

## Census in Brief

# Ethnic and cultural origins of Canadians: Portrait of a rich heritage

Census of Population, 2016

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- . not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0<sup>s</sup> value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- <sup>P</sup> preliminary
- <sup>r</sup> revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- <sup>E</sup> use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- \* significantly different from reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )

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## Highlights

- In 2016, over 250 ethnic origins or ancestries were reported by the Canadian population.
- Four in 10 people reported more than one origin.
- British Isles and French origins are still among the most common in 2016; however, their share in the population has decreased considerably since the 1871 Census.
- In 2016, close to 20 million people reported European origins.
- Chinese ancestry (1.8 million people), East Indian ancestry (approximately 1.4 million people) and Filipino ancestry (837,130 people) are among the 20 most common ancestries reported by the Canadian population.

## Introduction

Since the very first censuses, Statistics Canada has collected data on the origins of the population. In 1871, the year of the first Canadian census following Confederation, approximately 20 origins were enumerated in the Canadian population. At that time, 60.5% of the population reported origins from the British Isles, 31.1% reported French origins and less than 1% reported Aboriginal origins.

Census data on ethnic and cultural origins are used to draw a portrait of the richness, diversity and complexity of Canada's cultural heritage today. In 2016, over 250 origins were reported and 41.1% of the Canadian population recorded more than one origin.

Since the 1981 Census, Canadians have been able to report all the ethnic and cultural origins of their ancestors themselves, both on their paternal and maternal sides. Up to six origins per person were retained in 2016.

## French and British Isles origins are still among the most frequent

According to the 2016 Census, English (6.3 million), Scottish (4.8 million), French (4.7 million) and Irish (4.6 million) origins were still among the 20 most common ancestries reported by the Canadian population, either as a single response or in combination with other ancestries (multiple response). However, the proportions of French and British Isles origins were lower than in 1871.

In 2016, 32.5% of the Canadian population reported at least one origin from the British Isles, and 13.6% at least one French origin.

Canadian was the top origin, with 11.1 million people reporting this ancestry alone or in combination with other origins, representing approximately one-third (32.3%) of the country's population.

## More than 2 million people report Aboriginal ancestry

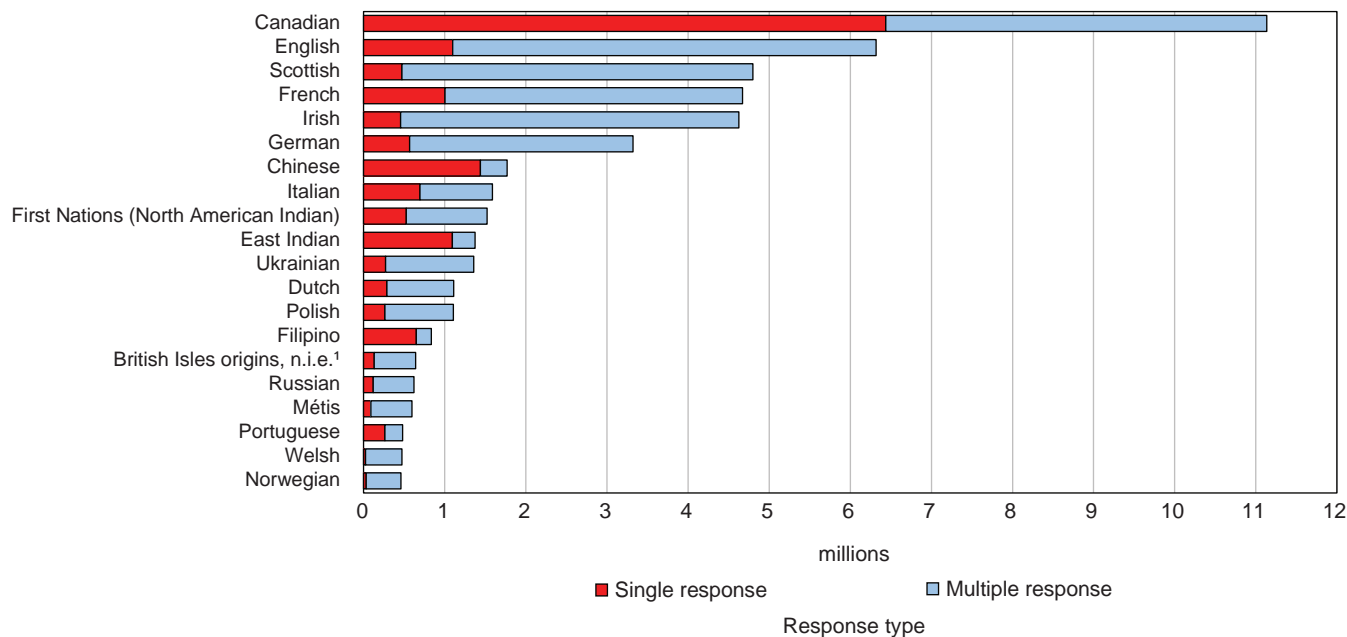
Aboriginal people in Canada contribute to the richness and diversity of Canadian cultural heritage. In 2016, 2.1 million people, or 6.2% of the total Canadian population, reported Aboriginal ancestry (single or multiple response).

