

Variability of Support for Sovereignty in Quebec, 1980-2004

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Introduction

Undeniably a distinct culture within Canada, Quebec is for many the albatross of Canadian politics.¹ Much of the national political debate of the past 35 years has dealt with Quebec's place in the Canadian confederation in light of increasing demands from Québécois² for more autonomy in their own province and a greater role for Francophones in the national government.

The background of the Quebec nation is key to understanding the modern political movements that have emerged from it. The central fact in understanding Quebec is that its Francophones³ largely do not regard themselves as French; their ancestors were left behind here when France abandoned the French and Indian War in 1759. Thus, the Québécois think of themselves as a unique people rather than as French-Canadians. In the long-fought and bitter French and Indian War, the British had more resources and were able to outflank the Canadiens, who were concentrated along the St. Lawrence River. Furthermore, France was involved in other struggles and did not view Quebec as a priority.⁴ Thus, the defeat of the Canadiens by the British was in a sense willed by the French government deciding to "cut and run." Their last ship of supplies and reinforcements came in 1758.⁵ On September 13, 1758, the French-Canadian forces led by Gen. Montcalm were defeated by the British, led by Gen. Wolfe, in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in what is now Quebec City. The war was formally ended with the Treaty of Paris of 1763. The abandonment by the French had profound implications for Québécois identity. Dufour writes that the Québécois would regard it as rejection by the French, which led to a permanent Francophobia among the mass

¹ Hill, p. xx-xxi.

² The term *Québécois* is used exclusively in this work to refer to Francophone Quebecers, specifically those descended from the original inhabitants of New France. The term *Quebecer*, or *Quebecker*, can refer to anyone who lives in Quebec.

³ In Canadian (especially Québécois) discourse, all persons are identified on the basis of their mother tongues as Francophones, Anglophones, or allophones (those whose mother tongue is neither French nor English). Thus, a person who speaks even perfect French but was raised by Anglophone parents can never be considered a Francophone.

⁴ Dufour, pp. 31-32.

Quebec public, in contrast to the love of France found only among the elite.⁶ The first serious effort by France to heal this rift was Charles De Gaulle's impetuous proclamation during his 1967 visit to Montreal, "Vive le Québec libre." This act not only led to De Gaulle's hasty departure from Canada, but it also soured Franco-Canadian relations for many years, a state that was exacerbated in 1997 when France commemorated the speech on a postage stamp. The broad cheering among the Québécois (those in the crowd and also the larger society) was not only a desire for independence, which had not reached the critical mass stage in Quebec at that point, but also recognition from France that the Québécois existed as a people.

The paradigm of Québécois seeing themselves as a unique people extends not only to their distant cousins in France but also to other Canadians of French extraction. Former McGill Chancellor Gretta Chambers notes the demand of Acadians and Franco-Ontarians for representation in the Senate, because Québécois cannot adequately represent them. "French Quebec has not championed Francophone minorities across Canada in the past," according to Chambers.⁷ Pan-Canadian Francophones sometimes allege that the Québécois are focused on their own situation and largely ignorant of the existence, let alone the issues, of Francophones in the rest of Canada.⁸ Columnist Jeffrey Simpson frequently laments that no Quebec media outlet has reporters in the rest of Canada, excepting Ottawa.

From 1763 onward, the key civil institutions in Quebec – including corporations, educational systems and the civil service – were dominated by persons of English ancestry. Only the Roman Catholic Church was Francophone-dominated in Quebec. Following the establishment of Canada as a country in 1867, Québécois gradually came into their own, but always dealing with English-speaking overlords or with Francophone elites believed to be in

⁵ Dufour, p. 28.

⁶ Dufour, p. 32.

⁷ Chambers, p. 215-16.

⁸ Author's confidential interview.

