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## Québec Votes: The Results and What They Could Mean

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WHEN, ON 30 NOVEMBER, Quebeckers went to the polls, they re-elected a Parti Québécois (PQ) government. A few hours before the vote, most observers and analysts expected a massive PQ victory, some of them going so far as to predict a landslide. The results, however, present a much different portrait: the PQ has a majority of seats in the National Assembly, but Jean Charest's Liberals won the popular support by a margin of 40,900 votes.<sup>1</sup> How can we read and interpret such results? What do they mean for Canada and Canadians?

It is not easy to analyze such results only a few hours after they are known. Most of the time, analysts will publish their first reviews a year after the event, taking time to perform more complex analyses of the outcome, comparing them with prior elections, or concentrating on one specific aspect of the campaign: the leaders, the debate, voter participation, etc. For the purpose of this seminar, I will proceed with a first reading of the results and try to discover the initial tendencies, the first elements that could be useful to other analysts, who will wish to bring a more in-depth interpretation to how Quebeckers expressed their political will in 1998.

In order to do so, I have organized the presentation in three parts. The first covers the forces in place and the key elements of the programs the three main parties defended over the campaign. Second, I will pay attention to a few signposts that can be taken

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<sup>1</sup>These results do not take into account the by-election held in Masson on 14 Dec. 1998.

into consideration in order to get behind the raw numbers. I will review them to see if they reveal useful elements in an initial attempt to explain why the results were so different from the ones predicted by most interested observers. Finally, instead of looking at the losses or no-gains that each party experienced, I will look at what each of them has gained from their rendezvous with the Québec electorate. The rationale behind such reading is that parties rarely build their future on their failures; even though this aspect could be of some interest from a journalistic or an organizational point of view, it offers fewer elements of analysis to the political scientist interested in understanding how the political situation might evolve. I have therefore decided on a more "optimistic" look at the issues, the look that a party's policymaker would consider. This review will lead to a more general conclusion in which I will try to evaluate what these results might mean for Canada and Canadians in the future.

## 1

In the interests of better understanding the impact this election might have, the raw numbers and the basic data from which all subsequent analysis will be made seem a good place to start. The points I wish to address here include the parties, the candidates contesting the 125 seats of the National Assembly, and the programs on which they ran.

*A Bipartisan System?*

Even though most people would tend to say that Québec politics is a matter of two parties struggling over constitutional issues, a closer look brings out a much more complex portrait: in this last election, 656 candidates from 10 recognized parties<sup>2</sup> or independents, ran in 125 ridings for an average of 5.25 candidates per riding. How then can we explain that only one elected member of the National Assembly does not come from the ranks of the Parti Québécois (PQ)

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<sup>2</sup>Recognition is given to parties by Québec's Chief Electoral Officer, and is different from the recognition given to a number of elected members in the National Assembly by its Speaker.

or the Parti libéral du Québec (PLQ)? The first answer comes from the electoral mode. As Massicotte and Bernard put it, the “first past the post” system constitutes “a distorting mirror”:<sup>3</sup> it does not allow representation for parties receiving fewer votes, as a proportional mode would do. Moreover, two other factors should be considered.

First, as shown in Table 1, most of these “third parties”—with the notable exception of the Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ)—present candidates in about only one-fifth of the ridings, therefore denying themselves the impact a provincial campaign would offer; not only do they lack the human resources to run in each riding, but they do not have sufficient material resources to conduct a “wall-to-wall” campaign. These factors combine to prevent any real success at the polls.

Table 1: Recognized Parties and their Candidates<sup>4</sup>

Party	Candidates	Party	Candidates
Action démocratique du Québec/Équipe Mario Dumont	125	Equality Party	24
Parti libéral du Québec	125	Parti marxiste-léniniste du Québec	24
Parti Québécois <sup>5</sup>	124	Bloc-pot <sup>6</sup>	23
Parti de la démocratie socialiste	97	Parti communiste du Québec	20
Natural Law Party of Québec	35	Parti innovateur du Québec	20
		Independent candidates	39

<sup>3</sup> Louis Massicotte and André Bernard, *Le Scrutin au Québec: un miroir déformant* (Montréal: Hurtubise HMH, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Directeur général des élections du Québec, *Sommaire des candidatures*, <http://www.dgeq.qc.ca/generales/sommaire.html> (28 Nov. 1998).

<sup>5</sup> A PQ candidate retired his name from the ballot after the closing date for nominations, leaving the party with an “orphan” riding. Another PQ candidate died a few days before the election, but was replaced in the by-election that followed on 14 Dec. 1998.

<sup>6</sup> As its name suggests, this party had only one item in its platform: the legalization of marijuana.

Another point is that there are no “regional” parties in Québec, such as one finds in Canadian federal politics. It is true that the plurality of parties is more evident in the Montreal area than elsewhere in the province; however, they do not reflect regional concerns, but are based on the less homogenous social fabric present in the area. On the other hand, it is also true that the PLQ gathers most of its votes in western Québec, due to its appeal to the higher concentration of English-speaking people in this part of the province. However, the PLQ cannot be considered a regional party since it has elected members from Gaspé to Pontiac. The point is that as no party represents specific regional interests, none can concentrate enough votes to get members elected. The Equality Party could have been in a position to do so in some Montreal West-Island ridings where a very high concentration of non-francophones can be found,<sup>7</sup> but it failed to do so, and the PLQ gathered most of the votes in these ridings.

### *The Raw Results*

As is usually the case in Québec, such a disparity of parties and candidates did not materialize in the National Assembly after election day. The final results show a strong polarization of the vote spread almost equally between the two main parties, the Action démocratique du Québec/Équipe Mario Dumont grasping an impressive 11.6 per cent, but gaining only one seat in the Assembly.

Table 2: Québec's 1998 General Election—The Results<sup>8</sup>

Party	Elected members	Per cent of votes
Parti Québécois	75	42.9
Parti libéral du Québec	48	43.6
Action démocratique du Québec/Équipe Mario Dumont	1	11.6
Others	0	1.8

<sup>7</sup>For instance: D'Arcy-McGee with 86 per cent (voted 96 per cent NO in 1995), Jacques-Cartier with 74 per cent (91 per cent NO), Notre-Dame-de-Grâce with 74 per cent (87 per cent NO), and Robert-Baldwin with 71 per cent (90 per cent NO).

