

Future demographic trends may help Canada's Aboriginal youth

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One of the principal reasons why there has been a decrease in overall crime rates in Canada since 1991 is related to changes in our demographics. Each year there are fewer younger people (i.e., those who typically are at much higher crime-risk) in the general population. Also, the annual growth rate of Canada's population has slowed since the 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, overall crime rates have been falling and this in turn has helped drive down the number of people incarcerated in prisons — numbers which have been falling fairly consistently since about 1995.

While slower population growth and an aging population characterize Canada's current and projected demographic trends, this pattern is not true for Canada's Aboriginal population. The Aboriginal growth rates are much higher than the non-Aboriginal population, and these are projected to continue for at least another decade.² However, Canada's aging population may work to the longer-term benefit of its Aboriginal peoples, as a dearth of non-Aboriginal youth over the next several decades could open up exceptional opportunities to integrate Aboriginal youth into the labour force, and may help to moderate the high rates of crime and incarceration amongst Aboriginal youth.

Demographics contribute to Aboriginal over-representation

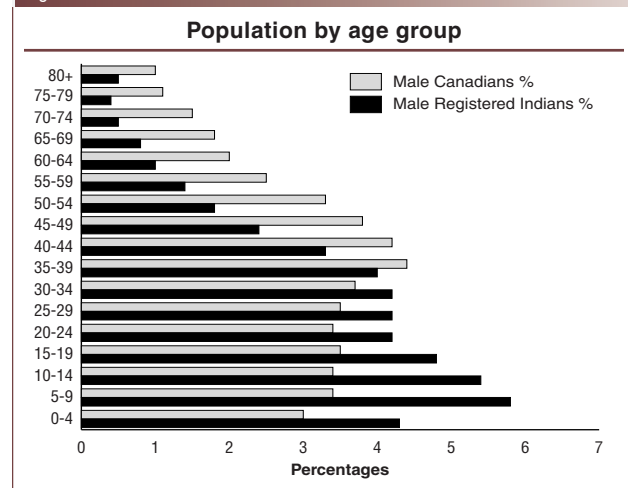
The over-representation of Aboriginal peoples in prisons is due, in part, to population demographics. The growth of Canada's Aboriginal population has been much higher in recent decades than the non-Aboriginal population. The Aboriginal population has been experiencing its own recent baby boom, proportionally, quite similar in dimensions to what the non-Aboriginal population experienced just after WW II. This baby boom is occurring just when the first of the baby boomers born to the non-Aboriginal population begin to reach late middle age. For example, Aboriginal birth rates are about 2.7 children per woman³ versus the current 1.6 children for non-Aboriginal women.

As a result of the high post-war birth rates, an unprecedented number of Canadians entered their teenage and young adult (i.e., 18-29) years during the period from 1960 to 1980. A rapid increase in crime rates coincided with the entry of the baby boomers into their teenage and young adult years. That initial youth trend is now long past. The leading wave of baby boomers are now (in 2002)

passing through their fifty-fifth birthday and the trailing edge have already passed thirty. Because there were one-third fewer babies born to the baby bust generation, the aging of the boomers has resulted in large decreases in the population under age 30 (crime rates in Canada have a significant age bias — typically the population between the ages of 14 to 32 account for the majority of violent and non-violent crimes reported by the police in Canada each year).⁴

Similar to the overall Canadian demographics experienced in the 1960s and 1970s, the Aboriginal population in Canada today is much younger — and as a consequence there are proportionally many more Aboriginal people in the high-risk youth age groups. This can be seen in Figure 1, which illustrates the disproportionate number of male Registered Indians who are less than 30 years of age as compared to males as a whole.

Figure 1



Canada's Aboriginal population is still experiencing a baby boom. As a consequence there continues to be both a higher rate of population growth, and the average age of the Aboriginal population remains much younger than the non-Aboriginal population. Moreover, given the number of young children and the much higher birth rate, large increases in the Aboriginal population are predicted to occur in the next decade.⁵ Both the rapid increases and the relative youthfulness of the Aboriginal population contribute to a disproportionate number of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian corrections versus the non-Aboriginal population.

