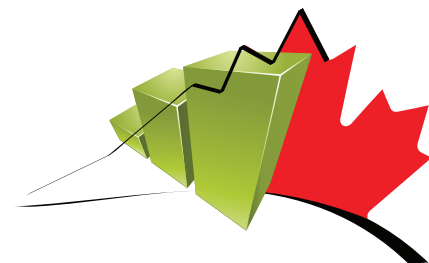


Economic and Social Reports

Who are Canada's legislators? Characteristics and gender gaps among members of legislative bodies



by Aneta Bonikowska

Release date: September 28, 2022

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Who are Canada's legislators? Characteristics and gender gaps among members of legislative bodies

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202200900003-eng>

Abstract

This study presents a profile of individuals who worked as legislators in 2016 in the federal public administration; provincial or territorial public administration; or municipal, local or regional public administration. It highlights differences in sociodemographic characteristics between male and female legislators using census data. In 2016, women made up just under one-third (32.5%) of all legislators, with roughly similar estimates at all three levels of government. In 2016, male and female legislators differed along several dimensions, such as age, marital status, presence of children and education. Similar proportions of male and female legislators were immigrants. Based on a subsample of legislators in 2016 who also responded to the 2011 National Household Survey and were working in 2011 or 2010, roughly one-third of male legislators in 2016 were also legislators in 2011, while less than one-fifth of female legislators in 2016 were also legislators in 2011. The share of women among legislators has not changed substantially between 2001 and 2016. The share of male and female legislators who are immigrants did not change over this period either. Some changes in average characteristics were observed in age, education and—among female legislators only—presence of children.

Author

Aneta Bonikowska is with the Social Analysis and Modelling Division, Analytical Studies and Modelling Branch, at Statistics Canada.

Acknowledgements

This study was funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada.

Introduction

In 2015, Canada witnessed its first gender-balanced federal cabinet. The share of women among candidates in federal elections and elected candidates has been increasing in recent years, although the share of women elected to the Parliament of Canada remains lower than the share of female candidates (House of Commons, Canada, 2019). Following the 2021 federal election, women made up 30% of members of Parliament (MPs) (Parliament of Canada n.d.)¹. Canada ranks 56th in the world in terms of the share of female parliamentarians. As of November 2021, there were six countries within the range of gender parity in Parliament (between 47% and 53%)²: Sweden (47.0%), Iceland (47.6%), Mexico (50.0%), New Zealand (49.2%), Nicaragua (50.6%) and the United Arab Emirates (50.0%). Two more countries exceeded the 53% mark: Cuba (53.4%) and Rwanda (61.3%) (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2021). Many countries with relatively high representation of women have voluntary party quotas, legislated candidate quotas or both (Krook and Norris 2014, Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020).

International research into women in politics has delved into the impact of the share of women in Parliament on the range of issues covered in election campaigns (Greene and O'Brien 2016); corruption and economic growth (Baskaran et al. 2018); and the impact of female mayors on the size of local government, municipal spending and crime rates (Ferreira and Gyourko 2014). A range of studies have also examined various barriers faced by women in politics, such as voter bias (Black and Erickson 2003, Fulton 2012), the presence of the incumbent effect (Kendall and Rekkas 2012, Thomas and Bodet 2013), and the gender gap in treatment of politicians by the media (Gidengil and Everitt 2003) and on social media (Rheault et al. 2019). More recently, a report by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women outlined a series of barriers facing women in Canadian politics, including harassment and discrimination, lack of family-friendly workplaces, and difficulties financing campaigns (House of Commons, Canada, 2019). There has been less focus on the characteristics of legislators and how they differ—or not—between women and men.

Using census data from 2016 and 2001, and the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), this study will answer four questions: (1) What were the characteristics of individuals serving as legislators in Canada in 2016, and how did their characteristics compare with those of eligible voters? (2) How do characteristics of male and female legislators compare? (3) What occupations did 2016 legislators hold in 2011, and how did this vary by gender? (4) Did the share of female legislators and the characteristics of male and female legislators change between 2001 and 2016?