<sup>8</sup>Directeur général des élections du Québec, *Sommaire des candidatures*, <http://www.dgeq.qc.ca/generales/resultats.html> (1 Dec. 1998). All data related to results come from this same source.

Of course, the first element that strikes one when looking at Table 2 is that the governing party gained many more seats than the Official Opposition, even though the PLQ got more votes. Partisans for a proportional mode would take this example to illustrate their point. The results obtained by the ADQ could also serve their purpose: the votes received by Mario Dumont's team would allow 14 or 15 seats to the ADQ under proportional representation; within the current system, the ADQ leader will still be the lone voice of his party in the National Assembly.

Interestingly, if both the PLQ and the ADQ can complain about this situation, they cannot refer to the same factor to explain it. The PLQ can look to the vote concentration in western Québec to explain the difference,<sup>9</sup> a concentration based on the non-francophone vote, but one to which francophones votes should be added. David Lublin analyzed this phenomenon in a recent study on context and electoral behaviour and presented it as the "contact hypothesis": "francophones living in ethnically mixed ridings are more likely to speak English and may view their economic and personal life as more closely tied to that of anglophone or allophone Quebecers than francophones in overwhelmingly francophone ridings."<sup>10</sup> This means that the PLQ not only garners most of the anglophone votes, but that they also benefit from an increased support in the francophone community due to the socio-demographic context of these specific ridings. For his part, Mario Dumont and the ADQ experienced and suffered from the opposite situation: it is the lack of concentration of their support that prevented Dumont from welcoming some seatmates in Québec City; the ADQ spread its votes so evenly that they failed to get more than one member elected, a phenomenon not unique in Québec politics.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Platforms*

A third item might be of interest to those who will conduct further studies with regard to this Québec election: the platforms defended

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<sup>9</sup> See maps published in *The Gazette* (1 Dec. 1998).

<sup>10</sup> David Lublin, "Context and Francophone Support for Québec Sovereignty," paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting (Boston, MA: Sept. 1998) 7.

<sup>11</sup> See Nelson Michaud, *L'énigme du Sphinx* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1998) 213.

by the three main parties. Usually this is an interesting element to be considered when analyzing election results. However, in this instance it seems that the platforms did not have much influence. The first reason could reside in the similarities within the parties' stances, as shown in Table 3.<sup>12</sup>

The second is that the electorate did not seem to pay attention to specific details, but preferred to go with the more global message. In this regard, it is interesting to note that one of the key weapons the PLQ wanted to use was the Rochon reform in health care. The "*virage ambulatoire*," the cuts, the closing of hospitals were all bad news that the Bouchard government had to live with for the last three years; people were not happy with these measures, unions were active in denouncing their effects, and there was not a week without having front-page coverage of the whole situation. Helped by ravaging headlines in *La Presse* and *The Gazette*, the Liberals went so far as to question the impact of government measures on the life expectancy of elderly people. However strong the attacks were, they did not succeed in influencing the electorate: people in Québec preferred to believe government spokespersons who said that choices had to be made between these cuts and the sinking of the whole system in a matter of a few years.

Another topic that the Liberals relied on, when they realized there was no more political mileage to be made out of the health question, was the "danger" associated with re-electing a PQ government: a future referendum on Québec's sovereignty. The only way to avoid this danger, the Liberals said, was to vote for them. However, they failed to propose anything attractive enough to the "soft nationalist" electorate they were aiming to convince. Instead of offering these would-be supporters a position where they could have been more comfortable, the Liberal strategists simply told them that the position the PQ offered was not suitable. As it turned out, these voters preferred to keep the position the PQ had given them, no matter how uncomfortable it might be.

Finally, a third reason comes to mind: much of the campaign was oriented toward the leaders of the three main parties. The coming of Jean Charest to the helm of the Liberals provided the

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<sup>12</sup>For a more complete synopsis and comparison of the platforms, see Gilbert Leduc, "De tout pour tous," *Le Soleil* (28 Nov. 1998): A19–20.

Table 3: The Platforms—A Comparative Perspective

Issue	PQ	PLQ	ADQ
Public finances	Deficit 0 should be attained in March 2000; afterwards, income tax should be reduced by 9 per cent (\$3.2 billion) and the rest of the sum (\$2.6 billion) re-invested in health care, education, job creation, and the fight against poverty; nothing specific is outlined for business.	Electing a Liberal government would raise the "referendum mortgage," resulting in a stronger economy; investments in health care (\$3.9 billion) and education (\$3.5 billion) and cuts in income tax (\$4.5 billion) and capital gains tax (\$3 billion) would follow.	The key priority would be to reimburse the provincial debt (\$90 billion). This, added to major cuts in the public services, would result in reducing income tax levels.
Health care	Increase the health budget from \$13 billion to \$15 billion by the end of its mandate.	Cancel scheduled cuts for the coming year; private clinics would be requested to be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.	Have the patients pay a nominal fee.
Education	Increase the funding of primary and high schools (\$151 million), colleges (\$10 million), and universities (\$40 million); most of these monies geared toward the hiring more teachers and professors.	Cancel the scheduled cuts for the coming year; hire 2,000 new teachers; establish English education from Grade 1; increase by 10 per cent the graduating levels both at colleges and universities; finance the establishments according to a performance scale.	Reduce the size of the Department and hire more people in schools; reduce support to university programs where employment perspectives are less promising; mandatory school until 16 years old would be replaced by mandatory school until high school diploma is obtained.
Public service	Provide permanent status to 2,000 term employees who have accumulated five years in the same job in the same department; double the number of training posts in the public service.	Consult with the public service in view of its reorientation; focus on health care and education sectors as well as direct services to the population.	Reduce the size of the public sector by 25 per cent, abolishing 61 departments and government organizations; permanent status to employees would also be abolished.
Constitutional stance	Work toward "winning conditions" in view of the next referendum.	No more referendums.	A ten-year moratorium on referendums

stage on which most of the campaign was focused: he was the man who could save Canada (and Québec) from the separatist threat. On the other side, Lucien Bouchard was also perceived as a charismatic leader and the PQ image-makers took full advantage of it: Bouchard was front and centre on most of the publicity material released to promote the PQ message. As far as Mario Dumont is concerned, one might say that the ADQ was a one-man show: the candidates, the team, and the platform were so little known that all ballots bore Dumont's name beside that of his party. All these elements considered, one can conclude that the leaders were much more important than the platforms during this campaign.

