

The Political Impact of Increased Diversity: What the Census Shows with Respect to Indigenous peoples - DRAFT

The 2021 census reveals a significant increase in immigrants and visible and religious minorities while the percentage of Indigenous peoples in the population has increased more slowly. This demographic shift will likely continue to play out at the national and riding level, with Indigenous voters losing relative importance in comparison to new Canadians and visible minorities. This article complements [my earlier analysis of visible and religious minorities](#) by examining riding-level data for Indigenous peoples, focussing on key demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

Figure 1 illustrates the limited number of ridings where Indigenous peoples comprise a significant proportion of the population, resulting in only 18 ridings out of 338 being more likely to elect Indigenous MPs. This pattern has remained consistent since 2011. Presently, only 11 Indigenous Members of Parliament hold office, representing less than their proportion of the population. As a result, Indigenous voters have relatively less influence in approximately two-thirds of ridings.

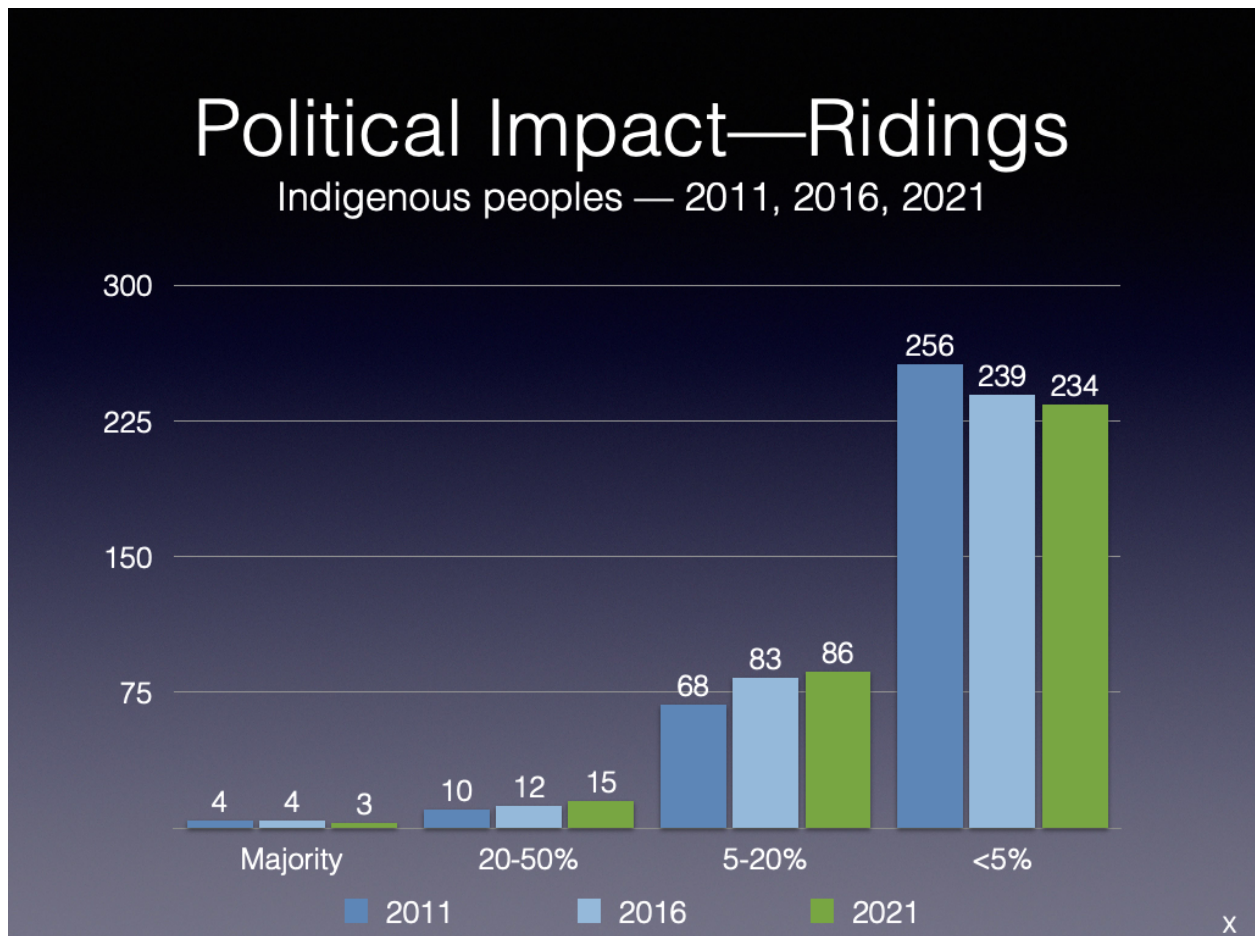


Figure 2 presents a breakdown of the percentage of Indigenous peoples by province. As expected, ridings with a majority of Indigenous peoples are concentrated in the North, while those with fewer but significant numbers of Indigenous peoples are scattered primarily throughout rural parts of the country. Manitoba and Saskatchewan have a higher number of ridings with significant Indigenous populations relative to their overall population. In total, 15 ridings have between 20 and 50 percent Indigenous peoples, an increase of six since 2016. These ridings are more likely to field Indigenous candidates from all parties.

Figure 2: Indigenous peoples ridings by province

	Canada	ON	QC	BC	AB	MB	SK	Atlantic
Majority	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
20-50%	15	3	1	1	1	2	3	2
5-20%	86	10	6	18	20	11	10	11
<5%	234	108	71	23	13	0	0	19
Total	338	121	78	42	34	14	14	32

Figure 3 provides the breakdown by Indigenous group, with only First Nations (2 ridings, Churchill-Keewatinook Aski and Desnethé-Missinippi-Churchill River) and Inuit (one riding, Nunavut) forming a majority of the population. Only First Nations form more than 20 percent in another five ridings.

Figure 3: Percentage of Indigenous peoples in ridings, National and Provinces

Riding	First Nations	Métis	Inuk (Inuit)	Multiple
Majority	2	0	1	0
20 to 50 Percent	5	0	0	0
5 to 20 percent	47	33	3	0
< 5 percent	292	309	334	338
Total	0	0	0	0

Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics vary by percentage of Indigenous peoples as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Demographic Summary

	Population	Growth	Density	Age	Religious	VisMin	OL Minority
Majority	63,201	-1.1%	0.1	28.5	4.8%	3.2%	2.7%
20-50%	74,787	0.9%	1.7	41.1	3.4%	6.2%	14.5%
5-20%	104,152	4.4%	422.5	43.3	5.3%	13.7%	11.4%
<5%	114,203	5.5%	2,003.4	42.3	13.1%	1.3%	5.3%

Ridings with a majority of Indigenous peoples tend to have smaller populations, lower growth rates, lower population densities, and younger populations. These ridings also tend to have a lower percentage of religious and visible minorities compared to ridings with less than 20 percent Indigenous peoples, highlighting the differences between rural and urban Canada. Growth rates are negative in Indigenous-majority ridings, while growth is marginal in ridings with between 20 and 50 percent Indigenous populations. Conversely, ridings with fewer Indigenous peoples tend to have a higher percentage of religious minorities, while official language (OL) minorities are most prominent in ridings with between five and fifty percent Indigenous peoples.

Figure 5 showcases educational attainment, including the prevalence of trades and university degrees, as well as household characteristics such as the percentage of married or common-law couples, household size, and whether residents live in single-detached housing or multigenerational households. It also examines the percentage of renters in each riding.

Figure 5: Key Social Indicators

		Majority	20-50%	5-20%	<5%
Trades	Male	13.0%	18.0%	16.7%	12.5%
	Female	3.5%	6.0%	5.6%	6.7%
University Degree	Male	9.2%	13.1%	19.6%	32.0%
	Female	16.5%	22.2%	27.6%	38.0%
Married/CL		49.1%	57.4%	58.3%	56.5%
Housing	Size	3.4	2.5	2.4	2.5
	Multigeneration	1.4%	0.5%	0.5%	0.7%
	Detached	66.4%	73.0%	66.1%	48.9%
	Renters	41.6%	26.5%	27.4%	33.9%

Trades are more prevalent in ridings with between five and fifty percent Indigenous men, while in ridings with fewer than five percent Indigenous women, trades are also more prominent. Conversely, the prevalence of university degrees tends to be inversely proportional to the

percentage of Indigenous men and women, with women generally having higher levels of university attainment.

The variation in marriage or common-law relationships between ridings is generally small. However, the largest household sizes and number of multigenerational families tend to be in ridings with a majority of Indigenous peoples. Single-detached homes are more prevalent in ridings with 20 to 50 percent Indigenous populations, while renters are more common in Indigenous-majority ridings.