Data and definitions

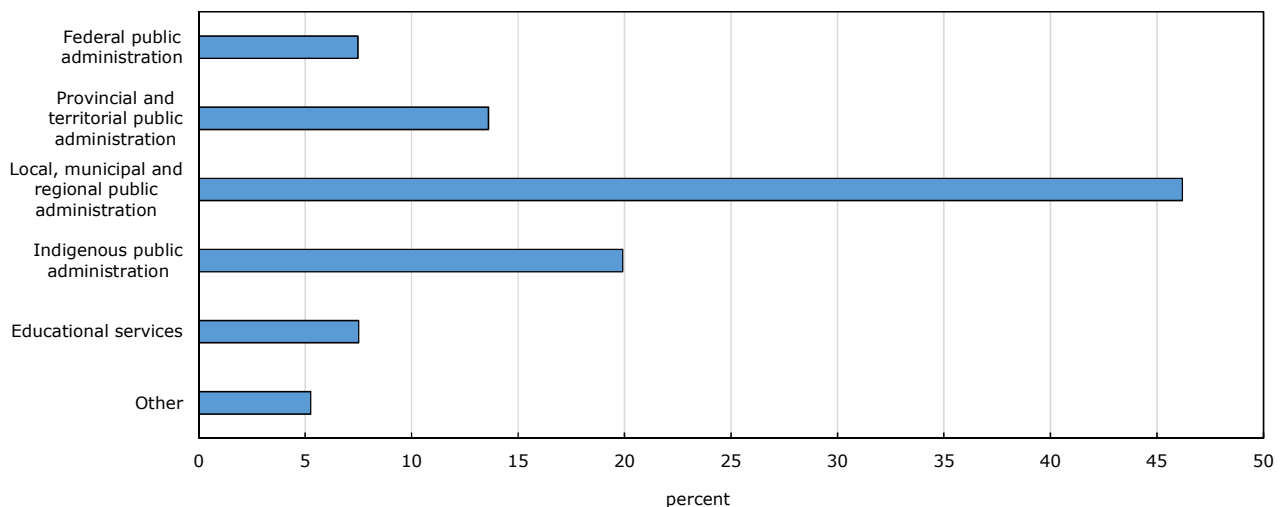
The analysis in this study is predominantly based on data from the 2016 Census of Population. Capturing 25% of Canada's population, it encompasses a sample large enough to study what is a relatively small occupation group. The linked 2011 NHS and 2016 Census provides longitudinal data for a subsample of 2016 legislators who completed both the NHS³ and the 2016 Census. These data are used to examine occupations held by 2016 legislators five years earlier, in 2011. Finally, the 2001 Census of Population is used to document changes in characteristics of legislators between 2001 and 2016.

Canada's National Occupational Classification (NOC) describes legislators as individuals who "participate in the activities of a federal, provincial, territorial or local government, legislative body or

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1. A commonly held "critical mass" argument holds that women are able to exert influence over the decision-making process when their share approaches 30% (Division for the Advancement of Women 2005).
 2. The United Nations adopted the 47%-to-53% range as a mark of gender balance within its ranks acknowledging that a precise 50% is unlikely to be sustainable (United Nations 2017).
 3. The NHS was a voluntary survey; about 21% of Canadians participated.

executive council, band council or school board as elected or appointed members” (Statistics Canada 2021).⁴ Legislators are identified by the four-digit NOC code 0011. The four-digit classification is the most detailed one available. This occupation group, however, can be further disaggregated by sector of employment (Chart 1). The largest share of legislators worked in local, municipal or regional public administration (46%). Of all legislators, 20% were part of Indigenous public administration. Provincial and territorial public administration (e.g., members of provincial Parliament, lieutenant governors) and federal public administration (e.g., MPs, senators and the Governor General) accounted for 14% and 8% of all legislators, respectively.⁵ A further 8% worked in educational services.

Chart 1
Distribution of legislators by sector of employment



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

The analysis in this study will focus on legislators who, during the 2016 Census reference week, worked in the federal public administration; provincial or territorial public administration; or municipal, local or regional (hereafter municipal) public administration. School board members and legislators in Indigenous public administration would be more appropriately analyzed separately from the other three types of public administration. Furthermore, the sample sizes of these two groups are small and limit the extent of the analysis that could be conducted. As a result, these two groups are excluded from the analysis, as are legislators working in “other” sectors.

To be eligible to run for public office in federal, provincial or territorial, or municipal public administrations, a person must be a Canadian citizen and be at least 18 years old. Individuals running for office in levels of government other than federal must also meet residency requirements (in the province, territory or municipality). Essentially, if a person can vote in a given election, a person can also run for office in that election, with some exceptions.⁶ The sample of legislators in this study is thus composed of Canadian

4. The NOC code 0011 changed slightly over the study period. In the 2001 Census, code 0011 included territorial commissioners, while in the 2016 Census and the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) this job was excluded from code 0011. Given that there are only three territorial commissioner positions in Canada, a comparison of legislators in 2001 and 2016 will be conducted nevertheless as though there were no changes to the classification. The classification is unchanged in the two years of data included in the linked NHS 2011 and Census 2016.

5. For a list of job titles included in the NOC code 0011 see:
<https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getAllExample&TVD=1267777&CVD=1267974&CPV=0011&CST=01012016&CLV=4&MLV=4&V=394366&VST=01012016>

6. E.g. some criminal convictions preclude individuals from running for office.

citizens aged 18 and older who were employed during the census reference week (May 1 to May 7, 2016). The final sample of legislators is 1,378. Canadian citizens aged 18 and older living in private households who were not employed as legislators during the census reference week are used as a comparison group and referred to as “eligible voters” throughout the study.