As can be seen from the preliminary observations I made about different elements related to the forces in place, there is no striking factor that can be brought forward to explain the results. Some people might say, as was heard in the hours following the vote, that “anything you do in Québec won’t change the fact that governments are usually elected here for two terms.” This seems a logical answer when one compares the number of seats held by the three parties before and after the election: they are about the same. On the other hand, this could be an easy way out, since nobody really relied on this argument during the campaign itself, with the exception of some Liberal partisans who were contemplating a possible defeat in view of the lead the PQ had in the polls released during the campaign. Moreover, the “two term rationale” does not explain why, if it were not for the voting mode, the Liberals would have gained power. This question resists any investigation made from the elements looked at so far. There is a need to look at some other dimensions in the hope of getting an answer.

## 2

Most of the signposts that retained my attention were placed along the electoral campaign road or simply inspired by analysts and commentators and were, at the time, questions or hypothesis about the outcome of the campaign. These signposts direct us toward the ridings that switched sides after the election, the tight races as well as the number of ridings won by an absolute majority, the ADQ factor, and the specificity of some ridings: “Drouilly’s Nine,” the ridings presenting opposite results in the 1994 election and in the 1995 referendum, and, finally, the presence of a possible “Charest effect” in eight Eastern Townships ridings.

*Ridings that Switched Sides*

To state that the results of the election did not change the composition of the National Assembly is partially true. Compared to former numbers, it seems that only one seat switched from the PQ to the PLQ; in fact, seven ridings sent to Québec City a representative of different stripes than his or her predecessor. This is illustrated in Table 4.



Table 4: Ridings that Switched Sides

<b>Liberal gains</b>	<b>PQ gains</b>
Anjou	Bertrand
Bonaventure	Frontenac
Limoilou	Iles de la Madeleine
Sherbrooke	

Most switches can easily be explained. For instance, the Bertrand riding was won by the PLQ in 1994, but by a small margin of 146 votes. Bertrand then experienced its first general election since the riding was created in 1992 from parts of three adjoining ridings: Rousseau (46.4 per cent), Labelle (35.1 per cent), and Prévost (18.5 per cent). In 1994 these three newly amputated ridings sent a PQ representative to the National Assembly and all three voted “yes” in the 1995 referendum, in proportions varying between 62.9 and 64.4 per cent. The 1998 result may therefore be explained by the general regional tendency already manifest in the last four years. As far as the Iles-de-la-Madeleine riding is concerned, pragmatism is the word. The riding consists of an archipelago, several miles from the coast of the Gulf of St. Lawrence; the feeling of being forgotten by the policymakers in far-away Québec City is strong, especially when the member (MNA—Member of the National Assembly) sits on the opposition benches. Therefore, even though the rate of approval for the incumbent was pretty good, voters of this part of Québec were convinced by the polls that the next government would be formed by the Parti Québécois. In consequence, they elected a member “from the right side,” hoping to benefit from their decision. Finally, when one knows that the Frontenac riding’s economy is dominated by asbestos mining—a product banned in many European markets—and that the incumbent Liberal MNA was unable to gain any important policy changes associated with this sector, it is conceivable that, here also, voters preferred to turn to a member who would be part of the future government caucus.

On the Liberal side, most of the gains were even easier to explain. In Anjou, the young minister of Public Safety had had a very hard time during the January ice storms, appearing to have had a total lack of control over the units that were supposed to

provide support to the storm victims. He paid the price for his inexperience, the strong proportion of non-francophone voters retrieving from him the necessary votes to bridge this deficit. Bonaventure was the Liberal stronghold of Gérard D. Levesque, who represented the riding from 1956 until 1993. After a short interlude it went back to the party that used to be elected there. If an easier explanation for a Liberal gain is possible, it can be found in the Sherbrooke riding: it has been represented federally for the last 11 years by Jean Charest, who was now seeking the seat provincially. Not only was Charest the “kid from the block,” but he was for a while considered as Premier-to-be: his defeat would have meant that the Liberals would have gone nowhere. Finally, the Limoilou riding is the only one that presents a not-so-expected gain for the Liberals. The riding is located in Québec City’s lower town and is predominantly composed of middle-class blue collar workers. The incumbent, a former chairman of the urban community, had the support of Québec City mayor’s election workers. He lost his seat to the former MNA, who made a political comeback. The man was well liked by his constituents, who seemed to prefer to give him back their confidence.

### *The Tight Races*

A further look at the results may bring to light what could be thought of as “tight races.” During the campaign, many media considered ridings that elected members with small majorities in 1994 as interesting races to follow closely. What is understood by “small majorities” varies from fewer than 1,000 votes to 3,500 (about one-tenth of the size of a small riding<sup>13</sup>). For the purpose of this analysis, we will restrict the numbers of the majority to 1,500 votes or less. We find that 6 out of 23 ridings fit this definition both in 1994 and in 1998 (out of 16). As shown in Table 5, no definite pattern can be found: even though these represent ridings where a switch was most likely to occur, only one of the six cases studied effectively switched sides (Anjou).

Moreover, the results of the 1995 referendum did not help in possible predictions of the 1998 outcome: in four (shadowed in grey in Table 5) out of six cases, the referendum results went in

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<sup>13</sup>In Québec, most ridings vary in population from 32,000–53,000 voters.

favour of the opposition to the riding's MNA, but only one riding did not switch its allegiance back at the time of the election. The exception is the riding of Anjou and this confirms the basis of my earlier comments. Moreover, it is the defection of francophone nationalist voters disgruntled by the performance of their minister that also explains this switch.

