

Official Languages, 1996



The 1871 Census, undertaken a few years after the adoption of the country's Constitution, highlighted the ethnic duality of the population – 61% of British origin and 31% of French origin. Eighty years later, following the Second World War, those of French origin still represented 31% of the population, while the British segment had declined to 48%. The stability of the proportion with French origin was due to the importance of international immigration in demographic growth in the years before and after the First World War. In 1951, 20% of the population had neither British nor French origins, a considerable increase since 1871 (nearly 8%) - those of aboriginal origin still represented about one percent of the population. The ethnic diversity of the population has been accentuated over the past half century by the high levels of international immigration and the gap between the fertility rates of the aboriginal population and that of other Canadians.

Over the years, ethnic diversity has given way to the linguistic duality. The two major ethnic groups represented more than 90% of the population in 1871; in 1996, 90% of the population speaks French or English most often in the home. However, this permanence masks the very different evolution experienced by English - and French - speaking communities across the country.

Today, in Canada, two large official languages groups represent about 83% of the population. There are also numerous other language groups, none of which represents more than three percent of Canadians. Both geography - 5500 kilometres (3400 miles) from coast to coast - and history play an important role in understanding the present language situation.

If we look at Canadians as a whole, we find that the language that most (84%) of them can speak is English, followed by French which about one-third (31%) of the population can speak. About one in six Canadians (17%) speak both official languages according to the 1996 Census. Those who live in areas where the two languages groups are in close proximity have a far greater tendency to speak both English and French. For example, half of the population in the Montréal metropolitan area and 44% of the population of Ottawa-Hull can speak two official languages.

The text for Official Languages is based on the following publication:

Marmen, Louise and Jean-Pierre Corbeil. Languages in Canada: 1996 Census. New Canadian Perspectives Series. Ottawa: Canadian Heritage, and Statistics Canada, 1999. Catalogue number: CH3-2-8/1999.

Mapping Notes

The data presented on the map layers were derived from the 1996 Census and were based on either the 288 census divisions (CD) or 5984 census subdivisions (CSD) for which data are released. The choropleth mapping technique is limited in use when displaying data for the large areas in the northern and rural regions, which contain small populations and are therefore, overemphasized. To view the population figures of a specific CD or CSD on a map, press the "Get Statistics" button and select the area of interest.

When comparing information between maps, it is important to understand that each map layer is based on a unique set of data. The class intervals used have been generated to represent the unique information on each map. As a result, the maps cannot be directly compared to each other. The individual maps, together with the supporting map text are the best sources for content comparison.

Note that in choropleth technique, areas are completely shaded and only one such layer can be viewed at a time.

At the time the census division boundaries were defined, Nunavut had not yet been designated as an official territory. It is therefore not referenced on the maps.

Definitions of underlined terms

Census Division : Census Division (CD) is the general term applied to areas established by provincial law which are intermediate geographic areas between the municipality and the province levels. Census divisions represent counties, regional districts, regional municipalities and other types of provincially legislated areas. In Newfoundland, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, provincial law does not provide for these administrative geographic areas. Therefore, census divisions have been created by Statistics Canada in cooperation with these provinces for the dissemination of statistical data. In the Yukon Territory, the census division is equivalent to the entire Territory. (Source: 1996 Census Dictionary, Statistics Canada)

Census Subdivision (CSD) : Census subdivision is the general term applying to municipalities (as determined by provincial legislation) or their equivalent (for

example, Indian reserves, Indian settlements and unorganized territories). In Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and British Columbia, the term also describes geographic areas that have been created by Statistics Canada in cooperation with the provinces as equivalents for municipalities for the dissemination of statistical data. According to the national hierarchy, census subdivisions add together to form census divisions. The CDs form provinces and territories. Two additional levels are defined in the national hierarchy to facilitate special data analysis. A special aggregation of census subdivisions called census consolidated subdivision (CCS) provides a level of geography between the CSD and CD which facilitates data analysis. In the rural context, the CCS is a grouping of smaller municipalities, usually contained within a larger municipality. For instance, a town located within a surrounding township will be grouped together with the township to form a CCS. In urban areas, CCSs are formed by contiguous groupings of CSDs. A principal user of the CCSs is the Census of Agriculture. (Source: 1996 Census Dictionary, Statistics Canada)

Choropleth map : A thematic map in which areas are coloured or shaded to create darker or lighter areas in proportion to the density or a particular characteristic of the theme subject in that area.