

**Census in Brief**

**Population growth in  
Canada: From 1851 to 2061**



**Population and dwelling counts,  
2011 Census**



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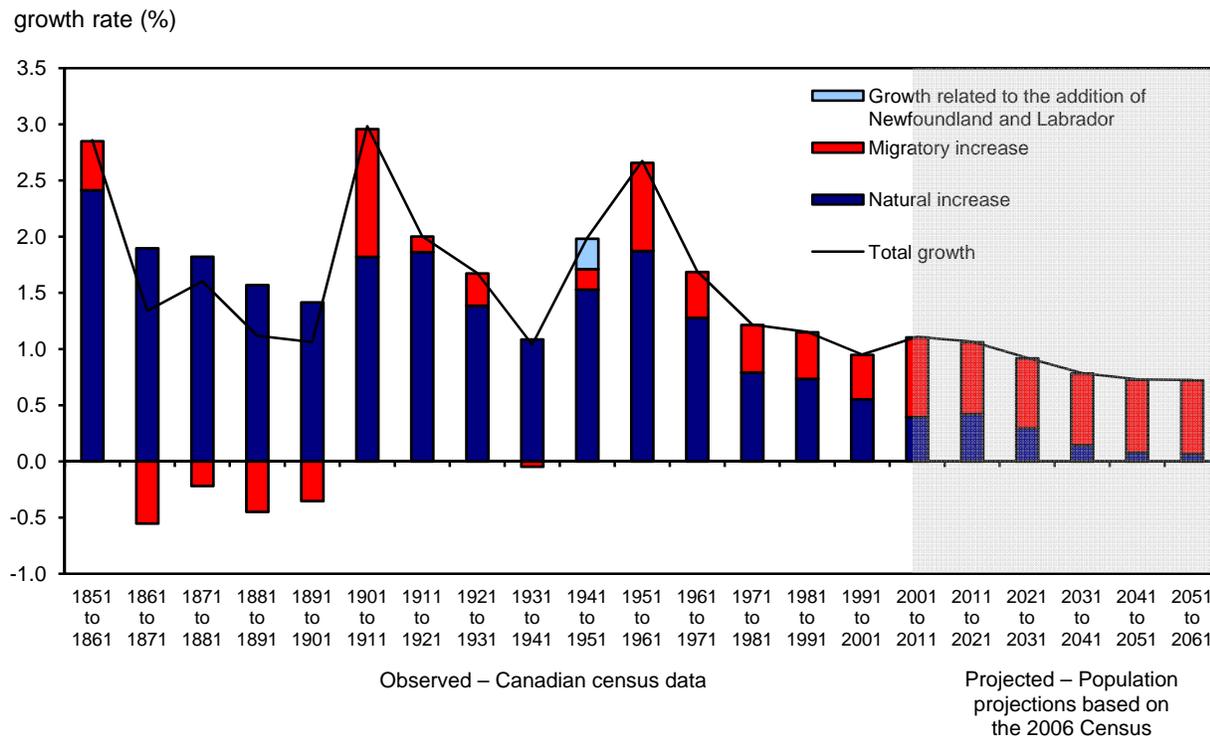
### Population growth in Canada: From 1851 to 2061

Since 1851, the nation's population growth has varied:

- In the decades from 1861 to 1901, the population increased slowly by a few million, at an annual average growth rate of less than 1.3% per year (Figure 1).
- Between 1901 and 1921, the population increased almost 3% a year on average. Then it gradually slowed in the following decades, to just above 1% between 1931 and 1941, a level not previously seen.
- In the decades from 1941 to 1971, the population increased owing to the baby-boom and strong immigration. During this period, the annual average growth rate was slightly more than 2.1%.
- Since the early 1970s, the rate of population growth has held at just over 1% per year on average.
- Over the past 10 years, with an annual average growth rate of just over 1%, Canada's population has grown at the fastest pace of any of the G8 countries.

**Figure 1**

**Observed (1851 to 2011) and projected (2011 to 2061) annual average growth rate, natural increase and migratory increase in Canada per intercensal period**



**Sources:**

**Period 1851 to 1861:** Keyfitz, Nathan. 1950. 'The growth of the Canadian population,' in *Population Studies*, volume IV, p. 47 to 63.  
**Period 1861 to 1931:** McInnis, Marvin. 2000. 'The Population of Canada in the Nineteenth Century,' in *A Population History of North America*, edited by Michael R. Haines and Richard H. Steckel, Cambridge University Press, pp. 371 to 432; McInnis, Marvin. 2000. 'Canada's Population in the Twentieth Century,' in *A Population History of North America*, edited by Michael R. Haines and Richard H. Steckel, Cambridge University Press, pp. 529 to 599; and Institut de la statistique du Québec.  
**Period 1931 to 2011:** Demography Division, Statistics Canada.  
**Period 2011 to 2061:** Statistics Canada. 2010. *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2009 to 2036*, Catalogue no. 91-520 (medium growth scenario).