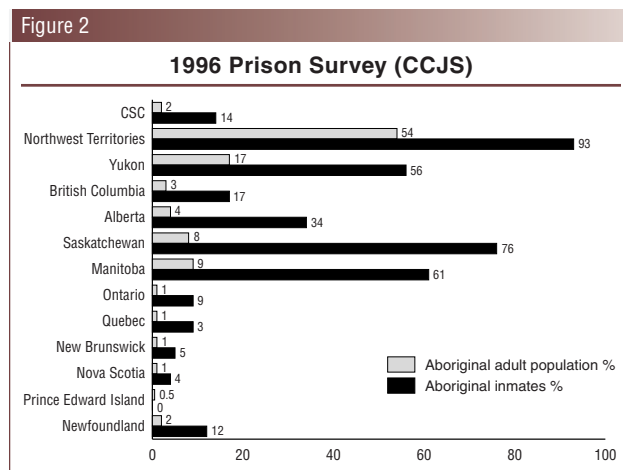
As Canada's population boomed after WW II, it also underwent increased urbanization. More than three-quarters of Canada's population now live in urban areas as compared to less than 60% at the end of WW II. It appears that a similar trend is underway within the Aboriginal population.

There seems to be a growing concentration of the young Aboriginal population in the core of the larger cities, especially throughout the West. This greater urban concentration may greatly increase the risk of contact with the justice system. Approximately 71% of Registered Indians now live off-reserve compared to just 58% in 1978. The urban population has grown steadily since 1951, when 27% of all Aboriginal people lived in large cities as compared to 64.3% in 1996.⁶

Carole LaPrairie⁷ identified Aboriginal groups residing in the inner cores of large cities as being the most vulnerable to the commission of crime and criminal justice processing. More recent research by LaPrairie⁸ has further reinforced the high contribution-rate of large Western cities to the over-representation of Aboriginal youth in the correctional systems.

Aboriginal people over-represented in prisons

A national one-day snapshot profile of Canada's adult correctional facilities conducted by Statistics Canada in 1996 (see Figure 2), found that the proportion of Aboriginal inmates was much larger than the proportion of Aboriginal adults in the Canadian population (overall, 17% in adult corrections versus 2% in the Canadian adult population).⁹



The 1996 prison survey also found that the population of adult inmates was significantly younger than the Canadian population as a whole: the median age of Canadians in 1996 was 41 years whereas the median age of adult inmates was 32 years; the median age of inmates in provincial

prisons was 31 years, and in federal penitentiaries it was 34 years.¹⁰

- Aboriginal men aged 20-24 represented almost one-quarter (22%) of provincial/territorial inmates but only 9% of their population. Aboriginal inmates tended to be even younger than non-Aboriginal inmates.
- Eighteen percent of male federal inmates were between 25 and 29, compared to 10% of adult males in Canada. The median age for Aboriginal inmates was found to be 29 years compared to 32 for non-Aboriginal inmates.

Any attempt to reduce Aboriginal over-representation in crime and incarceration will therefore need to take into account the two major factors which contribute to over-representation – these offenders are mainly young, have multiple disadvantages, and reside disproportionately in the core neighbourhoods of large Western cities.

From surplus to a deficit of youth

Canada's population profile is currently undergoing the transformation of population aging. Part of this aging of the population is due to the sheer number of baby boomers born between 1947 and 1966, and part reflects the huge disparity in the size of the generations that have come after.

The baby boom (1947-1966)¹¹

Post-war birth rates peaked around 1958, at about 4 children per woman of childbearing age. Since then, however, the birth rate has declined steadily and quite rapidly until today it stands at 1.6 children per woman of child bearing age. Because of the high post-war birth rates, an unprecedented number of Canadians entered their teenage and young adult years during the period from 1960 to 1980. Now this youth trend is reversing as the leading edge of the baby boomers approaches 60, and the youngest have now passed age 30. The baby boom, both those born in Canada and those born elsewhere, totaled some 9.8 million people in 1996, almost one-third of Canada's population.

The baby bust (1967-1979)

