



Rural and Small Town Canada ANALYSIS BULLETIN



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RURAL AND SMALL TOWN POPULATION IS GROWING IN THE 1990s

Robert Mendelson and Ray D. Bollman

HIGHLIGHTS

- ◆ Overall, Canada's rural and small town population has grown in each intercensal period since 1976.
- ◆ Rural and small town growth rates vary widely among the provinces.
- ◆ Much of the growth within rural and small town areas is in the small towns.
- ◆ Sub-provincial data show wide regional differences within each province.
- ◆ However, population growth has been higher in 'larger urban centres'.
- ◆ Thus, the share of Canada's population living in rural and small town areas has declined from 34 percent in 1976 to 22 percent in 1996.
- ◆ Newfoundland is the only province with over 50 percent of its population living in rural and small town areas.

Welcome to the first Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin

Statistics Canada is launching an occasional bulletin series to document the structure and trends in rural Canada. The objective is to provide baseline information for national and provincial discussions of rural issues and to provide a baseline with which local communities can compare their situation.

Future bulletin topics will include an analysis of employment and unemployment trends, an overview of rural youth, the nature of businesses in smaller communities and the rate of migration to and from rural and small town Canada.

Please complete the enclosed postcard evaluation or directly contact the editor at the address listed on page 2.



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Note of Appreciation

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

Introduction

Rural development discussions typically start with the following demographic questions:

1. How many people live in rural and small town areas?
2. Is this population growing or declining?

The objective of this bulletin is to provide an overview of the structure and trends of Canada's rural and small town population.

Rural and small town Canada continues to grow

In Canada, rural and small town (RST) areas experienced a growing population from 1976 to 1996. When viewed within constant boundaries, there was a 3 percent increase from 1986 to 1991, followed by a 4 percent increase from 1991 to 1996 (Figure 1). Note that each line segment in Figure 1 has a positive slope.

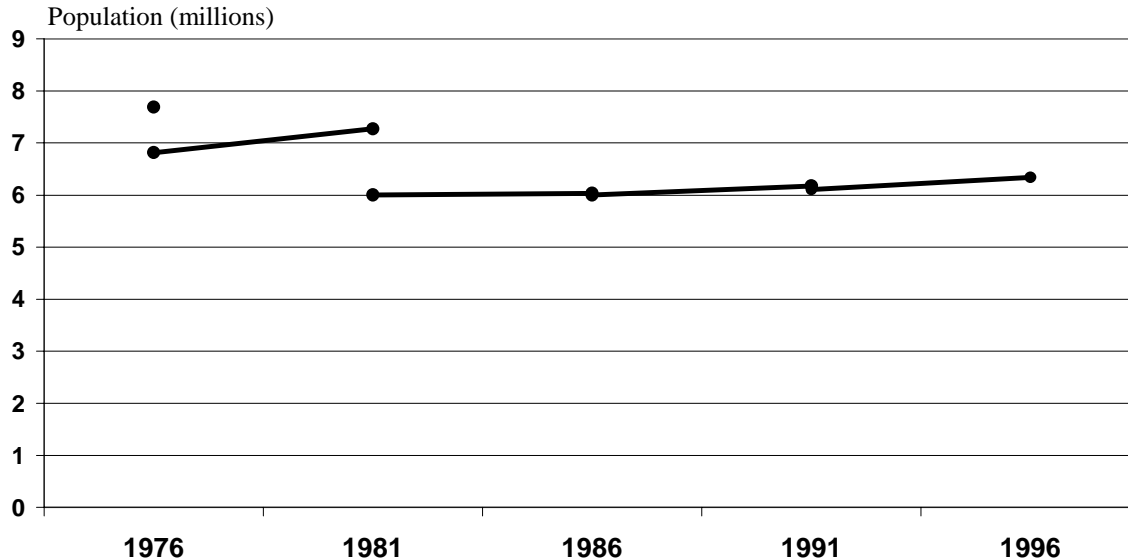
However, when the reclassification of boundaries is taken into account (i.e., when areas and people are reclassified from RST to larger urban centres), Canada's RST population was 18 percent smaller in 1996 compared with 1976. (In Figure 1, the 1996 result is lower than the initial value for 1976.)

