

## Census in Brief

# English, French and official language minorities in Canada

## 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 <i>Statistics Act</i>                                   |
| <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

- There has been a decline in French as a mother tongue and a language spoken at home in Canada.
- In Canada outside Quebec, the French language minority, defined by first official language spoken, edged down from 4.0% in 2011 to 3.8% in 2016.
- The proportion of Canadians who reported speaking English at home increased by 0.5 percentage points, from 74.0% in 2011 to 74.5% in 2016.
- The relative weight of the English-mother-tongue population fell in Canada.
- The relative weight of the official language minority in Quebec was 13.7% in 2016, compared with 13.5% in 2011.

## Introduction

In a context of large-scale immigration and broad linguistic diversity, the relative weight of English and French is likely to decline, especially in the private sphere. According to data from the 2016 Census of Population, the number of people in the Canadian population with an “other” mother tongue<sup>1</sup> has increased, while the relative share of the population with English or French as a mother tongue has decreased.

Nevertheless, English and French—the country’s two official languages—continue to play an important role in the lives of Canadians: they are the languages of convergence and integration into Canadian society.

However, the situation of French differs from English. Data on knowledge of official languages, languages spoken at home and first official language spoken (FOLS) indicate a decline in the relative weight of French in Canadian society. Conversely, English is seeing a bit of an upswing, particularly in Quebec.

## The number of French speakers is on the rise

In 2016, 29.8% of Canadians reported being able to conduct a conversation in French, which is down from 2011 (30.1%). However, over the same period, the number of people who could conduct a conversation in French rose by 400,000 to nearly 10.4 million people in 2016.

In Quebec, 94.5% of the population reported being able to conduct a conversation in French in 2016, which is similar to the proportion from the 2011 Census (94.4%). In numbers, this represented just over 7.6 million individuals in 2016.

Outside Quebec, the proportion of Canadians who reported being able to conduct a conversation in French remained relatively stable between 2011 and 2016, with an increase of 157,035 people.

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1. The expressions “other mother tongue” and “other language” refer to languages other than English and French. These include Aboriginal, immigrant and sign languages. Some data products also use the expression “non-official language” to refer to the same concept.

# English, French and official language minorities in Canada

**Table 1**

**Ability to conduct a conversation in French, Canada, Quebec, and Canada outside Quebec, 2011 and 2016**

	2011		2016	
	number	percent	number	percent
<b>Canada</b>				
Knowledge of French	9,960,590	30.1	10,360,760	29.8
French only	4,165,015	12.6	4,144,690	11.9
English and French	5,795,575	17.5	6,216,070	17.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,121,175</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>34,767,250</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Quebec</b>				
Knowledge of French	7,375,900	94.4	7,619,040	94.5
French only	4,047,175	51.8	4,032,635	50.0
English and French	3,328,725	42.6	3,586,405	44.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,815,955</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8,066,555</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Canada outside Quebec</b>				
Knowledge of French	2,584,690	10.2	2,741,720	10.3
French only	117,840	0.5	112,055	0.4
English and French	2,466,850	9.7	2,629,665	9.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,305,220</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>26,700,695</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011 and 2016.

## A decline in French in the private sphere

In 2016, close to 8.2 million Canadians, or 23.4% of the population, reported speaking French at home.<sup>2</sup> This proportion is down from 23.8% in 2011.

2. The 2016 Census of Population includes a two-part question on the languages spoken at home. The first part asks about the language spoken most often at home, and the second part about the language or languages spoken regularly at home in addition to the main language, if applicable. For each part, multiple responses are accepted. In this article, the statistics on language spoken at home include, unless otherwise indicated, all individuals who reported that language in part A or B, alone or with another language. "Main language" or "main language spoken at home" refers to part A ([language spoken most often at home](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/pop186-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/pop186-eng.cfm>)), and "secondary language" refers to part B ([other language spoken on a regular basis](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/pop187-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/pop187-eng.cfm>)).

