

# Socio-Economic Trends in the Canadian North: Comparing the Provincial and Territorial Norths

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**Abstract:** While there has been a recent increase in social research relating to the Canada's Territorial North, there is a relative poverty of research dealing with the Provincial North. That comparatively little has been written about the Provincial North means it is difficult to compare the social and economic situations in these two regions. This article is an introductory comparison of key socio-economic indicators as contained in the Census of Canada. The data shows that there are both similarities and important differences between these two regions. In addition to the Provincial Norths having a much larger population than the Territorial North, the two regions have different occupational and industrial structures, with the Provincial Norths having more blue-collar jobs linked to the resource sector while employment in the territories is much more dependent on the public sector. Despite this, in terms of population change, both regions appear to be very much influenced by the booms and busts of the resource economy. Both regions have higher percentages of Aboriginal population than most regions in Canada. Indeed, differences between the various regions of the Canadian North are likely the result of variations in the percentage of the population that is Aboriginal.

While there has been a recent increase in social research relating to Canada's Territorial North, there is a relative poverty of research dealing with the Provincial North (Poelzer & Wilson, 2005; Southcott, 2006). A recent bibliometric analysis of northern social science research done for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada notes that between 2000 and 2012, while northern research output increased substantially over this period, there was significantly more research published dealing with the three northern territories—Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon—than with northern regions of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador. This was despite the fact that the population of the Provincial

North is substantially larger than that of the Territorial North (Southcott, 2014: 4).

That comparatively little has been written about the Provincial North means it is difficult to compare the social and economic situations in these two regions of the Canadian North. While some basic data is available (Bone, 2009), it is useful to go into greater detail comparing the socio-economic situation that exists in these regions. This article is a brief introductory comparison. The data used for this comparison comes from the Canadian census. Where possible, the 2011 Census is used; however, the decision of the federal government to eliminate the mandatory long-form census, combined with concerns surrounding the new voluntary National Household Survey, means that data from 2006 is often the most reliable.

### Definitions of the North

While the Territorial North may be easy to define through the existing political boundaries, the borders of the Provincial North are less easy to agree on. Indeed, these borders often change in each province depending on which political party is in government (Southcott, 2006). For the purposes of this article, we are using the definition of the Provincial North that was agreed upon by various provincial governments for the purposes of a 2009 research report dealing with the changing economies of northern Canada, and published by the Northern Development Ministers Forum (Southcott & Irlbacher-Fox, 2009) These boundaries are illustrated in a map prepared by that organization (figure 1).

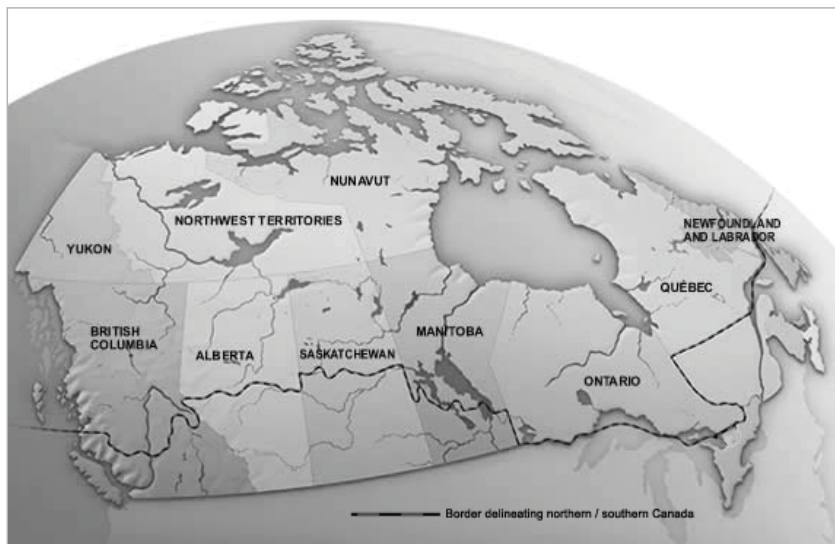


Figure 1: Map of regions of Northern Canada (Source: [www.focusnorth.ca](http://www.focusnorth.ca))

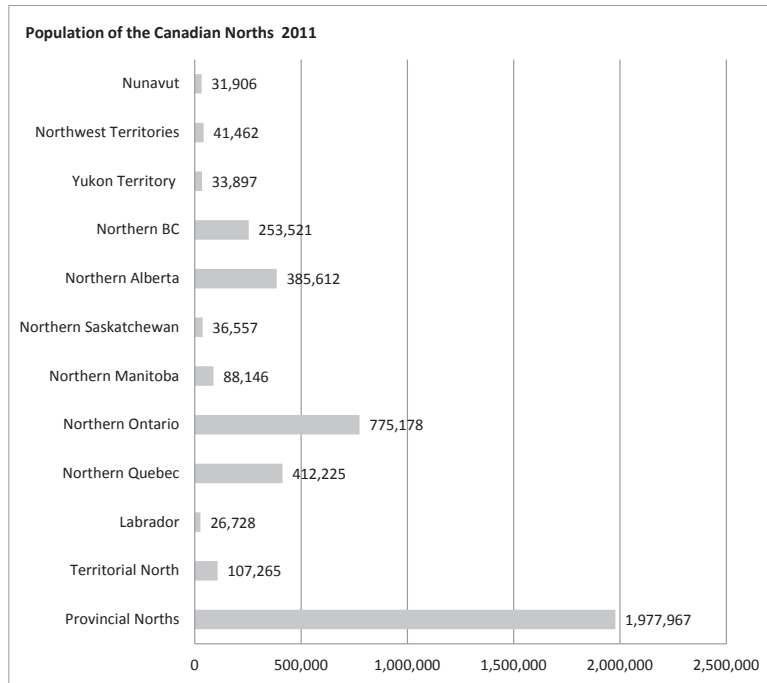
In order to describe conditions based on geographically-based statistical data, the analysis that follows uses definitions based on census geographical categories. A summary of these definitions are listed in Table 1. Where possible, the source of the definition is listed in the table.

