

## Population Composition, 1891-1961: Being Canadian

In 1891, "being Canadian" meant, almost without exception, honouring one's Native, French, or British cultural traditions, sometimes in combination, in a fresh spacious setting. In the 21st century "being Canadian" applies to dozens of ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups associated with all parts of the world, most commonly living in a few large cities.

To start this Maptour, navigate to the chapter page for: [Population Composition, 1891-1961](#)  
[Browse > National Perspectives - Population > Population Composition, 1891-1961](#)

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'Historical Atlas of Canada Online Learning Project' website. The page title is 'Population Composition 1891-1961'. The main content area features a map of Canada titled 'Ethnic Origin' with a 'Bilingual Belt' highlighted in yellow. Below the map is a timeline from 1800 AD to 2000 AD. To the right of the map is an 'Overview' section with text explaining the concept of 'being Canadian' in 1891 and the 20th century. Below the overview is an 'Interactive Maps' section with four map tour options: 'Ethnic Origin 1901', 'Ethnic Origin 1931', 'Ethnic Origin 1961', and 'The Bilingual Belt 1961'. At the bottom, there are sections for 'Notes' and 'More Resources' with various links.

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### Population Composition 1891-1961

Preview: Overview of this chapter

1800 AD 1900 2000 AD

**Notes**

- [Overview of](#)
- [Authors and Sources of](#)
- [Text from the printed Atlas of](#)
- [Essay from the printed Atlas of](#)

**More Resources**

- [Related resources on this site of](#)
- [Links to other sites of](#)

**Overview**

In 1891, "being Canadian" meant, almost without exception, honouring one's Native, French, or British cultural traditions, sometimes in combination, in a fresh spacious setting. Late in the 20th century "being Canadian" applies to dozens of ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups associated with all parts of the world, most commonly living in a few large cities. [More of](#)

**Interactive Maps** [★ Take a map tour of](#)

- [Ethnic Origin 1901](#)
- [Ethnic Origin 1931](#)
- [Ethnic Origin 1961](#)
- [The Bilingual Belt 1961](#)

**Graphs**

- [Major Ethnic Groups, 1901, 1931, 1961 of](#)
- [Population Growth, 1891-1961 of](#)
- [Population Profiles, 1901, 1931, 1961 of](#)
- [Urban and Rural Population of](#)

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## Two Solitudes



### Try This:

- Open the interactive map “Ethnic Origin, 1901.”
- On the **ZOOM/PAN** toolbar, click on the **Zoom in** button and click on the map once or twice until the large circles become pie charts.
- Use the **Pan** tool to **pan back and forth** so that you have seen the pie charts for all parts of Canada.



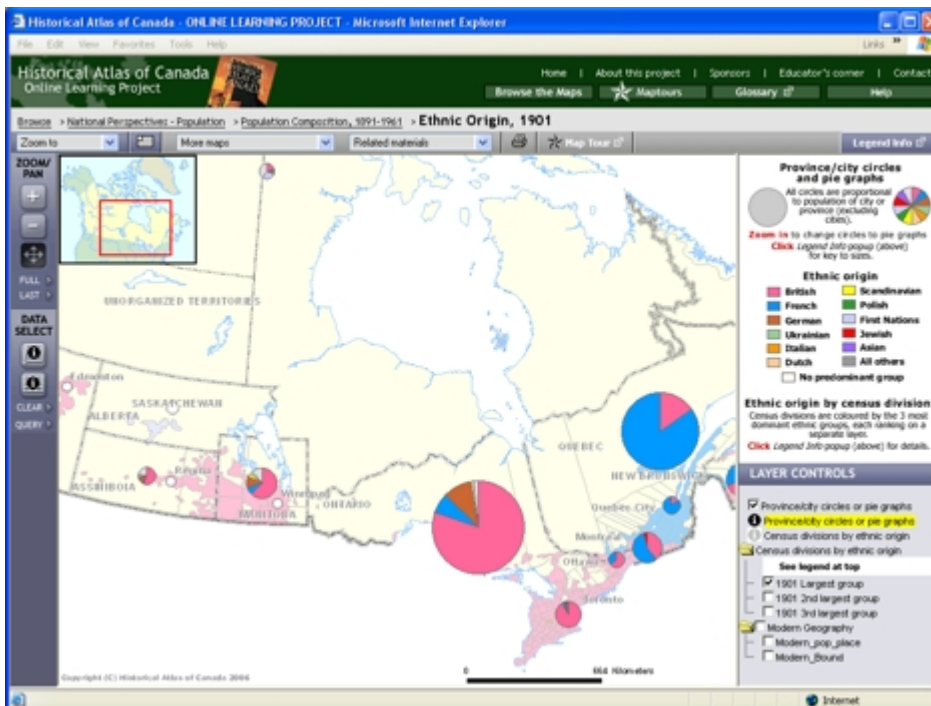
### Notice ...