## English, French and official language minorities in Canada

**Table 2**  
**French spoken at home, Canada, Quebec, and Canada outside Quebec, 2011 and 2016**

	2011		2016	
	number	percent	number	percent
<b>Canada</b>				
Only	6,043,305	18.2	6,081,030	17.5
Mostly	784,560	2.4	862,775	2.5
Equally	287,230	0.9	378,415	1.1
Regularly	777,095	2.3	829,905	2.4
Total (French)	7,892,190	23.8	8,152,115	23.4
<b>Total population</b>	<b>33,121,175</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>34,767,250</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Quebec</b>				
Only	5,687,005	72.8	5,741,620	71.2
Mostly	562,080	7.2	634,050	7.9
Equally	201,290	2.6	268,420	3.3
Regularly	351,520	4.5	381,495	4.7
Total (French)	6,801,895	87.0	7,025,580	87.1
<b>Total population</b>	<b>7,815,950</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8,066,560</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Canada outside Quebec</b>				
Only	356,300	1.4	339,410	1.3
Mostly	222,480	0.9	228,725	0.9
Equally	85,940	0.3	109,995	0.4
Regularly	425,575	1.7	448,410	1.7
Total (French)	1,090,295	4.3	1,126,535	4.2
<b>Total population</b>	<b>25,305,225</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>26,700,690</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011 and 2016.

Across Canada, there was a decrease in the number and proportion of Canadians who reported speaking only French at home. French is increasingly spoken with another language, an observation that was primarily seen in Quebec—where most of the country's French speakers reside—and, to a lesser extent, in the other provinces and territories.

### Decline in the demographic weight of the French-mother-tongue population

The number of people in Canada whose mother tongue is French is on the rise. However, on account of the linguistic diversification created by immigration, their relative weight is on the decline. This was observed in 2016 both in Quebec and all over Canada.

In Canada outside Quebec, the number of people whose mother tongue is French increased by 8,400 between 2011 and 2016 to 1,074,985. This growth is primarily attributable to individuals who reported having French and English as their mother tongue. Conversely, in 2016, fewer people reported having only French as their mother tongue than in 2011.

# English, French and official language minorities in Canada

**Table 3**  
**French-mother-tongue population, Canada, Quebec, and Canada outside Quebec, 2011 and 2016**

	2011		2016		Variation from 2011 to 2016
	number	percent	number	percent	percent
<b>Canada</b>					
French (total)	7,298,180	22.0	7,452,075	21.4	2.1
French only	7,054,970	21.3	7,166,705	20.6	1.6
French and another language	243,210	0.7	285,370	0.8	17.3
<b>Total population</b>	<b>33,121,175</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>34,767,250</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5.0</b>
<b>Quebec</b>					
French (total)	6,231,600	79.7	6,377,090	79.1	2.3
French only	6,102,210	78.1	6,219,665	77.1	1.9
French and another language	129,390	1.7	157,425	2.0	21.7
<b>Total population</b>	<b>7,815,955</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8,066,555</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3.2</b>
<b>Canada outside Quebec</b>					
French (total)	1,066,580	4.2	1,074,985	4.0	0.8
French only	952,760	3.8	947,040	3.5	-0.6
French and another language	113,820	0.4	127,945	0.5	12.4
<b>Total population</b>	<b>25,305,220</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>26,700,695</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5.5</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011 and 2016.

## French as the first official language spoken is increasing mostly in Quebec

The “first official language spoken”<sup>3</sup> is used to determine whether individuals with an “other” mother tongue adopt English or French. It helps to determine the place of Canada’s official languages within a broad diversity of languages and is also an indicator of how immigrants of all origins integrate linguistically into Canadian society.

The number of people with French as their first official language spoken (FOLS) rose from 7.7 million in 2011 to 7.9 million in 2016. However, this increase was observed primarily in Quebec. Outside Quebec, the official language minority population rose from 1,007,585 in 2011 to 1,024,200 in 2016, an increase of 16,615 people. The relative weight of the French minority population outside Quebec fell 0.2 percentage points from 4.0% in 2011 to 3.8% in 2016.

The trends vary from province to province. The French FOLS population saw its numbers and proportions decline in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Manitoba, and rise in number in the other provinces. In Ontario and Saskatchewan, this increase coincided with a drop in the relative weight of the official language minority. The relative weight of the French minority population remained stable in Alberta and British Columbia. Finally, in Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, the official language minority grew in both number and proportion.

3. Variable derived for applying the *Official Languages Act*. The variable is used to estimate the potential demand for government services in either official language. The derivation method considers knowledge of official languages first, mother tongue second, and the language spoken most often at home third.