Of the three main Aboriginal groups, First Nations (North American Indians) was the largest, with 1.5 million people. Within this group, Cree (356,660), Mi'kmaq (168,480) and Ojibway (125,725) were the most common ancestries. Métis ancestry was reported by 600,000 people, and Inuit ancestry was reported by 79,125.

# Ethnic and cultural origins of Canadians: Portrait of a rich heritage

**Chart 1**

**The top 20 ethnic origins reported alone or in combination with other origins (single or multiple response), Canada, 2016**



1. "British Isles origins, n.i.e." includes general responses indicating British Isles origins (e.g., "British," "United Kingdom") as well as more specific responses indicating British Isles origins that have not been included elsewhere (e.g., "Celtic").

**Note:** In this chart, the sum of the ethnic origins is greater than the total population because a person can report more than one ethnic origin in the census questionnaire.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

## Long-established groups in Canada are more likely to report several ethnic origins

Various factors can explain why people report one or more ancestries in the census. These include marriages and common-law unions between people from different cultural and ethnic groups, and knowledge of family history.

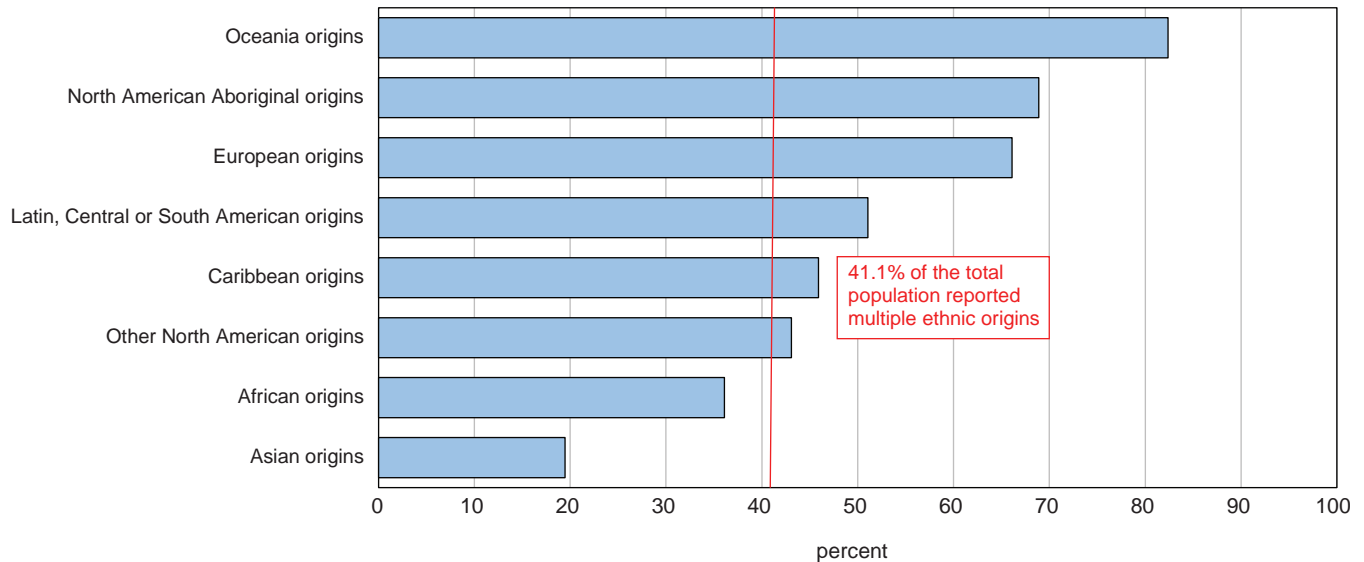
A high proportion of individuals from long-established groups in Canada reported more than one origin. North American Aboriginal origins and European origins were among the most commonly reported multiple origins in 2016.