Table 5: Ridings that Remained Neck and Neck

Riding	94 (23)	95	98 (16)
Anjou	PQ - 756	NO	LIB - 142
Crémazie	PQ - 429	NO	PQ - 306
Jean-Talon	LIB - 25	NO	LIB - 156
Kamouraska/Témiscouata	LIB - 386	YES	LIB - 110
Mille-Iles	PQ - 1371	YES	PQ - 664
Shefford	LIB - 1323	YES	LIB - 81

### *Absolute Majorities*

Looking at these tight races may lead one to think that tight races constitute a key element in the shaping of the composition of the National Assembly. In fact, the opposite is true: most ridings (75 out of 124) elected their member with an absolute majority (50 per cent plus 1 or more of the votes cast). Of these 75 ridings, 40 (or 53 per cent) went to the PQ, the remaining 35 (47 per cent) to the Liberals. When comparing these numbers to the proportion of ridings won by each party, 60 per cent of the seats went to the PQ and 39 per cent to the Liberals. Therefore, it might be inferred that the Liberals performed a little better as far as the "big wins" are concerned, a phenomenon explained by the huge majorities gained in some of the western Québec ridings and reflected in the Liberals gaining more popular support than the PQ when one refers to the percentage of the total votes obtained.

Table 6: Ridings Won by an Absolute Majority

Ridings won by 50 per cent +	PQ	Liberal
75	40	35
	53 per cent	47 per cent
Total number of ridings: 124	60 per cent went to PQ	39 per cent went to PLQ

These numbers are comparable to past election results. For instance, in 1994, 81 ridings elected their members with an absolute majority. Of these, 70 kept the same behaviour, but 11 failed to do so in 1998 (9 reiterated their allegiance to the same party—6 PQ, 2 PLQ, 1 ADQ—Bonaventure switched from PQ to PLQ, and Frontenac switched from PLQ to PQ). Finally, 5 ridings that did not elect their member with an absolute majority in 1994, expressed a clearer choice in 1998 (3 ridings went to the PQ and 2 to the PLQ). Therefore, we can conclude that the 1998 election did not present significant variations.

### *The ADQ Factor*

A great deal of reference was made to the influence the ADQ might have had in “splitting the vote,” since this party received over 11 per cent of the popular support. Was the ADQ factor so crucial? Needless to say, in the 75 ridings where an absolute majority was reached, the ADQ had no determining influence, except if we consider that a third runner might have incited the winner’s supporters to get out and vote in greater numbers. Such a scenario is totally hypothetical and would be very difficult to determine after the fact. Only a polling or a series of focus group studies might bring some information in this regard. Due to this uncertainty, I will not consider these 75 ridings for the purpose of this study. This means that we will consider 49 ridings in which a second ballot would have been necessary to identify an absolute majority winner. Of these, one was won by the ADQ (Mario Dumont’s Rivière-du-Loup), and in two cases the ADQ vote was smaller than the majority obtained by the winner. In other words, should these ADQ votes have been given to the runner-up, it would have made no difference to the final outcome. Therefore, we are left with 46 ridings to look at—i.e., where the ADQ vote was greater than the difference between the elected member’s numbers and those obtained by the candidate who ranked second.

Should we then consider all 46 ridings? The question is worth asking. For instance, should we have Candidate A who is elected with a majority of 5,000 votes over Candidate B, Candidate C getting 5,001 votes; to be significant, the transfer of votes from Candidate C to Candidate B would have to be at the rate of 100 per cent. This situation is theoretically possible, but logically doubtful: it would

mean that Candidate B is the second choice for all Candidate C voters, which is not necessarily the case; moreover, it is possible that Candidate C gained some votes from people who had no second choice and would have not voted if it were not for C's candidacy. Therefore, it seems difficult to consider a 1:1 ratio as indicating the presence of an influential factor.

There are no studies that establish a "threshold of significance" in such circumstances and it would be interesting to pursue further research along this line. Based on the fact that voters split almost evenly between PQ and PLQ, we could say that the 2:1 ratio would be better. However, this is to assume that the ADQ voters would have done the same thing. As pollsters have found over the years, such a division does not necessarily reflect the reality of the moment. I therefore propose to use a 1.5:1 ratio as a hypothetical basis for my analysis.

The raw results show that from the 46 ridings to be considered, 32 were won by the PQ and 14 by the PLQ, which could lead us to think that the ADQ hurt the Liberals much more than the *déquistes*. However, once we apply the 1.5 factor, the numbers drop down to 15 for the PQ and 12 for the PLQ, meaning that the ADQ factor is not so relevant as was broadcast on election night. If we restrict our reading to tighter races (i.e., where the winner's majority is under 1,500 votes) we find even closer numbers, with 6 seats being won by the PQ and 8 by the PLQ (these 14 cases falling within the parameters of the 1.5 factor). From these numbers, it seems difficult to trace a specific influence and attribute it to the ADQ: depending on which corpus is considered, both the PQ and the PLQ, in turn, appear as taking a very slight advantage of the ADQ vote.

Another element, however, can be considered before reaching a definite conclusion. The seven ridings where the ADQ scored over fifteen per cent in 1994, Rivière-du-Loup excepted, all went to the Parti Québécois. These seven ridings remained with the PQ in 1998. Can we then still refer to an ADQ factor? I would say that it is, at least, doubtful. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that the ADQ equally hurt or benefitted the PQ and the PLQ, a finding which is in agreement with the conclusions reached by Université de Montréal political scientist, Richard Nadeau.

In fact, the “ADQ factor’s” most influential determinant is probably not related to the proportion of votes obtained by the ADQ as much as to the tightness of the races between PQ and PLQ candidates. I will refer to two examples to illustrate this phenomenon. In the Blainville riding, for instance, the ADQ got an impressive 20.5 per cent of the valid votes. However, this represents 7,102 votes, while the PQ member has been elected there with a majority of 7,983 votes over the Liberal candidate. This means that even though all ADQ votes were transferred to the PLQ, the Liberal runner-up would still be short 881 votes to win. On the other hand, in the Bonaventure riding, the ADQ received only 6.3 per cent of the votes, not much more than half of its provincial average. Despite what appears as a meagre result, the vote in favour of the ADQ candidate is 9 times higher than the Liberal majority over the PQ, a difference of over 1,200 votes (ADQ=1,412; Liberal majority=165). In this case, there is no doubt that the ADQ can be considered an influential factor in the final results.

