

GEOG 220  
Political geography: the geography of elections

Place, Space and Identity  
Alan Nash

# Reading

Chapter 8, the section on “The Geography of Politics and Geographical Systems of Representation” ---- pages 337-339

# Representative government

- An important aspect of “sovereignty” rooted in space is the manner in which most democracies elect their representatives
  - It is by riding (or constituency) -- a spatial unit

# But not ALL democracies elect on the basis of spatial units

- Examples would include Hong Kong (before 1997):
  - Elections by professional group (i.e. all of the nurses and hospital personnel elect a representative)
- Other examples include countries that use forms of proportional representation
  - In these cases, parties declare a list of candidates, with the actual number elected depending on each party's share of the total vote.

# Geography of politics

- **Re-apportionment**

- The process of allocating electoral seats to a geographical area
  - Basically, the process of adding or subtracting to the total number of seats
    - Often using a formula driven by population numbers

- **Re-districting**

- The defining and redefining of territorial district boundaries
  - Basically, the process of redrawing boundaries
    - Often triggered by re-apportionment

# Example of Canada

- First, we need to recognize that Canada is a nested set of jurisdictions that operate on different spatial scales and have different responsibilities:
  - Federal
  - Provincial (and territorial)
  - Municipal
    - And each has its own type of representative (MP at the federal level; MNA or MLAs at the provincial;
    - and each has its own type of spatial unit: ward or borough for city level; ridings for provincial and federal levels.

# Example of Canada

- The British North America Act (1867) established that the four provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia should have a Parliament comprising of two houses:
  - An un-elected Senate – appointed to represent their region.
  - An elected House of Commons, based on the general principle of representation by population, and the provinces were to be divided into ridings for that purpose.

# Canada's Political Geography: Provinces and Territories



**Figure 9.29 Canada's political geography: provinces and territories** (Source: Geoffrey J. Matthews and Robert Morrow, *Canada and the World: An Atlas Resource*, 2nd ed. Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall, 1995, pp. 5–6. See also the National Atlas of Canada's website at <http://atlas.gc.ca/site> where a sequence of maps on the territorial evolution of Canada can be found.)

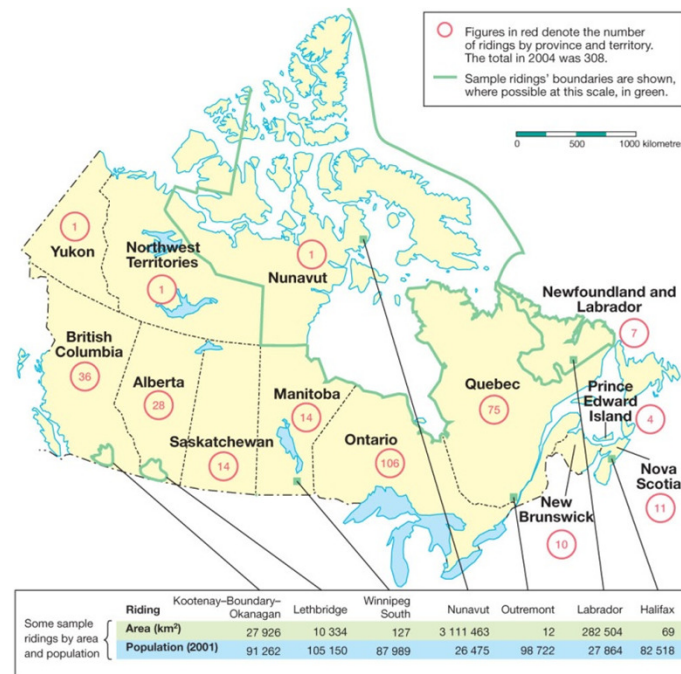
# Example of Canada

- The current formula to determine the allocation of seats (**reapportionment**) is set out in the Representation Act 1985
- The three territories get 1 seat each
- The population of Canada is then divided by 279 (the number of seats when the act came into force) to produce the *electoral quotient*
- The population of each province, when divided by the electoral quotient, produces the total number of seats that province has in the federal parliament
  - Subject to the provisions that no province can have less MPs than it has senators, and no province can have less MPS than it had when the act came into force.

# Canada

- For example, as a result of the population growth recorded in the 2001 census, 7 new seats were added:
  - 3 in Ontario
  - 2 in Alberta
  - 2 in British Columbia
- Bringing the total number of MPs in the House of Commons to 308 seats for the 2004 election.