**Table 4**

**Population with French as their first official language spoken, provinces, territories, and Canada outside Quebec, 2011 and 2016**

	French FOLS population <sup>1</sup>				
	2011		2016		Variation from 2011 to 2016
	number	percent	number	percent	percent
Newfoundland and Labrador	2,095	0.4	2,425	0.5	15.8
Prince Edward Island	4,810	3.5	4,665	3.3	-3.0
Nova Scotia	30,330	3.3	29,370	3.2	-3.2
New Brunswick	235,695	31.9	234,055	31.8	-0.7
Quebec	6,684,125	85.5	6,890,300	85.4	3.1
Ontario	542,390	4.3	550,600	4.1	1.5
Manitoba	41,365	3.5	40,975	3.2	-0.9
Saskatchewan	14,290	1.4	14,435	1.3	1.0
Alberta	71,370	2.0	79,840	2.0	11.9
British Columbia	62,190	1.4	64,325	1.4	3.4
Yukon	1,485	4.4	1,635	4.6	10.4
Northwest Territories	1,080	2.6	1,240	3.0	14.8
Nunavut	475	1.5	625	1.8	32.6
Canada outside Quebec	1,007,578	4.0	1,024,195	3.8	1.6

1. The data include responses in the category "French" and half of the responses in the category "English and French."

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011 and 2016.

## The ability to conduct a conversation in English is up

In 2016, 30 million Canadians reported being able to hold a conversation in English, an increase of 1.6 million people from 2011. In terms of proportion, it rose from 85.6% in 2011 to 86.2% in 2016.

In Quebec, 49.1% of the population reported being able to conduct a conversation in English in 2016, up 1.9 percentage points over 2011. This proportion represented 4 million people in 2016.

Outside Quebec, the proportion of Canadians who reported being able to hold a conversation in English remained relatively stable between 2011 (97.5%) and 2016 (97.4%). However, this corresponded to an increase of 1.35 million English speakers, for a total of 26 million in 2016.

## English, French and official language minorities in Canada

**Table 5**

**Ability to conduct a conversation in English, Canada, Quebec, and Canada outside Quebec, 2011 and 2016**

	2011		2016	
	number	percent	number	percent
<b>Canada</b>				
Knowledge of English	28,360,245	85.6	29,973,595	86.2
English only	22,564,670	68.1	23,757,525	68.3
English and French	5,795,575	17.5	6,216,070	17.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,121,175</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>34,767,250</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Quebec</b>				
Knowledge of English	3,692,585	47.2	3,958,855	49.1
English only	363,860	4.7	372,450	4.6
English and French	3,328,725	42.6	3,586,405	44.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,815,955</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8,066,555</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Canada outside Quebec</b>				
Knowledge of English	24,667,660	97.5	26,014,740	97.4
English only	22,200,810	87.7	23,385,075	87.6
English and French	2,466,850	9.7	2,629,665	9.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,305,220</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>26,700,695</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011 and 2016.

### English increasingly spoken with other languages at home

The proportion of Canadians who reported speaking English at home increased from 74.0% in 2011 to 74.5% in 2016, up 0.5 percentage points. In numbers, this means that close to 26 million Canadians spoke English at home in 2016.

However, the proportion of Canadians who reported speaking only English at home fell from 58.0% in 2011 to 56.8% in 2016. English is spoken more and more with other languages.

## English, French and official language minorities in Canada

**Table 6**  
**English spoken at home, Canada, Quebec, and Canada outside Quebec, 2011 and 2016**

	2011		2016	
	number	percent	number	percent
<b>Canada</b>				
Only	19,224,940	58.0	19,756,510	56.8
Mostly	2,232,140	6.7	2,406,355	6.9
Equally	1,052,665	3.2	1,514,470	4.4
Regularly	2,002,135	6.0	2,220,465	6.4
Total (English)	24,511,880	74.0	25,897,805	74.5
<b>Total population</b>	<b>33,121,175</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>34,767,250</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Quebec</b>				
Only	481,675	6.2	483,295	6.0
Mostly	285,745	3.7	298,890	3.7
Equally	144,945	1.9	183,430	2.3
Regularly	515,495	6.6	579,690	7.2
Total (English)	1,427,860	18.3	1,545,310	19.2
<b>Total population</b>	<b>7,815,950</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8,066,560</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Canada outside Quebec</b>				
Only	18,743,265	74.1	19,273,215	72.2
Mostly	1,946,395	7.7	2,107,465	7.9
Equally	907,720	3.6	1,331,040	5.0
Regularly	1,486,640	5.9	1,640,775	6.1
Total (English)	23,084,020	91.2	24,352,495	91.2
<b>Total population</b>	<b>25,305,225</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>26,700,690</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011 and 2016.

