

**The Chrétien Effect:  
Assessing the Personal Impact of a Canadian Party Leader**

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## Introduction

Micropolitics – the patterns of voting evident at the precinct level – are often affected by the presence of local residents running for office. This is called the friends-and-neighbours effect.<sup>1</sup> It can be seen in many local races, such as for sheriff, mayor, or prosecutor. In a primary election especially, when there are many candidates, one sees a pattern of a candidate's strongest precincts being those adjacent to his or her home. In some races, one can detect a friends-and-neighbours pattern benefiting several candidates in the same race. This is an expected consequence when voters have to evaluate many candidates (whose partisanship and positions on key issues are often indistinguishable) for the same office; many choose one over the other simply because the candidate lives nearby or was perhaps a local or district-level officeholder in that jurisdiction. The friends-and-neighbours voting pattern is more elusive in general election contests. With partisanship a more important determinant of vote choice in general elections, voters in a particular community or neighbourhood feel less need to vote for a candidate because he or she is “one of them.”

In the 2000 Canadian general election, the Liberal Party captured 36 of 75 ridings in Quebec. While this was a far cry from the 74 ridings Liberals won in the 1980 general election, it marked an improvement for the party over the 1993 and 1997 elections. Those elections were the first under Canada's latest party system,<sup>2</sup> which included the dominance of the Bloc Québécois in Quebec. It also represented an improvement for the Liberal Party over the 1984 and 1988 elections, before the arrival of the BQ, in which the Progressive Conservative Party led by Brian Mulroney dominated Quebec.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Clark Archer and Fred M. Shelley, with cartography by Ellen R. White. *American Electoral Mosaics*. Washington: American Association of Geographers, 1986. (Resources Publications in Geography series)

<sup>2</sup> Carty, et al, *passim*.

Those elections had reduced the Liberal Party in Quebec to a geographically small segment in Montreal and the Outaouais. In 1988, the Liberal Party won only 12 seats in Quebec, two in the Outaouais, nine on Montreal Island, and the riding of Shefford in the Eastern Townships (L'Estrie). In 1993, with Chrétien having replaced John Turner as Liberal leader, the party improved to 19 Quebec seats. Although losing Shefford and the downtown Montreal riding of Laurier—Ste-Marie to the Bloc Québécois, the party gained one additional seat in the Outaouais; four more seats on Montreal Island; two seats in the off-island suburbs; the easternmost riding in Quebec, Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine; and Chrétien's own riding, St-Maurice. Rural Quebec, which had been dominated by the Liberals in the 1970s and 1980 under Trudeau and by the Progressive Conservatives in 1984 and 1988 under Mulroney, was now dominated by the Bloc Québécois, which won 54 of the province's 75 seats.

In 1997, the Liberals won 26 Quebec seats: 14 of Montreal Island's 18 seats; four seats in the off-Island suburbs; three seats in the Outaouais; Beauce (captured by an independent in 1993); the vast Abitibi riding extending into the Far North of Quebec; Brome-Missisquoi in L'Estrie; Bellechasse—Étchemins—Montmagny—L'Islet on the South Shore east of Quebec City; and Chrétien held on in a close race for St-Maurice.

Similarly, the Progressive Conservatives were ignominious in the elections of the 1990s. In the 1993 election, under new leader Kim Campbell, they were reduced to two seats nationally, one of which was Jean Charest's seat in Sherbrooke, Que. Charest soon replaced Campbell as Tory leader. In the 1997 election, the party rebounded (a little) to 20 seats nationally, including five in Quebec. Charest was able to buoy his neighbors in three adjacent ridings to victory: Diane St-Jacques in Shefford, David Price in Compton—Stanstead, and André Bachand in Richmond—Arthabaska. André Harvey also won in

Chicoutimi riding. However, all were acutely aware of the “friends and neighbours” pattern in evidence in Quebec in 1997; after Charest quit federal politics in 1998 to go into provincial politics (his seat was decisively captured by the Bloc Québécois), the remaining Quebec Conservatives knew that former Prime Minister Joe Clark from Alberta, the new Tory leader, would not be as effective for them. (Indeed, the last time Clark was Tory leader, in 1980, the party had won a single seat in Quebec.) St-Jacques, Price, and Harvey defected to the Liberals before the 2000 election and all were re-elected. Bachand made his way through a tough fight to become the only Progressive Conservative MP from Quebec. (Truly, the only one between Brandon, Man. and St. Stephen, N.B.)

