



Chambre de commerce
du Montréal métropolitain
Board of Trade
of Metropolitan Montreal

Position paper presented to the

**Steering Committee of the Estates General
on the Reform of Democratic Institutions**

As part of the consultations on the

Reform of Quebec Democratic Institutions

by the

Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: That any reform of democratic institutions take into consideration, as a fundamental democratic principle, the necessary equality of each Quebec voter, regardless of their region.

Recommendation 2: That any reform of Quebec democratic institutions, to be achieved objectively and without partisan interest, and respecting the highest democratic requirements, contributes to returning the Metropolitan Montreal area to the centre of debate and political choices in Quebec.

Recommendation 3: That the *Election Act* be revised to allow only a 5% deviation between the number of voters in a riding and the average number of voters for all ridings in Quebec, while strictly limiting exceptions to two, i.e., those that existed in the previous electoral map (Îles-de-la-Madeleine and Ungava).

Recommendation 4: That all Quebec citizens be represented within a simple democratic system and that the modernization of democratic institutions leverage on new technologies, in order to increase communication between elected officials and citizens and between government and citizens, without increasing but rather reducing the cost to taxpayers.

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal has more than 7 000 members. Its mission is to be the leading group representing the interests of the Greater Montreal business community. Its objectives are to maintain, at all times, relevance to its membership, credibility towards the media and influence towards government and decision-makers.

Preamble

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal would like to emphasize that it is participating in the consultations on the reform of democratic institutions, not as an expert on such institutions, but rather as a keen observer of how these institutions work and their impact on the economic development of the Greater Montreal, as well as Quebec as a whole. Its involvement is therefore focussed mainly on identifying certain principles for guiding actions related to this process, primarily in establishing Quebec's electoral map. This is why, in compliance with the directives established by the Steering Committee of the Estates General on the Reform of Democratic Institutions for the presentation of a position paper, the observations of the Board of Trade refer to the final point: "other suggestions or comments."

Introduction

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal wishes to underline the interest it has in the issues related to the reform of democratic institutions in Quebec. The Board feels there are important ties between how democratic institutions work, citizen participation and Quebec's economic health. In this context, the Board of Trade wishes to inform the Steering Committee of the Estates General on the Reform of Democratic Institutions of its opinions and recommendations for two very specific parameters:

- The objective that any reform of democratic institutions must achieve; and
- The principles that any change to democratic institutions must respect.

1. One objective: to restore the Metropolitan Montreal area's just political weight

The political and electoral systems currently in place impose certain realities that are detrimental, in many respects, to Quebec's most important urban area. The Board of Trade therefore believes that any eventual reform of Quebec democratic institutions should be focussed on one major objective: to restore the Montreal area's just political weight.

The Metropolitan Montreal area, and more specifically the city of Montreal, is undeniably important to Quebec's economic activity. The Montreal area is responsible for 50% of Quebec's gross domestic product, as well as 70% of Quebec's exports. Montreal is, in many aspects, Quebec's international showcase, whether by reason of its economic and tourist activities, or as the third most popular North American destination for international conferences.

However, we find it absolutely deplorable that Metropolitan Montreal's significant contribution to the Quebec economy is not reflected by equitable political and democratic representation within the Quebec National Assembly. As the following points demonstrate, the Montreal urban area finds itself marginalized in terms of its representation in the Quebec political arena.

1.1 Large population in Montreal ridings

The first sign of this marginalization, the inequality in the composition of ridings on the Island of Montreal in comparison with those throughout Quebec, significantly hinders the political weight of metropolis voters.

By analysing the electoral map that will prevail in the next two Quebec general elections, we see that the voting weight of each Quebec voter is severely imbalanced and does not respond to the *Election Act* principle stipulating that electoral ridings must be delimited in such a way as to ensure that effective representation of electors is respected.¹

With an average number of 45,209 voters—data based on the permanent electoral list that dates from June 30, 2000—the new ridings located within the city of Montreal substantially exceed the provincial average of 42,713. In fact, close to 70% of all the ridings on the Island of Montreal have more voters than the provincial average, and 12 of the 28 ridings even have a positive deviation of more than 10%.

On the other hand, for the 97 ridings located outside the city of Montreal, 45% or 44 ridings have fewer voters than the provincial average. Moreover, 29 of these 44 ridings demonstrate a negative deviation of more than 10% in comparison with the provincial average.

