

## FRANCOPHONE BILINGUALISM, INTER-GROUP CONTACT, AND OPPOSITION TO SOVEREIGNTY AMONG QUÉBEC FRANCOPHONES

**SCOTT PIROTH**

Bowling Green State University

**PIERRE SERRÉ**

Université de Montréal

**DAVID LUBLIN**

American University

*Using ecological inference methods and a dataset that combines results from the 1995 Québec referendum, the federal and provincial elections of 1997 and 1998, and data from the Canadian census, this article considers the relationship between the local linguistic environment and francophone support for Québec sovereignty. Outside of Montréal, we find that the linguistic composition of the population has little direct influence on support for sovereignty but that support for sovereignty declines as the proportion of francophones who know English rises. In Montréal, we find that support for sovereignty rises as the non-francophone portion of the population declines, but knowledge of a second language does not influence support for sovereignty.*

The status of Québec within Canada has been at the centre of political debates in Québec throughout recent history, and language is a central element of this debate. A majority of francophone Quebecers supported sovereignty in the 1995 referendum, and pro-sovereignty parties won the 1997 federal and 1998 provincial elections. By contrast, non-francophones are overwhelmingly opposed to Québec's sovereignty. Preliminary research suggests that francophones living in areas with members of other linguistic groups (a way of defining contact) are less likely to support sovereignty than are francophones living in linguistically homogeneous areas.<sup>1</sup> This finding is consistent with the contact hypothesis.<sup>2</sup>

---

Address correspondence to Scott Piroth, Department of Political Science, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403. E-mail: [spiroth@bgsu.edu](mailto:spiroth@bgsu.edu)

The contact hypothesis suggests that contact among members of different groups leads to greater communication either through living side-by-side or by having the linguistic ability to communicate, and improves inter-group relations. Meaningful communication is not likely to take place, however, when members of different groups speak different languages and are unable to converse in the language of the other group. Of course, communication occurs even when people do not understand each other's language, but the level of contact is almost certainly higher as oral communication abilities rise. If communication decreases support for sovereignty, then support for sovereignty should be lowest in those areas with high levels of bilingualism because the barriers to inter-group communication are the lowest in such areas.<sup>3</sup>

This relationship may be more complicated, however, because the overall level of bilingualism in an area may be less important than the rates of bilingualism within different linguistic groups. Francophone bilingualism may indicate strong pressure toward linguistic assimilation, so contact theory may correspond with assimilation theory. Rather than signaling reduced inter-group conflict, francophone bilingualism would indicate linguistic conflict. Despite their numerical dominance, Québec francophones historically learned English in order to accommodate dominant anglophone economic interests. Learning English under economic duress may create resentment and lead to increased support for sovereignty, especially in those areas where francophones possess sufficient political resources to contest linguistic domination. In Québec, linguistic conflict centers on Montréal not just because of the presence of large numbers of non-francophones but also because the high level of urbanization facilitates communication among a politically skilled and educated francophone population. In short, the ability of francophones to communicate in English may imply either tighter links or greater conflict with non-francophones.

By contrast, if non-francophones can communicate in French, this could suggest that the status of French within Québec is increasingly secure and undermines the argument that political sovereignty is necessary to ensure that the French language continues to thrive in Québec. Learning French requires non-francophones to accommodate francophone linguistic

preferences, so it may provide direct evidence to francophones of the decline of the cultural division of labor and, more generally, of the cultural and political dominance of francophones in Québec. On the other hand, francophones may view non-francophone bilingualism as a success of the sovereignty movement and be encouraged to pursue sovereignty. It may also suggest that non-francophones will be less likely to leave Québec if sovereignty is achieved, reducing the negative impact of sovereignty on the Québec economy.

In this article, we consider the linguistic environment and its impact on support for sovereignty in greater detail. Specifically, we will examine the impact that neighborhood linguistic mix and bilingualism among members of different groups has on francophone support for sovereignty.