Definition of "Rural and Small Town" Canada

In this bulletin, "Rural and Small Town" (RST) Canada refers to the population living outside the commuting zones of larger urban centres—specifically, outside Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and Census Agglomerations (CAs). A CMA has an urban core of 100,000 or over and includes all neighbouring municipalities where 50 percent or more of the work force commutes into the urban core. A CA has an urban core of 10,000 to 99,999 and includes all neighbouring municipalities where 50 percent or more of the work force commutes into the urban core. Thus, RST Canada represents the non-CMA and non-CA population. It includes all the residents outside the commuting zones of larger urban centres. Only a small share of these residents live on farms.

Figure 1

Population is growing in rural and small town Canada¹



¹ Rural and small town Canada refers to the population outside Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and Census Agglomerations (CAs).
Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population, 1976 to 1996.

How to read Figure 1

The Census of Population in 1976 counted 7.7 million people living in rural and small town Canada. The boundaries for Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and Census Agglomerations (CAs) were redrawn for the 1981 Census of Population. According to the 1981 boundaries, there were only 6.8 million people living in rural and small town Canada in 1976. The line segment joining 1976 and 1981 shows the change in rural and small town population according to the (constant) 1981 boundaries. Similar boundary changes were made in each subsequent census. Each line segment has a positive slope indicating that, for Canada as a whole, the rural and small town population is growing. However, we end up with fewer rural and small town Canadians because of the classification of some municipalities into CMAs and CAs over time.

A wide variation in rural and small town growth rates among the provinces

From 1976 to 1996, three patterns appeared evident (Table 1):

1. Alberta, Ontario and Manitoba reported positive (although sometimes negligible) rural and small town population growth in each of the past four intercensal periods.
2. Four provinces (New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Manitoba) were generally stable, with either small increases or small decreases.

- Newfoundland and Saskatchewan reported a declining rural and small town population in each intercensal period since 1981. Their growth ranked at the bottom in the high growth period of 1976 to 1981.

In the 1991 to 1996 period, British Columbia and Alberta reported rural and small town growth rates that were over double the Canadian average.

Table 1

Between 1991 and 1996, the largest growth in rural and small town population was in British Columbia

1976-1981		1981-1986		1986-1991		1991-1996	
percent change in population in rural and small town ¹ areas							
Newfoundland	0.5	Newfoundland	-0.3	Newfoundland	-3.0	Newfoundland	-5.1
Prince Edward Island	1.9	Prince Edward Island	1.2	Prince Edward Island	-0.2	Prince Edward Island	2.4
Nova Scotia	1.9	Nova Scotia	2.7	Nova Scotia	0.5	Nova Scotia	-0.6
New Brunswick	3.5	New Brunswick	1.7	New Brunswick	-0.2	New Brunswick	1.3
Quebec	5.9	Quebec	-0.7	Quebec	1.6	Quebec	3.5
Ontario	3.0	Ontario	0.9	Ontario	9.3	Ontario	4.7
Manitoba	0.2	Manitoba	0.4	Manitoba	0.5	Manitoba	4.4
Saskatchewan	1.3	Saskatchewan	-1.0	Saskatchewan	-6.9	Saskatchewan	-2.0
Alberta	22.0	Alberta	2.5	Alberta	3.1	Alberta	7.8
British Columbia	17.0	British Columbia	-0.4	British Columbia	7.2	British Columbia	12.8
Canada	6.7	Canada	0.5	Canada	2.9	Canada	3.8

¹ Rural and small town refers to the population outside Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and outside Census Agglomerations (CAs).
 Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population, 1976 to 1996.