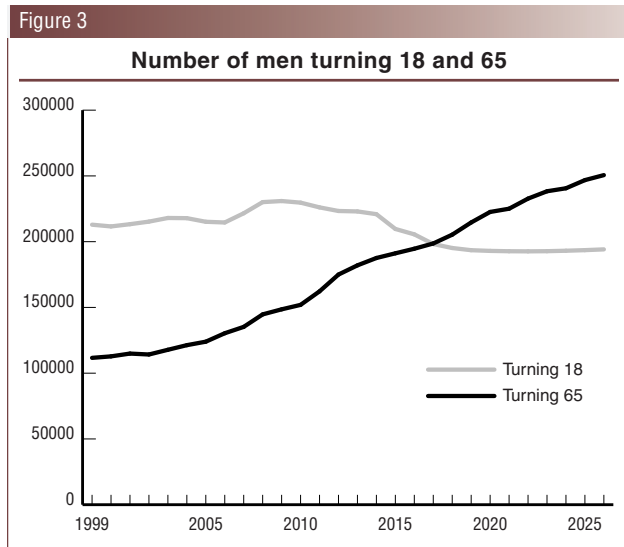
The commercial introduction of the birth control pill in 1961, and the rising participation of baby boom women into the labour market, is thought to have led to the rapid decline in fertility rates over the 1960's. The result was a decline in births and a smaller birth cohort, often called the baby bust. According to the 1996 Census of Canada, 5.4 million Canadians were in this cohort.

The baby boom echo (1980-1995)

These are the children born to the baby boomers. Although the birth rates for the baby boomers

were much lower than for their own parents, enough of them were reproducing by 1980 to create a mini-boom of their own. At its peak in 1990, the echo produced 406,000 babies from a population of 28 million compared with 479,000 from a population of only 18 million in 1959. This generation is also most noticeable in Ontario and the West – Quebec and Atlantic Canada did not have much of a baby boom echo because so many of their boomer generation have moved west. As of 1996, there are 6.9 million members of the echo generation.

Statistical calculation reveals that nearly a third fewer baby boom echo children were born than those babies born during the baby boom period of 1947-66. The longer-term implication of this generational disparity is that there are significantly fewer boomer children around to replace their parents in the labour force, as they begin to retire over the next decade. As shown in Figure 3, around year 2017 the number of Canadians who turn 65 each year will surpass the number who turn 18. Since this is typically the age where older workers retire and youth first enter the labour market on a permanent basis, this cross-over suggests that Canada may face a growing shortage of new workers post-year 2017.¹²



The cross-over when men reaching retirement age first exceed the number reaching the typical labour-market entry age will occur around 2017, and the gap will widen throughout the next decade and more. Each year over the next twenty-five years, the number of persons reaching potential retirement will increase significantly while the number of potential new replacements diminishes slightly. The implications are that sometime after 2017, the labour market demand may enter a “golden age” for youth. And an employment golden age for youth also — all other

things being equal – has implications for a dramatic decline in the crime rate in Canada. Not only will there be far fewer youth in the high-risk age groups, but their economic opportunities will be at an all time high.

Shortages could enhance economic prospects of Aboriginal youth

Canada’s Aboriginal population is still in the midst of its own baby boom, at least among the Registered Indian population that resides on reserve. However, there are indications that the very high birth rates for the “status” Aboriginal populations are starting to come down. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development’s (DIAND) latest projections estimate this population will grow by about 2% per year between 1998 and 2008. This growth would occur with an on-reserve growth rate of 3%, and an off-reserve growth rate of just 1%. The off-reserve population is expected to grow at a slower rate because of net migration back to reserve communities, coupled with lower fertility, mortality, and higher out-marriage rates off reserve.¹³

DIAND is also projecting significant increases in the working-age Registered Indian population (20 to 64 years), from 53% in 1998 to 56% ten years later. The current generation of Aboriginal baby boomers just born seems destined to be entering the labour market just as demand for new workers reaches a new high. Those currently in their teen and pre-teen years should face better employment prospects (see Figure 1). If First Nations and other Aboriginal leaders and Elders can prevail on these youth to better their education and job skills, the potential is there for Aboriginal youth to benefit significantly from the predicted labour shortages. This in turn could help to overcome the economic and social marginalization that has characterized previous generations.

As LaPrairie has noted (1996), today’s marginalized Aboriginal youth who have migrated to the major Western urban areas often have few tools for survival or integrating into mainstream society. As a growing number continue to migrate to live in urban settings, their lack of education and employment skills, coupled with substance abuse problems and personal histories of family violence and dysfunction, has contributed to negative peer associations and the adoption of anti-social behaviour.

The next twenty years should result in several changes to the factors in this equation. It is likely we will see an enormous labour market demand for Canada’s shrinking youth population, and this demand would extend to Aboriginal youth – especially those with some education and job

skills. Even today, with Employment Equity legislation as a motivation, public and private sector employers can be found chasing Aboriginal youth – especially those with job skills or a higher education.