truck with the Anglophone overlords. The long reign of the dictatorial Premier Maurice Duplessis of the Union Nationale party (1936 to 1959, with only a five year break) whetted the appetites of Québécois for a new order, a reshaping of Quebec society to fully incorporate Québécois aspirations for the province. After Duplessis's death, the Liberals under Jean Lesage came to power, and this came to be called the "Quiet Revolution." It meant not only the end of the era of Duplessis and his co-partisans; it was a time when old elites like the Union Nationale and the Roman Catholic Church were subjugated and replaced by new elites, like intellectuals. The key paradigm for Québécois was the demand that they be "masters in their own house." Corporations were pressured to install Québécois into executive and managerial positions formerly held exclusively by Anglophones. The English-dominated network of private utility companies was nationalized, and they became Hydro-Québec, one of the largest electricity producers in the world. For some Francophone leaders like René Levesque and assorted agitators, the Quiet Revolution need not stop with these societal reforms; they aimed for an independent Quebec separate from Canada. Many scholars believe that effort to be a natural outgrowth of the transformation. As one historian puts it, the Quiet Revolution represented "a society's transformation from a defensive minority, sheltered in a linguistic and cultural enclave, to a self-confident majority, ready if it wishes to assume control of its own national state."⁹ To this end, Levesque founded the Parti Québécois in 1968.

That was the same year that Pierre Elliott Trudeau became Prime Minister of Canada. Trudeau had been a federalist all along and had little patience for those who wished Quebec to pursue separatism. "Be master in your own house," he advised in the 1968 election campaign, "but let that house be all of Canada."¹⁰ Indeed, since Trudeau became prime minister, Quebecers have occupied that office for 35 1/2 of 37 years, a fact that has

⁹ Rodal, pp. xv.

¹⁰ Quoted in *Boundaries of Identity: A Quebec Reader*, p. 46.

not been lost on Westerners. One hallmark of Trudeau's long tenure as prime minister (1968-1979; 1980-1984) is Canada's official bilingualism. This is often cited as a cause of resentment of Quebec by Western Canada, since a requirement that civil servants be fluent in both of Canada's official languages is believed by many Anglophones to create a bias in favor of Francophones. In fact, French is the *lingua franca* of the Canadian national government. Visitors to government offices in Ottawa are apt to be greeted first in French, and federal civil servants usually converse among themselves in French.

The emergence of Quebec nationalism as a key item on the Canadian national agenda began with the October Crisis of 1970, when a group of terrorists, the Front de Liberation du Québec (FLQ), kidnapped a British diplomat, James Cross, and a Quebec cabinet minister, Pierre Laporte. Cross was released safely but Laporte was murdered and left in a car trunk. Trudeau invoked martial law, and the crisis was ended within a few days.

The country and the world were shocked in November 1976 when the province elected the Parti Québécois to a majority government.

Besides official bilingualism, the key landmark of the Trudeau government is the patriation of the Canadian constitution in 1982 and the inclusion of a U.S.-style bill of rights, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Prior to the patriation, Canada's constitution was a British act, and amendments had to go through the British Parliament. Just as official bilingualism is resented in the West, the constitutional deals are resented in Quebec. Quebec never signed onto the 1982 constitution, and two later constitutional amendment packages, designed to bring Quebec into the constitution, the Meech Lake Accord of 1987 and the Charlottetown Accord of 1992, were scuttled in the political process, with Trudeau leading the opposition to them. The Charlottetown Accord was rejected in a national referendum, which is one of the elements of the electoral support for sovereignty considered here.

Reed Scowen, a former civil servant, MNA, and adviser to Liberal Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa published a rant in 1999 expressing a solution for the Quebec problem:

The rest of Canada should “divest” itself of Quebec. He outlines his view of the root cause of the ongoing unity crisis. In the first National Assembly after the first election of the Parti Québécois in 1976, there were two other parties with seats (in addition to the Liberals): the Union Nationale, which had been the party of Duplessis, and Crédit Social. These parties disbanded before 1980 after every MNA of them switched either to the Parti Québécois or the Liberal Party.¹¹ Scowen alleges that upstart third parties (of which there have been many) have not been successful due to fear of splitting the vote on matters of Quebec sovereignty. “The Parti Québécois and the Liberals remain the only political alternatives,” he says, “each with slightly different answers to the National Question, but indistinguishable on every other issue of public policy. Political debate ... has ceased to exist in Quebec.”¹²

Scowen points out that both parties call for the overhaul of the federal system. He alleges that the only Francophone group in Quebec in favor of contemporary Canadian federalism is Cité Libre, a group which once numbered among its leadership Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Scowen’s description of the impact of Cité Libre reveals them to be approximately as influential in modern Quebec political life as the Libertarian Party is in the United States. Scowen says that both parties maintain an ambiguous relationship with the national government. “If the polls suggest that a spirit of conciliation is in the air, the separatists speak fondly of their proposed association with Canada. If the population gets irritable with Ottawa, the Liberals talk tough. So it’s not surprising that each party attracts about half the vote. The two parties alternate in power, depending mainly on the popularity of their leader at the moment.”¹³

Scowen asserted that Quebec would never elect a strong federalist government, but the election of the Liberals under Jean Charest in 2003 seems to contradict him. But this

¹¹ Scowen, p. 51.