Small towns are generally growing at the expense of the rural countryside

A shift in the population towards the small towns is evident in most rural and small town areas. Between 1991 and 1996, small towns (with a population of 1,000 to 9,999) in the RST areas increased at a rate of 7 percent. This increase was 6 percentage points greater than the rest of the RST area population (i.e., the population in the countryside outside centres of 1,000 or more).

Provincial differences in terms of RST population patterns fall into three categories:

1. RST population increase—in Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia, there was an increase in both the small towns and rural areas.
2. Small town increase and a rural area population decrease—in Newfoundland, Ontario and Manitoba.
3. RST population decrease—in Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, population decreased in both the small towns and rural areas.

The first two categories represent increases in small town population. British Columbia had the greatest increase (+23 percent) in small town population.

Sub-provincial data show wide regional differences

The sub-provincial data for 1991-1996 showed contrasts in the Atlantic provinces. Within every census division (CD) in Newfoundland, the RST population declined (Table 2). This contrasts with Prince Edward Island where the RST population increased in every CD. New Brunswick saw 64 percent of its CDs gain RST population, while 36 percent lost RST population. Nova Scotia had almost the opposite with 71 percent of its CDs losing RST population and 29 percent gaining RST population.

Quebec and Ontario experienced similar trends. In Ontario, 91 percent of the CDs had RST population gains, whereas, Quebec was less notable with only 62 percent.

In the West, a high share of CDs in both Alberta and British Columbia experienced gains in their RST population: Alberta with 95 percent, and British Columbia with 92 percent. Manitoba's CDs also had RST population gains, but it was a more moderate 73 percent. Only Saskatchewan had a decline in RST population in a majority of its CDs—72 percent of the CDs lost RST people.

Table 2

In British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Prince Edward Island, over 90 percent of census divisions reported increases in rural and small town population, 1991 to 1996

	Census divisions where the rural and small town component:		
	Declined	Grew	Total ¹
	number of census divisions ²		
Newfoundland	10	0	10
Prince Edward Island	0	3	3
Nova Scotia	12	5	17
New Brunswick	5	9	14
Quebec	33	53	86
Ontario	4	39	43
Manitoba	6	16	22
Saskatchewan	13	5	18
Alberta	1	18	19
British Columbia	2	23	25
Canada³	86	171	257
	percent distribution of census divisions ²		
Newfoundland	100	0	100
Prince Edward Island	0	100	100
Nova Scotia	71	29	100
New Brunswick	36	64	100
Quebec	38	62	100
Ontario	9	91	100
Manitoba	27	73	100
Saskatchewan	72	28	100
Alberta	5	95	100
British Columbia	8	92	100
Canada³	33	67	100

¹ Total census divisions with some rural and small town population in 1996.

² Census division (CD) is the general term applied to areas established by provincial law that are intermediate geographic areas between the municipality and the province. CDs represent counties, regional districts and regional municipalities. In Newfoundland, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, provincial law does not provide for these administrative geographic regions. Therefore, CDs have been created by Statistics Canada in co-operation with these provinces for the dissemination of statistical data.

³ Does not include the Yukon or Northwest Territories.

Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population, 1991 and 1996.

Map illustrates wide variation within each provinces

The Yukon and Northwest Territories are not discussed in the tables. However, an analysis of the map (at the end of this bulletin) shows strong growth across the North in the RST component of the total population.

The map shows considerable variability in RST population growth within each province. For example, in British Columbia, the heaviest RST population growth took place on lower Vancouver Island, the lower Fraser Valley, in south-central and central British Columbia and in the Okanagan Valley. On the other hand, the RST population declined near Williams Lake and Quesnel.

In Alberta, the largest RST population increase took place around the Calgary CMA. In Manitoba, the heaviest RST growth was around the Winnipeg CMA. In Saskatchewan, the largest RST declines were in eastern and south-central Saskatchewan.