Table 7: Ridings Gained with a Majority and where the ADQ Received a Greater Number of Votes than the Majority (Factor 1.5)

	All majorities	Majorities < 1500
<b>Total</b>	46	14
<b>Total PQ</b> (Factor 1.5)	32 (15)	6 (6)
<b>Total Liberal</b> (Factor 1.5)	14 (12)	8 (8)

### *Drouilly's Nine*

In a recent study, Université du Québec à Montréal sociologist Pierre Drouilly outlined the specificity of a group of nine ridings located on the mostly rural south shore of the St. Lawrence River, extending from Rivière-du-Loup to Richmond.<sup>14</sup> These are adjoining ridings that offer weaker support to the sovereignist project, even though three of them, Rivière-du-Loup, Kamouraska-Témiscouata, and Montmagny-L'Islet, present the highest proportion of francophone population in Québec, higher than in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area; the least francophone population of

<sup>14</sup> *Le Québec mou*, <http://www.coopcr1.qc.ca/base/politique/drouilly981121.htm>.

the 9 ridings, in Mégantic-Compton, reaches over 92 per cent. They are characterized by a rural exodus that results in a higher proportion of elderly people, a lower level of education, a strong proportion of blue collar workers/farmers; the revenues are lower than the provincial average even though unemployment is lower in these ridings than in those of the Gaspé area, for instance. Drouilly concludes that these characteristics encourage a more careful behaviour from this electorate.

It would be interesting to have a look at the political behaviour in these nine ridings in the 1994 election, the 1995 referendum, and the 1998 election. In 1994, only Bellechasse had elected a PQ MNA, who was returned to Québec City in 1998; on the other hand, as we have seen earlier, in 1998 Frontenac switched from PLQ to PQ, a move that is in accordance with the 1995 “yes” vote in this riding. The only exceptions worth noting are that Kamouraska-Témiscouata and Richmond voted “yes” to the referendum, but sent Liberal MNAs to Québec City, both in 1994 and in 1998, while Bellechasse did the exact opposite. Finally, the fact that Rivière-du-Loup is Mario Dumont’s home riding explains the ADQ votes in 1994 and 1998, as well as the “yes” vote in 1995 (Dumont was one of the “three tenors” promoting the “yes” cause). Therefore, the 1998 election tends to confirm Drouilly’s findings about what he identifies as the “soft Québec.”

Table 8: Drouilly’s Nine

<b>Riding</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1998</b>
Rivière-du-Loup	ADQ	YES	ADQ
Kamouraska-Témiscouata	LIB	YES	LIB
Montmagny-L’Islet	LIB	NO	LIB
Bellechasse	PQ	NO	PQ
Beauce Nord	LIB	NO	LIB
Beauce Sud	LIB	NO	LIB
Mégantic Compton	LIB	NO	LIB
Frontenac	LIB	YES	PQ
Richmond	LIB	YES	LIB

*Contradictions*

I have just referred to some instances of “contradicting patterns” between the votes expressed in 1994, 1995, and 1998. The ridings of Kamouraska-Témiscouata, Richmond, and Bellechasse are not the only ones. In fact, when one considers the votes expressed in the 1994 election and in the 1995 referendum, 11 ridings “contradicted” themselves. Can we interpret such a change as the expression of a new tendency in these ridings? The answer is not clear. In five cases (shown in italics in Table 9), the change observed in 1995 was confirmed in the following general election, but in six cases the electorate switched back to its former choice, establishing a continuity from one general election to the other.

Should we then refer to the “volatility” of the electorate? The numbers are not big enough to be significant: one half of these cases went one way and the other half went the other way; moreover, the whole corpus represents less than 10 per cent of all ridings in Québec. Therefore, no firm conclusion can be drawn.

Table 9: “Contradictions”

<b>Riding</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1998</b>
<i>Anjou</i>	<i>PQ</i>	<i>NO</i>	<i>LIB</i>
Bellechasse	PQ	NO	PQ
<i>Bertrand</i>	<i>LIB</i>	<i>YES</i>	<i>PQ</i>
<i>Bonaventure</i>	<i>PQ</i>	<i>NO</i>	<i>LIB</i>
Crémazie	PQ	NO	PQ
<i>Frontenac</i>	<i>LIB</i>	<i>YES</i>	<i>PQ</i>
<i>Iles de la Madeleine</i>	<i>LIB</i>	<i>YES</i>	<i>PQ</i>
Kamouraska-Témiscouata	LIB	YES	LIB
Richmond	LIB	YES	LIB
Shefford	LIB	YES	LIB
Ungava	PQ	NO	PQ



### *The Charest Effect*

A leader perceived as charismatic sometimes has a power of attraction that bears a direct influence on the results coming from his/her neighbouring ridings, creating something like a halo effect. The 1997 federal election gave prime examples of such a phenomenon: the NDP successes in the Maritimes were due to Alexa McDonough's work from Halifax and, to a lesser extent, the Reform sweep over Alberta was a reflection of Preston Manning's influence. The Tory victories in the Eastern Townships could as well be attributed in part to Jean Charest's presence in Sherbrooke. Would Charest have the same impact in provincial politics?

It is difficult to determine if such a "Charest effect" manifested itself. With the exception of Sherbrooke, which went from the PQ to the PLQ, all other ridings in the area simply renewed the support they had expressed in the 1994 election; six of them stayed with the PLQ and one (Johnson) re-elected its PQ MNA. To state that Charest's riding of Sherbrooke had a "Charest effect" is so obvious that it does not present any analytical interest. A look at the majorities obtained by the elected members could be an interesting indicator as long as the same number of candidates ran in a given riding in which the same number of valid votes were counted. Because such conditions are practically impossible to meet, we have to look elsewhere to be able to measure a possible Charest effect. Even though it is not perfect, the percentage of votes obtained could be more useful.