The Liberals rose to 36 seats in Quebec in 2000, nearly parity with the Bloc Québécois, reduced to 38. In addition to holding their 14 seats in Montreal and three Outaouais seats, they held Abitibi, Beauce, Bellechasse—Etchemins—Montmagny—L’Islet, and Brome—Missisquoi, recaptured Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, and Chrétien won his own St-Maurice riding with no repeat of the challenge that threatened to unseat him in 1997. They captured six seats in the off-island suburbs, including Beauharnois—Salaberry. They won three seats won in 1997 by Tories after those incumbents defected: Chicoutimi, Compton—Stanstead, and Shefford. To show that their upsurge owed not entirely to Tory defections, they also won Frontenac—Mégantic, defeating Bloc MP Jean-Guy Chrétien, (known to some as the other Jean Chrétien.) Perhaps most significantly, they won three Quebec City area seats, Louis-Hébert, Portneuf, and Quebec East.

In the 2004 election, the Liberals saw their Quebec holdings scaled back to levels reminiscent of the 1980s Tory victories under Mulroney. They retained their 14 Montreal ridings, but won only two ridings in the off-island suburbs, forfeiting even the riding of

Vaudreuil—Soulanges where the Liberal candidate had won a majority in 2000. The Liberals kept their three seats in the Outaouais (although they lost Abitibi), but in the rest of Quebec, Liberals held only Brome—Missisquoi (where the incumbent cabinet minister actually lost the election day voting<sup>3</sup>) and Beauce. The only riding in Quebec in which the Liberals increased their share of the vote in 2004 was Richmond—Arthabaska – the only Quebec riding to elect a Tory in 2000. This stands in contrast to most of the rest of the country. The Liberals increased their share of the vote in most ridings in Atlantic Canada and the West in 2004. Some of the decline in Quebec is attributable to the replacement of Chrétien with Paul Martin as Liberal leader. Indeed, the two Quebec ridings which saw the greatest Liberal decline from 2000 to 2004 were Chrétien’s former riding of St-Maurice—Champlain and the nearby riding of Berthier—Maskinonge.

The Liberal decline in Ontario in 2004 – although not as severe as in neighbouring Quebec – can be attributed to the rise of the Conservatives following the merger of the Progressive Conservative Party and the Canadian Alliance. The Tories captured 24 of 106 Ontario seats in 2004, a marked increase from the four seats they held at the election call.<sup>4</sup> No such rise occurred in Quebec in 2004; although the party posted gains in 16 ridings relative to the combined share of the two predecessor parties in 2000, the party only polled more than 20 percent in four ridings and was only competitive (within 10 percentage points of the winner) in one riding, the Quebec City riding Louis-St-Laurent.

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<sup>3</sup> Tony L. Hill, “Partisan Differences Between Advance Polling and Election-Day Voting in National Elections in Canada,” to be presented at the annual meeting of the New England Political Science Association, April 29-30, 2005, Portland, Me.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the ridings held by Cheryl Gallant and Scott Reid, elected in 2000 as Alliance MPs, and Gary Schellenberger, elected in 2003 as a Progressive Conservative, the party could claim John Bryden, who defected from the Liberals before the election.