If we take into consideration the total population in 1999, which follows the same trend as the electoral population, we notice that many Quebec regions will be over-represented as of the next general election. Therefore, with the new electoral map, the Bas-St-Laurent/Gaspésie region (excluding Îles-de-la-Madeleine) will then enjoy a political weight that is 38.6% greater than its demographic weight. Furthermore, Côte-Nord, Mauricie and Abitibi, now have a rate of political over-representation of 13.3%, 11.2% and 13%, respectively, in comparison with their population. During this time, Montreal has become under-represented, with a political weight that is 8.6% less than its demographic weight.²

Not only is this unbalance distressing, it will become even more prominent over the years. Therefore, in 2011, when the new electoral map will likely expire, the political weight of the Island of Montreal will be 9.1% less than its demographic weight, while very high levels of over-representation will be found in such areas as Bas-St-Laurent/Gaspésie (+53.7%), Côte-Nord (+25.9%), Mauricie (+18.5%) and Abitibi (+21.9%).

Recommendation 1: That any reform of democratic institutions take into consideration, as a fundamental democratic principle, the necessary equality of each Quebec voter, regardless of their region.

1.2 The regions: where elections are played out

The second example of the marginalization of the Montreal area in the Quebec political arena is that elections are now essentially won and lost in the regions. The research of political scientist Pierre Serré³ is especially interesting in the way it demonstrates how the Montreal area finds itself increasingly abandoned by political parties to the benefit of the Quebec hinterlands.

1. National Assembly of Quebec, *Election Act*, Official Publisher, 1989, section E-3.3, article 14.

2. See the appended table for a general view of certain administrative regions' electoral representativeness in terms of their population. A previous version of the table was appended to the letter that the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal sent on December 5, 2001, to the ex-Minister responsible for Electoral Reform, Guy Chevrette, to inform him of its comments in respect to the tabling of the final report of the *Commission de la représentation électorale* (CRE).

3. In relation to this subject, see Chapter 9 of Pierre Serré's doctorate dissertation, *L'impact électoral d'une minorité : le cas des non-francophones au Québec, 1970 à 1994*, Université de Montréal, 1997; as well as his recent work entitled, *Deux poids, deux mesures : l'impact du vote des non-francophones au Québec*, Quebec, VLB éditeur, 2002, 262 pp.

According to Pierre Serré, the current system creates a political dynamic that induces the major parties to court voters outside of Montreal if they want to gain and remain in power.⁴ Indeed, Mr. Serré's analysis, supported by a series of data that takes into consideration the demolinguistic evolution of both the Montreal area and other regions of Quebec over several decades, demonstrates that the partisan system is particularly distorted by the homogenous voting trend of non-francophones.⁵

On the Island of Montreal, according to Pierre Serré, the partisan alternation only affects a few ridings (referred to as vulnerable), while others will disappear from this group, due to the decrease in the demographic weight of francophones.⁶ Mr. Serré underlines that this phenomenon, far from limiting itself, already extends beyond the Island of Montreal. Before long, other ridings in the suburbs could be removed from the list of vulnerable ridings (in particular Fabre, Vachon, Vimont), resulting in a percentage of all changes in partisan allegiance in the Montreal area that could, within 10 years, slip below the threshold of 25% and even, within 20 years, below 20%.⁷

Going forward, Mr. Serré argues that:

[*Translation*]

This socio-political dynamic constitutes a source of social instability for Montreal and the whole of Quebec. Problems peculiar to the city are obviously taken into consideration by various governments through the lens of their own partisan interests. However, in politics as in economics, the invisible hand responsible for controlling relations between groups of whatever nature does not exist. We are, in fact, led to believe that certain issues, characterized by management lacking intuition, will truly suffer from this electoral dynamic. One of these issues deals with intercommunity relations, especially the integration of immigrants and their descendants into the anglophone minority, as well as the exodus of anglophones to other provinces in Canada. The **problem of economic development in the metropolitan area also reflects this dynamic**. Other problems are also affected by this problem of political representation, particularly in divisions between social classes, poverty, dropout rates, etc.⁸

In this context, Pierre Serré concludes, political weight does not currently correspond to Montreal's role as an economic driver. He adds that, [*Translation*] "faced with a partisan dynamic geared toward the rest of Quebec, which is the source of Montreal's lack of political clout in the National Assembly, it would be appropriate to question the ability of the political system to go ahead with reforms that are likely to re-establish a reasonable level of adequacy between the expression of the popular will and the profile of political representatives."⁹

In light of Mr. Serré's arguments, it is certainly troubling to read in an article entitled "Et Montréal, dans tout cela?" ["And Montreal, in all that?"], written by journalist Lysiane Gagnon, that, according to the *Institut de la statistique du Québec*, [*Translation*] "capital spending in Montreal by the Quebec government, for the past seven years, is \$1.3 billion: 19.4% of all spending for 24.8% of the population."¹⁰ She goes on to say that Quebec City, which represents 8.8% of the Quebec population, had access to \$1.6 billion in investments for the same period, which was 23% of the total.

