DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN CANADA'S URBAN AREAS:

Results from the 2001 Census

ABSTRACT

The authors assess the demographic changes in Canada's major census metropolitan areas as shown by the 2001 Census, in particular population changes, the aging of the urban population, and changes in the composition of their households. This article is based in part on 2001 Census analytic articles released in *The Daily,* Statistics Canada's official release bulletin, and available on Statistics Canada's website (www.statcan.ca). The authors would like to acknowledge the comments received from John Flanders on an earlier draft.

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During the past several decades, Canada's population has become increasingly concentrated in four broad urban regions: the extended Golden Horseshoe (the census metropolitan areas of Toronto, Oshawa, Kitchener, Hamilton and St. Catharines-Niagara, as well as the census agglomerations of Barrie and Guelph, and some adjacent areas); Montréal and its adjacent region; the Lower Mainland of British Columbia and southern Vancouver Island; and the Calgary-Edmonton corridor.

Between 1996 and 2001, the population of these four regions combined grew 7.6%, compared with virtually no growth (+0.5%) in the rest of the country. In 2001, 51% of Canada's population lived in these four regions, compared with 49% in 1996 and 41% in 1971.

The nation's 27 census metropolitan areas (CMAs), large urban centres with a population of 100,000 or more, were home to just over 64% of the total Canadian population in 2001. In fact, one-third of the population lived in one of the three largest metropolitan areas: Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver.

The national perspective: Lowest census-to-census growth rate in history

Nationally, the 2001 Census counted just over 30 million people, a gain of 4% from the 1996 Census. This was one of the lowest census-to-census growth rates in the history of the country.

There have been only two other periods in which the population grew this slowly: during the Depression of the 1930s and the period between 1981 and 1986. The slow growth between 1981 and 1986 was due to exceptionally low levels of immigration, less than 500,000 a year.

In contrast, between 1996 and 2001, immigration reached its highest levels in recent decades, accounting for about 60% of the total growth. During the late 1990s, immigration to Canada exceeded one million.

Nevertheless, the low level of natural increase, resulting from a decline in the number of births and an increase in the number of deaths, offset the positive impacts of immigration. The drop in births was due to continuing low fertility, coupled with the fact that the large baby boom cohorts had moved through the prime child-bearing ages. The increase in deaths was due to the aging of the population.

Large metropolitan areas grew four times faster than smaller urban centres

Between 1996 and 2001, the population in the 27 census metropolitan areas combined increased 6.2%, compared with a growth rate of 1.5% for smaller urban areas of 10,000 to 100,000, known as census agglomerations, or CAs. The remaining small town and rural areas experienced a small 0.4% decline in population for the same period.

Although the large urban areas as an aggregate grew most rapidly, there was a wide variation in growth rates. The population in 11 of the 27 census metropolitan areas increased at a faster rate than

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE CENSUS METROPOLITAN AREAS, CANADA (RANKING BY % CHANGE 1996-2001)

