (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 91-541-XIE), 2005. This can be consulted free of charge on Statistics Canada's website at www.statcan.ca.
2. During the 1990s, on average, 225,000 immigrants arrived in Canada annually and about 70% of them were visible minorities.
3. The analyses on which the population projection assumptions were based established that in 2000/01, the total fertility rate was 1.7 children per visible minority woman and about 1.5 children per white woman. For more on the fertility of Canada's immigrants and visible minorities, see A. Bélanger and S. Gilbert. 2003. "The fertility of immigrant women and their Canadian-born daughters." *Report on the Demographic Situation in Canada 2002, Current Demographic Analysis*, (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 91-209-XPE).
4. Mortality studies conducted for the projections estimated the life expectancy of visible minorities at 79.7 years for men and 84.3 years for women, compared with 76.2 years and 82.5 years for the rest of the population in 2001. These differences are due to the low mortality rates of recent immigrants, who are proportionally more numerous in the visible minority population. For more on the life expectancy of immigrants to Canada, see J. Chen, R. Wilkins and E. Ng, "Health expectancy by immigrant status, 1986 and 1991." *Health Reports* vol. 8, no. 3 (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 82-003) 1996.
5. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Trends in International Migration, 2003 Annual Report*, SOPEMI Editions, 2004.
6. Statistics Canada. September 4, 2003. "Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, 2001." *The Daily* (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001).