In Ontario, the largest RST population growth was outside the Windsor CMA, north of the Toronto CMA, outside the Ottawa CMA and outside the Kingston CA. RST growth in Quebec was greatest in the census divisions north of the Montréal CMA. Many census divisions in the Gaspé region and some census divisions between Québec City and Montréal recorded declining RST populations.

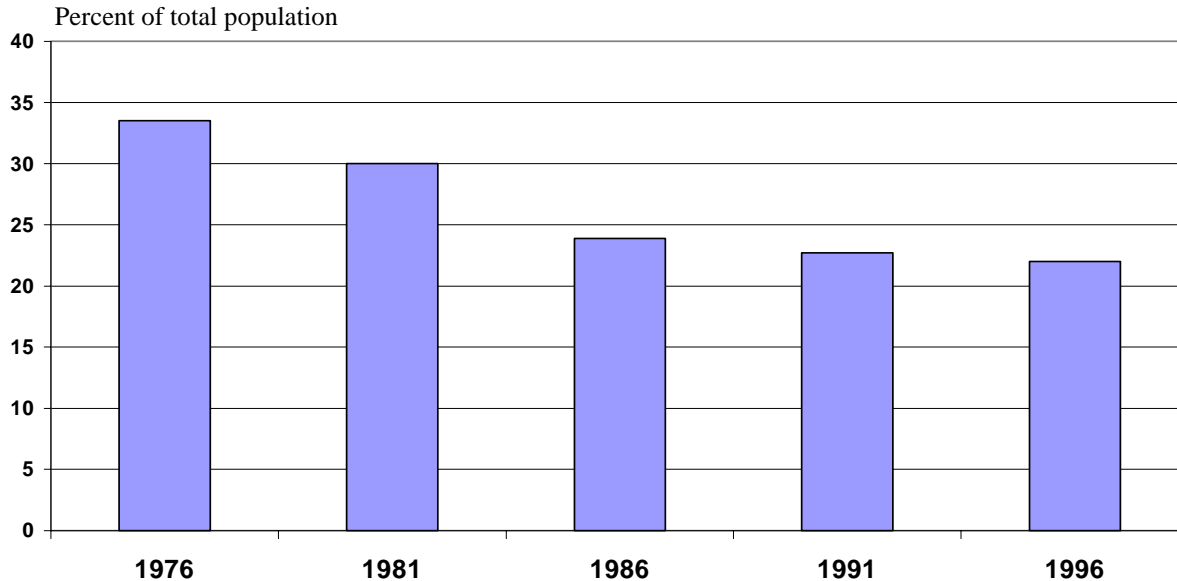
Declining share of rural and small town population in Canada

Despite a growing population in RST in every intercensal period since 1976, reclassification combined with a higher growth in larger urban centres means that the share of Canada's population living in RST areas continues to decline. The share of Canada's population living in RST areas declined to 22 percent in 1996 from 34 percent in 1976 (Figure 2).

This decrease of RST population share was most pronounced in British Columbia and Prince Edward Island—both provinces dropped by -21 percentage points. British Columbia dropped from 37 percent to 16 percent and Prince Edward Island dropped from 67 percent to 46 percent. In Saskatchewan, the drop was -20 percentage points, from 63 percent to 43 percent. Alberta dropped -16 percentage points, from 42 percent to 26 percent.

Figure 2

Rural and small town¹ residents now represent 22 percent of Canada's population



¹ Rural and small town refers to the population outside Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and Census Agglomerations (CAs).
Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population, 1976 to 1996.

In Newfoundland, over one-half (56 percent) of the population lived in RST areas in 1996. The four Atlantic provinces and the three Prairie provinces had the largest share of their population in RST areas. Within this group, the ranking changed marginally since 1976.

To summarize

At the Canada level, the rural and small town population grew. Generally, the rural and small town population grew in retirement destination communities and on the edge of the commuting zones of larger urban centres. Major growth of retirement destination communities appeared north of Montreal in the Laurentians, north of Toronto in the area of Muskoka and in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. All major cities in Canada seemed to be influencing growth of the rural and small town population at the edge of their commuting zone – some rural and small town residents were commuting long distances. This was apparent everywhere in southern Ontario, in the lower Fraser Valley and around Calgary and Winnipeg.