¹² Scowen, p. 51.

¹³ Scowen, p. 53.

was largely the same electorate that elected the Bloc Québécois to 54 of 75 seats in the House of Commons barely a year later.

The key puzzle analyzed herein is the stability of the sovereignist vote in Quebec over time. Is support for sovereignty largely the product of the same kind of swings that see a Republican win the governorship in North Dakota in one election and a Democrat the next? Or is there some larger ethnic basis that drives these results?

Data analysis

Support for sovereignty is analyzed over a number of national and provincial elections and referenda from 1980 to 2004. Included are these elections: the Quebec provincial elections of 1985, 1989, 1994, 1998, and 2003; the Canadian national elections of 1997, 2000, and 2004; the Quebec referenda of 1980 and 1995; and the Canadian national referendum of 1992. Votes for the Parti Québécois or the Bloc Québécois are interpreted as pro-sovereignty, as are Oui votes on the Quebec referenda and Non votes on the 1992 referendum. The average of these elections and the swing (highest minus lowest) in each unit of analysis (municipality) are used in the regressions.

The municipality, rather than the election poll (precinct) or riding, is used as the unit of analysis. This is because polling place and riding boundaries are not the same for national and provincial elections and they are subject to periodic change. Municipal boundaries are reasonably stable, notwithstanding the 1999-2006 rounds of municipal amalgamations and subsequent demergers.¹⁴ A sample of municipalities is used rather than a provincewide analysis. This is because of an excess of data. There were 26,850 electoral

¹⁴ The Parti Québécois government of Bernard Landry implemented a series of municipal mergers in 1999. For example, all of the municipalities on Montreal Island were amalgamated into a single city of Montreal. Quebec City was amalgamated with its suburbs. The cities of the Saguenay region (including Chicoutimi, Jonquière and La Baie) were united as Ville Saguenay. These mergers were unpopular with Quebecers and are cited as reasons for the Bloc Québécois's poor showing in the 2000 national election and the defeat of Landry's government in 2003. As a result, the Liberal government of Jean Charest allowed a series of

precincts in the 1998 provincial election. By U.S. standards, this is an unfathomable number. For example, Verdun, Que., with a population of 59,714, has 208 precincts. By contrast, Burnsville, Minn., pop. 60,434, has 17 precincts.¹⁵ The number of polling divisions used in national elections is not substantially smaller. Verdun had 135 polling units in the 2000 national election.

The following methodology was used to ensure randomness in the process of selecting municipalities. For each of these 15 regions, 3-4 places were chosen in each of four population groups (under 1000, 1001-5000, 5001-25000, over 25,000): Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Bas-St-Laurent, Chaudière-Appalaches, Coeur du Québec, Gaspésie, L'Estrie, Lower North Shore, Montérégie, Montreal Island, Montreal-North Shore Suburbs, Montreal-South Shore Suburbs, Outaouais, Quebec City Area, Nord du Québec, Saguenay. These regions were chosen largely for convenience but correspond somewhat (if not precisely) to similar regions created by the Quebec government for purposes of tourism and other administration and in general popular use. A map of these regions is included as an appendix. Table 10 (Population and Dwelling Counts, for Census Divisions, Census Subdivisions (Municipalities) and Designated Places (1)(2), 1991 and 1996 Censuses – 100% Data) of the Statistics Canada publication *A National Overview: Population and Dwelling Counts* was used. Each of the census divisions of Quebec (called county regional municipalities, or MRCs, in most of the province) was deemed to lie within one of the 15 regions. Since Quebec has 99 census divisions, this was an exercise in picking municipalities from an average of 6.6 census divisions per region. Ideally, there would have been three places chosen from each population group for each region, but some regions do not have this number of places in the higher population groups, so some oversampling of the smaller population groups occurred in these regions. The result was a set of 201 municipalities of

demerger referenda in June 2004. A large number of merged entities put the question to voters, and a large share of them passed. These demergers will take effect in 2006.

various size throughout Quebec. Insufficient census data was available for one municipality, Baie-St-Paul, and so it has been excluded from the analysis.