4. Pierre Serré, *Deux poids, deux mesures...*, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

5. According to Serré, "In view of the primacy of language divisions, the more or less certain or vulnerable character of ridings is directly linked to the proportion of non-francophones present in a riding." Quoted from his book, *Ibid.*, p. 189.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

8. *Id.*

9. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

10. Lysiane Gagnon, "Et Montréal, dans tout cela?," *La Presse*, October 19, 2002, p. A19.

Recommendation 2: That any reform of Quebec democratic institutions, to be achieved objectively and without partisan interest, and respecting the highest democratic requirements, contributes to returning the Metropolitan Montreal area to the centre of debates and political choices in Quebec.

2. Fairness and representation at a better cost: the essential principles

Before suggesting concrete actions in terms of the reform of Quebec democratic institutions, the Board of Trade believes that the following principles must be considered at length:

2.1. Equality of voter representation: two solutions to Quebec's electoral map problem

Where Quebec continues to evolve in a single-member constituency plurality system, there is an urgency to correct the distortions and imbalances that could put certain regions at a disadvantage, while benefiting others, as the current *Election Act* allows. However, if Quebec chooses a non-integral proportional or mixed system, which would divide the area into regional ridings or into larger ridings than what is on the current map, it is also essential that the voting weight of each individual voter remain balanced and respected.

2.1.1 The standard 25% deviation allowed by the Election Act

Quebec's *Election Act* sets the possible deviation between the number of voters for a given riding and the provincial average at around 25%. This guided the *Commission de la représentation électorale* (CRE) in the establishment of the current electoral map, which was adopted in December 2001. However, to avoid that residence in a given region changes the voting weight of each voter, we believe that this rule should be strictly limited. Other democracies do much better than Quebec in this regard. For example, in Australia, which like Quebec has a very unevenly distributed population across its territory, tolerates a maximum deviation of only 10%. Closer to home, in the United States, deviations are less than 5%. The Board of Trade holds that the division of Quebec's electoral map on the basis of a maximum deviation of 5%—the statistical deviation generally accepted in the social sciences—should be the standard that would ensure greater equality of voter representation.

A recently published study by the Institut de recherche en politiques publiques further exposes Quebec's poor performance in terms of the equality in the voting weight of each voter.¹¹ According to this study, Quebec ranks second to last among all Canadian provinces in respect to the fairness of its electoral map. In light of these results, reducing the deviation permitted between the numbers of voters in Quebec ridings seems all the more an imperative.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that, during the current preparation of Canada's next electoral map, the delimitation proposals for Quebec federal electoral ridings that were recently made public are more in line with the principle of the equality of each vote. The Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec actually suggests a deviation of less than 5%, compared to the provincial electoral quotient, in the delimitation of 71 of the 75 proposed ridings. It should be noted that in redefining the federal electoral map, the electoral quotient is determined using the total population and not only the electoral population, as is the case for Quebec's electoral map. Therefore, by considering the entire population in defining federal ridings, representation of all citizens is better ensured and the voting weight of each voter becomes more significant.

11. Donald E. Blake, *Electoral Democracy in the Provinces*, Institute for Research on Public Policy, Vol. 7, No. 2, March 2001.

2.1.2 The exceptions: limitation is necessary

The previous electoral map for Quebec recognized two exceptions to the 25% rule: the ridings of Ungava and Îles-de-la-Madeleine, the latter being the only riding previously recognized by the *Election Act* as an exception. Two ridings in a total of 125 is quite exceptional. However, the new electoral map no longer recognizes only the riding of Ungava as an exception, as well as, *de facto*, Îles-de-la-Madeleine, but rather six exceptional electoral ridings, meaning those that no longer respect the current 25% deviation rule, in comparison with the average number of voters for all ridings in Quebec.

Thus, with six ridings, or close to 5% of Quebec ridings, constituted outside the established thresholds, with Gaspésie becoming a complete exceptional region, the Board of Trade considers that this high number no longer befits the notion of "exception." Rather, we view it as a new category of ridings, a situation that we find contrary to the spirit of the Act.