### **Data and Methodology**

To explore these issues, we use a dataset that matches demographic information from the 1996 Census with election results from the 1995 Québec referendum, the 1997 Canadian federal election, and the 1998 Québec provincial election. Using EI, a method of ecological inference discussed at greater length elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> we have estimated with confidence intervals the actual share of votes cast for sovereignty in the 1995 referendum, and for pro-sovereignty parties in the 1997 federal election and the 1998 provincial election—the Bloc Québécois (BQ) in the 1997 election, and the Parti Québécois (PQ) in the 1998 vote—by francophone Quebecers for 2,577 geographical sub-units of Québec.<sup>5</sup>

The units of analysis have been divided into ten regions: three CMAs, four regions collectively named the Hinterland, and three regions, collectively named the Periphery. The CMAs are defined by the Census Bureau. The Montréal CMA includes the islands of Montréal, Laval, and the immediate surrounding suburbs. This region, by itself, contains almost 47% of the province's population. Similarly, the Québec City CMA consists of Québec City and its immediate surrounding suburbs, and the Hull-Gatineau CMA includes the cities of Hull and Gatineau and their surrounding suburbs. The Hinterland is divided into four regions depending on its proximity to these three metropolitan areas.

Hinterland-Outaouais is the region around Hull-Gatineau, extending north from the Ottawa River. Hinterland-Montréal includes the region south of Montréal to the United States border and the area north of Montréal to the Laurentians. Hinterland-Québec includes areas immediately surrounding the provincial capital both north and south of the St. Lawrence River. Finally, Hinterland-Other includes the region between Québec and Montréal that does not fall clearly within the sphere of influence of either city. This region extends from the border with the United States through the Eastern Townships and north of the St. Lawrence River. It includes the cities of Sherbrooke, Trois-Rivières, and Shawinigan. The Periphery is divided into three regions. Abitibi/Ungava extends from the upper Ottawa Valley north to the Hudson Bay and west through the far northern reaches of Quebec. Periphery-Saguenay/Lac-Saint-Jean/Côte Nord includes the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region, home of the Chicoutimi-Jonquière CMA, and extends east through the region north of the St. Lawrence River. Finally, Periphery-Gaspésie consists of the sparsely populated Gaspé Peninsula and the Iles-de-la-Madelaine.

Although some non-sovereignists vote for the PQ and the BQ and some sovereignists vote for other parties, we use “support for sovereignty” to refer to support for the pro-sovereignty position in each of the three elections in order to avoid more cumbersome phraseology. The high number of units not only increases certainty about our conclusions but makes it possible to examine the impact of linguistic context at a smaller level. One might expect linguistic context of a voter’s neighborhood and the immediately surrounding area to have the strongest impact on voting behavior.

While surveys have other advantages, it is usually not possible to use them to estimate support in small subsections of the area surveyed due to an insufficient number of respondents. The results here should also be more accurate than previous studies of Québec politics that applied methods of ecological inference because our dataset contains vastly more units of analysis. First, we will estimate francophone support for sovereignty in each of our units. Then, using weighted least squares regression models, we will focus on how contextual factors influence the level of support for sovereignty among francophones.

## Estimates of Francophone Support for Sovereignty

The dependent variable in our analyses is francophone support for sovereignty or sovereigntist parties (Yes votes in 1995, BQ votes in 1997, and PQ votes in 1998). We assume that Yes votes cast in the 1995 referendum was the most direct test of support for sovereignty. Although votes cast for the BQ in 1997 and the PQ in 1998 are not necessarily motivated by support for Québec's sovereignty (many other issues motivate voters in elections), there were strong correlations between Yes votes in the 1995 referendum and BQ in 1997 and the PQ in 1998 (.88 and .83, respectively). Comparison of the analysis of results of the 1995 referendum with those of 1997 and 1998 election results would allow us to confirm hypothesis about the nature of the main social forces that are shaping Québec's politics.

We have defined francophones in terms of the language a person speaks at home rather than by a person's "mother tongue."<sup>6</sup> Table 1 shows our EI estimates for francophone support for sovereignty in the three elections. Our estimates of francophone support for sovereignty are very similar to those of other researchers who have used ecological data and fall squarely within the range suggested by surveys.<sup>7</sup> Although province-wide results are interesting, EI provides individual estimates of francophone support for sovereignty for each of the 2,577 units that form the basis of our analyses in this article.