Census data used in the regressions for these municipalities were obtained from Statistics Canada from the 1996 census. It was decided to use that census rather than the 2001 census because the municipal boundaries in the earlier census were finer, being unaffected by the municipal mergers. Also, the 1996 census is closer to the median of the time frame under analysis.

The first piece of identity analyzed is Canadian ethnic identification. Not Canadian, but Canadien. This is a key element of ethnic identity somewhat unique to Quebec. When English-speaking people tell the census they are ethnically Canadian (or describe themselves that way in ordinary speech), it generally means they are a member of an unpopular ethnic group or that they are of multiple ethnicities that provoke some embarrassment in discussion. This is no different from multi-ethnic people in the United States who claim to be ethnically “American.” But in Quebec, the term “Canadien” has a special meaning. Dufour describes its meaning this way: “Under the French regime, New France was already known as Canada, the inhabitants as Canadians. That was the only name for Quebecers’ ancestors until the Union of 1840. The others called themselves ‘the British.’ The term ‘Canadiens’ is used in this sense...”¹⁶

According to Rodal, “The Québécois ... do not now see themselves as part of the voluntary confluence of separate ethnic and cultural mainstreams making up Canada. They long saw themselves as the only real Canadians, denied both partnership in the colonization and westward expansion of their country and their communal/cultural rights outside their heartland in Quebec.”¹⁷

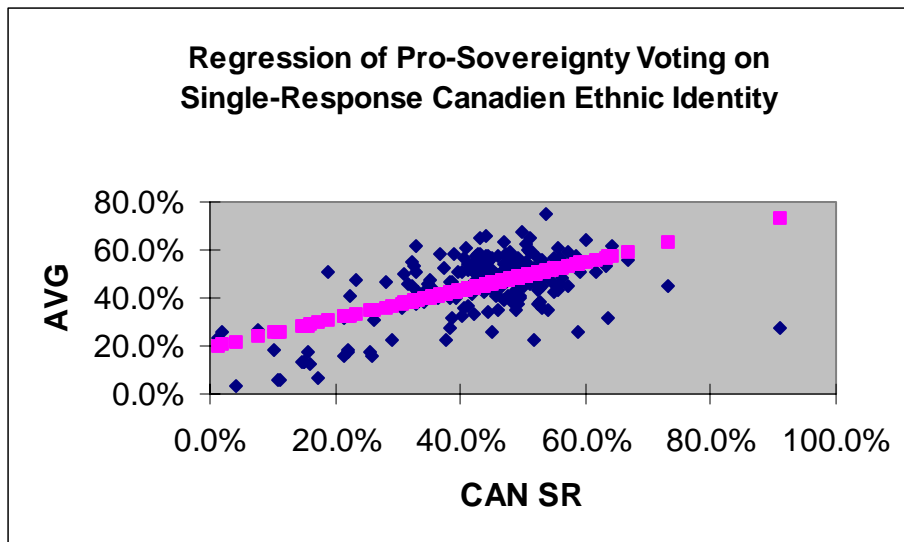
¹⁵ Minnesota Legislative Manual, 2003-04.

¹⁶ Dufour, p. 27.

¹⁷ Rodal, pp. xiv-xv.

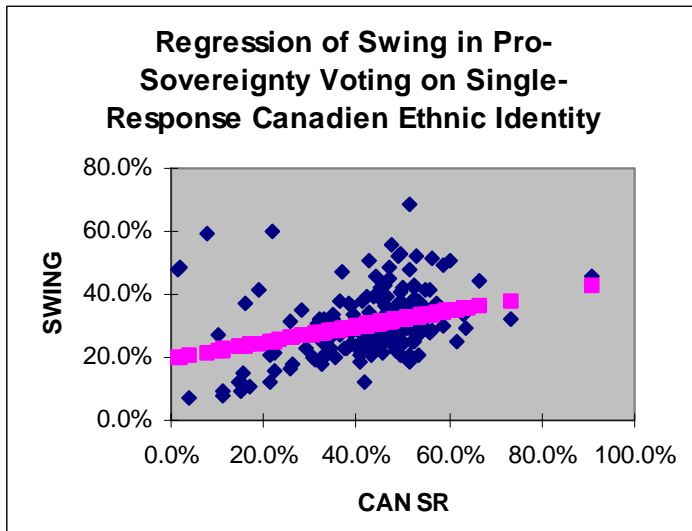
Thus, identification as “Canadien” is useful as a measure of Québécois identity. On the census, one may specify a single ethnic identification or name multiple ethnic identities. Persons who say only that they are Canadien or Norwegian or Finnish, for example, are said to have given a single response. A person’s multiple responses are counted in each of the ethnic groups mentioned. Naturally, the single response of Canadien is more indicative of Québécois identity than are multiple responses which only include Canadien or Canadian among several. This is no different from the well-founded belief that someone who describes himself ethnically only as Irish has a stronger sense of Irish identity than someone who describes herself as Irish-Swiss-Polish.