However, the rural and small town population was declining in some provinces and regions. The rural and small town population was declining in every region of Newfoundland. Most of the agricultural areas in Saskatchewan were declining – the exceptions were areas with oil and gas extraction and areas with long distance commuting to larger urban centres. The rural and small town areas in the Gaspé region of Quebec continued to decline.

Although there was an overall increase in the number of people, the share of Canada's population living in rural and small town areas was declining. The two main reasons were:

1. The population of larger urban centres was growing faster.
2. Over time, some rural and small town areas were reclassified into the commuting zone of larger urban centres.

Thus, Canada's rural and small town population now represents only 22 percent of the total population.

However, the rural and small town population represented a significant share of the population in six provinces. Newfoundland was the only province with more than 50 percent of its population living in rural and small town areas. Each of the other Atlantic provinces plus Saskatchewan and Manitoba had over one-third of their population residing in rural and small town areas.

This paper presents a broad summary of rural and small town population trends. Within each province and within each sub-provincial region, there was a wide diversity of patterns of population growth and decline. Small towns such as St. Brieux, Saskatchewan or Winkler, Manitoba or St. Clement and Coaticook in Quebec were examples of growth in places where many neighbouring places were declining.

For background details, refer to the working paper: **Rural and Small Town Population is Growing in the 1990s** (Ottawa, Statistics Canada, Agriculture and Rural Working Paper No. 36, Cat. No. 21-601-MPE98036). To order, phone the Agriculture Division of Statistics Canada at 1 800 465-1991 or the Regional Reference Centre at 1 800 263-1136. Robert Mendelson may be contacted at (613) 951-5385 (mendrob@statcan.ca) and Ray Bollman at (613) 951-3747 (bollman@statcan.ca).

How to read the map.

*This map only considers the rural and small town (RST) population in a census division (CD). The shading in each CD indicates the size of the change in the RST population component only. In a few cases, the RST population increased between 1991 and 1996, but the CMA/CA population in the same CD decreased more, leaving a net decrease in the overall population. Two examples are Saskatchewan census division number 12 and Gloucester County in New Brunswick where the larger urban centre (North Battleford and Bathurst, respectively) in the census division declined by more than the RST population increased. For a map of the change in the total population within each census division, refer to page 12 of **A National Overview: Population and Dwelling Counts** (Ottawa: Statistics Canada Cat. No. 93-357). Thus, we present here the change in only the RST population within each CD.*