## **The Chrétien Effect and the Charest Effect: Friends and Neighbours Voting Writ Large**

The Charest Effect in 1997 and the Chrétien Effect from 1993 to 2000 (but most markedly in 2000) can be conceptualized as an extension of the friends-and-neighbours voting pattern. The effects that Charest and Chrétien had of buoying their fellow partisans not merely in their local communities but in their regions of Quebec – a macro friends and neighbors vote – is thus made all the more fascinating. This effect would not be potent, and might barely be detectable, in the case of a party leader whose home base is a region in which his or her party is already strong. There is no point looking for a “Harper Effect” or a “Manning Effect” in Calgary because that city has been a fortress for the parties of those two leaders. The same would be the case for a “Martin Effect” in Montreal, where, as noted, the Liberal Party has had no trouble winning 14 of 18 seats. (It might be more noteworthy, however, that Liberal sway in the suburbs of Montreal has declined from Chrétien to Martin.)

Two tables illustrate the Chrétien Effect and the Charest Effect.

### **Data analysis**

The municipality, rather than the election poll (precinct) or riding, is used as the unit of analysis. This is because another work by the author needed such a database to analyze across provincial and national elections. Thus, neither polling place nor riding boundaries were suitable because they are not the same for national and provincial elections and they are subject to periodic change. Municipal boundaries are reasonably stable, notwithstanding the 1999-2006 rounds of municipal amalgamations and subsequent demergers.<sup>5</sup> A sample of

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<sup>5</sup> The Parti Québécois government implemented a series of municipal mergers in 1999. For example, all of the municipalities on Montreal Island were amalgamated into a single city of Montreal. Quebec City was amalgamated with its suburbs. The cities of the Saguenay region (including Chicoutimi, Jonquière and La

municipalities is used rather than a provincewide analysis. This is because of an excess of data. There were 26,850 electoral precincts in the 1998 provincial election. By U.S. standards, this is an unfathomable number. For example, Verdun, Que., with a population of 59,714, has 208 precincts. By contrast, Burnsville, Minn., pop. 60,434, has 17 precincts.<sup>6</sup> The number of polling divisions used in national elections is not substantially smaller. Verdun had 135 polling units in the 2000 election.

The following methodology was used to ensure randomness in the process of selecting municipalities. For each of these 15 regions, 3-4 places were chosen in each of four population groups (under 1000, 1000-5000, 5001-25000, over 25,000): Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Bas-St-Laurent, Chaudière-Appalaches, Coeur du Québec, Gaspésie, L'Estrie, Lower North Shore, Montérégie, Montreal Island, Montreal-North Shore Suburbs, Montreal-South Shore Suburbs, Outaouais, Quebec City Area, Nord du Québec, Saguenay. These regions were chosen largely for convenience but correspond somewhat (if not precisely) to similar regions created by the Quebec government for purposes of tourism and other administration and in general popular use. A map of these regions is included as an appendix. Table 10 (Population and Dwelling Counts, for Census Divisions, Census Subdivisions (Municipalities) and Designated Places (1)(2), 1991 and 1996 Censuses – 100% Data) of the Statistics Canada publication *A National Overview: Population and Dwelling Counts* was used. Each of the census divisions of Quebec (called County Regional Municipalities, or MRCs, in most of the province) was deemed to lie within one of the 15 regions. Since Quebec has 99 census divisions, this was an exercise in picking municipalities from an

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Baie) were united as Ville Saguenay. These mergers were unpopular with Quebecers and are cited as reasons for the Bloc Québécois's poor showing in the 2000 national election and the defeat of Landry's government in 2003. As a result, the Liberal government of Jean Charest allowed a series of demerger referenda in June 2004. A large number of merged entities put the question to voters, and a large share of them passed. These demergers will take effect in 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Minnesota Legislative Manual, 2003-04.

average of 6.6 census divisions per region. Ideally, there would have been three places chosen from each population group per region, but some regions do not have this number of places in the higher population groups, so some oversampling of the smaller population groups occurred in these regions. The result was a set of 201 municipalities of various size throughout Quebec. After this data set was created for a different exercise which also utilized census data, it was found that insufficient census data was available for one municipality, Baie-St-Paul, and so it was excluded from the analysis.