A closer look at these numbers indicates that, in fact, there was no real Charest effect, since the percentage of the votes obtained by the Liberal candidates in five of the six ridings where Liberals were elected was smaller in 1998 than it was in 1994. Would the number of candidates running be a factor here? The answer to this question is negative: of the five ridings where a smaller percentage of votes was obtained by the elected PLQ member, one (Orford) presented the same number of candidates running both in 1994 and 1998. In two other ridings (Brôme-Mississquoi and Richmond) there were fewer candidates running in 1998 than in 1994. This, combined with a Charest effect, should have favoured a higher percentage of votes going to the PLQ, not the contrary. Finally, in the two ridings where a greater number of candidates ran in 1998 compared with 1994 (Mégantic-Compton

and Shefford), a smaller proportion of votes in favour of the PLQ should have been compensated by the said "Charest effect"; on the contrary, the drop was significant, reaching 3.5 per cent and 7.5 per cent respectively.

The only riding where an increase in support is noted is in Saint-François, a riding covering part of the City of Sherbrooke and held by the Liberal leader in the Assembly. Here it seems that the combination of a prominent incumbent MNA with Charest's own influence allowed a modest increase of 1.52 per cent of the relative support to the Liberal candidate.

Finally, in Johnson, even though the PQ candidate was elected with a smaller percentage of the votes in 1998 than in 1994, it cannot be attributed to a resurgence in strength of the Liberals. Their candidate got only 37.75 per cent, while the party's representative had received 45.1 per cent of the votes four years earlier. Here the ADQ had a good bite at the Liberal support, gathering 12.43 per cent of the votes while, in 1994, the Equality Party came third with only 2.8 per cent. It is therefore impossible to refer to any influence of a "Charest effect" in this riding.

Table 10: Measuring the "Charest Effect"

Riding	1994				1998			
	Elected	Majority	% of votes	Candidates	Elected	Majority	% of votes	Candidates
Brôme-Missisquoi	LIB	9,430	61.12	5	LIB	8,338	57.17	4
Johnson	PQ	1,246	49.78	4	PQ	3,129	48.33	4
Mégantic-Compton	LIB	2,748	53.95	4	LIB	2,336	50.49	5
Orford	LIB	3,787	51.07	5	LIB	4,916	50.96	5
Richmond	LIB	4,061	54.28	5	LIB	4,654	53.06	3
Saint-François	LIB	2,616	49.48	5	LIB	3,679	51.00	6
Shefford	LIB	1,323	45.71	5	LIB	73	37.28	6
Sherbrooke	PQ	1,391	47.31	5	LIB	907	47.41	6

The numbers shown in Table 10 lead one to think that this time the Charest effect was much less important than it was during the last federal general election. In fact, from these numbers, it seems difficult to refer to any regional Charest effect at all.

*Other Factors*

Some other factors were referred to during the campaign and in some analyses that followed in the immediate aftermath. Most of them do not suggest any significant elements of interpretation. For instance, if one refers to ridings where “star” candidates ran, it seems that both the PQ and the PLQ gained in similar proportions. The only real “upset” was the defeat of the Minister of Public Safety in Anjou, an incident analyzed earlier. However, this concept of “star candidates” is very difficult to define: ministers, key opposition spokespersons, and candidates presented as potential ministers all can fall within this category. On the other hand, a successful business person or community activist might be considered a “star candidate” by the media, while those in the riding itself might consider the “local” candidate from the opposing party as the real star. Where then should the line be drawn? Following this angle of analysis is unlikely to be productive.

The same can be said about any “Bouchard effect” in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean. Since the 1970s this region has manifested a continuous strong support for the Parti Québécois. The results obtained by the PQ-elected MNAs from this part of the province cannot really be attributed to the direct influence of the PQ leader in Jonquière; other more long-lasting factors came into play in these ridings. Therefore, we should not spend more time in trying to get something out of this element.

In fact, from all elements that we have considered, it seems that one word is present everywhere—constancy. There were no major shifts in the results and these results cannot be explained by shifts that would have cancelled each other. Even though the “two term rule” is a rather simplistic explanation, it seems that the Québec electorate was not comfortable enough with Jean Charest to give him the premiership, while it was happy enough with Lucien Bouchard’s management of the province to give his party a second mandate.

To complete the analysis, a more comprehensive reading of the results is in order: what do they mean for the parties, the leaders,

Figure 1: A Party of Parties—Where the PQ Leaders Stand

J. Parizeau



R. Lévesque



L. Bouchard



P.M. Johnson



and the rest of the country? These are the questions that will be addressed in the third part of this paper. As I indicated earlier, the campaign was mainly centred on the party leaders; therefore, it seems natural to do a final analysis from this same angle. I will try to outline the base on which each of the leaders can build his political agenda for the coming months, as well as what these results mean for Canadians outside Québec.<sup>15</sup>

### *Mr. Bouchard's Mandate*

As one may recall, PQ strategists were confident, when the polls closed, of getting about 80 seats and 47 per cent of the vote. It is fair to say that such predictions made to journalists by party spin doctors usually err on the conservative side, so a better result would appear as an even bigger success. Therefore, we can say that the final numbers (75 seats and close to 43 per cent of the vote) are significantly below the PQ organizers' expectations.

Nevertheless, these results represent a clear victory for Mr. Bouchard. This also signifies a clear mandate, even if it is not the one hoped for: the relatively low number of votes obtained by the PQ does not provide Bouchard with a strong enough basis to justify going to a referendum in the very near future, despite Mr. Parizeau's comments on election night.