Recommendation 3: That the Election Act be revised to allow only a 5% deviation between the number of voters in a riding and the average number of voters for all ridings in Quebec, while strictly limiting exceptions to two, i.e., those that existed in the previous electoral map (Îles-de-la-Madeleine and Ungava).

2.2. Representation and efficiency at a better cost

Other than the principle that we have just addressed, it seems essential that fair representation be integral to a single democratic system. This simplicity is, in our opinion, an important factor that allows for an efficient system, as well as citizen participation. The Board of Trade views the creation of new structures of representation that are likely to incur additional costs for Quebec taxpayers with a great deal of reluctance.

Finally, where new technologies, especially the Internet, provide innovative ways to communicate with elected officials, these means should lead us to expect a reduction in the size of the system, while ensuring user-friendliness and faster, more efficient access to elected officials and other government authorities.

Recommendation 4: That all Quebec citizens be represented within a simple democratic system and that the modernization of democratic institutions leverage on new technologies, in order to increase communication between elected officials and citizens and between government and citizens, without increasing but rather reducing the cost to taxpayers.

Conclusion

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal considers that the Steering Committee of the Estates General on the Reform of Democratic Institutions could have reason to pride itself on the success of its review in such measure as the work resulting from that review will permit the restoration of the Montreal area's just political weight, thus returning it to its rightful position at the centre of Quebec's democratic process.

Electoral representation of certain administrative regions based on population

	Montreal	Gasp/L. St. Lawr ⁶	North Shore	Mauricie	Abitibi	Quebec
2000						
Population in 1999	1 799 448	296 896	103 735	264 251	156 039	7 345 390
Percentage of Quebec population	24,50%	4,04%	1,41%	3,60%	2,12%	100%
Electoral population in 2000	1 265 862	225 519	73 398	198 686	109 555	5 339 121
Percentage of electoral population of Quebec	23,71%	4,22%	1,37%	3,72%	2,05%	100%
Current number of members	30	7	2	5	3	125
Percentage of current number of members in the Nat. Ass. ¹	24,00%	5,60%	1,60%	4,00%	2,40%	100%
Ratio political representation/population ²	-2,03%	38,55%	13,29%	11,19%	12,98%	-
Ratio political representation/electoral pop. ³	+1,23%	+32,58%	+16,39%	+7,49%	+16,96%	-
Adopted number of members (December 13, 2001)	28	7	2	5	3	125
Percentage of adopted number of members in the Nat. Ass. ¹	22,40%	5,60%	1,60%	4,00%	2,40%	100%
Ratio political representation/population ²	-8,56%	38,55%	13,29%	11,19%	12,98%	-
Ratio political representation/electoral pop. ³	-5,52%	+32,58%	+16,39%	+7,49%	+16,96%	-
2011						
Population forecast in 2011 ⁴	1 884 400	278 600	97 200	258 100	150 500	7 645 100
Percentage of Quebec population (2011)	24,65%	3,64%	1,27%	3,38%	1,97%	100%
Estimated electoral population in 2011 ⁵	1 325 623	211 622	68 774	194 061	105 666	5 556 970
Percentage of estimated electoral population (2011)	23,86%	3,81%	1,24%	3,49%	1,90%	100%
Adopted number of members (December 13, 2001)	28	7	2	5	3	125
Percentage of adopted number of members in Nat. Ass. ¹	22,40%	5,60%	1,60%	4,00%	2,40%	100%
Ratio political representation/population (2011) ²	-9,12%	+53,67%	+25,85%	+18,48%	+21,92%	-
Ratio political representation/electoral pop. (2011) ³	-6,10%	+47,05%	+29,28%	+14,54%	+26,22%	-

Note 1: Percentage of number of members in the Nat. Ass. = (Number of members/125)

Note 2: Ratio political representation/population = ((percentage of number of members in Nat. Ass. / Percentage of population of Quebec)-1)

Note 3: Ratio political representation/electoral pop. = ((Percentage of number of members in Nat. Ass. / Percentage of electoral population of Quebec)-1)

Note 4: According to the Institut de la statistique du Québec

Note 5: Estimated electoral population = ((Electoral population in 2000 / Population in 1999) x Population forecast in 2011). According to forecasts made by the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal.

Note 6: This refers to the administrative regions of the Gaspé Peninsula and the Lower Saint Lawrence, not including the Magdalen Islands

Note 7: All percentages have been rounded off