A regression of the average vote for sovereignty dependent on single-response Canadien identity yields a coefficient of 0.596 with a standard error of the mean of 0.059. It is noteworthy that the outliers on the low end are almost entirely below the regression line, suggesting that the lack of Canadien identity is more highly correlated with voting against Quebec nationalism than the presence of Canadien identity is with voting for it.



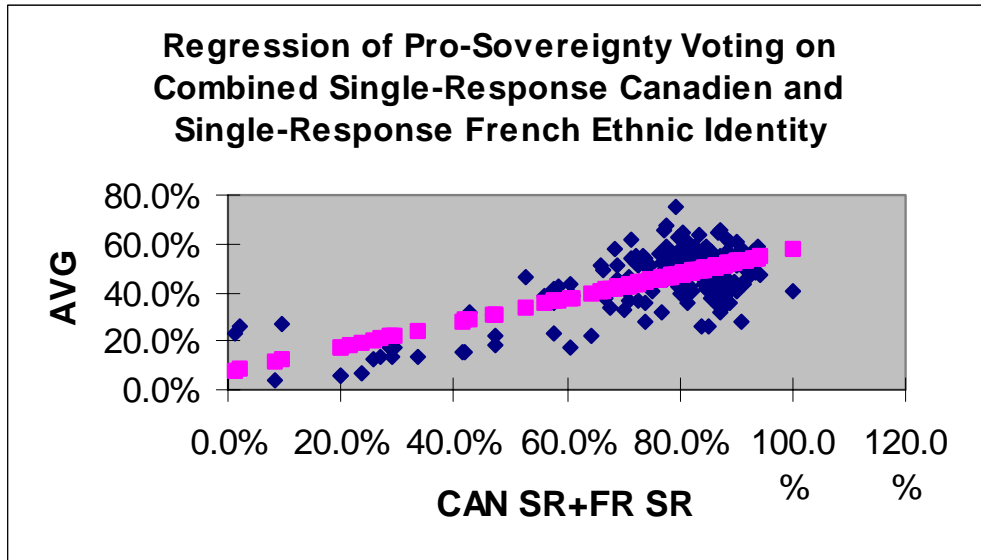
A regression on the swing (the difference between the high and low vote in a municipality) for sovereignty in the period studied) produces a much weaker coefficient, 0.253 with a standard error of the mean of 0.053. This supplies much of the answer to the

key question of whether support for sovereignty is persistent on an ethnic basis. Although the previous regression seems to suggest that the baseline level of support for sovereignty is ethnic, this one lends support to the idea that ethnic identity is not a huge factor in whether voters abandon the movement in going from election to election.



Many Québécois also identify ethnically as French. It is not possible using aggregate census data to know who identifies using only the two ethnicities French and Canadien, but is quite easy to aggregate those identifying singly as French with the single-response Canadien ethnic identifiers. In fact, in some places in Quebec, these two ethnic identities – singly – account for almost everyone. While some people use the term French mostly as a matter of shorthand or convenience, there are others for whom the term indicates a higher level of attachment to France than for Québécois as a whole, as discussed in the introduction. Accordingly then, we should expect the combination of French and Canadien to produce a less solid correlation than Canadien by itself. This is in fact the case. Computing a regression of average support for sovereignty on combined single-response Canadien and French identity produces a coefficient of 0.5 with a standard error of the mean