However, many Aboriginal youth are being passed-by today because of the factors that LaPrairie has referred to. Canada's leaders need to find ways to ensure that a significantly larger number of the Aboriginal youth in future will

have the basic education and employment skills to take advantage of the opportunities that will surely unfold. This would greatly assist in reducing the marginalization, and the crime and incarceration disparities that currently exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. Now is an opportune time to begin the planning necessary to ensure demographics trends to work in favour of Aboriginal youth. ■

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² There is some need for caution in interpreting Aboriginal population growth since 1985 as some of this growth was due to Bill C-31. For example, in: *Ethnic Mobility and the Demographic Growth of Canada's Aboriginal Populations from 1986 to 1996*, Eric Guimond cautioned: "Probably a major factor is Bill C-31, promulgated in 1985, which changed the rules for transmission of legal Indian status" (Presentation to CSC Research Branch staff, by Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development).

³ The proportion of young people aged 15-24 (18%) was also greater among the Aboriginal population than in the total population (13%). Moreover, there were 491 Aboriginal children under age 5 for every 1,000 Aboriginal women of childbearing age in 1996, which is about 70% higher than the ratio for the general population. See Boe, R (2000). *Aboriginal Inmates: Demographic Trends and Projections. Forum on Corrections Research, 12(1), 7-9.*

⁴ According to Statistics Canada, non-violent crimes are more often committed by persons age 14 to 20 years. In 1997, the largest single age group of persons charged by police with non-violent crimes are persons 16 years of age. The ages for persons charged with violent offences peaks at age 17 with a smaller peak at age 33. The involvement of persons in violent crime over the age of 32 continually decreases with age. Canadian Crime Statistics (1997). *Juristat* (85-002), 18(11).

⁵ Statistics Canada (1995). *Projections of populations with Aboriginal ancestry, Canada, Provinces/Regions and Territories, 1991-2016.* Catalogue 91-5390 XPE.

⁶ LaPrairie, C. (2002). Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system: A tale of nine cities. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, April, 181-208. Also see: Drost, H. (2001). *Labour Market outcomes and Income Distribution of Aboriginal Residents in Canada's Metropolitan Areas.* Prepared for the Policy Conference on Options for Aboriginal Candidates in Canada's Cities. Regina, Saskatchewan.

⁷ LaPrairie, C. (1992) *Dimensions of Aboriginal Over-Representation in Correctional Institutions and Implications for Crime Prevention.* Ottawa, ON: Solicitor General of Canada.

⁸ Op. cit. LaPrairie (2002).

⁹ Trevethan, S., and MacKillop, B (1998). A One-day Snapshot of Inmates in Canada's Adult Correctional Facilities. *Juristat* (85-002) 18(8).

¹⁰ Finn, A., Trevethan, S., Carrier G., and Kowalski, M. (1999). Female Inmates, Aboriginal Inmates, and Inmates Serving Life Sentences: A One Day Snapshot. *Juristat* (85-002) 19(5).

¹¹ David Foot has defined the baby boom (see Chapter 1, pp. 13-25) as the group in Canada born between 1947 and 1966. The baby boom occurred in only four Western countries – besides Canada, there were post-war baby booms in the United States, Australia and New Zealand. However, Canada's boom was the loudest in the industrialized world. The American baby boom started one year earlier (in 1946) and also ended one year earlier (1965). Foot believes this is because American troops were brought home earlier, in 1945, and babies started appearing in 1946. Canadian troops, on the other hand, came home later so Canadian births did not start to leap upward until 1947. The Canadian boom was also larger – at its peak in 1957, there were 3.7 children per family in the USA, versus over 4 per Canadian family in 1959, and just 3 babies per family in Australia at its peak. 2012 is the year that the leading edge of the baby boom will reach the standard retirement age of 65. From that point, and for the two decades following, the ranks of Canada's seniors will begin a period of rapid growth. See: Foot, D. K., and Stoffman, D. (1996). *Boom, Bust and Echo: How to Profit from the Coming Demographic Shift.* Toronto, ON: Macfarlane Walter & Ross.

¹² These statistics are based on population projections made by Statistics Canada after the 1996 Census. The results of the 2001 Census are just beginning to appear, and show that Canada's population growth between 1996 and 2001 was even lower than anticipated. However, since the vast majority of Canadians who will turn either 18 or 65 in 2016 are living in Canada today, we can be fairly certain that the cross-over depicted in Figure 3 will still be valid when Statistics Canada updates its population projections with the 2001 Census results.

¹³ Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (2000). *Registered Indian Population Projections for Canada and Regions 1998-2008.* Ottawa, ON: Author.