- Nearly all Canadians were of British or French descent in 1901.
- Western Canada had a multicultural composition absent in Eastern Canada.
- Persons of French descent are rare west of Ontario.
- Canada's First Nations were all but invisible in Canada's population in 1901.



### Consider!

- Canada's development as a multicultural nation is a phenomenon of the 20th century.



“Canada” meant “Eastern Canada”



Try This:

- On the ZOOM/PAN toolbar, click on “FULL.”
- Click on the drop-down menu “More Maps” and under the subheading “Pop-Up Comparison Maps,” select “Ethnic Origin 1931.” (This opens a smaller map window for 1931 - you may have to drag it aside to see the 1901 and 1931 maps at the same time.)
- Compare these two maps to see the change in population numbers and locales over these 30 years.
- Click on the drop-down menu “More Maps” and select “Ethnic Origin 1961.”
- Now compare the 1931 and 1961 maps for a comparative picture of change over 30 years.



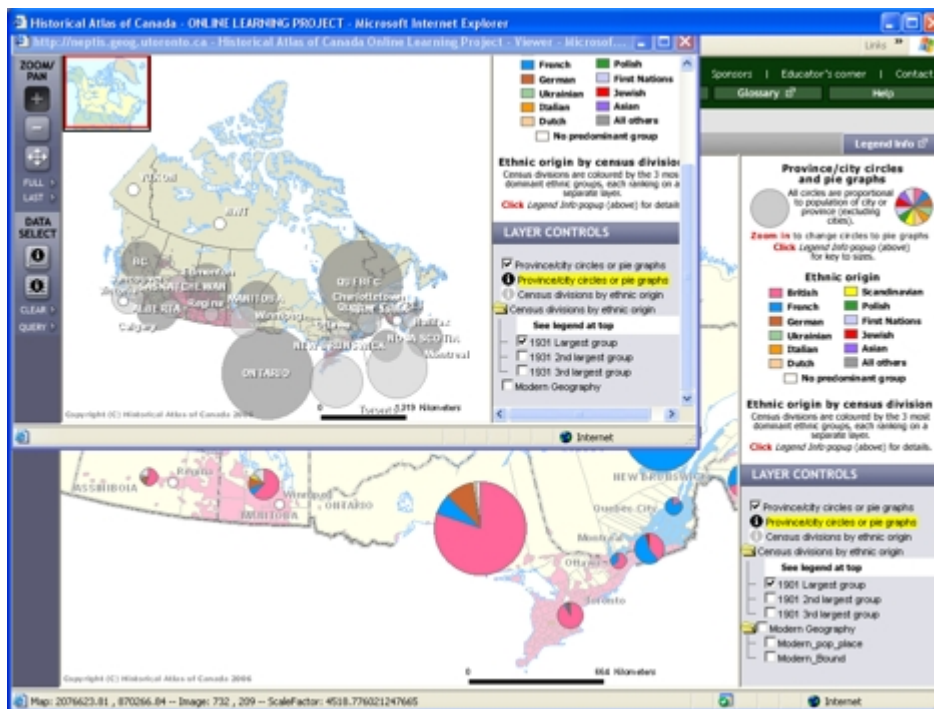
Notice ...

- Most Canadians in 1901 lived in Québec or Ontario.
- The eastern emphasis persisted through the 60 years covered by these maps.



Consider!

- People in British Columbia and Alberta together outnumber those in Québec in 2006.
- Lived-in Canada to the west of Lake Huron is very much a phenomenon of the 20th century.



