

Census in Brief

Canada's rural population since 1851

Population and dwelling counts,
2011 Census



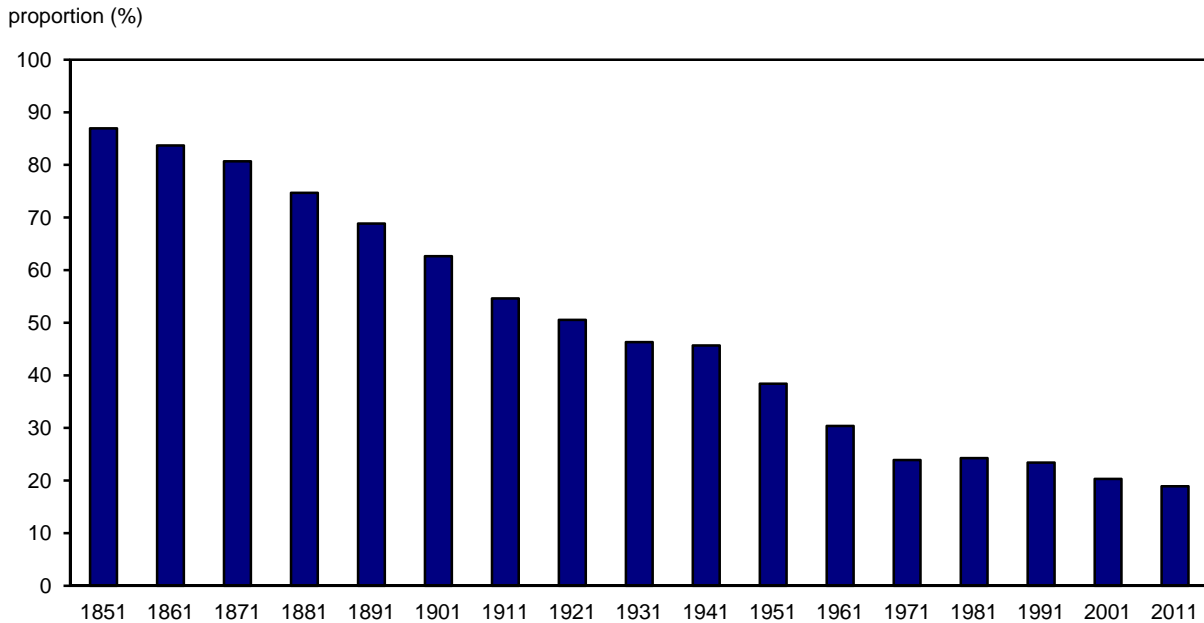
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Canada's rural population since 1851

According to the 2011 Census, more than 6.3 million Canadians were living in rural areas, that is, areas with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants and a population density below 400 people per square kilometre. This number has been relatively stable since 1991, while the population living outside of rural areas has been rising steadily. Consequently, the proportion of Canadians who live in rural areas has been dropping and in 2011 fell below 1 in 5 Canadians to 18.9% (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Proportion of the population living in rural areas, Canada, 1851 to 2011



Note: Data presented for 1851 to 1951 censuses are based on the definition of rural areas at that time.

Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1851 to 2011.

In 1851, nearly 9 in 10 Canadians lived in rural areas. At that time, the Canadian economy was based more on the primary sector than today, led by agriculture and the exploitation of natural resources, such as wood or coal.

The proportion of people living in rural areas has steadily declined over the past 160 years, falling below the 50% mark between 1921 and 1931, due to major shifts within the Canadian economy from agricultural to industrial.

Between 2006 and 2011, Canada's rural population increased by 1.1%, compared to Canada's overall growth rate of 5.9%.