Figure 6 presents median total after-tax income, the percentage of government transfers and income, and participation and unemployment rates. In general, majority Indigenous ridings tend to have weaker economic outcomes. Ridings with fewer Indigenous peoples have broadly comparable outcomes, with the exception being a higher prevalence of low income in ridings with between 20 and 50 percent Indigenous populations. Economic outcomes for women are generally worse, except with respect to unemployment rates in ridings with less than five percent Indigenous peoples.

Figure 6: Key Economic Indicators

		Majority	20-50%	5-20%	<5%
Median Total Income After Tax	Male	\$30,200	\$43,169	\$42,825	\$40,853
	Female	\$34,200	\$35,769	\$33,209	\$34,103
Government Transfer Prevalence	Male	20.7%	15.6%	15.4%	14.6%
	Female	31.3%	25.0%	25.2%	23.8%
LIM-AT Prevalence	Male	22.0%	13.2%	11.1%	10.4%
	Female	23.0%	14.3%	12.4%	11.6%
Participation	Male	56.2%	66.0%	66.4%	67.8%
	Female	51.9%	59.7%	58.6%	60.0%
Unemployment	Male	17.0%	10.7%	10.0%	10.0%
	Female	13.3%	8.6%	9.5%	11.0%

Regarding the political aspect and voter targeting, Figure 7 shows the limited number of ridings where an Indigenous group forms more than 10 percent of the population, and the larger number where an Indigenous group forms more than five percent of the population. This demonstrates the relatively limited extent to which political parties feel the need to address specific Indigenous concerns. First Nations have the greatest political weight in all provinces except for Métis in Manitoba, further emphasizing the more limited attention given to specific Indigenous concerns by political parties.

Figure 7: Indigenous peoples groups more than 10 and 5 percent in ridings

	Canada	ON	QC	BC	AB	MB	SK	Atlantic	North
	10 percent or more								
First Nations	23	5	2	2	2	4	5	1	2
Métis	5	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	0
Inuit	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
	5 percent or more								
First Nations	54	10	2	11	8	8	8	5	2
Métis	33	5	0	2	6	12	5	2	1
Inuit	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2

Figure 8 breaks down the 2021 election results, highlighting how the Liberals are concentrated in urban ridings with small numbers of Indigenous peoples, while the Conservatives and NDP have more elected MPs from rural ridings with higher numbers of Indigenous peoples. Compared to the 2015 election, the major change reflected in the overall election results was the loss of Liberal seats to the Conservatives and the NDP.