Table 1 illustrates the Chrétien Effect by isolating changes in Liberal share of the vote by region in Quebec. The table illustrates that Liberal support in Quebec dropped from 2000 to 2004 in all areas except L'Estrie, the Bloc fortress in the Saguenay region, and the relatively insignificant Nord du Quebec (which comprises about a third of a single riding in terms of population, although more than half of the province's land area). The only double-digit drop was in Chrétien's home region, the St. Lawrence Valley. The drop of 10.7 percentage points here was more than double the provincewide drop. This is consistent with the idea that Chrétien was personally bolstering the Liberal vote in that part of the province.

**TABLE 1. THE CHRÉTIEN EFFECT  
CHANGE IN LIBERAL VOTE SHARE IN QUEBEC, 2000-2004, BY REGION**

Region	LIB 00	LIB 04	DIFF	REL*
Abitibi-Temiscamingue	44.9%	33.5%	-7.6%	1.48
Chaudiere-Appalaches	51.5%	42.3%	-5.9%	1.16
Gaspesie	37.5%	27.9%	-6.7%	1.32
L'Estrie	35.0%	29.0%	3.0%	-0.58
Lower North Shore	27.5%	22.5%	-6.2%	1.21
Monteregie	43.9%	33.5%	-4.4%	0.86
Montreal Island	64.6%	55.0%	-6.9%	1.36
Nord du Quebec	37.0%	34.8%	1.9%	-0.38
North Shore Suburbs	40.8%	32.3%	-5.0%	0.98
Outaouais	50.3%	41.8%	-8.5%	1.66
Quebec City area	37.3%	27.0%	-6.5%	1.28
Saguenay	35.5%	31.4%	4.4%	-0.85
South Shore Suburbs	42.8%	33.4%	-6.3%	1.23
St. Lawrence Valley	41.6%	26.3%	-10.7%	2.09
Upper South Shore	38.9%	29.3%	-7.0%	1.37
TOTAL	42.9%	33.7%	-5.1%	

\* Change in this region relative to change in Quebec as a whole

Table 2 reveals a similar pattern for the Charest Effect, the change in support for the Progressive Conservative Party in Quebec from 1997 to 2000. The party suffered double-digit drops everywhere but the Lower North Shore (another minor region) where their decline was just a tiny bit under 10 percentage points. Although not as dramatic a proportion as the Chrétien Effect, the greatest Tory drop in that election cycle in Quebec was in Charest's home region of L'Estrie.

**TABLE 2. THE CHAREST EFFECT  
CHANGE IN PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE VOTE SHARE IN QUEBEC,  
1997-2000, BY REGION**

Region	CONS 97	CONS 00	DIFF	REL*
Abitibi-Temiscamingue	18.3%	2.1%	-16.2%	0.88
Chaudiere-Appalaches	20.3%	3.7%	-16.6%	0.91
Gaspésie	21.4%	3.1%	-18.3%	1.00
L'Estrie	45.5%	14.5%	-31.0%	1.69
Lower North Shore	14.2%	4.3%	-9.9%	0.54
Montérégie	26.7%	4.8%	-21.9%	1.19
Montreal Island	17.1%	6.4%	-10.7%	0.58
Nord du Québec	15.4%	3.6%	-11.8%	0.64
North Shore Suburbs	22.9%	5.2%	-17.7%	0.97
Outaouais	21.9%	7.4%	-14.5%	0.79
Quebec City area	24.2%	6.6%	-17.6%	0.96
Saguenay	28.8%	0.7%	-28.0%	1.53
South Shore Suburbs	19.7%	5.6%	-14.1%	0.77
St. Lawrence Valley	20.9%	3.0%	-17.9%	0.98
Upper South Shore	30.2%	3.8%	-26.4%	1.44
TOTAL	24.3%	5.9%	-18.3%	

