

# Women in Federal Elections

In this activity, students will step into the shoes of an historian to determine whether Canadian women have made gains over time in terms of numbers elected at the federal level.

**Length** 📄 30 minutes - 1 hour and 30 minutes (Small Problem)

**Prerequisites** Tables, Proportions, Graphs, Excel

**Concepts** Graphs, Excel

**Theme** Gender

**Disciplines** Psychology, Education



## Scenario

You cannot help but overhear two of your neighbours having a heated conversation while raking your leaves. You walk over to see what the disagreement is about.

- Lise:* [Pointing to Sara.] She refuses to be reasonable.
- Sara:* On the contrary. [Pointing back at Lise.] She is not well-informed.
- You:* Now you have me interested. What could two good friends be so at odds about?
- Lise:* What else – politics!
- You:* I see. Well, what about politics?
- Sara:* Lise thinks that women have made great gains in terms of getting elected at the federal level. I disagree.
- Lise:* And Sara says we haven't made any progress. That women are about as well-represented among elected officials as when they first got the right to run in elections in the first place! Now, when was that, anyway?
- You:* Hmmm. And what brought all this about?
- Lise:* Well, I saw that video from a few years back where Justin Trudeau said he had a gender-balanced cabinet "because it's 2015" – well, it was 2015 at the time.<sup>1</sup> The video was replayed on the news last night. It just got me thinking that we've come a long way.
- Sara:* And I told Lise that just because Trudeau has a nice message does not mean that women are nearly represented enough among elected officials. Wait a minute! [Sara turns to you.] You're an historian. Can't you solve this for us?
- You:* Let me see what I can do.

You head back home and decide to do a bit of research in order to better respond to your neighbour's request. You remember coming across some historical data about women running in Canadian elections some time ago. Now, if only you could find it again...



## What you need to produce

- One graph presenting trends in terms of women elected in Canadian federal elections over time
- A brief written interpretation of the table (~75 words)

## Evaluation grid

Understanding & Interpretation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graph clearly presents trends in terms of women elected in federal elections in Canada over time (2 points)</li> <li>• Patterns in the graph are explained clearly, and key data points and highlights are well-chosen and accurately interpreted (2 points)</li> </ul>	/4
Writing & Style	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing is formal in tone, and explains contents of the graph in clear language</li> </ul>	/2
Requirements	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graph is well-constructed (logical organization and choice of graph, clear labels, accurate data points) (2 points)</li> <li>• Interpretive text meets required length (~75 words; 2 points)</li> </ul>	/4
<b>Total</b>	<b>/10</b>



## Breakdown of the problem

After doing a bit of searching you find some relevant information to help you craft your response to your neighbours. You are reminded that although there was variation at the provincial level, in 1919 an amendment to Canadian electoral law made it possible for women to run in federal elections, and the first women candidates at the federal level ran in 1921.<sup>2</sup> This makes you all the more curious to answer your neighbour's question: **have women made gains over time in terms of being elected at the federal level in Canada?**

In your searching you also came across a useful data set for Canadian federal elections (see the corresponding Excel file). You decide you will work with the data set to **build one graph using Microsoft Excel** to respond to your neighbour's question. And you realize you should also be ready to interpret your graph for your neighbours, so you decide to **draft a few sentences (~75 words) that you can use to interpret the information in the graph and to highlight patterns (as well as any other data points from the elections data) that you consider to be significant.**

## References

1. Global News. (2015, November 4). *Justin Trudeau on why his cabinet is gender balanced* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8OOIU7xQrk>
2. Elections Canada. (2019, January 12). *A History of the Vote in Canada: Chapter 2: From a Privilege to a Right, 1867-1919*. Retrieved from <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=his&document=chap2&lang=e>