**Table 1:** Census-based definitions of regions of the Canadian North

Province/Territory	Census Geographical Definitions
Yukon Northwest Territories Nunavut	Territory
Labrador	Division No. 10 (1010) 00001 Division No. 11 (1011) 00001
Quebec (Designated under the Plan Nord)	Le Domaine-du-Roy (2491) 01000 Maria-Chapdelaine (2492) 01010 Lac-Saint-Jean-Est (2493) 01010 Le Saguenay-et-son-Fjord (2494) 01010 La Haute-Côte-Nord (2495) 01010 Manicouagan (2496) 01010 Sept-Rivières–Caniapiscau (2497) 01010 Minganie–Basse-Côte-Nord (2498) 01010 Nord-du-Québec (2499) 01000
Ontario (Northern Development Act)	Nipissing (3548) 21010 Parry Sound (3549) 01010 Manitoulin (3551) 01010 Sudbury (3552) 01010 Greater Sudbury (3553) 0010 Timiskaming (3554) 01010 Cochrane (3556) 21010 Algoma (3557) 01010 Thunder Bay (3558) 01010 Rainy River (3559) 00010 Kenora (3560) 22020
Manitoba (Northern Development Act) Includes designated communities (i.e., Aboriginal) south of Township 21	Division No. 19 (4619) 01010 Division No. 21 (4621) 00010 Division No. 22 (4622) 00010 Division No. 23 (4623) 00020
Saskatchewan (Northern Administration District)	Division No. 18 (4718) 01020
Alberta	Division No. 12 (4812) 21020 Division No. 13 (4813) 01010 Division No. 16 (4816) 00010, Fort McMurray Division No. 17 (4817) 21020 Division No. 18 (4818) 01010 Division No. 19 (4819) 01010

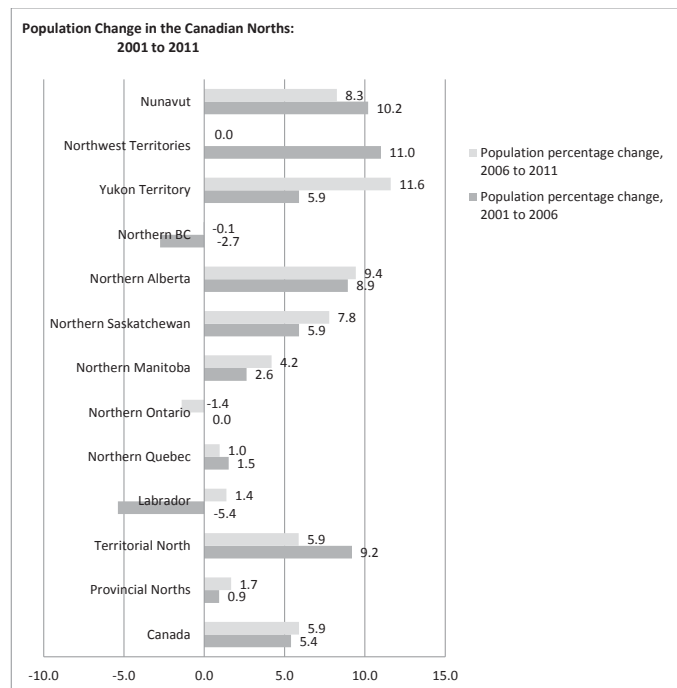
## Comparing the Populations of the Canadian Norths

Figure 2 lists the population totals for the regions of the Canadian North as indicated in the 2011 census. What is evident is that the population of the Provincial North far exceeds that of the Territorial North. In 2011, the population of the Provincial North totalled 1,978,000 people while that of the territories totalled just over 107,000.



