Overview of the Relationship between Country of Birth of Parents and Ethnic Origins as Reported in the 2001 Census of Canada

John Kralt

John Kralt currently does consulting through his company, JTK Consulting. He was previously a research officer for the Department of Canadian Heritage and its predecessor departments from 1982 through the end of 1997. From 1972 through 1982, he was with Statistics Canada as the analyst responsible for the language, place of birth and immigration, and ethnic data from the census.

ABSTRACT

This paper is an abridged version of a report commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage. The terms of reference for the paper required the author to examine the usefulness of ethnic origin data from the Canadian Census as compared to country of birth data and other alternative data sources and to provide an indication of the policy ramifications for the Department should other data sources replace the traditional ethnic origin Census question. Data used in this report are drawn from custom data tabulations prepared for the Department of Canadian Heritage from the 2001 and 1996 Censuses. Opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not in any way represent the views of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Introduction[1]

According to the 2001 Census, two in five Canadian residents aged 15 and over are either born outside Canada themselves, or have one or both parents born outside Canada. It is therefore not surprising that there is considerable interest, both among the general public and among those responsible for public policy, in this *immigrant* component of the population.

This report focuses on *Ethnic Origin* and its relationship to *Country of Birth of Parents* and the potential usefulness of the latter to replace the former. *Ethnic origin,* and its predecessor, *race* or *racial origin,* has been asked in some form or other in every census since 1871. Up to and including the 1971 census, only one *racial origin* or *ethnic origin* was to be reported and retained in the data. In response to a need for data on *Métis* (an impossible origin using 1971 criteria) and to remove some of the known inconsistencies in the data, more than one ethnic origin (multiple

responses) was allowed in 1981, a practice continued in subsequent censuses.[2] Information on the *country of birth of parents* has only been collected in the 1971 (was each parent born inside or outside Canada) and in 2001 (specific countries of birth of each parent for the population aged 15 and over).

The criticism of the ethnic/racial origins data collected by Census has intensified in the past 20 years. The introduction of multiple responses has made the data difficult to analyse for many users, in part because of the large number of potential combinations of origins. During recent collection phases of the census, these data have been systematically attacked in some of the mass media on the basis that we are all *Canadians* and that asking for the origins of Canadians is discriminatory and irrelevant. Since the introduction of self-enumeration in the 1971 Census, there has been a steady increase in the number of persons reporting *Canadian* as an ethnic origin. What to do with these *Canadian* responses has been an ongoing problem for many users, especially those who focus on single responses. As a result, it has been suggested that *country of birth of parents* (the country of birth of parents according to current boundaries) would be a good replacement as it is objective and not subject to misinterpretation.

During recent collection phases of the census, these data have been systematically attacked in some of the mass media on the basis that we are all Canadians and that asking for the origins of Canadians is discriminatory and irrelevant.

Overview of the Findings

The one third increase in the reporting of *Canadian* between the 1996 and 2001 censuses would be very significant if multiple responses were not allowed. However, the impact of *Canadian* on the total number of times specific ethnic origins *Other than English and French* have been reported has been minor, or non-existent. Only *English* (12.5%) and *French* (-28.2%) showed large percentage and numeric decreases between 1996 and 2001. (The other major change in numbers was a 2.4% decrease (104 thousand) for *Scottish*). It is argued here that the overall numbers reporting specific origins *Other than English and French* in 2001 are quite consistent with those collected in 1996. It is clear that the increase in *Canadian* has been at the expense of *English* and *French,* not at the expense of the *Other* origins.

Of the 23.9 million persons in Canada aged 15 and over, 6 in 10 (14.7 million) reported that they and both their parents were born in Canada. Among those aged less than 55, two thirds reported that they and both their parents were born here compared to only half of those aged 55 and over. Of the remaining 9.2 million Canadians, 5.3 million, nearly 2 in 3, were themselves immigrants. Of the 3.9 million born in Canada, 2.0 million had both parents born outside Canada and another 1.9 million had one parent born in Canada and the second parent born outside Canada. If the respondent has one or both parents born outside of Canada, three in five of those aged 25 and over were immigrants themselves, a figure considerably higher than the two in five among those aged 15-24.

