

Section 8.—Rural and Urban Population

For the purposes of the Census, the population residing in cities, towns and incorporated villages has been defined as 'urban' and that outside of such localities as 'rural'. The distinction between rural and urban populations in Canada, therefore, is a distinction of provincial legal status rather than of size of aggregation of population within a limited area. Since the laws of the various provinces differ in regard to the population necessary before a municipality may be incorporated as urban,* the line of demarcation between rural and urban population is not at all uniformly drawn throughout the Dominion.

This basis of comparing rural and urban populations adhered to throughout the census analyses is, then, adopted for Canada, not because it is best, but because the necessary comparable data over a long period of years required for comparison by degree of urbanization does not exist. Obviously, the populations of villages of less than 1,000 cannot be regarded as truly urban, although there is reason, for certain purposes, to distinguish them from the surrounding rural populations, in that they enjoy definite cultural advantages not possessed by the strictly rural municipalities.

Table 18 has been prepared to overcome some of the difficulties involved, and to provide a basis for comparison of urban centres by size with those of other countries. These data enable places outside any required size limits to be readily excluded. Similar data, by provinces, will be found in Volume II of the Census of 1941.

During the latest four decades there has been a radical shifting in the distribution of the Canadian population as between rural and urban districts. The change has been continuous throughout the period. In the decade ended 1941 the proportion increased from 53.70 p.c. to 54.34 p.c. Urban communities absorbed nearly 60.22 p.c. of the total increase with the result that the urban population of Canada in 1941 exceeded the rural by 998,177. Out of every 1,000 persons in the country, 457 were resident in rural and 543 in urban communities on June 2, 1941, as compared with 463 in rural and 537 in urban communities on June 1, 1931; 505 in rural and 495 in urban on June 1, 1921; and 546 in rural and 454 in urban on June 1, 1911. In this trend to urbanization of population Canada is by no means unique. The same change has characterized virtually all western nations to a greater or lesser degree during the past century.

The information regarding rural and urban residence was enlarged upon in the Census of 1941. Every person stated not only his province of birth, but also whether he was born in a rural or urban municipality, the length of residence in the rural or urban municipality in which he was enumerated, the province or country of previous residence, and whether this was in a rural or urban municipality. This information will enable a closer study to be made of urbanization and its causes.

Table 18 gives the distribution of urban population in Canada by size of urban centres, the rural-urban trend is very strongly indicated by the increased size of the larger cities and towns at a time when immigration, which in former decades (especially that of British origin) tended to concentrate in urban centres, was negligible.

* In Saskatchewan the original legislation of 1908 provided that a community of 50 persons on an area not greater than 640 acres might be incorporated. Several amendments have since been made and as the Act now stands, 100 people resident on an area not greater than 240 acres may be incorporated. The Ontario law, on the other hand, requires that a village before it can be incorporated must have a population of 750 on an area not exceeding 500 acres.