Conversely, a smaller proportion of individuals from groups that settled more recently in Canada reported more than one origin. This was the case for Asian ancestries and African ancestries, among others.

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**Chart 2**

**Percentage of multiple ethnic origin responses, by region of ethnic or cultural origin, Canada, 2016**



**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

## Close to 70% of individuals who reported Asian origins are foreign-born, compared with 15% of individuals who reported European origins

Immigrants from each immigration wave in Canada, as well as their Canadian-born descendants, have contributed to the ethnocultural diversity of the country's population.

In 2016, close to 20 million people reported European origins. However, a minority (15.1%) were foreign-born (first-generation population). Conversely, nearly 70% of the approximately 6 million people who reported Asian origins (including the Middle East) were foreign-born.

Among the population with European origins, 19.9% of people were born in Canada to at least one foreign-born parent (second-generation population) and 65.1% were born in Canada to two Canadian-born parents (third-generation population or more) [Chart 3].

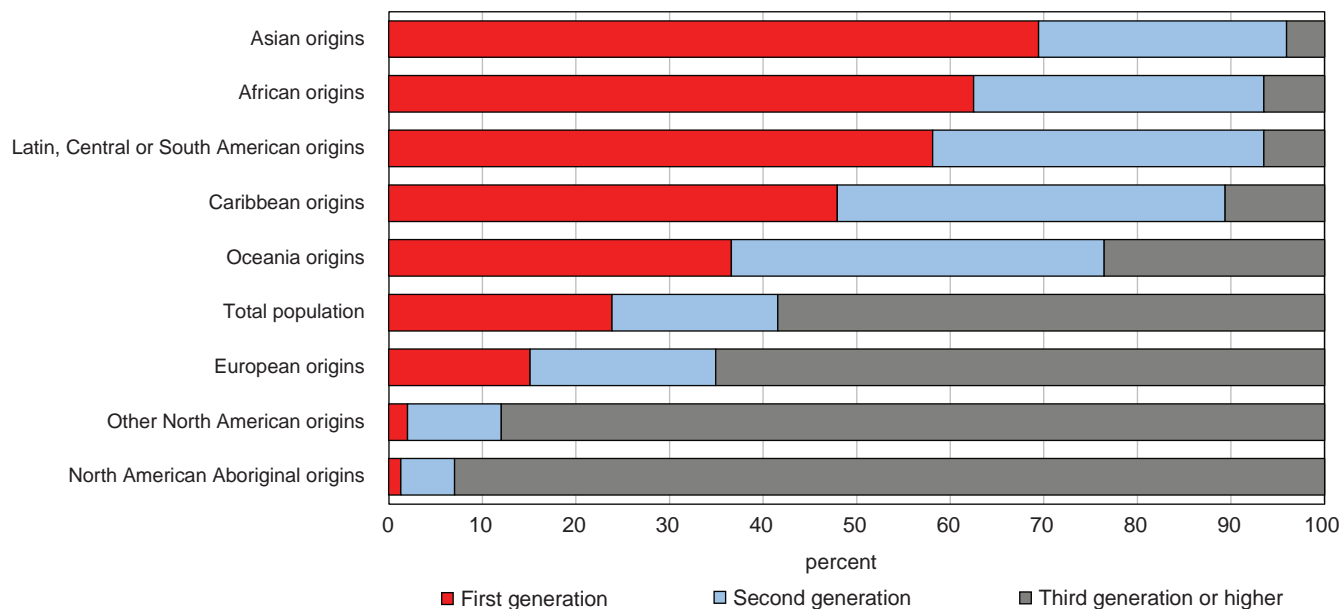
In addition to French and British Isles origins, German, Italian, Ukrainian, Dutch and Polish were among the most common ancestries reported by individuals from the second or third generation or more. These results reflect the heritage of the many Europeans who immigrated before the 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

1. For more information, see the following [video](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/video/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/video/index-eng.cfm>) and publication: Maheux and Houle. 2016. "150 years of immigration in Canada", Canadian Megatrends, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-630-X.