Sociodemographic characteristics of legislators

About one-third (32.5%) of all legislators in 2016 were women, compared with about half (51.2%) of eligible voters (Table 1). The estimated share of women was roughly similar at all three levels of government. Although the share was highest in the federal public administration (35.5%) and declined by level of government (33.4% in provincial or territorial public administration, and 31.7% in municipal public administration), the differences between types of public administration were not statistically significant.⁷

Legislators in 2016 were generally older than eligible voters, with an average age of 56.8, compared with 48.5 among eligible voters. Nearly three-quarters (73.2%) were aged 50 or older, compared with nearly half (49.1%) of the comparison group, while 5.6% of legislators were younger than 35, compared with 26.6% of eligible voters. Legislators were more likely to be married (69.7%) than the comparison group (47.2%). They were also less likely to have children younger than 18 years living with them.⁸

A lower share of legislators than eligible voters were immigrants (8.4% versus 21.2%). Of those, fewer than one in five (17.8%) immigrated to Canada between 1991 and 2016 (25 years or less before the 2016 Census). Just over half of all adult immigrants who were Canadian citizens at the time of the 2016 Census immigrated during the same period. The share of immigrants was highest among federal legislators, at 12.5%, with 7.8% at the provincial and territorial level and 7.9% at the municipal level.

7. I.e. the observed difference between government levels could simply be due to sampling variability, due to chance, meaning there is no compelling evidence of a difference between government levels.

8. Children under the age of 18 in the census family. For census families with no minor children, census data do not allow a distinction between those individuals who never had children, those who have adult children living in a different dwelling, and those who have joint custody of minor children who live elsewhere most of the time.

Table 1
Characteristics of legislators who worked in the federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, local or regional public administration and adult Canadian citizens, 2016

	Legislators	Canadian citizens ¹
	percent	percent
Female		
Overall	32.5	51.2
Federal public administration	35.5	...
Provincial and territorial public administration	33.4	...
Local, municipal and regional public administration	31.7	...
Age (mean)	56.8	48.5
Age group (years)		
18 to 34	5.6	26.6
35 to 49	21.2	24.4
50 to 64	41.4	28.3
65 and older	31.8	20.8
Marital status		
Married	69.7	47.2
Common-law	12.7	13.3
Separated or divorced	7.3	9.2
Widow ed	3.3	5.1
Single, never married	7.1	25.2
Presence of children in census family		
Age 0 to 17	21.4	27.1
Age 0 to 5	5.5	10.7
Immigrant	8.4	21.2
Arrived betw een 1991 and May 2016	1.5	10.8
Arrived before 1991	6.9	10.4
Indigenous identity	6.8	4.5
Highest completed level of education		
Less than high school	4.1	15.4
High school	18.1	27.4
Non-university postsecondary	32.7	34.2
University degree	45.1	23.1
Field of study of highest postsecondary credential²		
Education	10.4	6.9
Visual and performing arts, communications technologies, and other	2.7	3.8
Humanities	7.0	5.3
Social and behavioural sciences and law	22.5	11.2
Business, management and public administration	26.9	21.0
Physical and life sciences and technologies	2.2	3.8
Mathematics, computer and information sciences	2.4	3.8
Architecture, engineering, and related technologies	12.0	21.1
Agriculture, natural resources and conservation	3.3	2.2
Health and related fields	7.9	14.4
Personal, protective and transportation services	2.7	6.5
	hours	hours
Hours worked during reference week³		
Mean	35.9	37.6
25th percentile	20.0	35.0
50th percentile	40.0	40.0
75th percentile	50.0	40.0

... not applicable

1. Canadian citizens aged 18 and older w ho did not w ork as legislators during the census reference w eek.

2. Individuals w ith a postsecondary credential only.

3. Actual number of hours w orked at all jobs held in the w eek of May 1 to May 7, 2016. Individuals w ho reported w orking zero hours in that w eek w ere excluded from the calculations.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100.0% because of rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

A higher share of legislators, compared with eligible voters, reported an Indigenous identity (6.8% versus 4.5%). The share was highest at the federal level, at 14.2%, followed by 8.1% at the provincial and territorial level, and 5.2% at the municipal level.

Legislators had higher levels of education than eligible voters—77.8% of legislators had a postsecondary credential, compared with 57.3% of adult Canadian citizens. The gap was driven by those with a university degree (45.1% of legislators versus 23.1% of eligible voters). Among those with a postsecondary credential, almost half of legislators, compared with nearly one-third of eligible voters, studied subjects in two broad fields: business, management and public administration; and social and behavioural sciences and law. Legislators were also less likely to have studied in engineering or health-related fields than the comparison group.