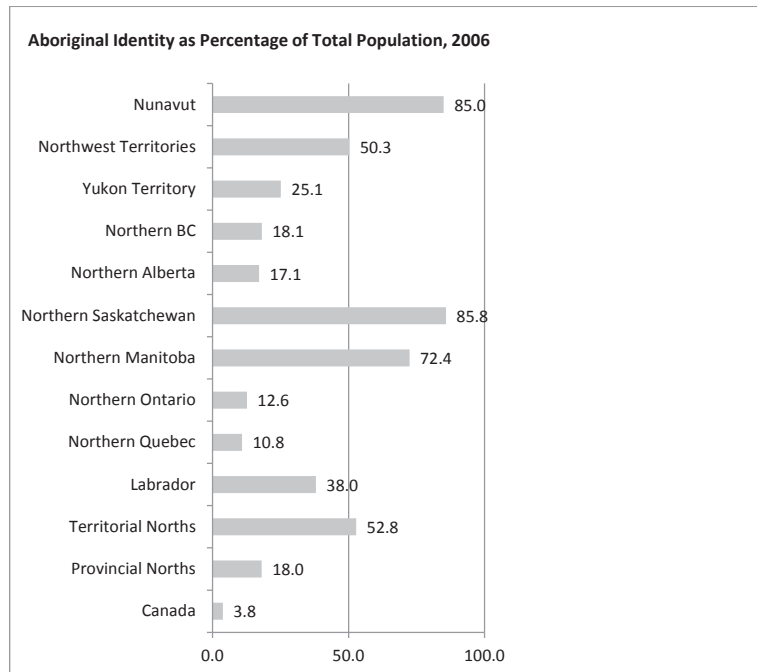
**Figure 2.** Population of the Canadian Norths, 2011. (Source: Census of Canada 2011.)

In terms of population change, the census data from 2001 to 2011 shows that there is considerable variability amongst the regions of the Canadian North (figure 3). Generally, the territories had more growth than the Provincial Norths although Northern Alberta, and to a lesser extent Northern Saskatchewan, saw considerable growth during this period. The older industrial Provincial Norths such as those of Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia tended to experience population stagnation (Southcott, 2012). Much of the variability is likely the result of the boom and bust nature of the resource industry that dominates the economy of these regions.



**Figure 3.** Population change in the Canadian Norths, 2001 to 2011. (Source: Census of Canada 2006 and 2011.)

One of the distinctive demographic characteristics of all regions of the Canadian North is the high percentage of Aboriginal population compared to other regions of Canada. Indeed, as has been noted elsewhere, the presence of a large Aboriginal population can explain many of the socio-economic differences between the Canadian North and the rest of Canada (Southcott, 2006). Figure 4 shows the percentage of the population identifying themselves as Aboriginal in the 2006 Census. In all cases, the Provincial Norths and the territories had higher percentages of Aboriginal identity population than for Canada as a whole. Generally, the territories had a higher percentage of Aboriginals than the Provincial Norths, but at the same time there is considerable variation between each region. According to the above mentioned definitions of each North, the region with the highest percentage of Aboriginals was Northern Saskatchewan with 85.8%. Northern Quebec had the lowest percentage at 10.8%. When looking at the three territories, Nunavut had the highest percentage at 85% followed by the Northwest Territories at 50.3%. In the Yukon, 25.1% of the population self-identified as Aboriginal.



**Figure 4.** Aboriginal Identity as Percentage of Total Population, 2006. (Source: Census of Canada, 2006)

Past analyses of Canada's northern communities have noted a gender imbalance as an important characteristic of the region (Dunk, 1987). In the past, the presence of male-dominated positions in the extractive resource sector was the main reason for this difference (Lucas, 1971). Figure 5 examines the gender differences in 2006 by calculating sex ratios based on the average number of males per 100 females. All regions of the Canadian North had higher ratios of males to females than the national average of 96. At the same time, there were considerable differences between regions. Of all northern regions, Northern Alberta had the highest number of males per females while Northern Ontario had the lowest.

Interestingly, these differences also vary considerably between different age groups. In Figure 6 we see that the average sex ratios for the combined Territorial North and Provincial North are fairly close to the national averages until age 44 at which point differences increase considerably.

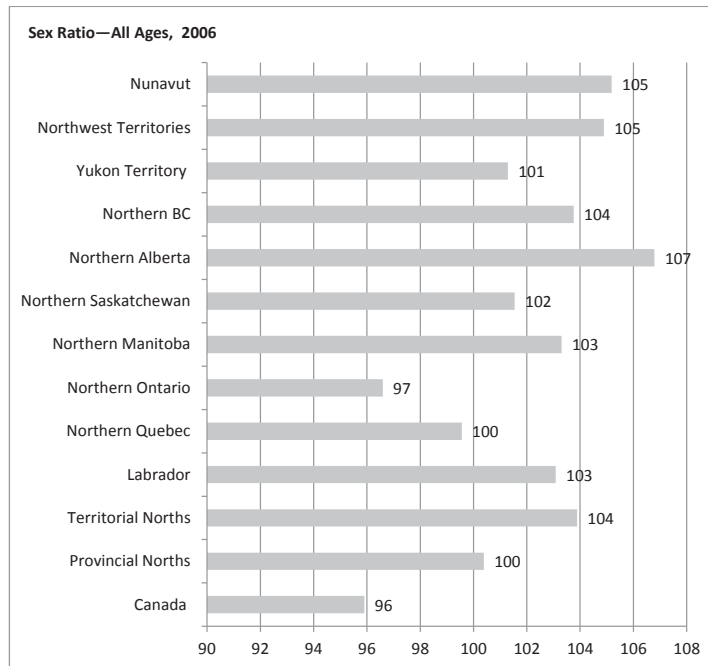


Figure 5. Sex Ratio—All Ages, 2006. (Source: Census of Canada 2006)