The French Diaspora



Try This:

- Close the 1931 map window, and keep open the map "Ethnic Origin, 1961."
- Under LAYER CONTROLS, turn off the checkbox for "Province/city circles or pie graphs." Turn on the **i** layer for "Census divisions by ethnic origin." Also turn on the checkboxes for "1961 largest group" and for "Modern Geography."
- Use the Zoom-in tool to drag a rectangle on the map from Windsor in Southern Ontario to Cape Breton in Nova Scotia.



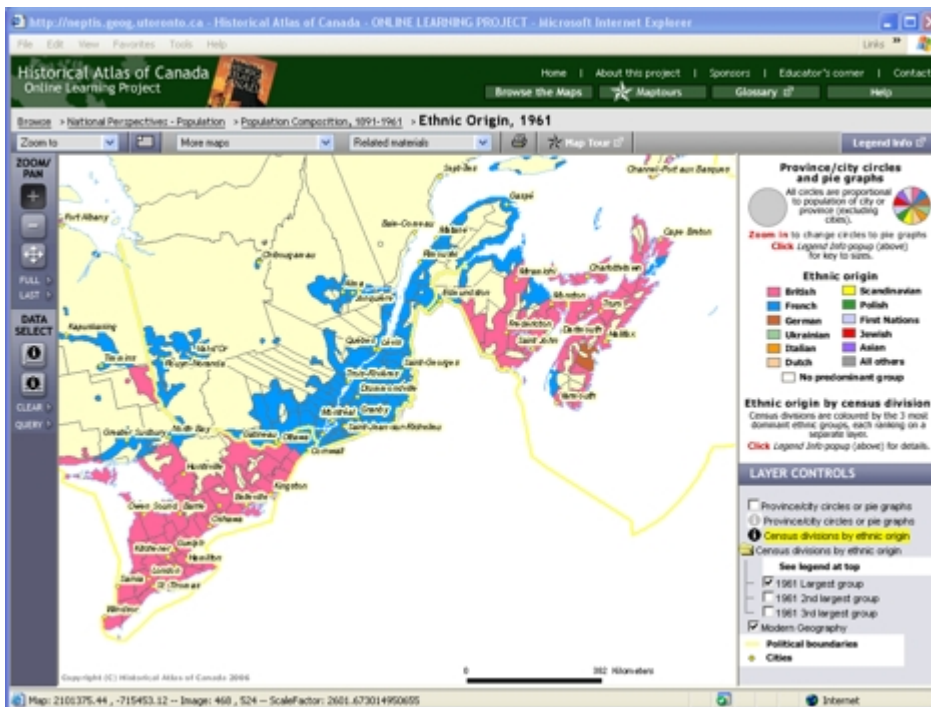
Notice ...

- People of French descent have spread to become predominant well beyond the boundaries of Québec, where their ancestors had traditionally lived.
- The French-British contrast does not match the Québec-Ontario boundary.



Consider!

- Political boundaries may be vulnerable to repositioning to conform with changing cultural circumstances.
- Another time look at the story of the Acadians, people of French origin in Maritime Canada whose turbulent history is recounted in the chapter: "Acadian Deportation and Return, 1750-1803."



## Majorities and Pluralities



### Try This:

- Keep open the interactive map "*Ethnic Origin, 1961.*"
  - Under LAYER CONTROLS, turn off the checkbox for "Modern Geography" and turn on "1961 2nd largest group."
  - Cycle back and forth between "1961 largest group" and "1961 2nd largest group."
- 



### Notice ...

- British and French trade places throughout eastern Canada. Each is second to the other.
- 



### Try This:

- Turn on "1961 3rd largest group."
  - Cycle back and forth among all three options.
  - On the DATA SELECT toolbar, click on the Table tool and then click on one of the Census divisions on the map, to open its pop-up data table .
- 