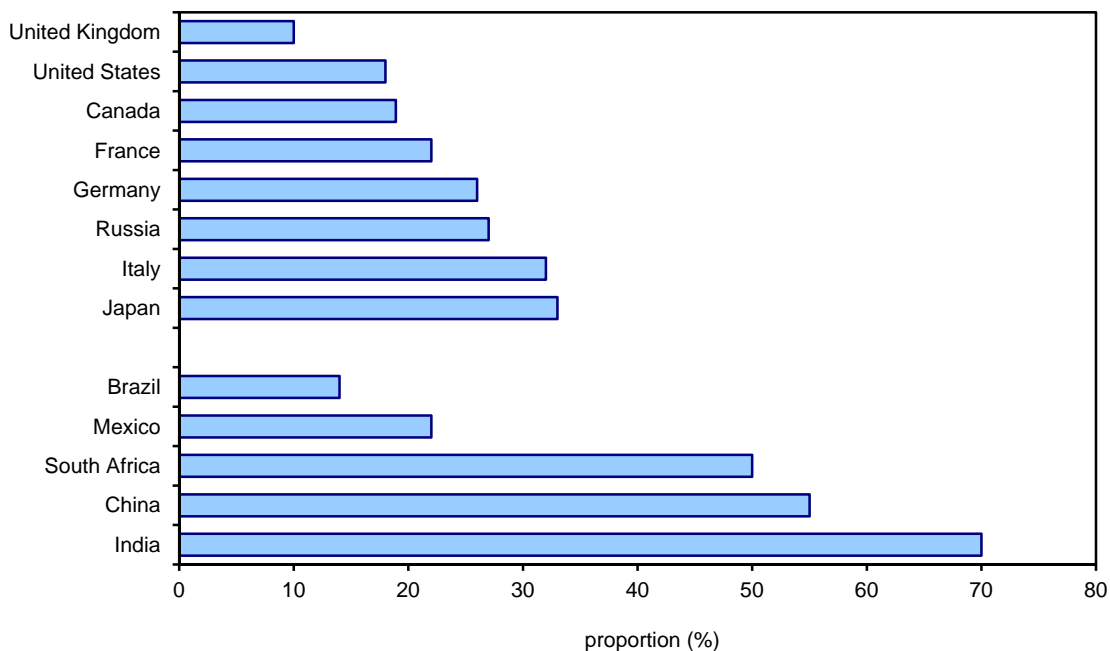
International comparisons

The proportion of people living in rural areas in Canada (18.9%) is among the lowest of the G8 countries,¹ with only the United Kingdom having a notably smaller proportion (Figure 2). More than 2 persons in 10 live in a rural area in France, and more than 3 in 10 in Japan.

The proportion of the population living in rural regions is much higher in some other countries. In India, for example, more than 2 in 3 people live in rural areas, and in China, more than 1 in 2. Many African countries also have high rural proportions, reflecting major differences in geography and economic structure among the different countries of the world.

Figure 2

Proportion of the population living in rural areas,¹ G8 countries and other selected countries,² 2010 or 2011



Notes:

1. Data compilation by the World Bank based on data from the United Nations, which referred to data and definition from the national statistical agencies. The definition of the rural population may vary from one country to the next.

2. This group of countries is having a dialogue with the G8 on various issues.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2011 Census of Population, and World Bank.

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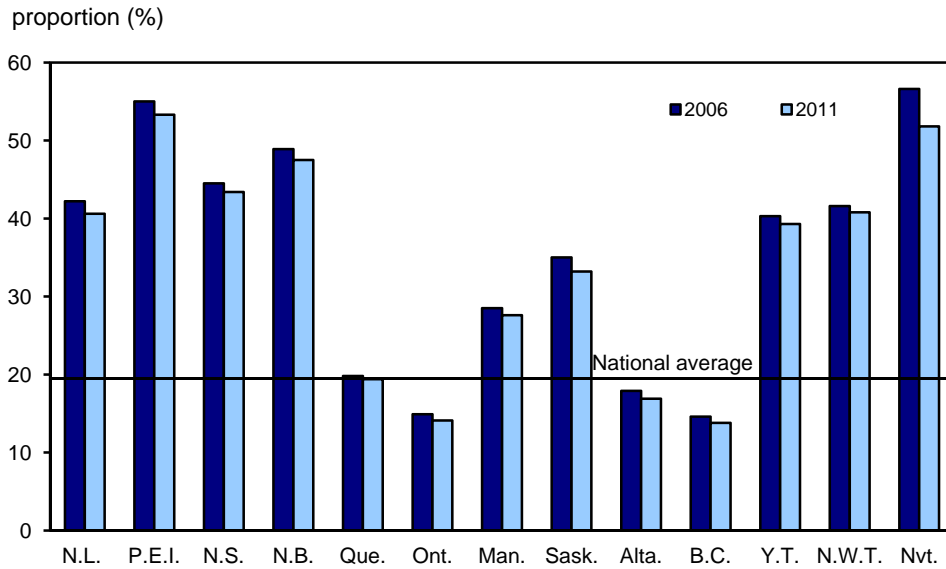
Provinces and territories

The size of the rural population varies greatly (from 14% to 53%) from one province or territory to another (Figure 3). In 2011, the share of the rural population exceeded 50% in one province and one territory: Prince Edward Island and Nunavut. These are also Canada's least populous province and territory.

In 2011, only four provinces had a proportion of their population living in rural regions near to or lower than the national average: Quebec (19.4%), Ontario (14.1%), Alberta (16.9%) and British Columbia (13.8%). The proportion of the population living in rural areas was highest in the Atlantic provinces and in the territories.

However, in all provinces and territories, the rural proportion of the population declined between 2006 and 2011.

Figure 3
Proportion of the population living in rural areas, provinces and territories, 2006 and 2011



Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 2006 and 2011.

Acknowledgments

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