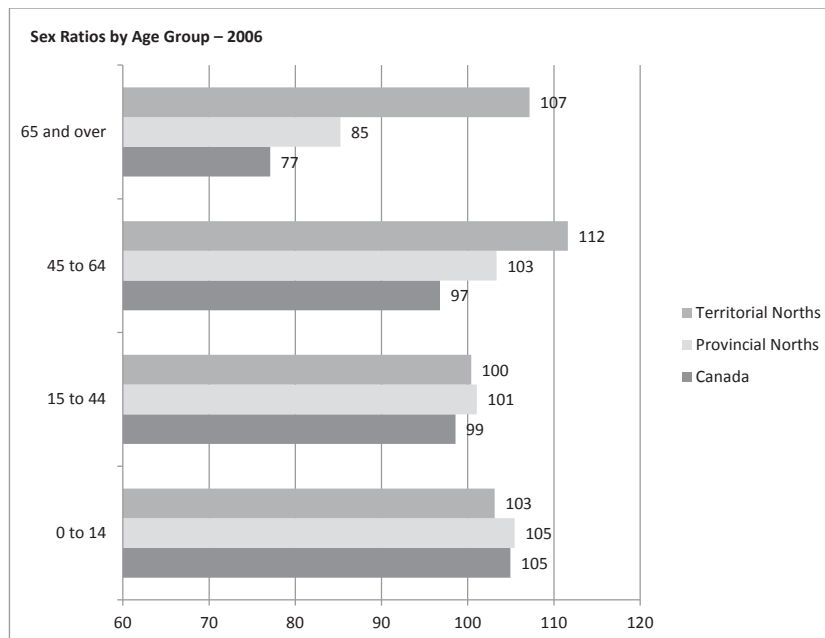


Figure 6. Sex Ratios by Age Group, 2006. (Source: Census of Canada 2006)

Traditionally, Canada's northern regions had younger populations than the national norm (Southcott, 2006). This was a result of a combination of factors including higher birth rates among the Aboriginal population since the 1950s, the fact that the Aboriginal population tended to die at earlier ages, and because the extractive resource sector tended to hire younger workers. Table 2 shows the age ratios for different age categories. These represent the percentage of the population in each particular age group. While the averages of the Provincial North and the Territorial North show that these regions tend to continue to have younger populations, there are areas of the Provincial North, notably Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, which now have populations that are older than national averages. Overall, the population of the Territorial North is younger than that of the Provincial North, but those Provincial Norths that have a high percentage of Aboriginal population, such as Northern Saskatchewan, tend to have extremely young populations compared to national norms.

**Table 2.** Age Ratios, 2006. (Source: Census of Canada 2006)

	0 to 14	15 to 44	45 to 64	65 and over
Canada	17.7	41.3	27.4	13.7
Labrador	20.6	45.7	27.5	6.3
Northern Quebec	17.6	38.7	30.4	13.4
Northern Ontario	17.1	37.7	29.4	15.8
Northern Manitoba	31.4	43.7	19.3	5.6
Northern Saskatchewan	34.0	44.7	16.2	5.2
Northern Alberta	22.8	44.7	23.7	8.8
Northern British Columbia	20.8	42.1	27.7	9.4
Provincial Norths	19.7	40.2	27.7	12.4
Yukon Territory	18.8	42.6	31.1	7.5
Northwest Territories	23.9	48.4	22.9	4.8
Nunavut	33.9	48.4	14.9	2.8
Territorial Norths	25.3	46.7	23.0	5.0

The study of migration patterns tells us much about a particular community or region. If a region has a relatively large number of people moving into the area, it usually means the region is going through a period of economic growth. If the region has a relatively small number of people coming into the area, it usually means the region is going through a period



of economic stagnation or decline. Table 3 looks at the percentage of the population that had moved into the community they now live in over the previous five years. In terms of total migrants we can see that communities in the Provincial Norths, with the exception of those in Northern Alberta, had lower numbers of migrants as a percentage of the population than was the case for Canada as a whole. Communities in the Territorial North, on the other hand, had, with the exception of Nunavut, higher percentages of migrants.

**Table 3.** Migrants (last 5 years) as a percentage of the population, 2006. (Source: Census of Canada 2006)

	Migrants	Intra-provincial migrants	Inter-provincial migrants	External migrants
Canada	18.9	12.1	2.9	3.9
Provincial Norths	15.5	11.2	3.4	0.8
Territorial Norths	20.7	5.8	13.5	1.4
Labrador	16.6	10.4	5.6	0.5
Northern Quebec	10.3	9.4	0.6	0.3
Northern Ontario	13.2	10.7	1.9	0.6
Northern Manitoba	13.9	9.7	3.8	0.4
Northern Saskatchewan	11.5	8.2	2.7	0.6
Northern Alberta	25.7	14.4	9.5	1.8
Northern British Columbia	18.0	12.6	4.4	1.0
Yukon Territory	19.9	5.4	12.9	1.7
Northwest Territories	24.0	5.4	16.8	1.8
Nunavut	16.5	6.7	9.4	0.4