# Geography of a Federal Election, Canada, June 2004



**Figure 9.30 The geography of a federal election** This map shows the distribution of federal ridings (election districts) in the general election of 28 June 2004 by province and territory. Canada's vast territorial expanse and very uneven population distribution pose difficulties for the creation of ridings that are equal in terms of population. Low population densities in rural and northern areas make it very difficult for ridings to reach national averages for population before they become physically too large for one person (the MP) to represent adequately. For example, the entire territory of Nunavut comprises only one federal riding. It is more than 3 million square kilometres but has a population of only 26 475. The much higher population densities of urban and southern regions mean that there are more ridings in these areas and, all other things being equal, that their interests predominate in the House of Commons. Of the examples shown on the map, the small inner Montreal district of Outremont is the smallest, with an area of only 12 square kilometres, but with a population of 98 722. The challenges of balancing competing spatial interests lies at the heart of electoral geography. (Source: Number of electoral districts and district boundaries are taken from the Elections Canada website at [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca).)

# Size of sample Canadian ridings

Riding	Kootenay Boundary Okanagan	Lethbridge	Outremont	Nunavut
Area	27,926 sq km	10,334 sq km	12 sq km	3.11millio n sq km
Pop (2001 census)	91,262	105,150	98,722	26,475

# 2015 election

- 30 new seats to be added to previous total of 308 (so 2015 total will be **338**)
- BC 36 +6 to be 42
- Alberta 28 + 6 to be 34
- Ontario 106 + 15 to be 121
- Quebec 75 +3 to be 78
- Rest of provinces and territories unaltered.

# Most important web site

- **Elections Canada** web site is [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)

# Canada

- The **redistricting** (or re-drawing) of federal riding boundaries is the responsibility of each province's independent boundary commission.
  - Why must there be re-districting? – the act of adding extra ridings means that somehow space has to be found to fit them in, and this often involves revising the boundaries of many surrounding ridings.

# Canada

In redrawing boundaries, the commission must take into account factors such as:

- The historical development of the riding
- The strength to which areas within the riding identify with particular communities
- In sparsely populated rural or northern areas, a manageable geographical size is also important since this contributes to the riding's sense of identity, and also enables the MP to visit all parts of the riding easily.
- Finally, ridings should be of equal population size.

# Canada

- However, this last criterion is hard to achieve in practice (especially if trying to achieve the other goals), so in practice a variation of plus or minus 25 percent of the electoral quotient for the province in question is permitted.
- Nevertheless this can be problematic, since many of the smaller (population) ridings are large, rural ones – ridings where each vote is technically worth “more” than in heavily populated, small (in area), urban ridings.

# Size of sample Canadian ridings: “worth of individual vote”

Riding	Kootenay Boundary Okanagan	Lethbridge	Outremont	Nunavut
Area	27,926 sq km	10,334 sq km	12 sq km	3.11millio n sq km
Pop [notes]	91,262 very different mountain valleys placed in one riding	105,150 A city surrounded by large rural area	98,722 Very densely settled Montreal city riding	26,475 [“vote” here worth almost 4 times that of someone in Lethbridge]

# Canada

- The same processes described above are used for the reapportionment and redistricting of provinces and municipalities, and at every level, the process is designed to be as objective and non-partisan as possible.
- Before independent boundary commissions were established, the redrawing of boundaries was often influenced by political parties to their own benefit – a process known as **gerrymandering**

# Gerrymandering

- **Gerrymandering:** the practice of redistricting for partisan purposes
- Named for the most celebrated example: from a US election of 1812 in which Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry sought to maximize the number of Republican-Democrats elected at the expense of the Federalist Party.