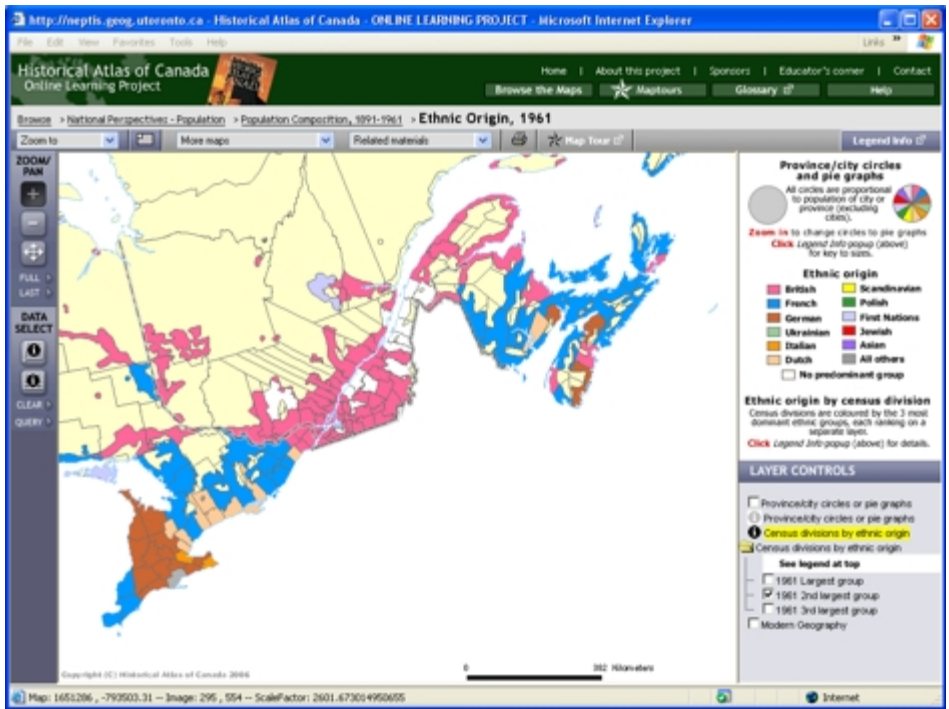
### Notice ...

- The St. Lawrence valley was so homogeneous in 1961 that it had no third ethnic group of significance (i.e. more than 1%); in a few cases there was not even a second ethnic group of significance.
  - First Nations citizens made only a tiny showing in second place, but a far more substantial one in the third.
  - British and French hardly ever are as low as third in the rankings in eastern Canada.
- 



### Consider!

- New ethnic groups have been slow to establish themselves in eastern Canada.
- These maps give no hint about the proportions of each ethnic group in each jurisdiction. The "largest" group could dominate, at close to 100%, or merely be slightly bigger than others, even as low as 34%.
- In 1961 the census form called upon individuals to declare a single ethnicity, even those Canadians of mixed heritage.



Contrasts in the Maritimes



Try This:

- Keep open the interactive map "Ethnic Origin, 1961."
- Under LAYER CONTROLS, turn on the checkbox and the **i** layer for "Province/city circles and pie graphs." Keep "1961 largest group" on as background.
- Click on the "Zoom to" drop-down menu and select "The Maritimes."
- On the DATA SELECT toolbar, click on the Table tool and drag a rectangle that encloses the pie charts for New Brunswick and Saint John.



Notice ...

- New Brunswick and Saint John are selected and highlighted on the map, and a table opens, giving numbers of people by ethnic group for the city and for the rest of the province.
- The French-British mix in Saint John is not representative of the province as a whole.



Try This:

- Close the table box, and on the DATA SELECT toolbar click on CLEAR, unselecting New Brunswick and Saint John and removing the highlighted outline.



Notice ...

- Looking at the pie charts, the ethnic mix in Halifax is very similar to the overall pattern for Nova Scotia.



Consider!

- New Brunswick is Canada's only officially bilingual province.

Bilingualism



Try This:

- On the Browse topbar, click on "Population Composition, 1891-1961" to return to the chapter page. Then open the map "The Bilingual Belt, 1961."
- Under LAYER CONTROLS, turn on the checkbox for "Modern Geography."
- Use the Zoom-in tool to zoom in to Southern Ontario and Québec, including the area from Sault Ste. Marie and Kapuskasing to Québec City.