In looking at where these migrants came from, Table 3 shows us that migrants to communities in the Provincial Norths were mostly from other communities within the same province, or intra-provincial migrants. This was even the case for Northern Alberta. Migrants to communities in the territories, however, came primarily from communities outside that territory (here known as interprovincial migrants). Another interesting difference between the Provincial North and the Territorial North concerns the number of people migrating to a community from outside Canada (external migrants). For Canada as a whole, just under 4% of people had moved to their particular community from another country over the past five years. The

percentages of migrants from outside Canada were lower in the Provincial North compared to the Territorial North. At the same time, percentages in both Norths were significantly lower than the national average.<sup>1</sup>

### Economic Characteristics

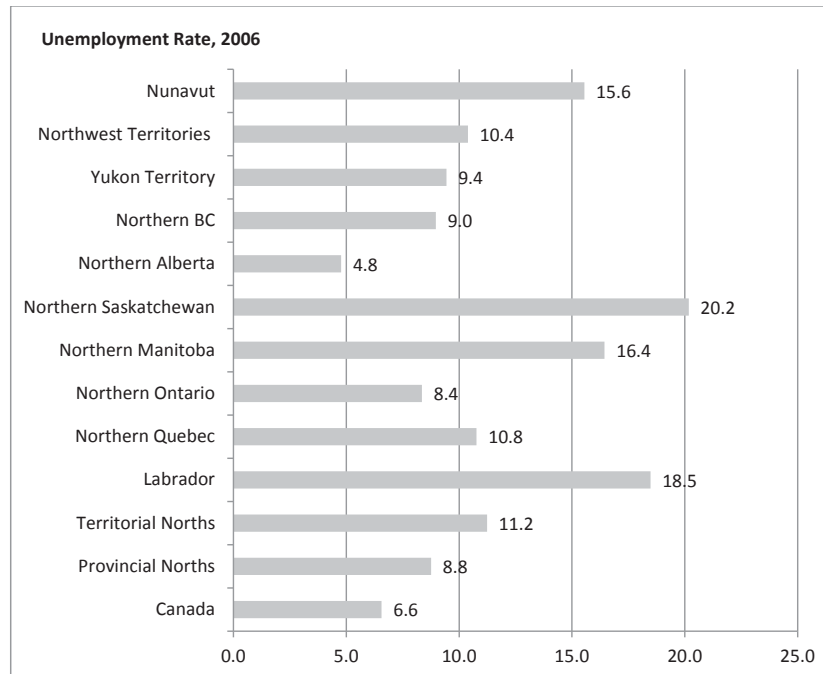
Most demographic indicators are heavily, if not entirely, influenced by economic factors. Whether the population of a region is growing or shrinking depends on whether the number of jobs in the region is growing or shrinking. Any proper understanding of social and demographic differences between regions depends, therefore, on a proper understanding of economic trends.

One of the most basic economic indicators is the percentage of the population that have jobs. The employment rate is the percentage of people 15 years of age and older who are actually employed.<sup>2</sup> Figure 7 compares employment rates in the provincial and territorial Norths.<sup>3</sup> Generally, the Provincial North had lower employment rates than the Territorial North, but there is a large variation. Northern Alberta had the highest employment rate at 71.3% while Northern Saskatchewan had the lowest rate at 40.3%.



Figure 7. Employment Rate, 2006. (Source: Census of Canada 2006)

Unemployment rates measure the percentage of people who are unemployed and are actively looking for work. Figure 8 shows that all areas of the Canadian North, once again with the exception of Northern Alberta, had unemployment rates that were higher than the national average. Northern Saskatchewan had the highest unemployment rate, 20.2%, followed by Labrador at 18.5%.



**Figure 8.** Unemployment Rates in Canada, 2006. (Source: Census of Canada 2006)

A better understanding of the economic conditions in the region can be achieved through an analysis of its industrial structure. How does this structure differ from Canada as a whole and how is this structure changing? Past analyses have shown that as a percentage of all jobs, northern regions have more resource related jobs, more public sector jobs, and fewer manufacturing jobs (Bone, 2009; Southcott, 2006). Figure 9 shows the industrial structure of the territorial and provincial North compared to Canada as a whole through a summary of the percentage of jobs in each major industrial category. It clearly shows that many of the earlier observations concerning the industrial structure of the North continued to exist in 2006. Both the provincial and territorial North had a higher percentage of jobs in mining and oil and gas extraction, in transportation, in educational services,

and in public administration. They also had a significantly lower percentage of jobs in manufacturing, wholesale trade, and finance and professional services.