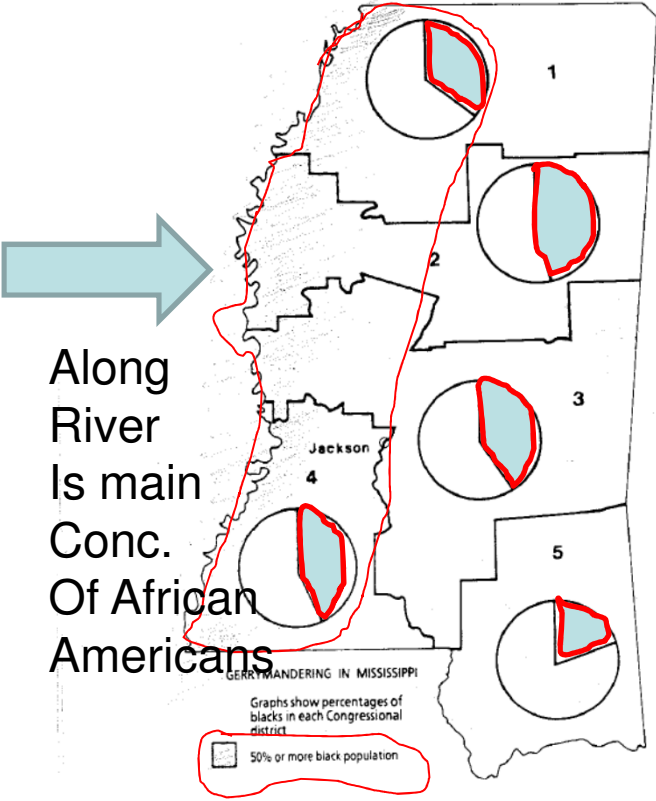
# Gerrymandering Salamander, 1812



**Figure 9.31 Gerrymandering salamander, 1812** This strange beast was the result of political shenanigans that used the geography of U.S. electoral district boundaries to concentrate Federalist votes within a single "sacrifice" district to avert the possibility of Federalist supporters influencing elections in the other districts. Today, laws attempt to prevent such blatant manipulations of the geography of voting. (Source: *Boston Gazette*, 26 March 1812.)

# USA: example from Mississippi of “racial gerrymandering”

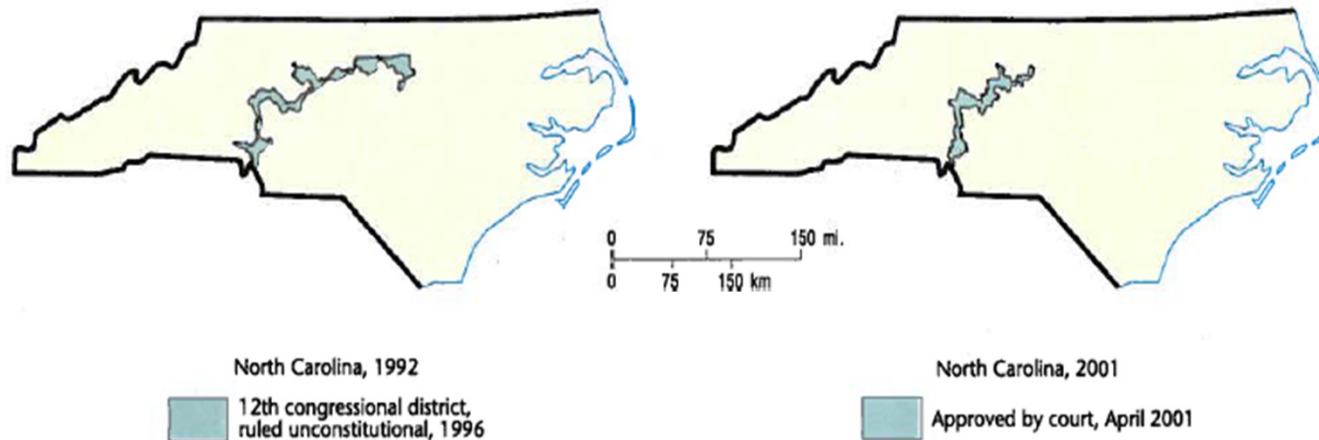
(source: R.Morrill)



**FIGURE 3** GERRYMANDERING OF CONGRESSIONAL SEATS IN MISSISSIPPI. As Mississippi Blacks became registered, Congressional districts were shifted from a north/south to east/west pattern, preventing any district from having a Black majority population.

# Gerrymander – 1996, revised 2001

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**FIGURE 6.7** Gerrymandering of a congressional district in North Carolina. The North Carolina Twelfth District was created in 1992 to ensure an African-American majority so that an additional minority candidate could be elected to Congress. Note the awkward shape of these districts, often a sign of gerrymandering. In 1996, the North Carolina district and others gerrymandered for racial purposes were

declared unconstitutional. The lines were redrawn, and although the district still looks very much gerrymandered, the courts approved the revised version. (Source: The New York Times.)

**THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY** Besides ensuring a particular racial makeup of the winners, what other goals might be involved in gerrymandering?

## Quebec 2015

Provincial ridings are also redrawn to allow for population changes (see [www.electionsquebec.qc.ca](http://www.electionsquebec.qc.ca))

There are 125 electoral divisions in Quebec.