	Population			Migration 1996-2001			
				Net Internal			From Outside of Canada
CMAs	Population 2001	% Change 1991-96	% Change 1996-01	15-29	All Other Ages	Total	Total
Calgary	951395	9.0	15.8	32100	24910	57010	42415
Oshawa	296298	11.9	10.2	4110	13340	17450	2765
Toronto	4682897	9.4	9.8	27560	-72100	-44540	374195
Edmonton	937845	2.6	8.7	16035	13155	29190	24095
Vancouver	1986965	14.3	8.5	12415	-33020	-20605	168125
Kitchener	414284	7.4	8.2	3030	4705	7735	14505
Abbotsford	147370	20.2	8.0	130	2270	2400	4950
Windsor	307877	6.3	7.3	2015	4075	6090	13300
Ottawa-Gatineau	1063664	7.3	6.5	15415	11085	26500	43215
Hamilton	662401	4.1	6.1	3025	13610	16635	21530
Halifax	359183	3.7	4.7	6630	940	7570	6575
London	432451	4.5	3.8	1520	-1720	-200	11730
Saskatoon	225927	3.8	3.1	1600	-3415	-1815	4165
Montréal	3426350	3.7	3.0	27400	-39935	-12535	115215
Sherbrooke	153811	4.7	2.8	-1740	25	-1715	2510
Victoria	311902	5.7	2.5	2095	145	2240	8020
Québec	682757	4.1	1.6	-475	-12845	-13320	6165
Kingston	146838	5.1	1.6	-1505	1865	360	2975
St. Catherines-Niagara	377009	2.2	1.2	-1830	4900	3070	6285
Winnipeg	671274	1.0	0.6	1665	-9640	-7975	14885
Regina	192800	1.0	-0.4	-170	-5715	-5885	2555
St. John's	172918	1.3	-0.7	-2945	-2585	-5530	1400
Trois-Rivières	137507	2.7	-1.7	-2210	95	-2115	570
Saint John	122678	-0.1	-2.4	-800	-1485	-2285	1000
Saguenay	154938	-0.3	-3.4	-3905	-1780	-5685	360
Thunder Bay	121986	0.5	-3.7	-2710	-2120	-4830	605
Sudbury	155601	1.8	-6.0	-4070	-3210	-7280	650

Source: Census of Canada

the 4% national average. But nine others had smaller positive growth, while the population of seven CMAs declined.

With three exceptions (Ottawa-Gatineau, Windsor and Halifax), the census metropolitan areas with the strongest growth were located in three regions: the Golden Horseshoe in southern Ontario, the Calgary-Edmonton corridor, and British Columbia's Lower Mainland. The fastest growing census metropolitan areas were Calgary (+15.8%), Oshawa (+10.2%), Toronto (+9.8%), Edmonton (+8.7%) and Vancouver (+8.5%).

Among the 115 census agglomerations, or CAs, the population of 23 increased at a faster rate than the national average of 4%. Some 35 CAs had a slower but positive growth rate, while the population of 57 declined. Those experiencing the greatest rate of growth were Barrie, (+25.1%) and Wood Buffalo and Grand Prairie, both of which grew at a rate of about 18%. Seven of the 10 census agglomerations with the highest growth rates were located in Alberta.

The data also showed a continuation of movement to rural and small town areas within commuting distance of a CMA or CA. ("Commuting distance" was the distance at which more than 30% of the working population commuted.) These areas experienced a population growth of 3.7% between 1996 and 2001, following a 6% gain during the previous five-year period.

Migration patterns: 15 of 27 CMAs lost more people than they gained

Between 1996 and 2001, 15 out of the 27 census metropolitan areas, including Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, lost more people than they gained in migratory exchanges with the rest of the country.

However, since nearly seven in 10 immigrants settle in one of these three areas, the loss of population to other parts of the country was more than offset by moves into these areas from outside Canada. Even in smaller CMAs, it is interesting to note that in many cases movement from outside Canada accounted for as much, or more, growth than internal migration (Table 1).

All three of the largest census metropolitan areas – Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver – experienced a net loss of population due to internal migration. Each showed a net gain among young people aged 15 to 29. But this gain was more than offset by a net loss of older families and seniors.

In the case of Toronto and Vancouver at least, it appears that much of the net population loss was to areas

within the larger urban region. For example, moves to other parts of the Golden Horseshoe, such as Oshawa, Barrie, and Burlington, accounted for much of the net out-migration from the census metropolitan area of Toronto.

A similar trend appeared in Vancouver. Many individuals who pulled up stakes in the census metropolitan area moved to adjacent areas within British Columbia, including Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Mission and Victoria.

Intra-urban growth: Migration to the suburbs

All census metropolitan areas consist of a number of municipalities around a major, or core, city. In most cases, the population growth of the core city was lower than the growth in the rest of the metropolitan area. For example, the population of the suburban area surrounding the core city of Toronto increased 17.2%, four times the growth rate of the core itself (+4%).