### Explaining Support for Sovereignty: Contact versus Threat

We begin by testing two competing hypotheses: (1) the contact hypothesis, which holds that "more contact between individuals

**TABLE 1** EI Estimates of Vote for Sovereignty in 1995 and Sovereigntist Parties in 1997 and 1998 by Linguistic Group

	Francophones	Non-Francophones
1995	58.9 (.01)	0.77 (.08)
1997	46.1 (.03)	0.75 (.16)
1998	50.6 (.08)	0.95 (.46)

*Note:* EI estimates; standard errors in parentheses.

belonging to antagonistic social groups tends to undermine negative stereotypes and reduce prejudice, thus improving inter-group relations by making people more willing to deal with each other as equals”<sup>8</sup> and (2) the threat hypothesis, which holds that members of a group will perceive themselves more politically (and socially and economically) threatened as members of another group become more numerous. Applied to the Québec case, these theories suggest two diametrically opposed hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1: As the proportion of non-francophones in an area or unit of analysis increases, support for sovereignty among francophones decreases.*

*Hypothesis 2: As the proportion of non-francophones in an area or unit of analysis increases, support for sovereignty among francophones increases.*

When we consider these hypotheses at the smallest possible level of analysis, our 2,577 units, there is empirical support for Hypothesis 1: the contact hypothesis. There are statistically significant correlations between the percentage of francophones in a unit and the EI-estimated francophone vote for sovereignty in each of the three elections. In 1995, the correlation is .51; in 1997, the correlation is .46; and in 1998, the correlation is .52 (Weighted Pearson’s Correlation. Unless otherwise noted, all reported correlations are significant at  $p < .01$ , two-tailed test). Thus, francophones living in linguistically mixed areas are less likely to support sovereignty than are those francophones living in a mostly French-speaking area. As Drouilly found in his aggregate analysis, these relatively modest correlations, however, hide a much stronger relationship within the Montréal CMA.<sup>9</sup> In the Montréal CMA, where the larger percentage of non-francophones is concentrated, the correlations between the percentage of francophones in a unit and the EI-estimated francophone vote for sovereignty in 1995, 1997, and 1998 are .73, .79, and .72, respectively.

However, if we examine these hypotheses at the regional level (see Table 2), the picture is decidedly mixed. On one hand, the 98% francophone Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region is consistently the region that is most supportive of sovereignty, and the Hull-Gatineau CMA and the surrounding Outaouais region, with their large concentration of non-francophones, are the regions that are least supportive of sovereignty. On the other hand, francophones

**TABLE 2** EI Estimates of Francophone Support for Sovereignty by Region

	% Francophone	1995 Referendum	1997 Election	1998 Election
Hinterland-Québec (4%)	99	51	40	47
Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean (5%)	98	72	55	64
Québec City CMA (10%)	98	57	44	47
Hinterland-Other (16%)	97	58	43	50
Periphery-Abitibi (2%)	97	63	49	58
Hinterland-Montréal (11%)	92	61	49	53
Periphery-Gaspésie (2%)	92	62	45	55
Hull-Gatineau CMA (4%)	81	32	26	35
Outaouais (1%)	76	45	41	44
Montréal CMA (47%)	70	63	53	55

*Note:* The number in parentheses is the percentage of Québec's total population living in the region.

in the least francophone region, the Montréal CMA, are among the most supportive of sovereignty, whereas francophones in Québec City and its surrounding regions are less supportive of sovereignty despite the region's overwhelming francophone majority. These results at the regional level may reflect that the contact only reduces inter-group friction in smaller units where greater day-to-day contact is more likely to occur.

The impact of region-specific factors is most clear in the case of the Hull-Gatineau CMA and the surrounding Outaouais region. Because many Quebecers in this region are employed by the federal government and the economic fortunes of many others are closely tied to the federal government, the costs of separation would be keenly felt in this region.<sup>10</sup> The relative lack of support for sovereignty in Québec City is more puzzling. Drouilly suggests that many public-sector workers in the provincial capital region have never forgiven the PQ for the bitter clashes between the PQ government and the public sector unions that occurred in 1982–83.<sup>11</sup> It is the relatively high level of support for sovereignty in Montréal, however, that casts some doubt on the contact hypothesis.