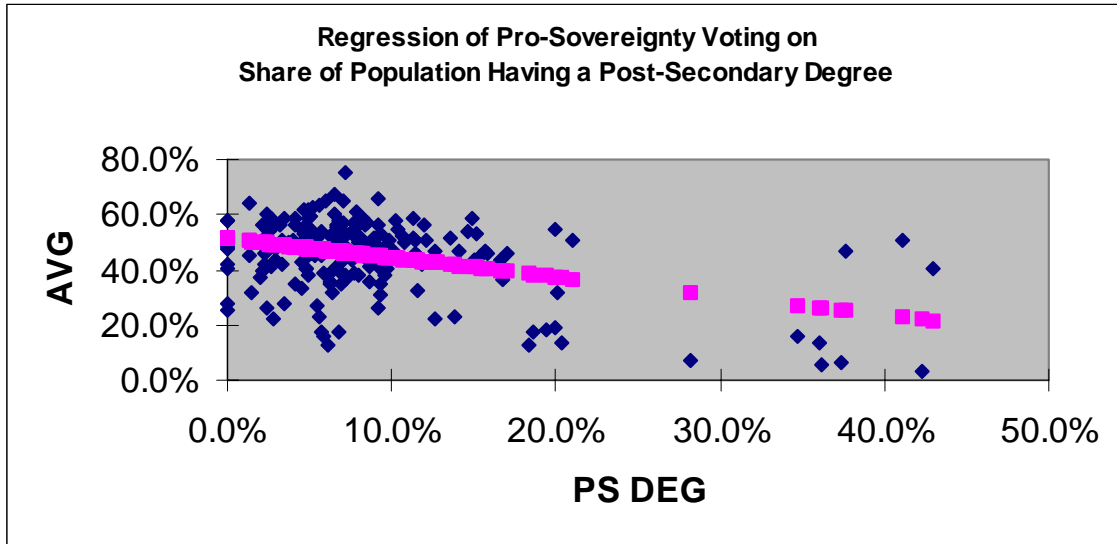
of 0.036. The scatterplot is a little bit neater, and of course the intercept at 0.075 is much closer to 0.



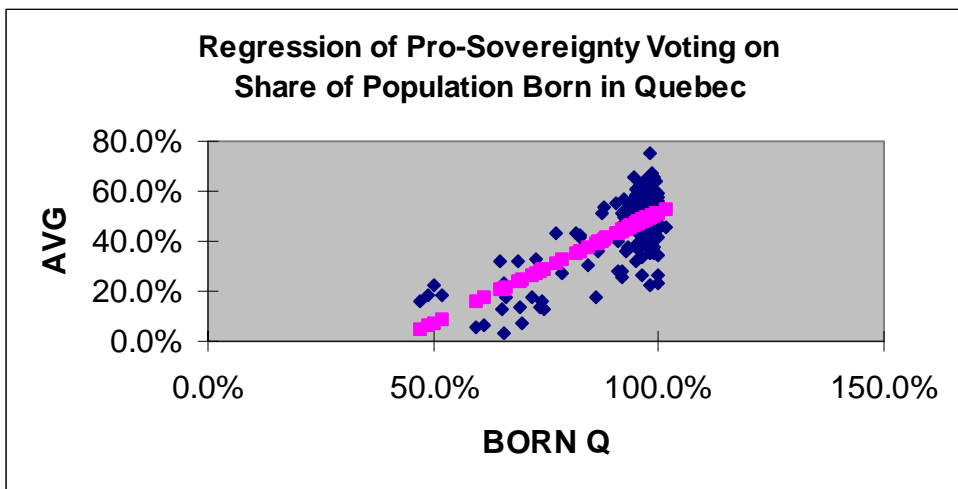
While these are both solid statistical findings, the idea that the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois are Québécois ethnic nationalist parties is hardly original or surprising. Since the census is rich with other data besides ethnicity, it might be worthwhile and informative to try some other variables to understand if something other than Québécois identity drives pro-sovereignist voting in Quebec.

A regression of the average sovereignty vote on the percent of the population having a high school diploma or lower (i.e., no post-secondary education) produces a coefficient of 0.239 with a standard error of the mean of 0.074. This is a very weak finding. However, a contrary idea, the relationship of pro-sovereignty voting and having not only post-secondary education but also a college degree, produces a coefficient of -0.69 with a standard error of the mean of 0.112. This is a very strong inverse relationship and hints at why Quebec nationalists are frequently scoffed at by their neighbors of the professional classes. It must