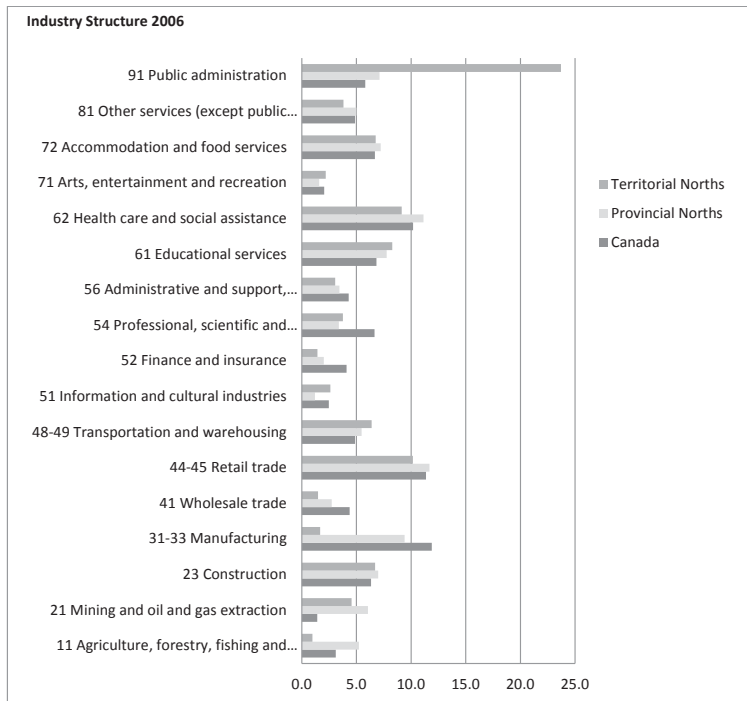
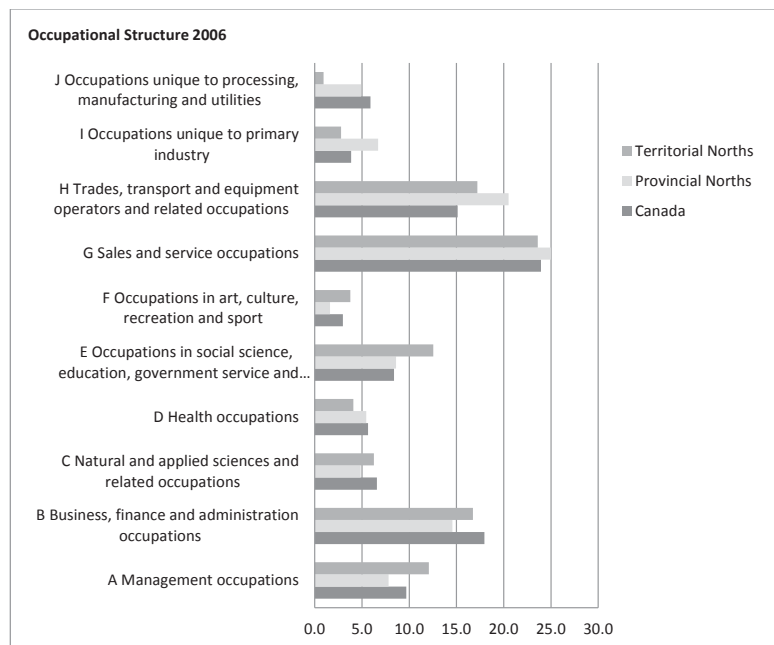


Figure 9. Industry Structure, 2006. (Source: Census of Canada 2006)

Figure 9 also shows us some interesting differences between the provincial and territorial Norths. The most notable is the fact that the territories had a much higher dependence on public administration related employment than the Provincial Norths. The Provincial Norths have a much higher percentage of manufacturing jobs than the Territorial Norths as well as, not surprisingly, a higher dependence on employment related to agriculture and forestry.

While a comparison of industrial structures gives us an idea of the types of jobs that exist in these regions as far as the economic sectors are concerned, a comparison of occupational structure can give us a better idea of the types of jobs as far as socio-economic status and educational requirements. Figure 10 compares the occupational structure of the provincial and territorial Norths as compared to the national norms of Canada. What is evident is that there is a significant difference between the occupational structures

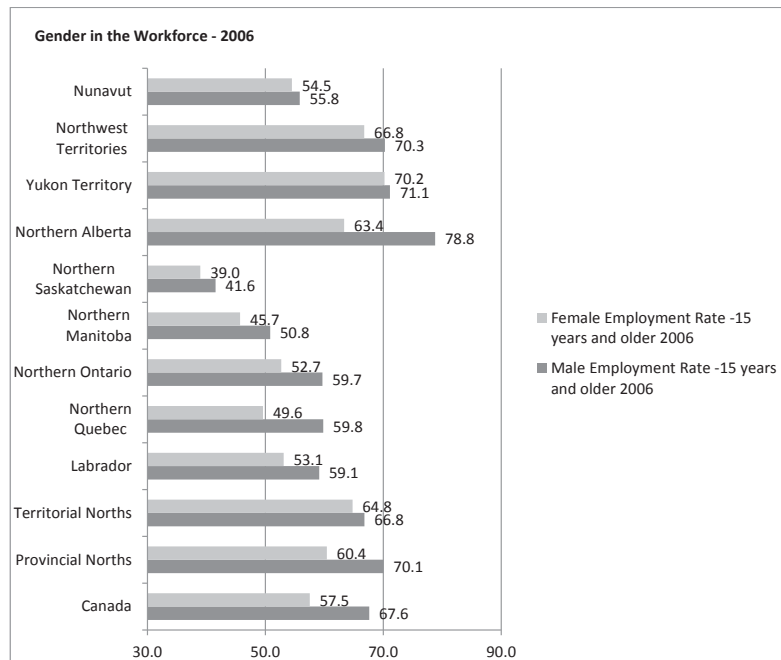
of the provincial and territorial Norths and that both differ from national norms. The Provincial Norths had a higher percentage of “blue collar” occupations—unskilled and semi-skilled jobs often associated with primary industry, manufacturing, construction, trades, and transportation. While the Provincial Norths had fewer blue collar jobs in manufacturing than Canada as a whole, they more than made up for this in occupations linked to primary industry and trades and transport. Interestingly, the Territorial Norths had a much lower percentage of blue collar occupations when compared to both the Provincial Norths and Canada. The Territorial Norths also had a higher percentage of jobs with higher socio-economic status when compared to the Provincial Norths. When compared to Canada as a whole, the Territorial Norths had a higher percentage of social science related occupations and management occupations.