Legislators reported working, on average, slightly shorter hours during the reference week in 2016 than did eligible voters. However, their weekly hours worked were also more dispersed, with legislators having worked fewer hours than the comparison group in the 25th percentile of their respective distributions, while legislators in the 75th percentile worked more hours than the 75th percentile of the comparison group. Weekly hours worked varied by level of government. Legislators at the federal level reported having worked, on average, 49.5 hours during the reference week, compared with 50.1 hours at the provincial and territorial level, and 29.5 hours at the municipal level.⁹

How do characteristics of male and female legislators compare?

Female legislators, at 54.5 years on average, were younger than male legislators, at 57.9 years on average in 2016 (Table 2). Over one-third (35.5%) of male legislators were aged 65 or older, compared with less than one-quarter (24.1%) of female legislators. Among female legislators, 28.1% were aged 35 to 49, compared with 17.9% of their male counterparts.

A lower share of female than male legislators were married (60.0% versus 74.3%). The share of female legislators who were divorced or separated was nearly three times higher than that of male legislators (12.8% versus 4.6%). A higher share of female than male legislators were widowed (and not remarried or in a common-law relationship). Compared with eligible voters, the distribution of legislator marital status was skewed toward being married, particularly among men. For both men and women, the share of legislators who were married was higher than among eligible voters: 25.7 percentage points higher for men and 14.0 percentage points higher for women.

A similar share of male and female legislators (about one in five) had children younger than 18 years in their census family, lower than among eligible voters. For example, 20.0% of female legislators had children younger than 18 years, compared with 28.1% of eligible female voters. Similarly, 4.4% of female legislators had children aged 5 years or younger in their census family, compared with 11.1% of eligible female voters.

A roughly equal share of male and female legislators were immigrants, both overall and by period of immigration. Likewise for legislators reporting an Indigenous identity. The small observed gender differences in each of these characteristics were not statistically significant.

9. Among individuals who were legislators in 2016 in municipal governments, over half of those who were employed in 2015 reported working mostly part-time weeks that year (fewer than 30 hours a week). While census data cannot differentiate between individuals who switched jobs between January 2015 and the census reference week in 2016, information on hours worked during the reference week suggests that many legislators in municipal governments do in fact have part-time jobs.

Female legislators worked fewer hours than male legislators during the census reference week, on average, at 34.3 versus 36.6 hours. For both men and women, the dispersion of hours worked was larger among legislators than among eligible voters, i.e., both male and female legislators worked fewer hours than eligible voters at the 25th percentile of the hours-worked distribution for each group, but more hours at the 75th percentile, with roughly similar hours worked at the median. Legislators in municipal government positions had the lowest number of hours worked (30.1 hours among men and 27.2 hours among women, on average). The difference in hours worked between men and women was higher among federal government legislators (49.7 hours for men and 44.1 for women) than among provincial and territorial government legislators (49.5 hours for men and 47.9 for women).

Female legislators were more educated than male legislators, with a higher share of women than men holding a postsecondary credential: 35.2% of women had a non-university postsecondary credential, compared with 31.5% of men, and 47% of women had a university degree, compared with 44.2% of men.¹⁰ A higher share of women than men had a university degree in the general population—24.4% of women versus 21.7% of men—although a slightly lower share of women than men had a non-university postsecondary credential. A lower share of female than male legislators did not have a high school diploma (1.9% of women and 5.1% of men), both lower than the respective shares among eligible voters.

Among legislators with a postsecondary credential, smaller differences in field of study existed between male and female legislators than in the general population. The two most common areas of study for both male and female legislators were social and behavioural sciences and law; and business, management and public administration. The next two most common fields of study among female legislators were health and related fields, and education, while for men the next two most common fields were architecture, engineering, and related technologies; and education. Among female eligible voters, the most common fields of study were business, management and public administration; health and related fields; social and behavioural sciences and law; and education. Each accounted for between approximately 10% and 25% of women. By contrast, architecture, engineering and related technologies, and business, management and public administration jointly accounted for more than half of male eligible voters with a postsecondary credential, with all other fields accounting for less than 10% each.

10. Note that while neither the gender gap in having a non-university postsecondary credential nor in having a university degree were individually statistically significant, the difference between men and women in the share with a post-secondary credential was statistically significant.