In Canada outside Quebec, the proportion of the population who reported speaking English at home remained stable at 91.2%. However, the proportion who spoke only English at home fell almost two percentage points. This decrease was offset by a similar increase in the use of English along with another language.

In Quebec, two in three people who spoke English at home also spoke another language. In 2016, 19.2% of the population reported speaking English at home, up from 2011 (18.3%). An increase was observed among people who spoke English and another language.

### The demographic weight of the English-mother-tongue population is down

Large-scale immigration has also led to a decrease in the demographic weight of the English-mother-tongue population across Canada. A decline was also recorded in all provinces.

In Canada outside Quebec, the English-mother-tongue population represented 72.9% of the entire population in 2016, down 1.1 percentage points in spite of an increase of over 750,000 people.

In Quebec, the population with English as their mother tongue grew in number. There were 718,990 people with English as their mother tongue in Quebec in 2016, compared with 700,405 in 2011. The percentage of the population with English as a mother tongue was 8.9% in 2016, compared with 9.0% in 2011.

## English, French and official language minorities in Canada

**Table 7**  
**English-mother-tongue population, Canada, Quebec, and Canada outside Quebec, 2011 and 2016**

	2011		2016		Variation from 2011 to 2016
	number	percent	number	percent	percent
<b>Canada</b>					
English (total)	19,424,090	58.6	20,193,335	58.1	4.0
English only	18,858,980	56.9	19,460,850	56.0	3.2
English and another language	565,110	1.7	732,485	2.1	29.6
<b>Total population</b>	<b>33,121,175</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>34,767,250</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5.0</b>
<b>Quebec</b>					
English (total)	700,405	9.0	718,990	8.9	2.7
English only	599,225	7.7	601,155	7.5	0.3
English and another language	101,180	1.3	117,835	1.5	16.5
<b>Total population</b>	<b>7,815,955</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8,066,555</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3.2</b>
<b>Canada outside Quebec</b>					
English (total)	18,723,685	74.0	19,474,345	72.9	4.0
English only	18,259,755	72.2	18,859,695	70.6	3.3
English and another language	463,930	1.8	614,650	2.3	32.5
<b>Total population</b>	<b>25,305,220</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>26,700,695</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5.5</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011 and 2016.

### The population with English as its first official language spoken is rising in Quebec

In Quebec, the number and proportion of individuals whose first official language spoken is English increased. The official language minority grew from 1,058,250 people in 2011 to 1,103,480 people in 2016, an increase of 45,230. Moreover, the relative weight of the minority was 13.7% in 2016, compared with 13.5% in 2011.

## 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.

Specific information on the quality and comparability of census data on language can be found in the [Language Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/003/98-500-x2016003-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/003/98-500-x2016003-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-500-X2016003.

### 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 analyses on language can be found in [The Daily](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/170802/dq170802b-eng.htm) (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/170802/dq170802b-eng.htm>) of August 17, 2017, and in the Census in Brief articles entitled [English–French bilingualism reaches new heights](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016009/98-200-x2016009-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016009/98-200-x2016009-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-200-X2016009, and [Linguistic diversity and multilingualism in Canadian homes](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016010/98-200-x2016010-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016010/98-200-x2016010-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-200-X2016010.

Additional information on language can be found in the [Highlight tables](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hltfst/lang/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hltfst/lang/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-402-X2016005; 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=2016&THEME=118&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=) (<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=2016&THEME=118&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>), Catalogue nos. 98-400-X2016045 to 98-400-X2016079 and 98-400-X2016343 to 98-400-X2016345; the [Census Profile](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E) (<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) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-404-X2016001.

An infographic entitled [Immigrant languages in Canada, 2016 Census of Population](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017025-eng.htm) (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017025-eng.htm>) also illustrates some key findings on immigrant languages in Canada.

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) (<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 data quality information, the [Guide to the Census of Population](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>), 2016, 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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