**Figure 10.** Occupational Structure, 2006. (Source: Census of Canada 2006)

As noted above, historically the paid workforce in the Canadian North has been primarily male (Lucas, 1971). Indeed, largely due to the lack of jobs for women, northern resource towns have been called “no place for a woman.” There have been indications that the situation has been changing in at least some of the towns and in some regions (Gill, 1990; Randall & Ironside, 1996). Figure 11 compares the male and female employment rates

for the Provincial Norths, Territorial Norths, and Canada. When compared to both the national average and the average for the Provincial North, the Territorial Norths had a higher percentage of females in paid employment. Indeed, even the Provincial North had a higher percentage of the female population in paid employment than was the case for Canada as a whole. At the same time, there is a tremendous degree of variation between the different regions. While 70.2% of the female population of the Yukon 15 years of age and over was employed in 2006, only 39% of the female population of Northern Saskatchewan was.



**Figure 11.** Gender in the workforce, 2006. (Source: Census of Canada 2006)

Education is often listed as one of the most important factors for economic and social development in contemporary society. Indeed, since the 1970s observers of social change have noted the increased importance of education for economic and social development (Bindé, 2005). This represents a change from the industrial era of the nineteenth and early twentieth century when the most important criteria for economic success in a region or country was access to capital in order to invest in industrial development. Unionized blue collar jobs could supply workers with fairly stable and relatively well-paid employment without the need for high levels of formal education. This was the situation in many regions of the Canadian North until the 1980s (Southcott, 2012).

Historically, Indigenous communities in Canada's North have had a difficult relationship with educational institutions (Kirkness, 1999; Neegan, 2005). Until recently, these institutions were seen primarily as instruments of assimilation (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2002). Those Aboriginal people who attempted to access education often faced racism, prejudice, and other barriers that made success difficult. It has only been since the 1980s that these communities have been able to develop and have access to more culturally appropriate educational systems (McGregor, 2011).

Table 4 compares Canada, the Provincial Norths, and the Territorial Norths in terms of the highest level of formal education achieved as recorded in the 2006 Census. Compared to national averages, both the provincial and territorial Norths had a considerably higher percentage of the population with less than the equivalent of a high school diploma. At the same time, there were important differences between the provincial and territorial Norths. The Provincial Norths had a much higher percentage of individuals whose highest level of education is a trades apprenticeship or diploma. They also had a much lower percentage of people with a university degree when compared to the territories.

**Table 4.** Highest level of education attained for percentage of population, 2006. (Source: Census of Canada 2006)

	Canada	Provincial Norths	Territorial Norths
No certificate, diploma or degree	15.4%	22.0%	26.0%
Certificate, diploma or degree	84.6	78.0	74.0
High school certificate or equivalent	23.9	23.9	17.5
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	12.4	16.8	11.5
College, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma	20.3	21.3	22.8
University certificate, diploma, or degree	27.9	16.0	22.2
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	5.0	3.4	3.2
University certificate or degree	22.9	12.6	19.0
Bachelor's degree	14.6	8.4	12.9
University certificate or diploma above bachelor level	2.4	1.7	1.6
Degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry	0.7	0.4	0.5
Master's degree	4.5	1.8	3.6
Earned doctorate	0.8	0.3	0.4

Historically, incomes in the North have varied (Southcott, 2006). These variations were seen most clearly in the differences between the Indigenous population and others. Aboriginal peoples have generally had incomes much below the norms for the nation and for the region. On the other hand, for those living in the primarily non-Aboriginal resource industry towns, incomes were usually quite high as the demand for their labour and the presence of unions meant higher salaries than in many sectors of the Canadian economy.

Figure 12 compares average incomes as reported in the 2006 Census. Generally speaking, those living in the Territorial Norths reported higher incomes for 2005 than Canada as a whole. At the same time, there was some internal variation with those in Nunavut earning slightly below the national norm. As a whole, the Provincial Norths had lower average incomes than the Canadian average. What is also evident, however, is that there was a great deal of variation between the Provincial Norths, with residents of Northern Alberta making 15% more than the average Canadian and with residents of Northern Saskatchewan earning over 40% less.