In fact, there is an element which is important to understand here: even though both men claim to be from the same political party, they do not necessarily belong to the same political family. As illustrated in Figure 1, the PQ is not a monolithic party: it is made of members coming from former socialist movements—the mostly rural Ralliement national (RN) and mostly urban Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale (RIN)—Liberal autonomists who followed in René Lévesque's footsteps when he resigned from Jean Lesage's Liberal government, and from supporters of the Union nationale, a now vanished party that used to align itself on the right with the Tories while defending a strong autonomist stance. Daniel Johnson Sr., one of its leaders, is the author of the *Equality or Independence* manifesto. While Mr. Parizeau stands more in the RN/RIN (left) tradition, Mr. Bouchard

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<sup>15</sup> Some elements of this section were published in *The Chronicle Herald* and *The Mail Star* (5 Dec. 1998): C1–2.

now appears to be somewhere between the Liberal and the Union nationale (right) stances.<sup>16</sup> This can explain why Bouchard announced, as early as the Tuesday following the election and against Parizeau's statement, the "*mise en veilleuse*" (postponement) of his referendum project. He will then concentrate on "good governance," which could spell good news for the rest of the country: if Québec can enhance its socio-economic health, the whole country will benefit from it.

Will Bouchard go as far as working towards the renewal of federalism? His margin for manoeuvre is slim: due to the small numbers he received, he needs the support from his more doctrinaire wing. Therefore, he will probably not be able to tag his actions with the "renewed federalism" concept; however, if his commitment towards social union is followed by other similar actions, we could witness a *de facto* renewal of the federation. Such a scenario is not impossible: one has to remember that Bouchard is the one who, through speech writing, initiated the "beau risque."<sup>17</sup> Moreover, he is first and foremost a negotiator; he likes bargaining games, and the more difficult the challenge the more stimulated he is. Again, having Québec back at the table should be perceived as good news for Canada, no matter how late it joins in the discussions.

### *Mr. Charest's Program*

By winning most of the popular support, Jean Charest positioned himself to take full command of his party, something he has not been able to do since he was chosen leader in April. Charest simply did not have all the necessary tools to face the challenge of an election. First, he did not have the "feeling" of Québec politics.

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<sup>16</sup>The other leader of the PQ, Pierre-Marc Johnson, was even closer to his father's stance; in fact, some of his opponents within the PQ, associated with the more RN/RIN side of the party, have even labelled him as a "closet federalist."

<sup>17</sup>This expression was coined by René Lévesque, then PQ Premier of Québec, to refer to his opening towards Ottawa, following the election of the Conservative government in 1984. This softening in Lévesque's attitude was due to the commitment made by Brian Mulroney to bring Québec back into the Canadian family (i.e., have Québec sign the 1982 constitutional deal) "with honour and enthusiasm." These words were part of a 1984 electoral campaign speech made in Sept-Îles, by Mulroney, a speech that Lucien Bouchard had written.

After spending 14 years in Ottawa, most of them at the highest levels of federal politics as a minister or as leader of a national party, he did not have the opportunity to look at the issues from a provincial angle. If we compare Charest with Premier Russell MacLellan from Nova Scotia, for instance, we might note that Mr. MacLellan's federal responsibilities allowed him to stay closer to local considerations. The same is true for Pat Binns; moreover, Mr. Binns even had the opportunity to benefit from a few years spent far from Ottawa between his days as MP and his Premiership: this allowed him to get a better grasp on local issues. As well, Brian Tobin's ministerial responsibilities were closely related to one of his home province's key concerns, the fisheries. Mr. Charest's case is different: he needed time to immerse himself in provincial politics, time that Mr. Bouchard strategically did not allow him, by calling the election not much more than six months after Mr. Charest's arrival on the provincial scene.

Another major problem Mr. Charest had to face was that his political roots in the Blue Tory Party did not match the expectations of some deep-dyed influential Red Liberals. Federally, Charest was considered by many of the people he would now lead as the enemy, only ten months before arriving at the helm of the provincial Liberals. Everyone recalls the severe blow Jean Chrétien offered Charest at the end of the 1997 federal campaign;<sup>18</sup> everyone recalls that on the night of the 1995 referendum, Chrétien waited for Charest to take the stage before broadcasting his own message, therefore cutting Charest from TV screens throughout the country.

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<sup>18</sup>In the last days of the campaign, Chrétien declared that he would not recognize a 50 per cent plus 1 victory of the "Yes" forces in a eventual referendum on Québec sovereignty. This statement galvanized forces behind the Bloc Québécois candidates, who were able to gain back the support of soft nationalist voters that Charest's people had been able to convince. Most analysts recognized that this statement by Chrétien cost Charest some seats in Québec (and maybe elsewhere in Canada due to the discouraging effect the polls, affected by numbers in Québec, had on would-be Tory voters a few days before the election). Chrétien then preferred to face the "bad separatists" instead of the opposing federalist forces behind Charest, on the opposition benches; in doing so, Chrétien thought it would be easier for him to be perceived as the politician able "tackle the Québec problem," a perception that could leave him as the strongest defender of the federalist cause in the province.

Moreover, in March, as Charest was to be chosen leader, Raymond Garneau, a former Québec Minister of Finance under Robert Bourassa and Finance Critic in Ottawa, bluntly stated that there was no need for such a deal.<sup>19</sup> Three days before the vote, Marc-Yvan Côté, former Québec Minister of Health in the Bourassa government and long-time Liberal key organizer, threw in the towel, saying that things would be fixed after the election.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly enough, the Liberal candidate in Côté's former riding, a former chief of staff for one of Québec's key Conservative ministers in Ottawa, was facing incumbent Minister of Health, Jean Rochon; as of now,<sup>21</sup> Denis Roy finished second to Rochon, trailing by 33 votes! Some might say, with due reason, that Côté's comments probably cost Roy enough votes to prevent him from getting a seat in the National Assembly.

Despite Charest's chief organizer's claims that this story about Liberal/Tory unhappiness is unfounded, there are enough incidents that lead to a different conclusion. As Nova Scotia's Leader of the Opposition, Robert Chisolm, will probably witness with the transfer of Hinrich Bitter-Suermann<sup>22</sup> from the Tory ranks to his own caucus, it is not always easy to welcome yesterday's foe as today's friend. Therefore, it is fair to say that Mr. Charest did not obtain all the support he needed. His worried looks during the last days of

<sup>19</sup> Denis Lessard, "Le PLQ est 'tombé sur la tête' selon Raymond Garneau," *La Presse* (17 March 1998): B1; Presse canadienne, "Garneau persiste et signe 'Les sauveurs, ça dure le temps des sondages,'" *Le Soleil* (19 March 1998): A7.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Pelchat, "Un malheur ne vient jamais seul ... Marc-Yvon Côté fait l'autopsie de la délaite libérale," *La Presse* (29 Nov. 1998): A6.