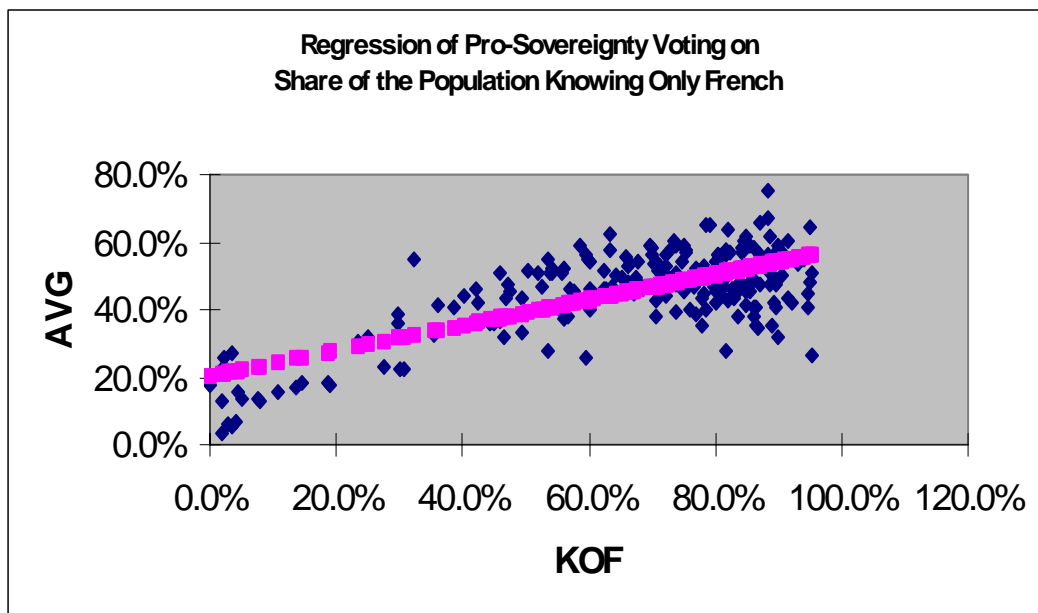
be cautioned, however, that relatively few municipalities have large shares of the population with college degrees, and these outliers happen to have higher pro-federalist voting.



The regression of pro-sovereignty voting on the share of the population born in Quebec produces an enormously positive coefficient of 0.882 with a standard error of the mean of 0.064. However, only a few municipalities in this survey were below the 50 percent mark in terms of the share of their population born in the province.



Since language is the national obsession in Canada parallel to the American national obsession with race, five separate questions are asked on the census long form about it. These questions are: mother tongue, home language, work language, knowledge of official languages, knowledge of non-official languages. Of these, the consensus of scholars and census data users is that mother tongue is most important because it defines a person's identity. The others relate to social and educational situations. Nevertheless, it is a useful question in a society as monolithically French as Quebec (by PQ mandate) whether those people who know only French are more persuaded to vote for the PQ. A regression of average pro-sovereignty voting on the share of the population knowing only French produces a relatively mild coefficient of 0.377 with a standard error of the mean of 0.026. The points cluster more closely to the regression line than some of the other examples presented herein. It is interesting that language proves so much less salient than ethnic identity. Indeed, regressing pro-sovereignty voting on the Francophone share of the population produces only a slightly higher coefficient than those who only know French: 0.467 with a standard error of the mean of 0.028.



Discussion

In the introduction to his reader on ethnic and other identity in the province, Dodge declares, “Quebec is not a monolithic society that speaks with one voice.”¹⁸ The measures illustrated here show that Quebec, even “pure laine” French Quebec, is even less monolithic than is usually believed, and that there are wide swings in support for sovereignty and its advocates from election to election. “Quebecers like strong governments, in Quebec and in Ottawa,” according to Trudeau.¹⁹ As Scowen points out, the Quebec Liberal Party is frequently only a little less outspoken about Québécois nationalism than the Parti Québécois. The Liberal Party has cultivated many Québécois voters, particularly in the off-island suburbs of Montreal that frequently hold the balance of power in Quebec elections. The goal for the Liberal Party is to combine these swing voters – often called “soft sovereignists” – with the solid Liberal base in Montreal’s West Island, L’Estrie, and the Outaouais to produce a victory.

Thus, an asymmetry exists. It is not in the interest of the Quebec Liberal Party to alienate the Québécois, but the Parti Québécois can win a majority without a single vote from Anglophones or allophones. Part of this is a systematic bias built into the polity because non-Québécois who tend to support the Quebec Liberal Party are concentrated disproportionately in a smaller number of ridings and produce huge numbers of surplus votes while the Parti Québécois wins many competitive seats. In the 1998 election, this produced an electoral inversion, because the Liberals won more votes but the Parti Québécois won more seats.²⁰ Siaroff has demonstrated a clear and persistent electoral bias

¹⁸ Dodge, p. xii.