Two factors are behind population growth: natural increase and migratory increase.

**Natural increase** is the difference between the number of births and deaths during a given period. This is how any population is replenished in the absence of migration.

**Migratory increase** is the difference between the number of immigrants entering the country and the number of emigrants leaving the country.

### Negative migratory increase in the 19th Century

During several decades of the past 160 years, immigration has contributed greatly to the growth of Canada's population.

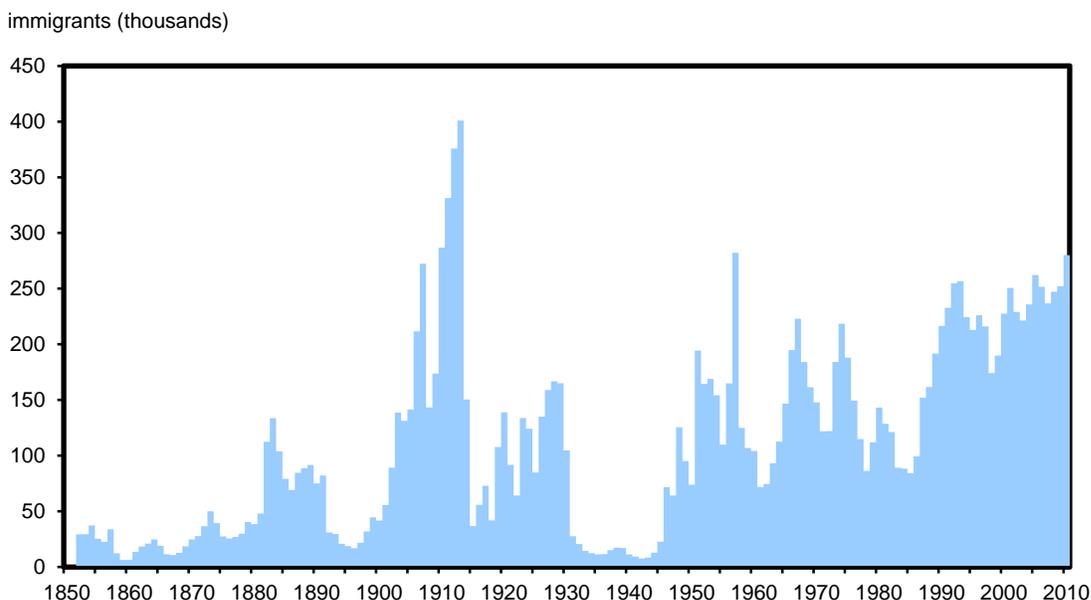
However, five decades were marked by a net outflow of migrants: the last four decades of the 19th century (1861 to 1901) and the 1930s (1931 to 1941). During these periods, the growth of the Canadian population was due entirely to natural increase, which was more than sufficient to offset migratory losses.

Between 1861 and 1901, Canada did experience a few waves of immigration, mainly from Europe (Figure 2). Starting in 1880, many immigrants, including some from Asia, entered Canada namely to work on the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

However, more people, especially those living in Eastern Canada, left the country primarily to settle in the United States. Their reasons for leaving included the Long Depression (1873 to 1896), the lack of farmland and the economic lure of American factories.

Therefore, the fertility of Canadian women, estimated at more than five children per woman on average, was the only contributor to population growth during this period.

**Figure 2**  
**Annual number of landed immigrants in Canada, 1852 to 2010**



Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

During the 1930's, migratory increase was slightly negative as immigration to Canada slowed, particularly because of economic and social circumstances arising from the Great Depression that began in 1929. The number of immigrants admitted to Canada declined considerably, from an average of 123,000 a year during the 1920s to fewer than 16,000 during the 1930s (Figure 2).

Natural increase was also at its lowest level up to that point. Fertility fell to less than three children per woman on average during this decade, a level not previously seen.

### **Two periods of high population growth**

Two periods were characterized by strong natural increase and migratory increase: 1901 to 1911 and 1941 to 1961.

In the early 20th Century, large numbers of immigrants settled in Canada, mainly to populate the West. Between 1901 and 1911, more than 1.2 million immigrants, mostly from Europe, came to Canada, generating what was then a record migratory increase. In addition, fertility was also high, averaging almost five children per woman.

A significant rise in fertility resulted in the post-Second World War baby boom. The baby boom continued until the mid-1960s, contributing to a rise in natural increase. From 2.6 children per woman in 1937, fertility rose to 3.9 children per woman in the late 1950s, a level not seen since the beginning of the century.