In 2015, due to population changes:

2 new electoral divisions to be added in the Laurentides

1 To be removed from Island of Montreal

1 to be removed from the Mauricie

In Montreal, this will mean there are a total of 27 electoral divisions for 2015, and that 9 divisions will need redrawing (see next map)

**LA CARTE ÉLECTORALE**  
À L'IMAGE DU QUÉBEC

**LA PAROLE EST À VOUS**  
**Proposition de changements à la carte électorale**

Au Québec, la Loi électorale précise que la délimitation des circonscriptions électorales doit être revue toutes les deux élections générales. Cette révision assure une représentation plus juste et équitable des électrices et des électeurs, car elle prend en compte les réalités démographiques et territoriales du Québec actuel.

La Commission de la représentation électorale invite les Québécoises et les Québécois à exprimer leur opinion sur les changements qu'elle propose à la carte électorale. Une dizaine d'auditions publiques auront lieu dans les régions où les circonscriptions sont modifiées par la proposition.

**Pour plus d'information :**  
[lacarte.electionsquebec.qc.ca](http://lacarte.electionsquebec.qc.ca)  
1 888 ÉLECTION (1 888 353-2846)

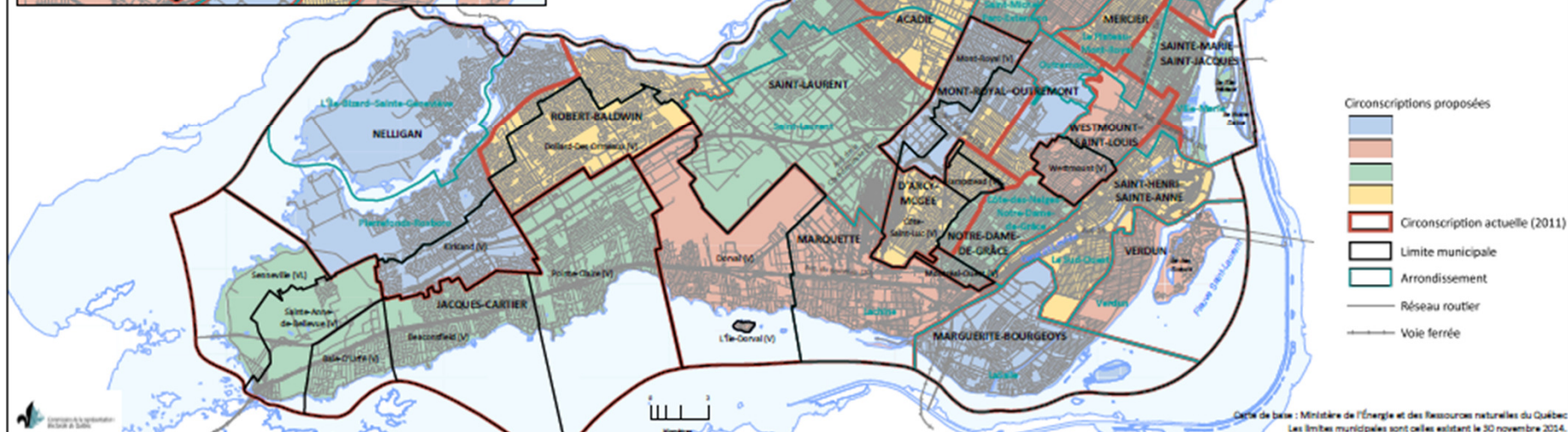
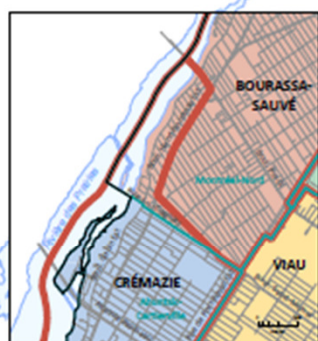
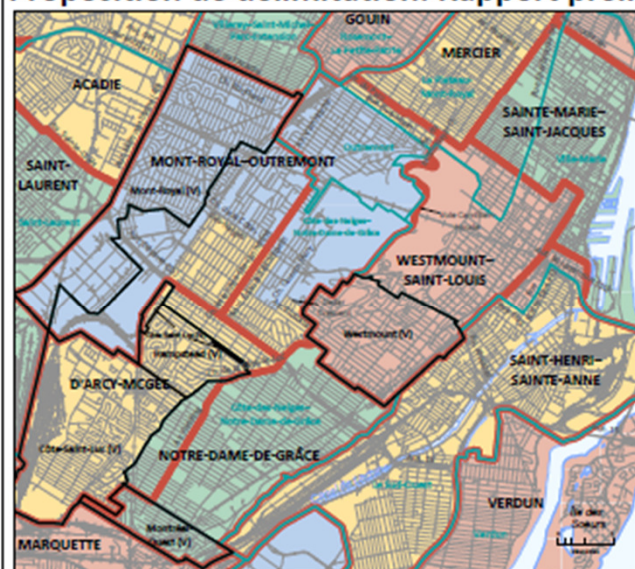
**ATS** Les personnes sourdes ou malentendantes peuvent composer sans frais: 1 800 537-0644