Viewed from another perspective, perhaps there is a threshold of francophones necessary to sustain high levels of support for sovereignty within a unit rather than a linear relationship between percentage francophone and support for sovereignty. As Table 3 shows, there does not seem to be much difference between

**TABLE 3** EI Estimates of Francophone Support for Sovereignty by Per Cent of French Speakers in the Unit of Analysis

% French	1995	1997	1998
Greater than 95	62	48	54
80–95	62	51	54
50–80	59	48	50
Less than 50	48	36	40

francophone support for sovereignty in overwhelmingly francophone areas (95% or more francophones) versus those areas with a solid francophone majority (80% to 95%). Francophone support for sovereignty decreases slightly in those units that are 50% to 80% francophone; however, the real drop-off occurs in those units where francophones are not a majority. In the 1997 and 1998 elections, this may be partially attributable to the fact that PQ and BQ candidates were not competitive in ridings with non-francophone majorities, but this should not influence the 1995 referendum, which exhibits the same effect.

These estimates help to explain why the correlation between the share of francophones in the population and francophone support for sovereignty in the Montréal CMA is so much stronger than in the rest of Québec. Within the Montréal CMA, 25% of our units are not majority francophone, and only 13% of the units are more than 95% francophone. By contrast, outside of Montréal, only 3% of the units are not majority francophone, and nearly 80% of the units are more than 95% francophone. These results may provide support for the contact hypothesis because they suggest that the contact hypothesis is most valid where the greatest amount of inter-group contact takes place. Nevertheless, the mere fact that support for sovereignty declines in linguistically mixed areas does not necessarily mean that contact between members of different groups causes the decline. To better understand the dynamics of inter-group communication, we need to consider the effect of bilingualism in more detail.

### Language Knowledge and Support for Sovereignty

For a variety of reasons, many francophones fear that the long-term survival of the French language in Québec may be imperiled.



Demographic decline in Canada, cultural and economic integration with an anglophone-dominated continent, a clear historical cultural division of labor, which requires francophones seeking to advance in white-collar occupation to learn English, and, more recently, the declining birth rate among francophones and influx of immigrants choosing English as their main language rather than French were main reasons for linguistic insecurity. All of these factors have led Québec's provincial government to use legislation, most notably Bill 101, to reinforce the use of French in Québec.

Despite the progress of French since the 1970s, there is strong evidence that many francophone Quebecers continue to view the French language in Québec as threatened and are more likely to support sovereignty than are those who do not perceive a threat to the language (surveys show that 50–70% of francophone Quebecers believe that French is threatened).<sup>12</sup> There is also clear evidence that feeling threatened is likely to be linked to sovereignty support.<sup>13</sup>

If contact decreases support for sovereignty, support for sovereignty should be lowest in those areas where barriers to communication are the lowest, such as in areas with high levels of bilingualism. Survey data indicate that francophones who use English on a regular basis are less likely to support sovereignty than are those who use English less often. Bilingual francophones are probably more likely to have anglophone friends and are probably more likely to be employed in sectors of the economy that are closely linked to the rest of Canada. This suggests the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3: As the proportion of francophones who can converse in English in an area or unit of analysis increases, support for sovereignty among francophones decreases.*

Francophone bilingualism removes one obstacle to intergroup communication, but it does not ensure that such communication will occur or that such communication will undercut support for sovereignty. Some studies have suggested that francophones and anglophones in Montréal “have sufficient linguistic skills to communicate with each other but they often choose not to communicate.”<sup>14</sup> Francophones who learn English because it is a requirement of their jobs may have little contact with

ordinary non-francophone Quebecers and may resent having to switch languages to accommodate unilingual anglophones in the workplace.