CANADA

RURAL AND SMALL TOWN POPULATION* CHANGE, 1991 TO 1996

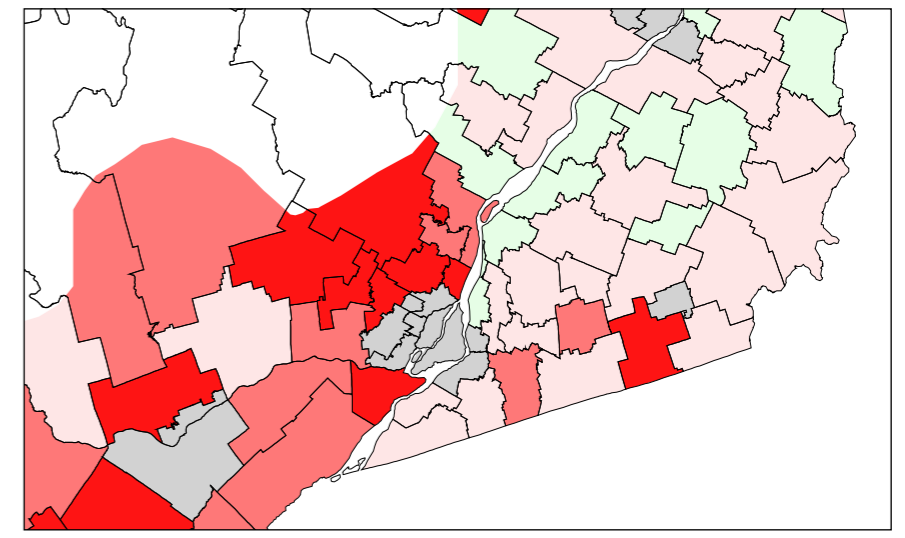