The country of birth of parents were only collected for the population aged 15 and over. Historically, approximately 3 in 10 of all immigrants in Canada in the census came here as children under the age of 15. Therefore, among children currently aged <15, a number also immigrated to Canada. It is argued here that among immigrants there are two different streams in the *country of birth of parents* data:

a. - persons *who were born outside Canada and who themselves immigrated to Canada:* these persons almost by definition have both parents born outside Canada. These persons are divided between those who immigrated to Canada as adults (it seems reasonable to assume that for most, although not all, their parents did not immigrate to Canada) and those who immigrated to Canada as children under the age of 15 (it seems plausible to assume that the vast majority of these persons accompanied their immigrant parents).

b. - persons *who were born in Canada who have one or both parents as immigrants:* these persons have parents who live in Canada and whose parent(s) could have immigrated to Canada either as children or as adults.

In the data available from the 2001 Census, it is not known if the parents immigrated to Canada. If the parents immigrated, it is known at what age the parents immigrated to Canada.

Ignoring for the moment the impact of not having cultural origins for data for 60% of the population, the use of *Country of Birth of Parents* data as a proxy for cultural affinity and as a replacement for ethnic origin depends in part on the extent to which the same country of birth is reported for parents. It seems reasonable to assume that the impact of the culture of the *home country* (country of birth of the parents) would be stronger for those who came here as adults than for those who came here as children, ties to the *home country* are stronger for those who are the children of adult immigrants than for those who are the children of children, the ties to the *home country* are least strong when the parents are born in different countries or in Canada.

Not all origins would be equally affected by the loss of the ethnic data. For example, while much of the data for most of the Western European origins would disappear, the data for much of the rest of the globe would be retained. In examining specific countries of birth of parents for persons aged 15 and over, 4 in 5 reported the same country of birth for both parents and the remainder reported different countries. Nearly 9 in 10 persons with a Canadian born parent had both parents born here. This is not the case for persons with parents born outside Canada

as only 2 in three reported both parents as being born in the same country, although the extent to which parents were born in the same country varies greatly from country to country. The extent to which the ethnic origin reported was associated with the country of birth of one or both parents, e.g. persons reporting *Greek* and country of birth of parent(s) *Greece,* showed considerable variation for different countries of birth. For Western European countries, the rate of association was very low while it was high for virtually all other countries.

Alternative Data Sources: Aboriginal Identity, Visible Minority, Religion

The 1996 and 2001 Censuses also had questions on the visible minority status, aboriginal identity and religion. It could be argued that these data could be alternative data sources for these three populations. However, persons who reported an *Aboriginal Identity* did not necessarily report an *Aboriginal Origin* and persons reporting an *Aboriginal Origin* did not necessarily report *Aboriginal Identity.* If the ethnic origin data were to be eliminated, the census could only identify two thirds of the *Total Reported Aboriginal Population.* Similarly, there is not a 1:1 correlation between a person reporting an ethnic origin and that same person reporting that ethnic origin as a visible minority. In fact, only half of those who reported *Latin American Origins* reported *Latin American Visible Minority Status* compared to 9 in 10 for *Filipino* and *Korean.* It is possible to get some indication of the Jewish population from a religion question (if such a question is included in the Census) although 15.5% of combined Jewish population only reported *Jewish* as an ethnic origin.

Policy and Data Implications for the Department of Canadian Heritage

There are two major areas for the Department of Canadian Heritage and its programs that would be adversely affected:

1) the absence of any data on many of the cultural and ethnic groups with which the department has been dealing with on an ongoing basis;

2) the perception of *who is a Canadian, Canadian Identity* or *the sense of belonging to Canada,* ideals promoted by the department as part of its mandate.