Communication, when it does occur, does not always produce harmony. In the Québec case, some authors emphasize that increasing contact between francophones and anglophones creates pressures toward assimilation among francophones.<sup>15</sup> In a study using data from the 1960s and 1970s, Olzak found that separatist activities and votes for separatist parties occurred more often in cities with large numbers of bilingual francophones. She suggests that increasing contact with anglophones in the economic realm causes francophones to support separatism as a “strategy to insulate French Canada against the threat of assimilation to the English culture.”<sup>16</sup>

The sovereigntist movement first mobilized in Montréal—where contact between francophones and non-francophones is greatest—and francophone support for the Yes side in the 1980 referendum was higher in Montréal than in the rest of Québec. Blais and Nadeau explain this finding by arguing that it is in Montréal where anglophone domination is most obvious.<sup>17</sup> Since the 1970s, support for the PQ and for its sovereigntist option has spread throughout Québec and is no longer concentrated in Montréal.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, some suggest that there is a qualitative difference between the nationalism of Quebecers from predominantly French regions, which is characterized by a sense of belonging, and the nationalism of Montréalers, which is tightly bound to the linguistic question.

If support for sovereignty is motivated by fears that the French language is doomed to a slow death in Canada, then when non-francophones learn French, support for sovereignty should decline because francophones’ sense of linguistic security will increase. On the other hand, bilingualism among francophones may suggest pressures toward assimilation and increase the perception that the French language is threatened in Québec, thus increasing support for sovereignty. The above discussion suggests the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4: As the proportion of non-francophones who can converse in French in an area or unit of analysis increases, support for sovereignty among francophones decreases.*

*Hypothesis 5: As the proportion of francophones who can converse in English in an area or unit of analysis increases, support for sovereignty among francophones increases.*

However, non-francophone bilingualism does not inherently impede support for sovereignty. Non-francophones who can communicate in French may be less likely to leave Québec in the wake of a Yes vote due to stronger links with the francophone majority and because of their ability to participate more fully in the dominant language of the new country. The departure of large numbers of non-francophones might greatly injure the Québec economy in the wake of sovereignty. Francophones may believe that rising French-language skills indicate that fewer non-francophones would leave Québec after a Yes vote. As a result, the ability of non-francophones to speak French might allay francophone concerns that the departure by massive numbers of non-francophones could harm the Québec economy. This line of reasoning suggests:

*Hypothesis 6: As the proportion of non-francophones who can converse in French in an area or unit of analysis increases, support for sovereignty among francophones rises.*

In the remainder of this article, we test our six hypotheses.

### **Exploring the Influence of Bilingualism on Electoral Behavior**

The language variables in our analysis include the following: percentage francophone, non-francophone knowledge of French, and francophone knowledge of English. Bilingualism was determined by the percentage of people who affirm that they are able to conduct a conversation in both English and French in response to the census question: “Can this person speak English or French well enough to conduct a conversation?”<sup>19</sup> Non-francophone knowledge of French is calculated from the census data by subtracting the percentage of francophones (French spoken at home) from the percentage of those who claim to be able to conduct a conversation in French. This variable is included only for non-francophones living in units of analysis with fewer than 95% francophones. In a nearly unilingual environment, communication among members of different linguistic groups is likely to be infrequent, whereas in

a linguistically mixed environment the potential for communication is far greater. Francophone knowledge of English is estimated using EI. The census provides data on the percentage of francophones living in each unit and the percentage of residents in each unit who can speak English—these data plus the population of each unit are sufficient information for EI to estimate the percentage of francophones who can speak English.

Although this article focuses primarily on the issue of language, one cannot ignore the impact that other variables have on support for sovereignty. In our multivariate analysis, we have also included measurements of age, education, and income for each unit of analysis, as well as occupation and region.

Age is the demographic variable with the strongest impact on support for sovereignty. Surveys show an enduring and unambiguous generational divide in support for sovereignty. Support for sovereignty averages 10% higher among Quebecers born in the 1940s than among those born prior to 1940 and another 10% higher again among those born after 1950 than among those born in the 1940s.<sup>20</sup> Although census data are not ideal for isolating the impact of age, there are units with decidedly older (and younger) demographic profiles. Our age variable is the percentage of persons older than 55 (as of 1996) living in each unit of analysis.

Education is operationalized as the percentage of persons living in each unit of analysis who have attended a university (with or without receiving a diploma). Although the relationship between education and support for sovereignty is weaker than is the relationship between age and support for sovereignty, it has been demonstrated that, among francophones, support for sovereignty increases with increasing education.<sup>21</sup> More educated people tend to be more likely to join political movements, and teachers, students, union officials, artists, and community activists have generally been the core activists in the sovereigntist movement.