¹⁹ Trudeau, p. 249.

²⁰ Hill, p. xii.

against the Quebec Liberal Party dating back to 1936.²¹ Thus, ethnicity emerges as a key but not a complete answer to the enigma that is Quebec politics.

Regional variations in pro-sovereignty voting, 1980-2004

Region	Swing (lowest to highest)	Average Support for Sovereignty	Number of municipalities included
Abitibi-Témiscamingue	32.5%	56.3%	12
Bas-St-Laurent	40.4%	43.1%	11
Chaudière-Appalaches	39.5%	39.0%	9
Coeur du Québec	32.6%	49.5%	18
Gaspésie	28.1%	47.7%	12
L'Estrie	28.8%	42.8%	17
Lower North Shore	32.2%	51.1%	12
Montérégie	26.1%	42.4%	21
Montreal Island	16.4%	23.0%	11
Nord du Québec	42.4%	41.5%	6
North Shore Suburbs	28.9%	50.9%	18
Outaouais	23.0%	30.5%	12
Quebec City Area	37.4%	44.7%	17
Saguenay	34.7%	56.6%	11
South Shore Suburbs	25.3%	50.9%	13
Grand Average	30.6%	45.1%	200

²¹ Siaroff, *passim*.



Appendix 1. This paper operationalizes the regions of Quebec in a manner similar to, although slightly less numerous than, the 20 tourist regions. The Manicouagan and Duplessis regions are combined as the Lower North Shore. Charlevoix is split between this region and Quebec City area. La Mauricie, Lanaudière, and Centre-du-Québec are combined as Coeur du Québec. Part of Montérégie is called South Shore suburbs. Part of Laurentides, is included in North Shore Suburbs, as is Laval. The rest is included in Outaouais. No municipalities in Îles de la Madeleine are analyzed herein.

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

**CANADIAN/CANADIEN SINGLE-RESPONSE ETHNICITY
1996 CENSUS, BY FEDERAL ELECTORAL DISTRICT**

Rank	RNum Riding	Canadian - Single responses
1	24067 Saint-Maurice	52.8%
2	24005 Beauce	52.7%
3	24040 Lotbinière	52.1%
4	24062 Saint-Hyacinthe - Bagot	52.0%
5	24026 Joliette	51.3%
6	24068 Shefford	49.7%
7	24008 Bellechasse - Etchemins - Montmagny	49.7%
8	24053 Repentigny	49.4%
9	24055 Richmond - Arthabaska	49.2%
10	24057 Roberval	49.1%
11	24054 Richelieu	49.1%
12	24027 Jonquière	49.0%
13	24021 Frontenac - Mégantic	49.0%
14	24009 Berthier - Montcalm	49.0%
15	24014 Champlain	48.7%
16	24018 Chicoutimi	48.2%
17	24059 Témiscamingue	47.5%
18	24020 Drummond	47.3%
19	24063 Saint-Jean	47.1%
20	24070 Terrebonne - Blainville	46.8%
21	24016 Charlevoix	46.7%
22	24028 Kamouraska-Rivière-du-Loup-Témiscamingue	46.6%
23	24007 Beauport - Montmorency - Orléans	46.5%
24	24030 Lac-Saint-Jean	46.2%
		38.1% Average for Quebec
52	13001 Acadie - Bathurst	36.2% Highest non-Quebec riding
53	24036 Laval-Est	35.9%
69	10001 Bonavista - Trinity - Conception	25.4% Highest non-Francophone riding
70	13010 Tobique - Mactaquac	24.9%
71	12006 Kings - Hants	23.9%
106	24002 Ahuntsic	17.8% These Quebec outlier
121	24029 Notre-Dame-de-Grâce - Lachine	16.5% ridings are mostly
123	24066 Saint-Léonard - Saint-Michel	16.2% populated with
126	24047 Papineau - Saint-Denis	16.0% immigrants;
147	24048 Pierrefonds - Dollard	14.3% Not typical
162	24031 Lac-Saint-Louis	13.4% Québécois ridings.
		12.7% Average for rest of Canada
215	24065 Saint-Laurent - Cartierville	10.5%
221	24046 Outremont	9.9%
290	24045 Mont-Royal	4.4% Lowest Quebec riding
299	59029 Vancouver Kingsway	2.8%
300	35012 Davenport	2.8%
301	61001 Nunavut	2.7% Lowest riding

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