Table 2
Characteristics of legislators who worked in federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, local or regional public administration and adult Canadian citizens, by gender, 2016

	Legislators		Canadian citizens ¹	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Age (Mean)	57.9	54.5	48.0	49.0
Age group (years)		percent		
18 to 34	5.5	5.8	27.5	25.8
35 to 49	17.9	28.1	24.4	24.3
50 to 64	41.1	42.0	28.3	28.2
65 and older	35.5	24.1	19.8	21.6
Marital status				
Married	74.3	60.0	48.6	46.0
Common-law	12.3	13.5	13.6	12.9
Separated or divorced	4.6	12.8	7.6	10.6
Widow ed	2.0	6.1	2.2	7.9
Single, never married	6.8	7.7	28.0	22.6
Presence of children in census family				
Age 0 to 17	22.0	20.0	26	28.1
Age 0 to 5	6.0	4.4	10.3	11.1
Immigrant	8.2	8.7	20.6	21.7
Arrived between 1991 and May 2016	1.5	1.6	10.4	11.2
Arrived before 1991	6.7	7.1	10.2	10.5
Indigenous identity	7.3	5.8	4.3	4.6
Highest completed level of education				
Less than high school	5.1	1.9	16.1	14.7
High school	19.3	15.8	27.3	27.4
Non-university postsecondary	31.5	35.2	35.0	33.5
University degree	44.2	47.0	21.7	24.4
Field of study of highest postsecondary credential²				
Education	10.4	10.3	3.4	10.2
Visual and performing arts, communications technologies, and other	2.0	4.0	3.6	4.0
Humanities	6.2	8.6	4.3	6.2
Social and behavioural sciences and law	21.6	24.2	7.7	14.5
Business, management and public administration	25.8	28.8	16.3	25.3
Physical and life sciences and technologies	2.0	2.5	4.1	3.5
Mathematics, computer and information sciences	2.1	3.0	5.2	2.6
Architecture, engineering, and related technologies	17.3	2.0	40.1	3.4
Agriculture, natural resources and conservation	3.9	2.0	2.9	1.5
Health and related fields	5.5	12.5	5.6	22.6
Personal, protective and transportation services	3.1	1.9	6.9	6.2
Hours worked during reference week³				
Mean	36.6	34.3	40.4	34.7
25th percentile	20.0	20.0	37.0	30.0
50th percentile	40.0	37.0	40.0	38.0
75th percentile	50.0	45.0	44.0	40.0

1. Canadian citizens aged 18 and older who did not work as legislators during the census reference week.

2. Individuals with a postsecondary credential only.

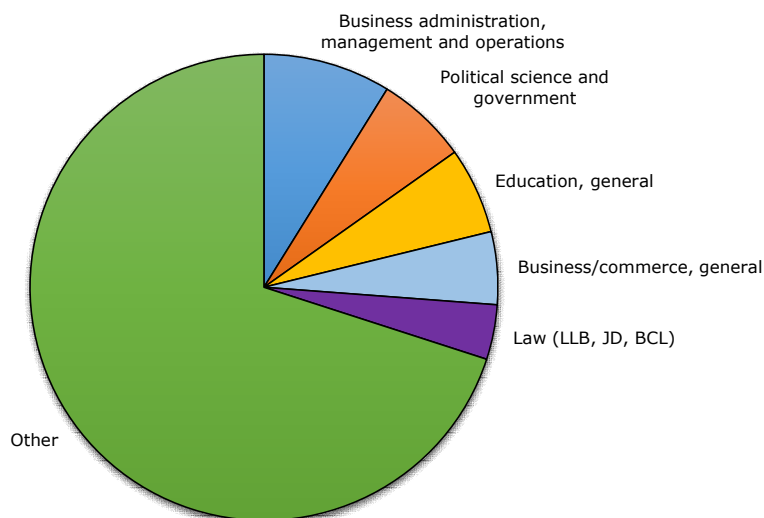
3. Actual number of hours worked at all jobs held in the week of May 1 to May 7, 2016. Individuals who reported working zero hours in that week were excluded from the calculations.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100.0% because of rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

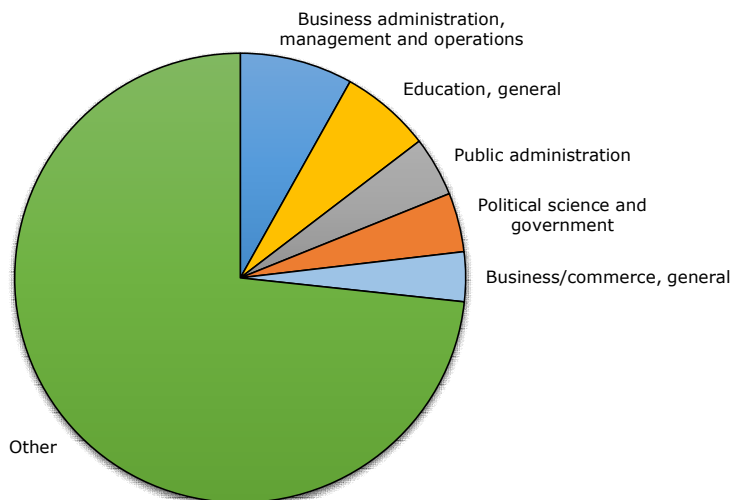
Among legislators with a postsecondary credential, the five most common detailed fields of study¹¹ were also very similar for men (Chart 2) and women (Chart 3). Business administration, management and operations was the most common field for both male and female legislators with a postsecondary education, with business/commerce (general) also among the top five fields for both. Political science and government, and education (general) were also common to both. Law and public administration rounded out the top five fields for men and women, respectively.