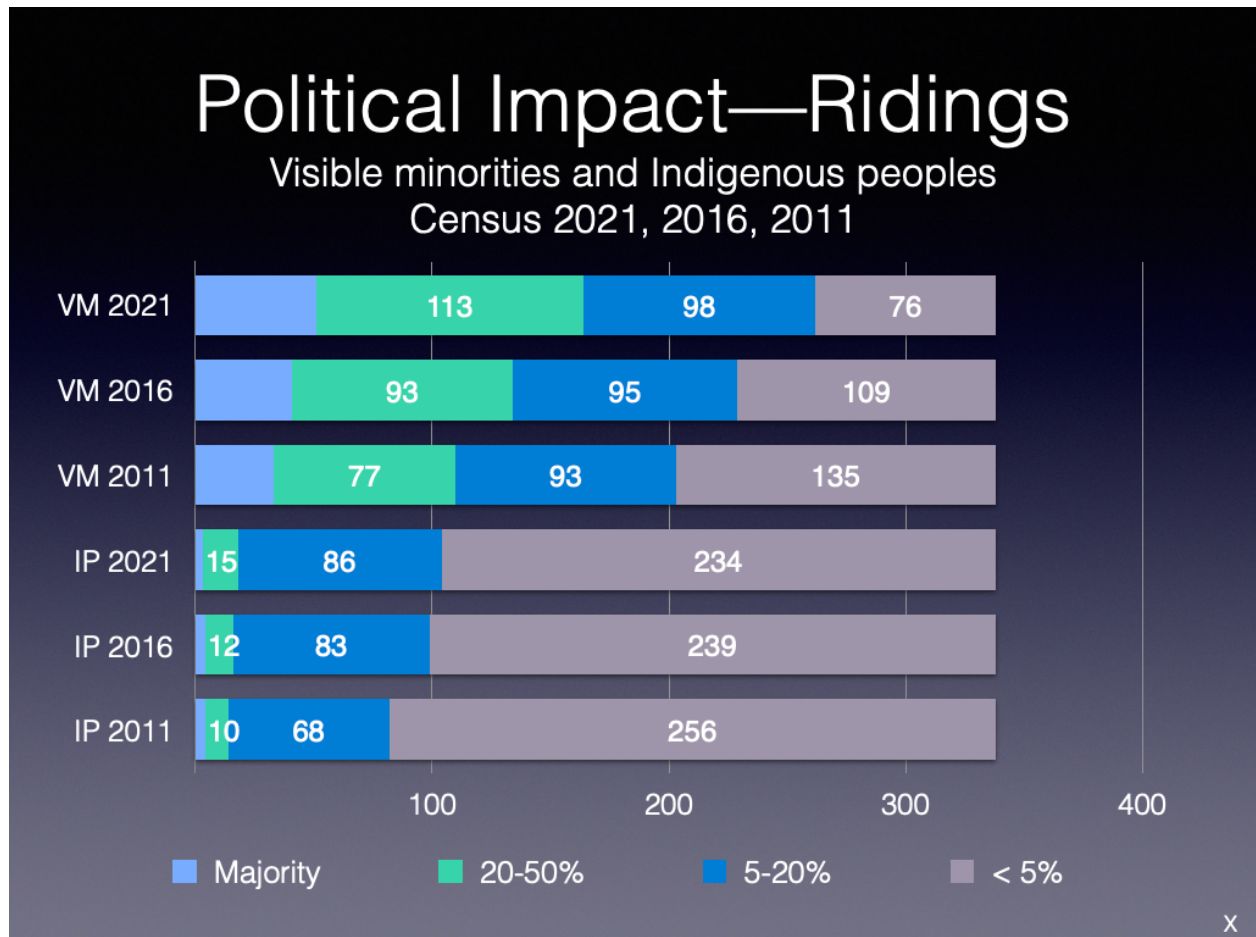
Figure 8: 2021 Party Results

	Liberal	CPC	NDP	Bloc	Green
Majority	0.0%	0.8%	8.0%	0.0%	0.0%
20-50%	2.5%	5.9%	0.0%	3.1%	50.0%
5-20%	11.9%	43.7%	40.0%	12.5%	0.0%
<5%	85.6%	49.6%	52.0%	84.4%	50.0%

Concluding observations

Indigenous communities are predominantly located in rural and Northern Canada, and therefore an Indigenous lens is essentially a rural lens. Conversely, a visible minority lens is more suited to an urban and suburban context. While Indigenous voters have historically been important, their political weight is becoming less significant compared to visible minority voters. Over the past decade, the percentage of visible minorities has grown by close to 40 percent, now comprising close to 22 percent of eligible voters, whereas the Indigenous population has only increased by 16 percent since 2011 and represents only five percent of the population.

Figure 9 shows the relatively static nature of Indigenous political weight in terms of the number of ridings where they form a significant portion of the population, in contrast to the strong growth of visible minorities at the riding level. The number of ridings in which visible minorities form a majority of the population has increased from one in ten (33) in 2011 to close to one in six (51) in 2021, while the number of ridings in which Indigenous peoples form a majority has actually declined between 2016 and 2021 to only three ridings. However, the number of ridings with between five and fifty percent Indigenous populations increased to six ridings.



While concerns over riding representation have mainly focused on the number of Quebec ridings in relation to its declining share of the population, reflecting lower immigration, this analysis suggests that the disparity in population growth rates between visible minorities and

Indigenous peoples may become an issue given the government's ongoing increase in immigration of permanent and temporary residents.

Methodology:

All data is from the Census profile given that it provides riding-level data. Indicators were chosen based on their pertinence. Electoral results data is from Elections Canada.

Andrew Griffith is the author of "*Because it's 2015...*" *Implementing Diversity and Inclusion*, *Multiculturalism in Canada: Evidence and Anecdote* and *Policy Arrogance or Innocent Bias: Resetting Citizenship and Multiculturalism* and is a regular media commentator and blogger ([Multiculturalism Meanderings](#)). He is the former Director General for Citizenship and Multiculturalism and has worked for a variety of government departments in Canada and abroad and is a fellow of the Canadian Global Affairs Institute and Environics Institute.