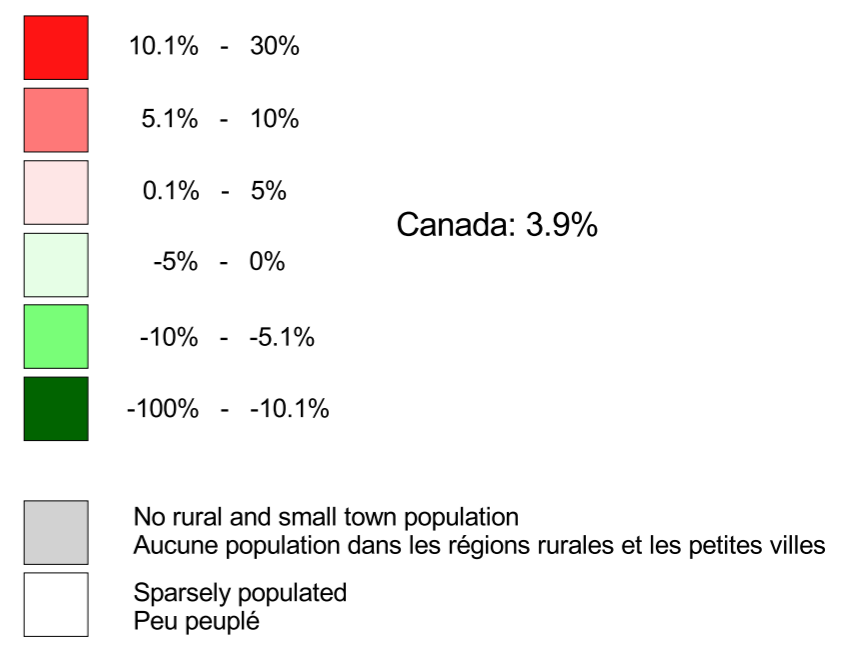
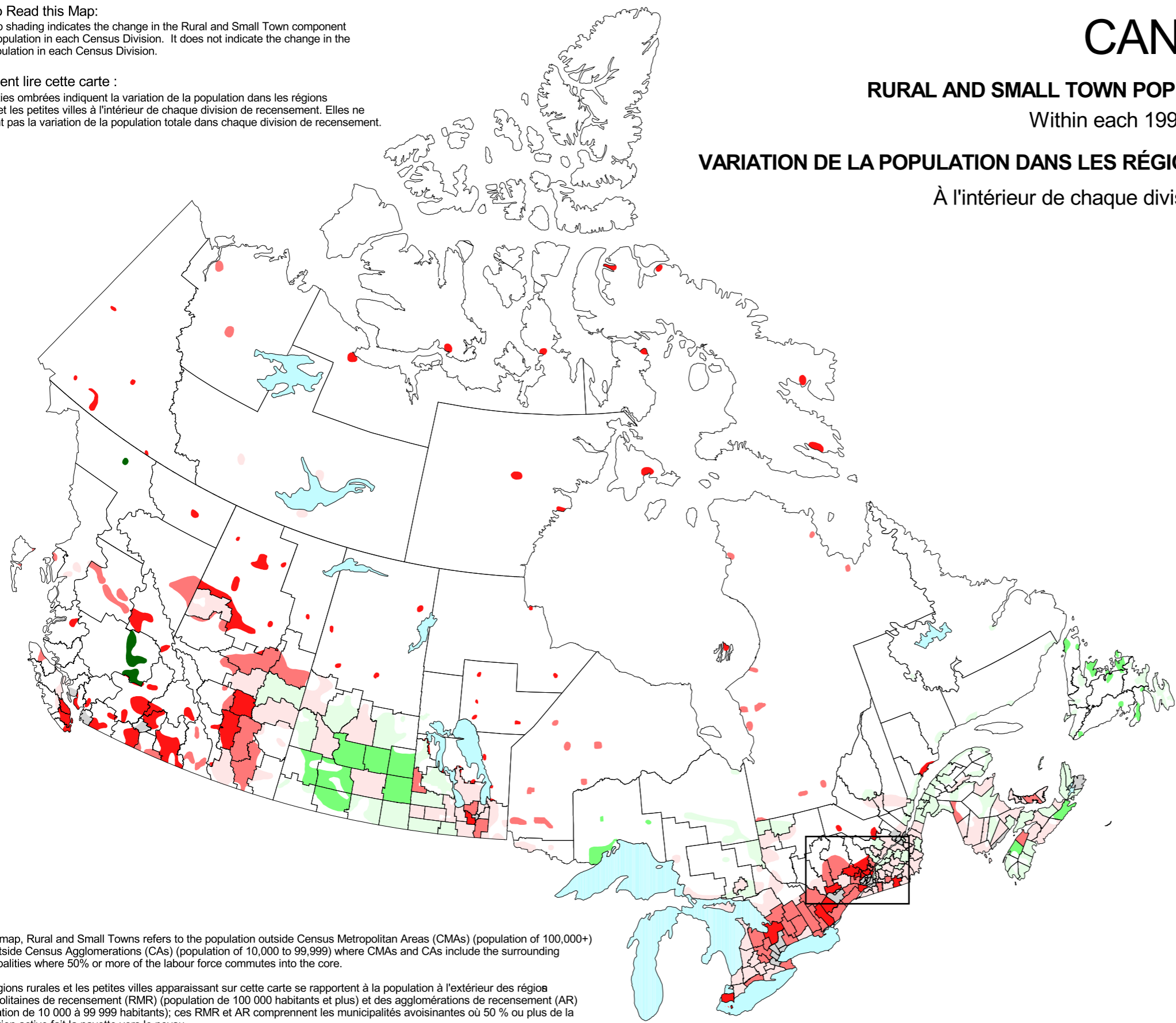
Within each 1996 Census Division