Chart 2
Top five detailed fields of study among legislators with a postsecondary education, men



Notes: Fields of study are based on four-digit Classification of Instructional Programs 2011 categories. LLB refers to Bachelor of Laws, JD refers to Juris Doctor and BCL refers to Bachelor of Civil Law.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Chart 3
Top five detailed fields of study among legislators with a postsecondary education, women



Note: Fields of study are based on four-digit Classification of Instructional Programs 2011 categories.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

11. Four-digit Classification of Instructional Programs, 2011.

The top five detailed fields of study accounted for 30% of all male legislators with a postsecondary education and 27% of female legislators with a postsecondary education. The remaining legislators with a postsecondary education (roughly 70%) obtained their highest credential in one of a wide variety of disciplines.

Can differences in characteristics between male and female legislators be accounted for by differences in age?

Some of the gender differences among legislators may be driven by the fact that female legislators were, on average, younger than their male counterparts. Table 3 shows the observed and age-adjusted gender gaps in these characteristics.

Female legislators were around 14 percentage points less likely to be married than male legislators; accounting for age differences reduced this gap by fewer than 2 percentage points. Female legislators were also about 4 percentage points more likely than male legislators to be widowed. Accounting for age differences reduced this gap by half. The age-adjusted gap in the share of separated or divorced legislators was barely smaller than the observed gap.

Female legislators were slightly less likely to have children younger than 18 years in their census family (although the difference is not statistically significant). However, when differences in age were taken into account, female legislators were about 11 percentage points less likely to have children in their census family than their male counterparts.¹²

In addition, female legislators were less likely than their male counterparts to have less than a high school education; age differences between them accounted for less than one-quarter of that gap. They were also about 3 percentage points more likely to have a university education; age differences accounted for about half of that gap.

12. In contrast, among eligible voters, conditional on age, women were more likely than men to have children aged 0 to 18 in their census family.

Table 3
Observed and age-adjusted gaps in selected characteristics between female and male legislators

	Observed gap	Age-adjusted gap
	percentage points	
Marital status		
Married	-0.136 ***	-0.119 ***
Common-law	0.012	0.002
Separated or divorced	0.073 ***	0.069 ***
Widow ed	0.037 **	0.018 ***
Single, never married	0.008	0.000
Presence of children in census family		
Age 0 to 17	-0.020	-0.111 ***
Age 0 to 5	-0.017	-0.013
Highest completed level of education		
Less than high school	-0.039 **	-0.030 *
High school	-0.035	-0.026
Non-university postsecondary	0.037	0.040
University degree	0.029	0.015

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

** significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.01$)

*** significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.001$)

† significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.10$)

Note: Estimates in the table are marginal effects from logit models.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Occupations held by legislators before they ran for office

For a subsample of 2016 legislators, occupations they held in 2011 can be examined using longitudinal data created by linking the 2016 Census and the 2011 NHS.¹³ Of the 2016 legislators in the study sample, 25.3% also responded to the 2011 survey. Of those who responded to the NHS, a further 17.4% were not employed at the time of the survey and had not worked since January 2010 (estimate not statistically significantly different between men and women). The estimates in this section are based on the subsample of legislators who were found in the NHS dataset and who were working at the time of the NHS, or had held a job since January 2010.

Nearly one-third of men (32.3%) and 17.9% of women who were legislators in 2016 were also legislators in 2011 (Table 4). Nearly one in five of them worked in a different level of government or sector in 2011 than in 2016. More than half (58.9%) of the women worked in three broad occupation groups, namely management occupations; business, finance and administration occupations; and occupations in education, law and social, community and government services. Less than half (44.1%) of men worked in these same three occupations groups, although a higher share of men (25.8%) than women (15.4%) worked in management occupations.

13. If a person was not employed during the reference week of 2011, the occupation reported on the NHS pertains to the last job held since January 2010, if any.

Table 4
Occupation groups in 2011 of legislators working in federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, local or regional public administration in 2016

	Men	Women
	percent	
Legislator ¹	32.3	17.9
Management occupations	25.8	15.4
Business, finance and administration occupations	8.4	21.9
Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services	9.9	21.6
Sales and service occupations	10.6	...
All other occupation groups	13.0	...
Sales and service occupations and all other occupation groups	...	23.2
... not applicable		

1. Includes those working as legislators in sectors other than federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, local or regional public administration.