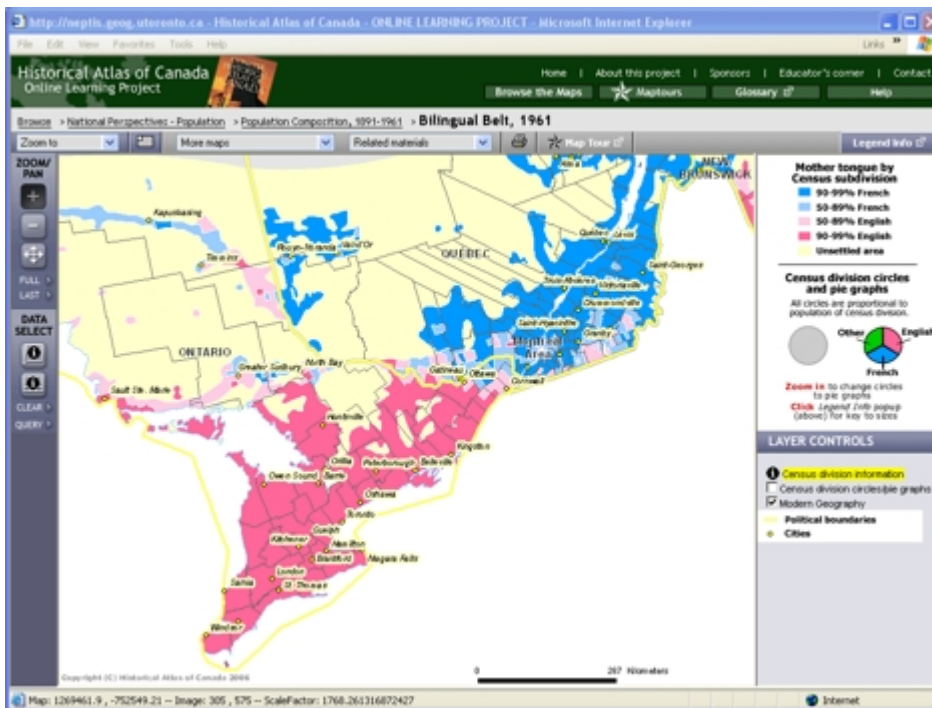
Notice ...

- The pattern of mother tongue corresponds closely with the pattern of ethnicity. (See Maptour pages 4 and 6.)
- Zones extending eastward from Kapuskasing and Sault Ste. Marie, through the Ottawa River valley and on eastward to Sherbrooke, mark the transition between French and English.
- This "bilingual belt" is fuzzy, although the political boundary between Québec and Ontario is sharp.



Consider!

- This map tells us nothing about where individuals proficient in both French and English languages lived.
- Northern Ontario and the Ottawa River valley are the parts of eastern Canada where one is likely to find both French and English in common use at the same time.
- Canada recognizes only English and French to be "official languages," despite the dozens of other languages also spoken throughout the country.





## A Little Data Management



### Try This:

- Keep open the map "The Bilingual Belt, 1961."
  - Turn off the checkbox for "Modern Geography."
  - Use the **Table tool** to **drag a rectangle** that includes several Census Divisions, to select them.
- 



### Notice ...

- A table box opens, giving details of French and English language use in each of the Census Divisions selected.
  - On the map, the borders of each of the Census Divisions selected have been highlighted. (You may have to drag the table aside to see the map.)
- 



### Try This:

- On the **DATA SELECT** toolbar , click on "QUERY."
  - In the Query box that opens, for "Percent French greater than or equal to" choose "90%." For the other three statements, choose "Exclude from Query." Then **Submit Query** .
- 



### Notice ...

- A pop-up box with a table of 49 rows opens, responding to your query. (You may have to click on "More Records" to see all the entries. )
- 



### Consider!

- You have here a demonstration of the concern about tiny percentages raised on page 5 of this Maptour.
- Many opportunities exist for analysing language data.

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Zoom to [ ] More maps [ ] Related materials [ ] Map Tour [ ] Legend info [ ]

**ZOOM/PAN**

+

-

FULL

LAST

**DATA SELECT**

+

-

CLEAR

QUERY

**Mother tongue by Census subdivision**

- 90-99% French
- 50-89% French
- 50-89% English
- 90-99% English
- Unsettled area

**Census division circles and pie graphs**

All circles are proportional to population of census division.