As well, immigration also rebounded after the Second World War and was especially high during the 1950s. In 1957, against the backdrop of the Hungarian and Suez crises, Canada received more than 282,000 immigrants, resulting in a high migratory increase during the 1950s.

### **Natural increase no longer a major factor since 2001**

Between 1851 and 2001, natural increase was the main factor behind Canada's population growth. The proportion of growth due to natural increase, however, has declined since the late 1960s. Since 2001, it has accounted for about one-third of population growth. This decrease was the result of two factors.

The first was a rapid decrease in fertility in the late 1960s and the 1970s and its fairly constant level since then. By 1976, fertility had fallen to less than 1.8 children per woman. There was a corresponding decrease in the number of births during this period (Figure 3).

Since the mid-1970s, the number of births has been stable at a level below 400,000 per year, owing to relatively low fertility ranging from 1.5 and 1.7 children per women.

The second factor was a steady rise in the number of deaths (Figure 3). This was due in part to the aging of the population (an increasingly large proportion of the population is in the more advanced ages where mortality is higher). It was also due to population growth.

As a result, the numbers of births and deaths have converged since the end of the baby boom in Canada, and migratory increase has taken on an increasingly important role in recent Canadian population growth.

### Projections: Population growth could rely almost entirely on migratory increase

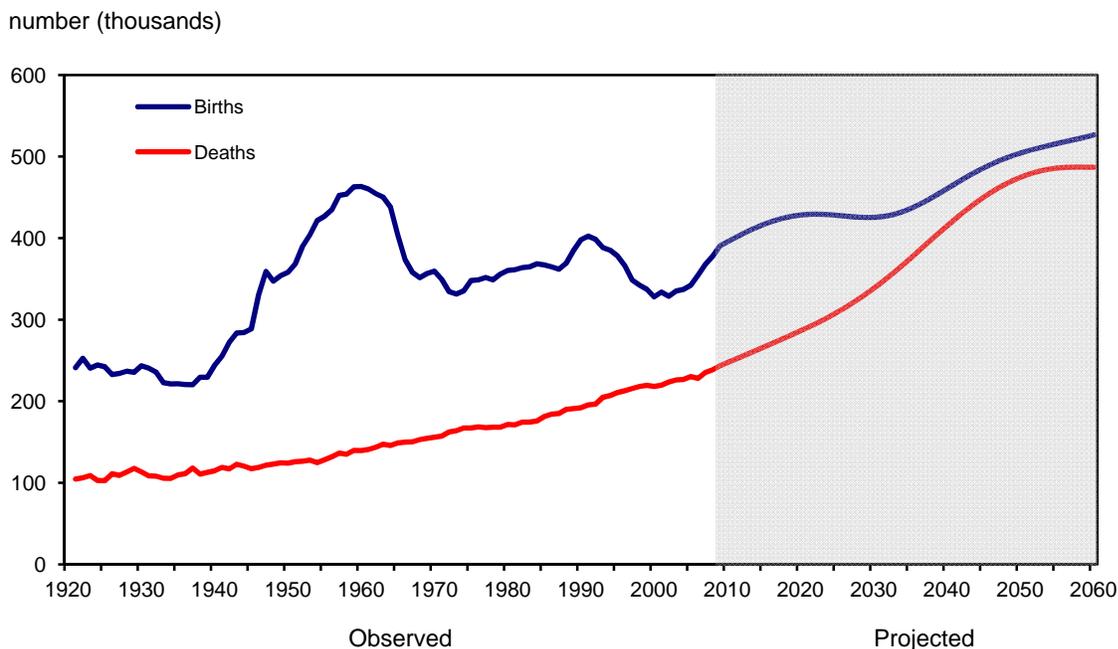
According to all scenarios used in Statistics Canada's most recent population projections, natural increase is expected to continue to decline in the future decades, due to a projected increase in the number of deaths (Figure 3).

The aging of the population will accelerate between 2011 and 2031 as baby boomers reach the age of 65. In 2026, the first of the baby boomers will reach the age of 80, an age when mortality is high. As a result, the number of deaths will increase significantly.

The medium growth scenario used in population projections assumes an immigration rate of 7.5 immigrants per 1,000 population and a fertility rate of 1.7 children per women. This scenario indicates that starting in 2031, migratory increase could account for more than 80% of Canada's population growth, compared to about 67% currently (Figure 1).

Without a sustained level of immigration or a substantial increase in fertility, Canada's population growth could, within 20 years, be close to zero.

**Figure 3**  
**Observed (1921 to 2008) and projected (2009 to 2061) number of births and deaths in Canada**



**Sources:** Canadian vital statistics and Statistics Canada. 2010. *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2009 to 2036*, Catalogue no. 91-520 (medium growth scenario).

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