VARIATION DE LA POPULATION DANS LES RÉGIONS RURALES ET LES PETITES VILLES*, 1991 À 1996

À l'intérieur de chaque division de recensement de 1996

How to Read this Map:
The map shading indicates the change in the Rural and Small Town component of the population in each Census Division. It does not indicate the change in the total population in each Census Division.

Comment lire cette carte :
Les parties ombrées indiquent la variation de la population dans les régions rurales et les petites villes à l'intérieur de chaque division de recensement. Elles ne montrent pas la variation de la population totale dans chaque division de recensement.



* In this map, Rural and Small Towns refers to the population outside Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) (population of 100,000+) and outside Census Agglomerations (CAs) (population of 10,000 to 99,999) where CMAs and CAs include the surrounding municipalities where 50% or more of the labour force commutes into the core.

* Les régions rurales et les petites villes apparaissant sur cette carte se rapportent à la population à l'extérieur des régions métropolitaines de recensement (RMR) (population de 100 000 habitants et plus) et des agglomérations de recensement (AR) (population de 10 000 à 99 999 habitants); ces RMR et AR comprennent les municipalités avoisinantes où 50 % ou plus de la population active fait la navette vers le noyau.

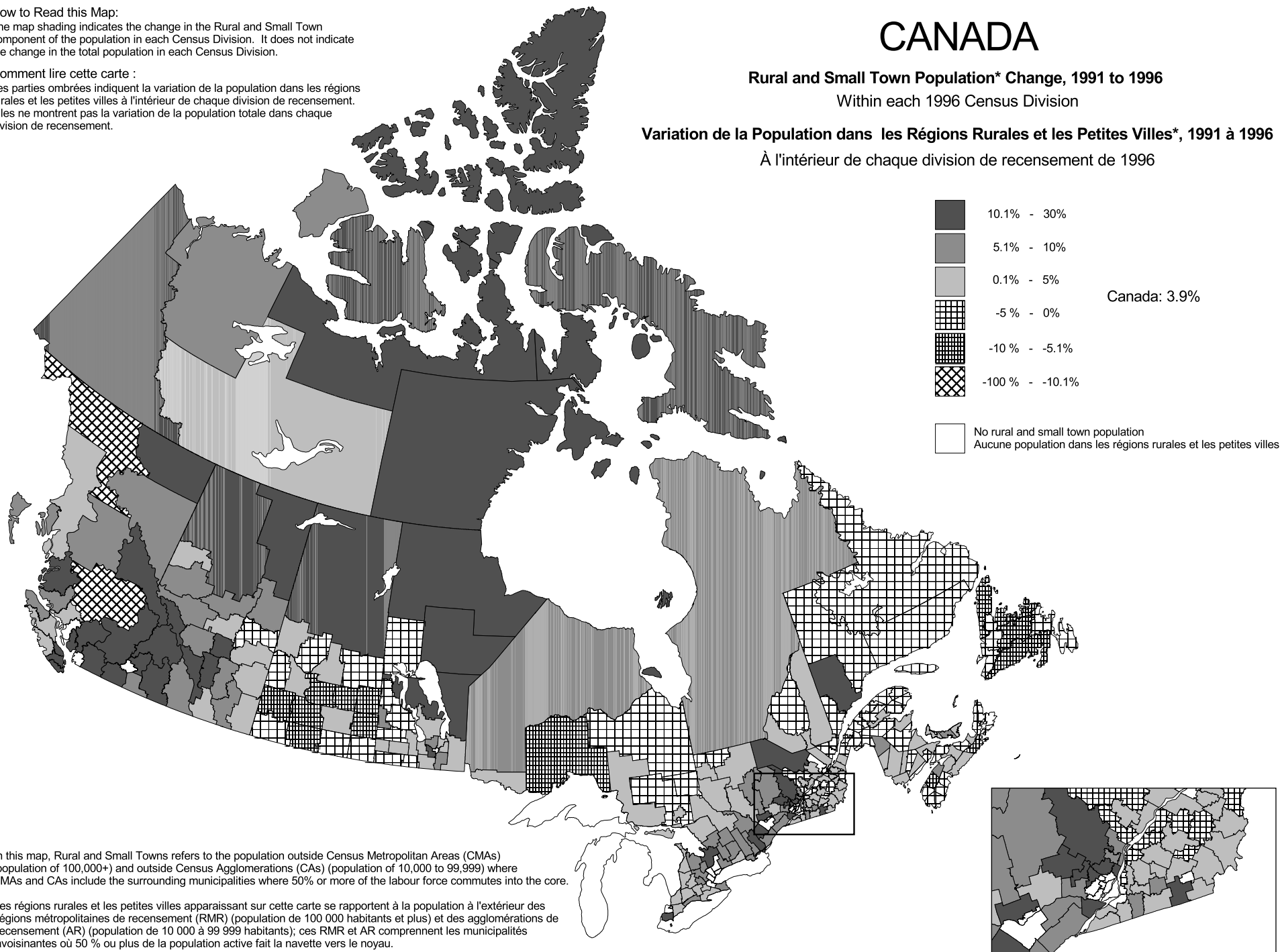
CANADA

Rural and Small Town Population* Change, 1991 to 1996

Within each 1996 Census Division

Variation de la Population dans les Régions Rurales et les Petites Villes*, 1991 à 1996

À l'intérieur de chaque division de recensement de 1996



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Population Change, 1991 and 1996 Censuses
By 1996 Census Division

Variation de la population, recensement de 1991 et 1996
Par division de recensement de 1996