Other English French

Zoom in to change circles to pie graphs

Click Legend info page (below) for key to sizes

**LAYER CONTROLS**

Census division information

Census division circles/pie graphs

Modern Geography

**Census division information**

Rec	NAME	Total_pop	English	French	Other	Percent_English	Percent_French	Percent_Other
1	Lakelse	40313	38502	823	988	95.50785	2.04163	2.45052
2	Papineau	32697	4029	28157	312	12.93065	86.11464	0.95472
3	Pontiac	19947	10979	8327	641	55.04099	41.74952	3.21352
4	Prescott	27228	4415	22401	320	16.21612	82.80854	1.17535
5	Rushbro	89635	74688	5468	9440	83.32459	6.13378	10.54164
6	Carleton	352932	244058	80941	27933	69.15157	22.93389	7.91455
7	Dundas	17182	15273	739	1150	88.99913	4.30903	6.70085
8	Outaouais	44308	13428	29810	1070	30.30654	67.27905	2.41401

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Map: 955247.91, -655294.84 - Image: 1.29, 5.01 - SCAMP FACTOR: 1.768-263.2168/1/2/7

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## Changing Proportions



### Try This:

- On the Browse topbar, click on "Population Composition 1891-1961" to return to the chapter page. Then open the graph "Major Ethnic Groups, 1901, 1931, 1961."



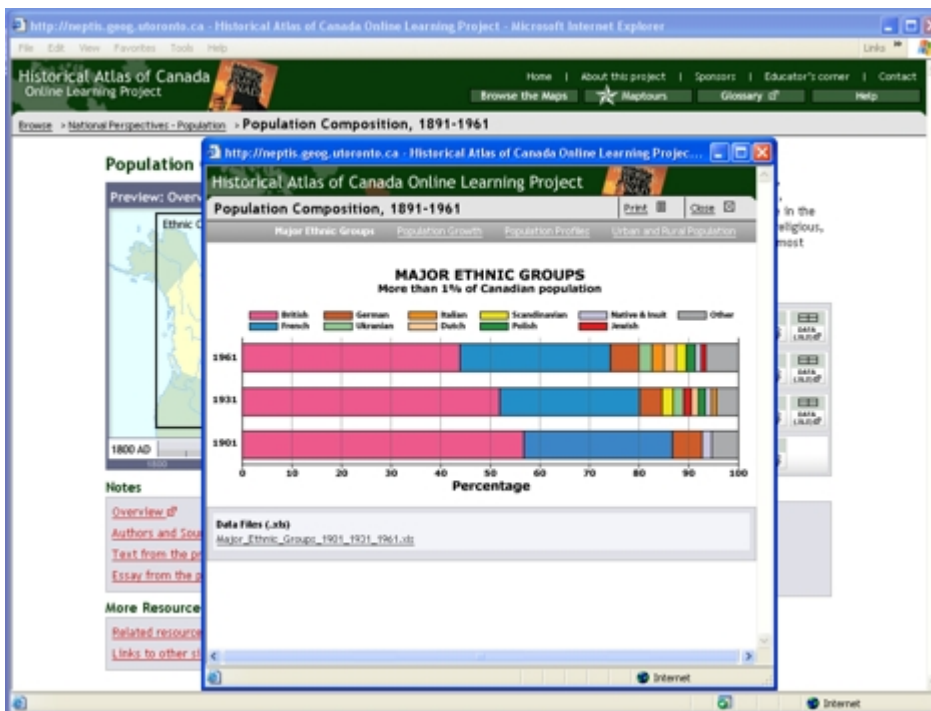
### Notice ...

- The proportion of non-French and non-British Canadians has grown substantially between 1901 and 1961, entirely at the expense of the British component.



### Consider!

- This graph shows proportions, and absolute numbers may tell a different story. (To find out, click on the data file under Data Files (.xls).)
- All ethnic groups were probably growing between 1901 and 1961.



Canadians Urbanize



Try This:

- On the Browse Graphs topbar, click on "Population growth," to open the graph "Population growth, 1891-1961."



Notice ...

- During the 1910s Canada made the transition from being a predominantly rural country to being predominantly urban.



Consider!

- Through two-thirds of the 20th century the rural population actually increased, even as its proportion decreased.
- The trend shown here may not have persisted in the half century since 1961.

These are just a few of the questions that these maps and data can address. If you have ideas for other questions, please use our Feedback page to send them in, and they may be posted on the website in the future.