Commission de la représentation électorale du Québec

20 MARCH 2015

# Île-de-Montréal

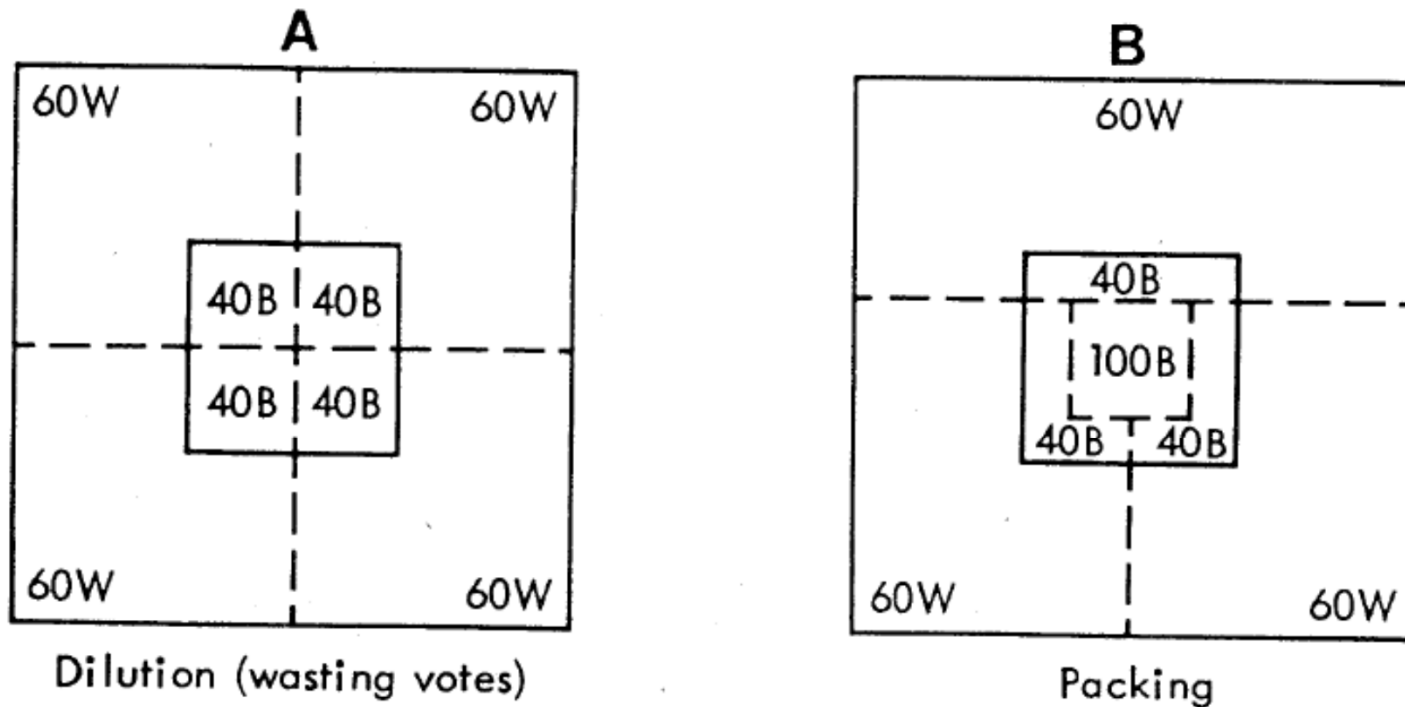
## Proposition de délimitation: Rapport préliminaire



Carte de base : Ministère de l'énergie et des ressources naturelles du Québec  
Les limites municipales sont celles existant le 30 novembre 2014.

Two main ways to gerrymander 4 seats: “dilution” [‘wasting”] - which gets you 4 “W” seats -- or “packing” – which gets you 3 safe “W” seats, and 1 “B” seat.

Example: Richard R. Morrill’s work in USA on racial gerrymandering



**FIGURE 5** RACIAL GERRYMANDERING