



Letters

Re: Federal Electoral Boundaries 2012

Sir:

The federal electoral boundaries commissions for each of the ten Canadian provinces were established in 2012 with each commission consisting of three members. Each commission had to follow several rules including a population for each riding as close as reasonably possible to the electoral quota for each province, community of interest, community of identity, and historical patterns. The variance from the population equality rule was limited to plus or minus 25%, except in extraordinary circumstances.

The publication of the ten reports demonstrates that each commission developed its own provincial approach within the required rules. However, some unusual features did occur.

The Manitoba Report set a tolerance goal of plus or minus 5% from the provincial average rather than plus or minus 25%. The Ontario Report noted an inappropriate involvement of two members of Parliament in the redistribution process.

The Commission for Alberta introduced what appears to be a new term called the doughnut approach. This method can be used to deal with large populations outside municipalities. In this way a riding may be designed to take in several small communities surrounding a city.

The Commission for Prince Edward Island decided to make no changes to the electoral boundaries established in 2002 for its four ridings.

The Commission of Saskatchewan published both

a majority report supported by a judge (chair) and a university professor (vice-chair) and a dissenting report by a third member (president of Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities). Their differences centred on the number of seats in Regina and Saskatoon and the growth in size of rural ridings.

All of the commissions were required to establish ridings based on effective representation as described by the *Carter* case and not follow closely equal population in each constituency. A useful statistical method to determine the variation in the size of ridings is to calculate the Gini index. The Gini scale varies between 0, which is complete equality, and 1, which is complete inequality. For example, complete equality (0) would occur when all constituencies in a province had the same population and complete inequality (1) would occur when one riding

had all the population and other ridings had no people in them

The table below shows the Gini indices for the federal electoral boundaries of each province. The lowest index of .011 is for Prince Edward Island; the highest index is .128 for Newfoundland and Labrador. These results show that no commission created ridings based only on ridings equal in population size.

The comments and indices shown are based on reports presented to the chief electoral officer and sent to the members of Parliament for assessment. Parliament could alter these reports and send them back to one or more of the commissions. Then these commissions could accept or reject these changes. Thus final authority rests with the federal commission in each province.

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Gini Indices for Reports of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission Presented to Chief Electoral Officer of Canada 2012	
Prince Edward Island	.011
Alberta	.014
Manitoba	.023
Saskatchewan	.027
Québec	.041
British Columbia	.041
Nova Scotia	.050
Ontario	.059
New Brunswick	.074
Newfoundland and Labrador	.128
Source: Report of each provincial commission for 2012	

For an explanation of the Gini index see H. Alker Jr. and B. Russett, "On Measuring Inequality," *Behavioral Science*, vol 9, 1964, pp. 207-218.