Absence of Data

If the country of birth of parents were to be used to replace the ethnic origins data, it would mean that for many of the ethnic and cultural groups of interest to the department, there would be little or no data. In essence, there would be little data for most groups with origins in Western Europe, including Jewish. However, the impact for Canadian Heritage would probably be most significant in the total absence of *Aboriginal/North American Indian/Métis* and *Inuit* ethnic origins data. The Department of Canadian Heritage deals with all Aboriginal persons, not just with those who identify as such, or who are registered, or are band members. The aboriginal ethnic data and aboriginal identity data combined provide a better data-set to assess the socioeconomic conditions of aboriginal persons in Canada than only the aboriginal identity data.

Impact on Perception of Who Is a Canadian

The way in which the Census categorizes cultural data has a major impact on how Canadians see themselves. Up to and including the 1971 Census, Canadians were either *only British* or *only French* or *only Other,* i.e. *Neither British nor French.* Since 1981, Canadians have been designated as *British and*/or *French and*/or *Other* with *Other* being divided between *Aboriginal* and *non-Aboriginal.* In 1996 and 2001, the addition of visible minority data means that *Other* is now divided between *Aboriginal* and *Non Aboriginal* and *Visible Minority* and *Non Visible Minority.* By some quirk of statistical logic, the instructions and the question flow on the Census questionnaire do not allow an individual to report both a *Visible Minority* and *Aboriginal Identity.*

By only using *country of birth of parents* data, official Canada would effectively be sending a message to newer arrivals and their children that no matter what they do, they are not really *Canadians* as the government distinguishes between immigrants and their children and all other Canadians. It is argued here that the immigrant or the child of an immigrant is thereby seen as being somewhat less *Canadian,* has less of a right to be in this country than a person who is born here of parents who were born here. Being *immigrant* implies that the Canadian government gave the foreigner or the foreigner's parent permission to take up permanent residence in Canada, gave the immigrant or the immigrant's child permission to become citizens of Canada. At the same time, unlike virtually all children of parents born in Canada, the Canadian government can deport the immigrant under a number of circumstances, and can remove that citizenship or immigration status for the immigrant and even the immigrant's child if the immigrant was not totally forthcoming in his/her immigration or citizenship application.[3]

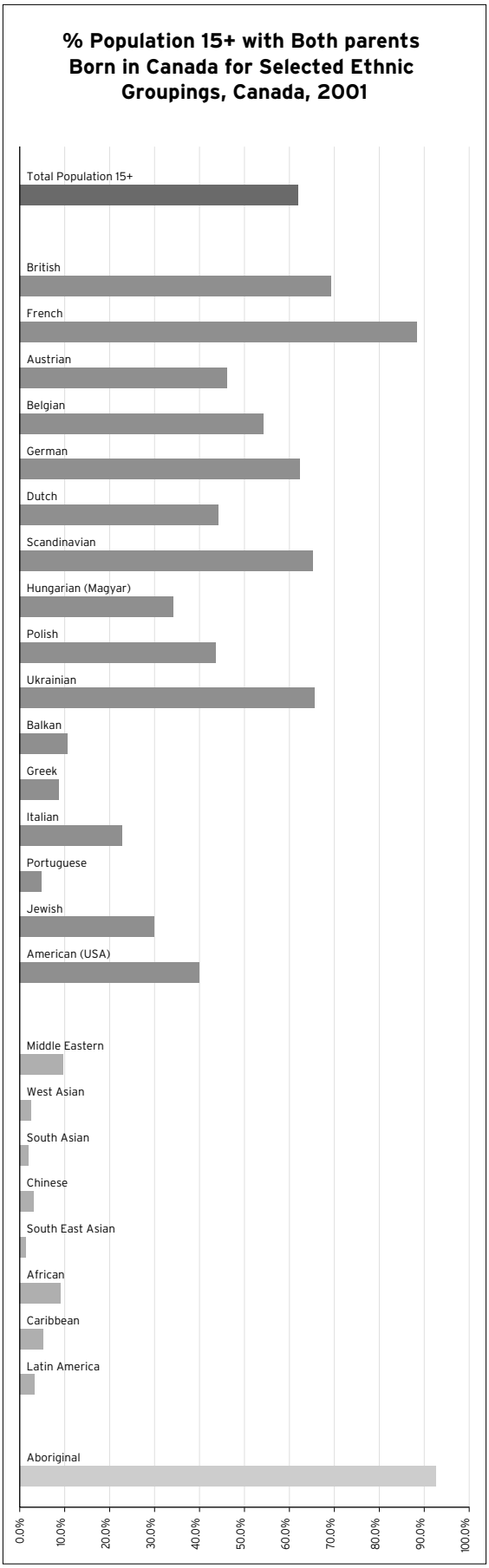
By eliminating the ethnic data, there would be no effective *official recognition* that all Canadians or their ancestors, with the exception 1.4 million Aboriginal Canadians, were immigrants at some time in the not too distant past. In the rationale for collecting the 1921 racial origin data, the statisticians of the day wrote:

