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## Stockton Hughes Center Research: Demographic Profile of NJ Legislature Remains Basically Unchanged – and Unrepresentative of Constituents

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The November 2015 election for the New Jersey State Legislature did little to change the demographics of the state Assembly and Senate. The 216<sup>th</sup> New Jersey State Legislature is older, less ethnically diverse, more predominantly male, and better educated than the average New Jersey citizen, according to research published today by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

The report, “New Jersey State Legislature: A Demographic Profile, 2016 Update,” builds upon findings of 2015 Hughes Center research to reveal that in spite of some turnover in the NJ State Assembly, New Jersey’s Legislature demographically still fails to resemble the constituents it represents. The research was conducted by John Froomjian and Kevin Coopersmith of the William J. Hughes Center.

One change noted between the 215<sup>th</sup> and current state legislatures is an increase in social media presence. Ninety percent of all legislators have a Facebook page, up seven percentage points from last year’s report. Seventy-four percent of New Jersey legislators are active on Twitter as well, a 14-percentage-point increase from last year.

“With all 120 seats up for election, only 12 seats, or 10 percent of both houses, were filled by someone new. And in terms of demographics, the new people looked remarkably similar to the legislators they replaced,” explained Mr. Froomjian, senior research associate.

The researchers compiled a database of demographic characteristics of all 120 members of the state Senate and General Assembly, and compared those characteristics with the general population. The database is an update of the “Hughes Center New Jersey State Legislature Database,” a statistical profile first constructed to document demographic trends within the 215<sup>th</sup> New Jersey State Legislature last year.

The New Jersey State Legislature experienced year-to-year turnover of 12 Assembly seats.

Statistically speaking, the Legislature has different characteristics than the general population it represents.

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- ◆ The New Jersey State Legislature is on average 18 years older than the average New Jersey citizen (average legislator age is 57 compared to 39 statewide);
- ◆ The State Legislature is 70 percent male, compared to 49 percent in the general population, a difference of 21 percentage points;
- ◆ The Legislature is 83 percent white, while 69 percent of the state's general population is white, a 14-percentage-point difference;
- ◆ 81 percent of New Jersey legislators have their bachelor degree or higher, more than double the 36 percent of the population who are college graduates;
- ◆ In terms of party affiliation, 63 percent of New Jersey legislators are Democrats, while only 33 percent of New Jersey's population is a member of the Democratic Party.

In the November 2015 elections, Democrats picked up four Assembly seats previously held by Republicans, leading to the Assembly now being split 65/35 Democrats to Republicans, compared to a 60/40 Democrat/Republican split a year ago.

Other key findings include the following:

- ◆ 63 percent of the Legislature attained a graduate/professional degree or higher, with the juris doctorate degree in the most common (33 percent) across both houses;
- ◆ 57 percent of college-graduate legislators completed their bachelor degree out of state;
- ◆ 59 percent of college-graduate legislators attended private academic institutions for the bachelor degree;
- ◆ When it comes to occupation, attorney (27 percent) is the most represented in the Legislature. Full-time legislator (19 percent), executive/management positions (15 percent) and consultant (8 percent) were among the next most common;
- ◆ 13 percent of New Jersey legislators have served in the military, about double the percentage of veterans in the general population;
- ◆ 33 percent of the legislators have served for five or fewer years; 7.5 percent have served for 26 or more years.

The 2016 report can be downloaded at [www.stockton.edu/hughescenter](http://www.stockton.edu/hughescenter). It contains supplemental graphs and charts.

## **Methodology**

The Hughes Center for Public Policy created a database of demographic and biographical variables for all 120 members of the 216<sup>th</sup> NJ State Legislature. The database includes new members as of February 22, 2016. The data were obtained through research of the state Legislature's website ([www.njleg.state.nj.us/](http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/)), from individual legislator's Web pages, from

Fitzgerald's Legislative Manual (Skinder-Strauss Associates, Newark, NJ) and from interviews with legislative staff.

### **About the Hughes Center**

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy ([Stockton.edu/hughescenter](http://Stockton.edu/hughescenter)) at Stockton University serves as a catalyst for research, analysis and innovative policy solutions on the economic, social and cultural issues facing New Jersey, and promotes the civic life of New Jersey through engagement, education and research. The Center is named for William J. Hughes, whose distinguished career includes service in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ambassador to Panama and as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stockton. The Hughes Center can be found at [facebook.com/StocktonHughesCenter](https://facebook.com/StocktonHughesCenter) and can be followed on [Twitter@hughescenter](https://twitter.com/hughescenter).