\* Change in this region relative to change in Quebec as a whole

## Discussion

While the actual electoral significance of the Charest Effect and the Chrétien Effect might not have been to elect more than a handful of MPs, those small numbers can have tremendous political significance, insofar as the five rural Quebec seats the Liberal Party won in 1997 were enough to move the party from a minority government to a majority government. This does not even take into consideration the four seats in the off-island suburbs the Liberals won that year. Another example is the NDP capturing all four seats in greater Halifax in 1997. This macro friends-and-neighbours pattern, driven by the presence of NDP Leader Alexa McDonough in Halifax – kept the party above the Progressive Conservatives in House standings by one seat. By the same token, the NDP retaining three of those seats in 2000 kept the NDP from falling below official-party status. This was analogous to what happened to the NDP in 1993, when the leader was from the Yukon – which for practical political purposes, has no neighbours. The theory here suggests that had the leader in that instance been from a riding where the macro friends-and-neighbours effect could have taken place, the NDP might not have fallen three seats short of official party status in the House of Commons.

Another case of the macro friends-and-neighbours pattern making a difference was the 1972 election that saw the Tories under Robert Stanfield come within two seats of defeating the Liberals under Pierre Trudeau. Although they came up short, the Conservatives might not have come even that close without Stanfield sweeping his home province of Nova Scotia on their behalf; Nova Scotia was not as kind to Tories either before or after Stanfield's tenure as Tory leader.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hill, *Canadian Politics, Riding by Riding*, pp. xviii, 29-46.

A key point in this discussion is that where the leader is from, and his or her capacity to influence the election of other regional copartisans can be an important factor in the success or failure of a party at election time. In the Canadian political system, where it has been noted that Quebecers tend to vote only for parties with leaders from Quebec,<sup>8</sup> and with a strong and active regionalism in its electoral dynamic, the regional prominence of a leader might be given more prominence than it has been in the recent past. There was no discussion, for example, in the race to elect a new Liberal leader after Chrétien (or in the machinations within the Liberal Party to oust Chrétien that preceded his resignation) of the likelihood that the party would lose rural Quebec seats under Martin (although there was no rival to the Liberal leadership from rural Quebec). This is not true for all leadership contests and all parties. The two Ontario challengers to the leadership of the Conservative Party of Canada in 2004 (Belinda Stronach and Tony Clement) made much mention of the importance of their province and their purported greater ability to win seats in it than they perceived of the eventual winner of that contest, Stephen Harper.

This thesis should not be mistaken for alleging that choosing a particular leader from a certain region will automatically lead to the macro friends-and-neighbours effect. For example, although Joe Clark won his seat in Calgary Centre in 2000 without too much trouble (although some assert that the Liberals pulled back their campaign in order for Clark to win<sup>9</sup>), Clark's presence as Tory leader did not make much difference even in the other Calgary ridings. In 1997, with Charest as leader, the Tories did 1.39 times in the other six Calgary ridings (excluding Calgary Centre) what it did in Alberta as a whole, while in 2000, the Tories did only 1.3 times as much for the corresponding geography. The same is the case for Jack Layton and the NDP in Toronto in 2004. In 2000, the party polled 1.21 times

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<sup>8</sup> Hill, p. xx.

as well in Toronto as in Ontario as a whole, but in 2004, this ratio was only 1.04. That said, the party polled an average of 19.3 percent in Toronto in 2004 compared with 10.5 percent in 2000<sup>10</sup> and 18.5 percent provincewide in 2004 compared with 8.7 percent in 2000. The point here is that even though Layton led the NDP to greater heights in Ontario than McDonough had, there was no macro friends-and-neighbours pattern at work.

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<sup>9</sup> Hill, p. 363.

<sup>10</sup> Average of ridings.



**Appendix.** This paper operationalizes the regions of Quebec in a manner similar to, although slightly less numerous than, the 20 tourist regions. The Manicouagan and Duplessis regions are combined as Lower North Shore. Charlevoix is split between this region and the Quebec City Area. La Mauricie, Lanaudière, and Centre-du-Québec are combined as Coeur du Québec. Part of Montréal is called South Shore Suburbs. Part of Laurentides is included in North Shore Suburbs, as is Laval. The rest is included in Outaouais. No municipalities in Îles de la Madeleine are analyzed herein.

Source of map: Bonjourquebec.com (Quebec government tourism web site)

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