<sup>21</sup> Results at the time of the public lecture remained unchanged after official recount. It has to be noted that irregularities were reported: an independent candidate withdrew from the race, giving his support to Roy; despite instructions given by the riding's electoral officer, his name was not removed from the ballots in all voting sections, causing confusion. The electoral officer took the question under review and the Liberal team considered for a while bringing the whole matter before the courts.

<sup>22</sup> This MHA had been elected under the conservative banner. A few months after his election, he resigned from the Tory ranks, sat a few days as an Independent, to soon join the NDP Official Opposition. The problem comes from the NDP riding association, where long-time workers and supporters see their chances to run for office—and, who knows, get elected—disappear for as long as this newcomer will hold his seat.



the campaign were interpreted by most as his discomfort with what the polls were telling him; it might also have been caused by his lack of control over his team—something he deeply resents.

The key element, though, is the success Charest gained in terms of popular support: it gives him a strong enough basis on which to build a team he will really control and lead. His caucus has new blood coming in the qualified persons of André Tranchemontagne (former CEO of Molson's breweries), constitutional lawyer and academic Benoît Pelletier, and Monique Jérôme-Forget (Chairperson of the Institute for Research on Public Policy); these will be reliable allies in his future endeavours. In this sense, he also won something in this battle.

### *The Dumont Factor*

Mario Dumont's performance during the leader's televised debate surprised many people. The media, especially, made a big noise about it: they had a new character to bring on the screen and they did not want to miss such an opportunity. A more sober reading would say that Dumont was simply not as bad as most expected. He threw a few punches at Charest and—thanks to an instant-reading device used by a polling firm to measure, in real time, public reaction as the debate was progressing—Dumont was crowned. The big question, though, is why? Dumont did not sell much of his program then and what he sold cannot be considered key elements that would have made the voters change their minds. It is true that on election day Dumont almost doubled the support for his party from what he had received four years earlier. It is also true that the half million votes he gathered can be seen as Dumont's personal success; since his candidates were so little known he had to ask the chief electoral officer to change his party's name by adding to it his own to read: *Action démocratique/Équipe Mario Dumont*. People voted for a media-built image; Dumont himself admitted on the night of the election that the votes his party got needed to be transferred into memberships, meaning that this support was in no way deep-rooted. If the campaign had lasted two more weeks, as is usually the case in Québec, one might think that Dumont's support would probably have decreased.

Since it rests on a largely federalist platform, the support Dumont obtained (12 per cent of the vote) is a factor that Premier

Bouchard will have to take under consideration: the Premier cannot add Dumont's support to his own party's when evaluating the total support for the sovereignty option. However, one question remains: how much control will Dumont keep on these votes? Due to his weak platform and to the lack of deep-rooted membership, it is doubtful that he will be able to keep full control; and the smaller the degree of control he has, the less significant his support will be to Bouchard. It is therefore this aspect, more than the votes "stolen" from either the Liberals or the PQ, that should be considered as the real "Dumont factor." As of now, the election allowed Dumont to raise his profile. Will he use it to play the role of heavy water in Lucien Bouchard's constitutional atomic agenda, by slowing down the chain reaction, or will he come back to his more separatist stance? Only time will tell.

*What is in it for Canada?*

Bouchard won the seats, Charest won the vote, and Dumont won the fame. Does this mean that, after all, this was a Québec election with no bearing on the rest of the country? The fact that Lucien Bouchard had to commit himself to negotiate a new partnership with the provinces and that the results he achieved will prevent him from going full-speed ahead with his referendum; that Jean Charest received enough support to give him the opportunity to build a strong opposition, which will, let us hope, raise the level of the debates; and that Mario Dumont is not, for now, the catalyst of the sovereigntist option he once was; all this makes me think that Canadians might benefit from this outcome.

First of all, if the uncertainty factor of Québec's future is removed for a little while, Québec's economy might improve. This will have a direct effect on the overall Canadian economy and, through the mechanics of transfer payments, will benefit the regions that need it most. Second, if the premiers come to the table and work out a deal on the social union that includes Québec, it would open a door to other adjustments, including those expected by Canadians from other parts of the country, and lead towards a renewed federation. Finally, should the discussion channels be more open, it will be easier for Québec and other provinces to work out agreements on matters of common interest. Therefore, as long as an open-minded attitude prevails, all of Canada might gain from the outcome of this election.

### *Conclusion*

This paper offered a close look at the general election held in Québec on 30 November 1998, an election won—in terms of seats—by Lucien Bouchard's Parti Québécois, but where the Parti libéral du Québec, led by Jean Charest, obtained more of the popular vote. This paradoxical situation makes the election an interesting phenomenon to study by itself. In order to do so, I have reviewed three aspects: the forces in place, the information provided by a few signposts, and, finally, the significance of the results for the leaders of the three main parties, as well as for Canada.

A first general conclusion that can be drawn is that there were no major shifts in terms of representation in the National Assembly, nor in terms of elements that influenced the outcome of the vote. However, when one looks at the impact on the leaders and the parties, it seems that the election has given each of them new tools to organize and defend their respective political agendas.

Many more in-depth studies will follow, with more detailed information and different analytical stances than this. However, from these observations, it appears that one of the most promising paths to follow is towards an analysis of the mandate given to Québec's political elite rather than towards a study of what might have caused the continuity within the province's governance. This aspect will probably bear even more significance with regard to the ongoing negotiation on the social union and, consequently, on future modifications to the shape of the Canadian political framework. In a climate of impossible constitutional talks while, at the same time, there is an obvious need to fix several constitutional or quasi-constitutional irritants, will we find the first elements of a viable answer here?