Notes: The sample includes individuals employed as legislators in one of the three levels of public administration in 2016, who also responded to the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), and who were employed at the time of the NHS or at any time since January 2010. Occupation groups pertain to the job held during the reference week in 2011, or to the last job held since January 2010. The total sample size is 301.

Source: Statistics Canada, linked 2011 National Household Survey and 2016 Census of Population.

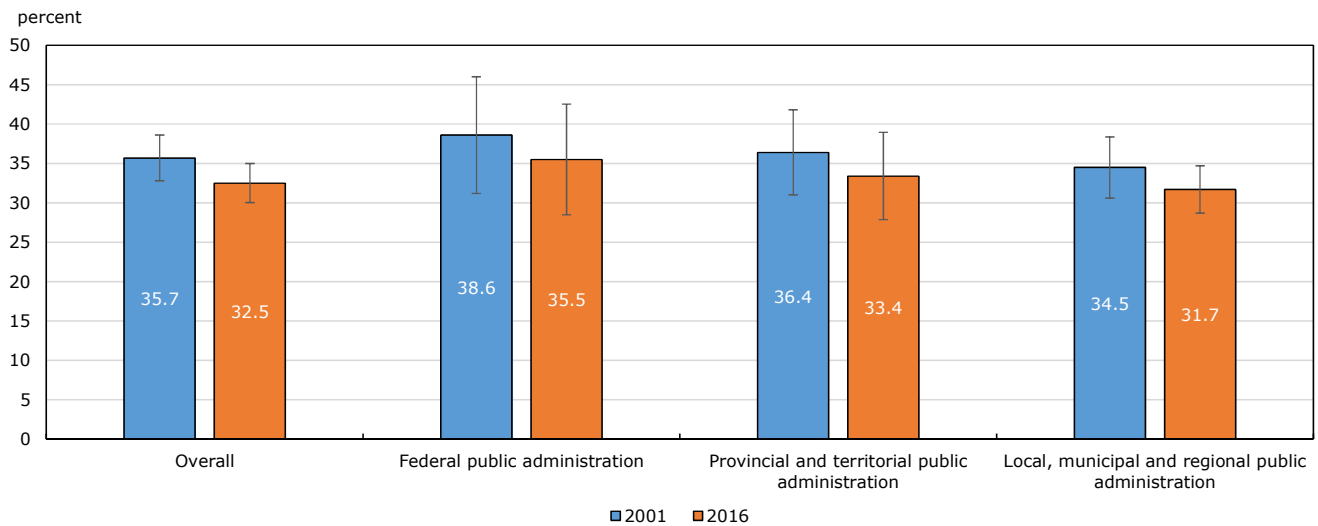
Have the characteristics of legislators changed since 2001?

In 2016, 32.5% of legislators were women, while in 2001, the proportion was 35.7% (Chart 4). A similar pattern was observed across the three levels of government. In all cases, however, the difference between the two years was not statistically significantly different from zero. While there is no compelling evidence of a decline in the share of women legislators over this period, there is certainly no evidence of an increase.

Compared with 2001, legislators in 2016 were older—the average age increased by 4.2 years for male legislators and by 5.0 years for female legislators (Table 5). The increase was driven by a higher share of legislators in the 65-or-older age group. The share of male legislators aged 65 or older rose from 16.9% in 2001 to 35.5% in 2016. The share of female legislators aged 65 or older rose from 6.9% in 2001 to 24.1% in 2016.

Changes in marital status were generally small and not statistically significant for legislators of both genders. While the share of male legislators with children aged 0 to 17 years in their census family has essentially not changed over this period, the share of female legislators with children dropped by 12.4 percentage points, from nearly one in three (32.4%) in 2001 to one in five in 2016. The share of female legislators with young children in their census family (ages 0 to 5 years) fell by about half, from 9.2% to 4.4%.

Chart 4
Share of women among legislators, overall and by level of government, 2001 and 2016



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2001 and 2016.

There has been essentially no change in the overall share of legislators who were immigrants between 2001 and 2016. A higher share of male legislators reported an Indigenous identity in 2016 than in 2001.¹⁴

Legislators in 2016 were more educated than those in 2001. The share of legislators without a high school diploma declined by 8.4 percentage points among men, from 13.5%. The share with a university degree also declined (although this change was not statistically significant) by 4.1 percentage points, from 48.2%. This was balanced by an increase in the share with a high school diploma and a non-university postsecondary credential. The share of female legislators without a postsecondary credential declined over this period. Notably, the share with a university degree increased by 7.6 percentage points, from 39.5% to 47.0%. While a smaller share of female than male legislators were university graduates in 2001, the opposite was true in 2016.