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**Chart 3**

**Distribution of ethnic and cultural origins of the population, by generation status, Canada, 2016**



**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

In the entire Canadian population, three Asian origins were among the 20 most commonly reported origins: Chinese (close to 1.8 million people), East Indian (approximately 1.4 million) and Filipino (837,130).

These three origins were among the most common Asian origins reported by first- and second-generation individuals. Chinese, Lebanese and Japanese were the most common Asian origins reported by individuals in the third generation or more.

For the first time in the 2016 Census products, data for five additional Asian origins were published: Hazara, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Bhutanese and Karen. In addition to these, five new African origins were also published: Edo, Ewe, Malinke, Wolof and Djiboutian. These new Asian and African origins were mainly reported by foreign-born individuals, a reflection of the most recent immigration waves.

In 2016, just over 1 million people reported African origins, 749,155 reported Caribbean origins and 674,640 reported Latin, Central or South American origins.

The majority of people who reported African origins or Latin, Central or South American origins were part of the first generation to arrive in Canada. The most common ancestries among first-generation individuals from these two regions are Mexican, Colombian, Egyptian and Moroccan.

Overall, foreign-born individuals were less likely to report more than one ethnic origin than Canadian-born individuals. In 2016, 17.8% of the foreign-born population reported more than one ancestry, compared with 45.3% and 49.3% of the second and third generation or more, respectively.

## Data sources, methods and definitions

### Data sources

The data in this analysis are from the 2016 Census of Population. Further information on the census can be found in the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

### Ethnic and cultural origins:

Canada has collected data on the origins of the population in almost every census of population since 1867. However, a number of factors have made it more complex to report these origins, which poses challenges for interpreting and comparing historical data. For example, the wording and format of the question on origins have changed. Furthermore, the social context in which questions have been asked, as well as respondents' knowledge of the ethnic and cultural history of their ancestors can influence the type of response given at the time of the census. Historical comparisons of ethnic and cultural origins have limitations and should be made with caution.

Additional information on the quality and comparability of census data on ethnic origin can be found in the [Ethnic Origin Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/008/98-500-x2016008-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/008/98-500-x2016008-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-500-X2016008.

### Methods

**Random rounding and percentage distributions:** To ensure the confidentiality of responses collected for the 2016 Census, a random rounding process is used to alter the values reported in individual cells. As a result, when these data are summed or grouped, the total value may not match the sum of the individual values, since the total and subtotals are independently rounded. Similarly, percentage distributions, which are calculated on rounded data, may not necessarily add up to 100%.

Because of random rounding, counts and percentages may vary slightly between different census products, such as the analytical documents, highlight tables and data tables.

### Definitions

Please refer to the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-301-X for additional information on the census variables.

## Additional information

Additional analysis on immigration and ethnocultural diversity can be found in *The Daily* (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025b-eng.htm>) of October 25, 2017, and in the Census in Brief articles entitled *Children with an immigrant background: Bridging cultures* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016015/98-200-x2016015-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-200-X2016015 and *Linguistic integration of immigrants and official language populations in Canada* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016017/98-200-x2016017-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-200-X2016017.

Additional information on immigration and ethnocultural diversity can be found in the *Highlight tables* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hlt-fst/imm/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-402-X2016007; the *Data tables* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Lp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=0&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2017&THEME=120&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>), Catalogue nos. 98-400-X2016184 to 98-400-X2016215; the *Census Profile* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>), Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001; and the *Focus on Geography Series* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-404-X2016001.

A brief historical picture of changes in Canada's immigration source countries can be found in the *Video centre* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/video/index-eng.cfm>).

Two infographics are also available. *Immigrant population in Canada* (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017028-eng.htm>) shows some of the key findings, particularly regarding place of birth of immigrants and recent immigrants in Canada. The second infographic, *Gateways to Immigration in Canada* (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017029-eng.htm>), shows the main admission programs under which immigrants have entered Canada since 1980.

For details on the concepts, definitions, and variables used in the 2016 Census of Population, please consult the *Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-301-X.

In addition to response rates and other information on data quality, the *Guide to the Census of Population, 2016* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-304-X, provides an overview of the various phases of the census, including content determination, sampling design, collection, data processing, data quality assessment, confidentiality guidelines and dissemination.

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