> "The significant fact in the present connection is this. The combined biological and cultural effect on Canada of the infiltration of a group of English is clearly different than that produced by an equal number of, say, Ukrainians coming to the country. This is partly due to the different biological strains and partly due to different cultural environment in the home country. It would be futile from a practical point of view to attempt to separate the biological and the cultural influence. It is known, for example, that biologically the Orientals are not assimilable in Canada, even if culturally assimilation were possible."

Similar sentiments were contained in the 1931 and 1941 reports on ethnic/racial origins.[4] While such blatantly *English/French* ethnocentric statements are now totally

unacceptable in the public forum, it is argued here that much of the discussion surrounding the questions of who are *Canadian ethnics* and who are *immigrants* and *second generation immigrants* has many of the same ethnocentric overtones.

The chart, based on ethnic origins, shows the extent to which persons with specified ethnic origins aged 15 and over reported that both parents were born in Canada. From the chart, it is clear that there would be a major change in the European component of the population. Origins such as *Scandinavian, German,* etc. would effectively disappear while many others such as *Dutch* and *Belgian* would decrease drastically. The effective result is that persons whose parents were born in Western European countries would probably be reduced to small minorities in the next couple of decades as the immigrants and their children who came in the immediate post World War II war immigration die. European origins, with the exception of *Ukrainian,* would be reduced to those deemed as less desirable in the 1929 report. Given the extremely low percentages of persons aged 15 and over whose parents are both born in Canada among third world origins, these origins are and will continue to be considered as immigrant for the next 50-100 years, as many of the immigrants with these origins are currently children or came here at a young age.[5]



References

1. This paper is an abridged version of a report commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage. The terms of reference for the paper required the author to examine the usefulness of ethnic origin data from the Canadian Census as compared to country of birth data and other alternative data sources and to provide an indication of the policy ramifications for the Department should other data sources replace the traditional ethnic origin Census question. Data used in this report are drawn from custom data tabulations prepared for the Department of Canadian Heritage from the 2001 and 1996 Censuses. Opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not in any way represent the views of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

2. For a more detailed description of the rationale for the changes between 1971 and 1981 and later years, see Kralt, John *Ethnic Origin in the Canadian Census, 1871-1981* in R..W. Petryhsyn (ed): *Changing Realities: Social Trends Among Ukrainian Canadians* Edmonton :The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1980 pp. 18-49 and John Kralt *Ethnic Origin in the Canadian Census, 1871-1986* in Frank Trovalto, Shiva Halli and Leo Driedger (ed) *Ethnic Demography: Canadian Immigrant, Racial and Cultural Variations,* Ottawa: Carleton University Press 1990 pp.13-29.

3. Even minors born in Canada and who are Canadian citizens by birth can effectively be deported if their parents are deported.

4. Quoted in Kralt, John, 1980 p.22-23

5. Historically, approximately 30% of all immigrants came here aged less than 15. Almost by definition, the parents of these children immigrants and the children immigrants were born outside Canada. If it is assumed that the life span of a person is 80 years and if there is an average of 25 years between generations, then the children of these children immigrants who have immigrated in the past 10 years would still be reporting themselves as born of immigrant parents a century from now.