In census metropolitan area of Vancouver, the population of the city of Vancouver increased 6.2%, compared with 9.4% in the remainder of the CMA. In Montreal, the Montreal Urban Community increased 2.1%, while the rest of the CMA grew 4.1%.

The growth in these surrounding municipalities has been fueled by migration and natural increase, as young families choose to live and raise children in suburbs. Seventeen of the 25 fastest-growing municipalities in Canada were those that surround the core of census metropolitan areas.

In fact, an interesting trend is the continued emergence of large, rapidly growing suburban municipalities, those with a population of 100,000 or more, within the largest census metropolitan areas.

For example, in the census metropolitan area of Toronto, the populations of Vaughan, Markham, Richmond Hill and Brampton increased 20% or more. The populations of Mississauga and Oakville increased between 10% and 20%. In many cases, these gains were five times the growth rate of the city of Toronto.

In the census metropolitan area of Vancouver, the population of the city of Surrey grew 14.2%, more than twice the growth rate of only 6.2% for the city of Vancouver.

Census data from 1996 have shown the increased tendency toward the concentration of employment in these large suburban municipalities.

Information yet to be released from the 2001 Census will allow for a more complete analysis of this trend and its impact on commuting and other patterns.

Aging of urban populations

In general, the 19 million people who lived in the 27 census metropolitan areas were younger than the people who lived outside them. Overall, the median age of individuals living in these metropolitan areas was 37.0 years, compared with 38.8 years for the population in the rest of the country.

The oldest census metropolitan area was Trois-Rivières, where the median age in 2001 was 41.2 years, an increase of 3.6 from 1996. Victoria, the oldest census metropolitan area up to 1996, became second oldest, with a median age of 41.0 years, up 2.3. St. Catharines-Niagara maintained its position as third oldest with a median age of 40.2 years, an increase of 2.6 from 1996.

Saskatoon kept its rank as the nation's youngest census metropolitan area, with a median age of 34.4 years. It was followed by Calgary, at 34.9, and Kitchener, with a median age of 35.3.

Calgary replaced the census metropolitan area of St. John's in Newfoundland and Labrador, which slipped from second to tenth youngest with a median age of 36.3 years, up 3.0 from 1996. This high increase in median age was due in large part to very high out-migration of young people.

The 2001 Census showed a clear relationship between population growth and population aging. Census metropolitan areas that had the largest growth in population did so by attracting relatively young migrants. In general, among census metropolitan areas, the faster the population growth, the lower the increase in median age.

Table 1 summarizes some key demographic indicators for the 27 CMAs.

Household composition: More people living alone

Between 1996 and 2001, the number of private households continued to grow faster than the population. For Canada as a whole, the number of households increased 6.9%, while the number of people living in these households rose 4.0%.

The number of private households increased in almost all census metropolitan areas from 1996 to 2001, whether or not their populations increased. Households in all metropolitan areas combined rose 8.0%, while the total population grew by 6.2%.

The increase of smaller households was the biggest contributor to the growth of private households. More people are living alone, and more families have no children at home.

Again there was a wide variation in household composition across the urban areas. Census metropolitan areas with the oldest populations tended to have a high proportion of one-person households.

For example, one-person households accounted for nearly one in every three households in Sherbrooke, Trois-Rivières, Victoria, Quebec and Montreal. These single households often consisted of older women living on their own. In contrast, one-person households accounted for 19% of the total in Oshawa.

The future: Increasing concentrations in three largest urban areas

If fertility remains low and recent international migration patterns persist, population growth will continue to depend on international migration. In fact, under this scenario, by 2025 the number of deaths will surpass the number of births, and immigration would then account for all of population growth.

As a result, if current levels of immigration and settlement patterns continue, the population will be increasingly concentrated in the three largest CMAs, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, which now attract most immigrants. By 2026, nearly 40% of Canada's population would be living in one of these three metropolitan areas, up from 33% in 2001.