Income is measured by the median household income in the unit of analysis. There is some reason to believe that support for sovereignty is greater in lower income areas.<sup>22</sup> Since its origin, the PQ has presented itself as a social democratic party and has had the support of most of Québec's major unions and those on the political left. But the PQ's record as a governing party—clashes with public sector unions in the 1980s, support for free trade in the 1980s and 1990s, and focus on deficit reduction in the 1990s—has

disappointed many of its social democratic supporters. Nevertheless, a plausible case can be made that leftists view sovereignty as an opportunity to adopt social democratic policies in an independent Québec that would be impossible in Canada.

Occupation is a variable that is closely linked with education. Those francophones in intellectual occupations have been disproportionately represented in the leadership of the PQ, and the party has historically received disproportionate support from this group.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, middle-class francophones in other occupational categories have not always been as consistently favorable toward sovereignty. When there was a clear cultural division of labor in Québec, middle-class francophones had strong economic incentives to support nationalism; however, some observers contend that the improved economic status of members of the francophone middle class has led to a decrease in support for sovereignty among members of this group by “reducing their economic incentives to further alterations in the socio-political status of Québec society.”<sup>24</sup> Members of other occupational categories also may have particular reasons to support or oppose sovereignty. For example, union members tend to support the PQ and sovereignty, while farmers, who rely heavily on subsidies from the federal government, tend to oppose sovereignty.

The census distinguishes among 12 categories of workers. In our analysis, we have grouped occupations together into six categories: (1) professionals in business, management, and the health sector, (2) professionals in science, teaching, and the arts, (3) clerical, service, and transportation workers, (4) sales workers, (5) primary sector workers, and (6) workers employed in construction, manufacturing, and utilities.

The demographic variables in our analysis are aggregated characteristics of individuals in the units of analysis, such as their income or education. These demographic variables are more than crude measures that parallel the individual characteristics utilized in survey data analysis. Rather, we hypothesize that voters are influenced by the context in which they live.<sup>25</sup> Government workers may vote against sovereignty if they believe that it will cost them their jobs, but reduced government employment would also carry serious implications for the entire economy in areas with a high percentage of government workers. Self-interest might fuel widespread opposition among all voters in such a context. A similar

logic applies to other demographic variables: highly educated francophones may influence those with less schooling when the former are numerous. Some of the influences of a youthful population may rub off on the older voters who reside near them.

There is considerable regional variation in support for sovereignty. The PQ's original core supporters were primarily young, well-educated Montréalers, and Montréal is where PQ candidates achieved the party's first victories in 1970.<sup>26</sup> Over time, the PQ has gained support from a large cross-section of Québec francophones, but Montréal francophones remain disproportionately likely to support sovereignty. Conversely, support for sovereignty and sovereigntist parties is particularly low in Hull-Gatineau and the surrounding Outaouais region, where many francophones work for the federal government and the region's economy is closely tied to Ottawa.

Support for sovereignty has been particularly high in the relatively isolated Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, a traditional bastion of conservative French nationalism, and perhaps surprisingly low in Québec City and surrounding area. Drouilly suggests that the 1982 confrontations between Québec's public-sector unions and the PQ government have created lasting distrust and that the PQ's pledge to integrate federal civil servants into an independent Québec's bureaucracy is viewed as a possible threat to public-sector jobs in the Québec City region.<sup>27</sup> This region's dependence on tourism from outside of the province is another possible contributing factor to its tepid support for sovereignty. Quebecers living in other regions may also have particular reasons for supporting or opposing sovereignty based on regional economic factors. For example, dairy farmers are likely to be particularly sensitive to the potential costs of sovereignty due to their reliance on federal subsidies, whereas those who earn their livings in the fisheries may be resentful of federal restrictions.

## Results

To test our hypotheses, we conducted both bivariate and multivariate analyses. We examined the bivariate relationship between francophone support for sovereignty and various measures of bilingualism by analyzing the correlations between these variables. We have also constructed models of the relationship for each of the

three elections between the independent variables and support for sovereignty using weighted least squares regression equations. To preview our findings, we find that francophone bilingualism decreases francophone support for sovereignty outside the Montréal CMA even though the presence of non-francophones does not. On the other hand, while the presence of non-francophones reduces support for sovereignty in the Montréal CMA, the linguistic ability of neither francophones nor non-francophones relates to francophone support for sovereignty.