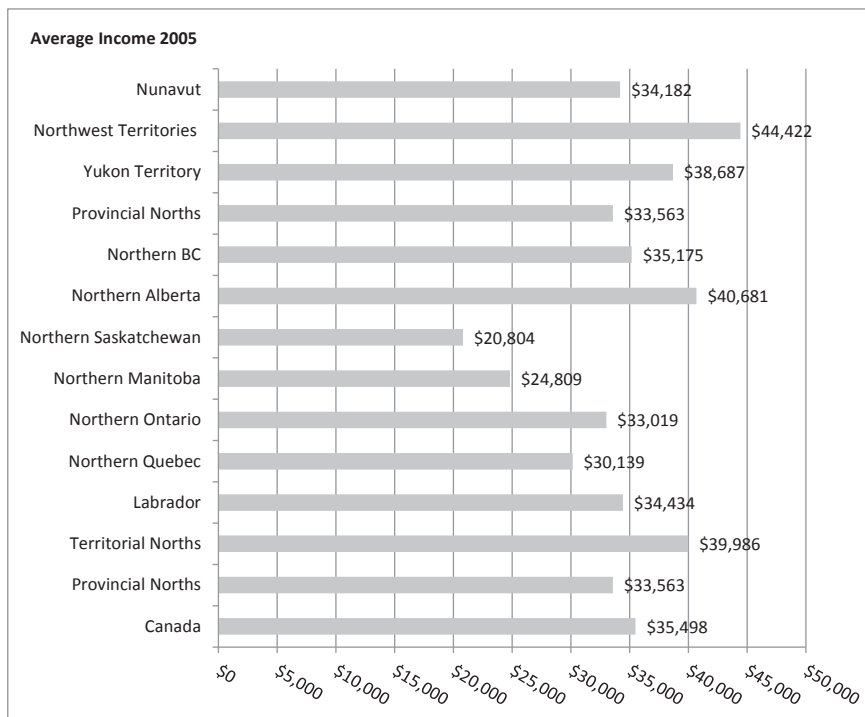


Figure 12. Average income, 2005. (Source: Census of Canada 2006)



### **Observations: A Tale of Many Norths**

This initial comparison of social and economic characteristics in the provincial and territorial Norths indicates that there are both similarities and important differences between these two regions. The Provincial Norths represent a much larger population than the Territorial Norths, but in terms of population change, both regions appear to be very much influenced by the booms and busts of the resource economy. Both Norths have higher percentages of Aboriginal population than most regions in Canada and have higher percentages of males. Despite recent improvements in the Yukon, and to a lesser extent in the Northwest Territories, neither the provincial or territorial Norths have been successful at attracting large numbers of immigrants when compared to Canada as a whole. In economic terms, with the exception of Northern Alberta, both the provincial and territorial Norths have higher unemployment rates than the rest of Canada. Both regions have higher percentages of individuals whose highest level of formal education is less than the equivalent of a high school diploma.

What is perhaps most interesting are the differences between the two regions. Generally, the age structures of the Provincial North are close to national norms but the Territorial North remains a much younger population. With the exception of Northern Alberta, the Provincial Norths have fewer migrants coming to their region than national averages while the Territorial Norths have more migrants than the rest of Canada. Employment rates vary between the territories and the Provincial Norths, but generally most territories have higher employment rates than Canada and most Provincial Norths have lower employment rates. The Provincial Norths and Territorial Norths have different occupational and industrial structures, with the Provincial Norths having a dominant blue collar industrial structure linked to the resource sector while the structure of the territories is much more dependent on public sector employment. Linked to this difference, the Provincial Norths have more individuals whose highest level of formal education is associated with the industrial trades while the Territorial Norths have a higher percentage of individuals with a university degree. In terms of incomes, once again with the exception of Northern Alberta, the Provincial Norths have average incomes below Canadian norms while the Territorial Norths have higher incomes.

It should be pointed out, however, that one of the main explanations of the differences between the various regions of the Canadian Norths is likely the result of variations in the percentage of the population that is Aboriginal. This is most notable when comparing figures for Northern Saskatchewan to other areas of the Canadian North. Because Northern Saskatchewan was

defined by the provincial government as being limited to Division No. 18, over 85% of its residents are Aboriginal. The fact that Northern Saskatchewan has the highest percentage of Aboriginals is likely also an important explanation why Northern Saskatchewan is that area of the Canadian North that has the lowest employment rates, the highest unemployment rates, and the lowest incomes. Further research is needed to determine the extent to which the percentage of Aboriginals explains differences in socio-economic indicators with the different regions of the Canadian North.

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### Notes

1. Recent media stories have discussed increased numbers of immigrants coming to the Territorial North (*Globe and Mail*, January 22, 2014), but while numbers may have increased recently there is little evidence that these numbers are approaching national norms. While data for the National Household Survey of 2011 is suspect, profile data shows that new immigrants (those arriving in the past five years) represent 2.7% of the population of the Yukon, 1.9% of the population of the Northwest Territories, and 0.4% of the population of Nunavut. For Canada as a whole, 3.5% of the population is made of immigrants who have arrived in Canada since 2006, while for British Columbia the percentage is 4.3.
2. This indicator is influenced by the percentage of the population that is of retirement age. If there are a larger number of elderly then the employment rates will be lower, while lower numbers of elderly will tend to increase employment rates.
3. A problem that needs to be mentioned is the limitations of census labour force data due to seasonal variations. Job situations vary considerably throughout the year. Often, employment varies from season to season. The labour force data collected in the 2006 Census, as was the case for previous censuses, does not account for seasonal variations or rapid shifts in employment. It represents the situation on May 15th, 2006.

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