14. The share of the population as a whole that reported an Indigenous identity has increased over the 2000s. While demographic trends favoured an increase in the Indigenous population, there has also been a net increase in the number of people reporting Indigenous identity on surveys or the census over time, who may not have done so in earlier years (O'Donnell and LaPointe 2019).

Table 5
Characteristics of male and female legislators working in federal, provincial, territorial, local, municipal or regional public administration in 2001 and those of their counterparts in 2016, and changes in characteristics of legislators between 2001 and 2016

	Men			Women		
	2001	2016	Change (2016 minus 2001) mean	2001	2016	Change (2016 minus 2001)
Age	53.7	57.9	4.2 ***	49.5	54.5	5.0 ***
	percent		percentage points	percent		percentage points
Age group (years)						
18 to 34	7.7	5.5	-2.2	8.5	5.8	-2.7
35 to 49	22.8	17.9	-5.0 *	37.2	28.1	-9.1 *
50 to 64	52.6	41.1	-11.5 ***	47.5	42.0	-5.5
65 and older	16.9	35.5	18.6 ***	6.9	24.1	17.2 ***
Marital status						
Married	73.5	74.3	0.8	63.1	60.0	-3.1
Common-law	9.7	12.3	2.6	11.5	13.5	2.0
Separated or divorced	6.8	4.6	-2.2	11.1	12.8	1.8
Widow ed	1.3	2.0	0.7	6.0	6.1	0.1
Single, never married	8.7	6.8	-1.9	8.4	7.7	-0.7
Presence of children in census family						
Age 0 to 17	23.6	22.0	-1.6	32.4	20.0	-12.4 ***
Age 0 to 5	6.2	6.0	-0.2	9.2	4.4	-4.8 *
Immigrant	9.0	8.2	-0.8	10.1	8.7	-1.4
Indigenous identity	4.1	7.3	3.2 **	4.8	5.8	1.0
Highest completed level of education						
Less than high school	13.5	5.1	-8.4 ***	5.2	1.9	-3.3 *
High school	14.7	19.3	4.6 *	23.7	15.8	-7.9 *
Non-university postsecondary	23.6	31.5	7.9 **	31.6	35.2	3.6
University degree	48.2	44.2	-4.1	39.5	47.0	7.6 †

* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)

** significantly different from reference category (p < 0.01)

*** significantly different from reference category (p < 0.001)

† significantly different from reference category (p < 0.1)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100.0% because of rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2001 and 2016.

Conclusion

Who are Canada's legislators? This study presents a profile of legislators who worked in the federal, provincial or territorial, or municipal public administration in 2016. Legislators were, on average, older than eligible voters and more likely to be married. Immigrants made up a smaller share of legislators than of eligible voters, while individuals reporting an Indigenous identity made up a higher share. Legislators were more educated than eligible voters, more likely to hold a university degree and less likely to have a high school education or less. While some fields of study were more common among legislators than eligible voters—particularly fields related to management, business, social sciences and law—overall, a wide variety of fields of study were represented among 2016 legislators. This suggests that field of study does not preclude individuals from successfully running for public office.

In 2016, women made up just under one-third (32.5%) of all legislators, with roughly similar estimates at all three levels of government. There were some notable differences in characteristics between male and female legislators. Male legislators were, on average, older than female legislators, more likely to be married and less likely to be separated or divorced. While there was no observed gender gap in the share of legislators with children younger than 18 years in their census family, adjusting for age differences between male and female legislators revealed that women were 11.1 percentage points less likely to have children younger than 18 years in their census family than similarly aged men. Adjusting for age had little impact on the magnitude of observed differences in marital status.

Female legislators were more educated than their male counterparts; age differences accounted for some of the gender gap in education. Among those with a postsecondary credential, the distribution of fields of study was more similar between male and female legislators than between eligible male and female voters.

Based on a subsample of legislators for whom longitudinal data were available, and who were employed in 2011 (or 2010), just over one in four men worked in management occupations in 2011, a higher share than any other occupation group, while women were more evenly distributed across jobs in management occupations; business, finance and administration occupations; and occupations in education, law and social, community and government services. A higher share of men than women were already working as legislators in 2011.

The share of female legislators overall, and within each of the three levels of government examined, has not changed substantially between 2001 and 2016—the small declines observed were not statistically significant. There has also not been any notable changes in the proportion of legislators who were immigrants. Both male and female legislators in 2016 were older than those in 2001. A higher share of male legislators reported an Indigenous identity in 2016 than in 2001; however, it is not clear whether this is caused by a change in reporting observed over time, or a real increase. More male and female legislators had at least a high school education in 2016 than in 2001, and a higher share of women, but not men, had a university degree.

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