Hypothesis 1 is confirmed. Francophone support for sovereignty declines as the share of non-francophones increases in the Montréal CMA, even after controlling for linguistic ability. In the Montréal CMA, reducing the percentage of francophones in a unit of analysis by one standard deviation of 26% cut the share of francophones supporting the Yes side in 1995 by 6.5%. In 1997 and 1998, the impact of the share of francophones was even stronger with a one standard deviation change resulting in a shift of 7.8% in 1997 and 7.3% in 1998.

Unlike in the Montréal CMA, there was no statistically significant relationship between the percentage of francophones and francophone support for sovereignty in the rest of Québec (see Table 4). These findings reflect, of course, the relatively low number of non-francophones outside of Montréal rather than a limitation of the contact hypothesis to Montréal or heavily urbanized areas. Outside of Montréal, the weighted mean unit of analysis was 95% francophone and the median unit was nearly 99% francophone. Support for sovereignty was lowest in the regions where one might expect the most contact between francophones and non-francophones. Support for sovereignty was much lower in CMA Hull-Gatineau, closely linked with Ottawa and the federal government across the river, than elsewhere in non-Montréal Québec. The difference was especially pronounced in 1995 when francophones in the CMA Hull-Gatineau voted 25% less for the Yes side. Pro-sovereignty options also received less support in the surrounding Outaouais region, though the drop in support was less than in CMA Hull-Gatineau and the coefficient did not achieve statistical significance at the  $p < .05$  level in the 1997 election. Support for sovereignty was also lower in the surrounding Hinterland-Québec, CMA Québec, and Hinterland-Other regions, which attract large numbers of tourists from the rest of Canada and the United States.

**TABLE 4** Models of Francophone Support for yes in 1995, the BQ in 1997, and the PQ in 1998 (Weighted Least Squares Regression)

Variables	Montréal			Rest of Québec		
	1995	1997	1998	1995	1997	1998
Percent Francophone	.24 (.02)	.29 (.02)	.27 (.02)	-.02 (.03)	-.03 (.04)	-.03 (.04)
Percent Francophones who Know English	.05 (.04)	.03 (.03)	-.08 (.03)	-.20 (.02)	-.25 (.03)	-.25 (.03)
Percent Non-Francophones who Know French	-.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	—	—	—
Percent 55 and Older	-.41 (.03)	-.32 (.03)	-.35 (.03)	-.40 (.02)	-.22 (.03)	-.25 (.02)
Percent with University Education	-.17 (.07)	-.06 (.06)	-.10 (.06)	.16 (.04)	.18 (.05)	.19 (.05)
Median Family Income (\$10,000)	-.02 (.00)	-.02 (.00)	-.02 (.00)	-.02 (.00)	-.01 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Business, Management, Health	-.18 (.10)	-.11 (.09)	-.04 (.08)	-.04 (.04)	-.13 (.05)	-.04 (.04)
Natural Sciences, Teaching, Arts	.63 (.11)	.48 (.09)	.61 (.09)	.23 (.05)	.23 (.06)	.24 (.05)
Services, Transportation	.28 (.09)	.20 (.07)	.16 (.08)	.04 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.04 (.03)
Sales	-.36 (.13)	-.50 (.11)	-.35 (.12)	-.02 (.06)	-.18 (.07)	-.03 (.06)
Primary Sector	-.20 (.19)	-.23 (.16)	-.25 (.17)	-.11 (.04)	-.05 (.05)	.05 (.04)
CMA Québec	—	—	—	-.07 (.01)	-.05 (.04)	-.12 (.01)
CMA Hull-Gatineau	—	—	—	-.27 (.01)	-.16 (.02)	-.17 (.01)
Hinterland-Montréal	—	—	—	.01 (.01)	.03 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Hinterland-Québec	—	—	—	-.11 (.01)	-.10 (.01)	-.10 (.01)
Outaouais	—	—	—	-.12 (.02)	-.02 (.02)	-.08 (.02)
Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean	—	—	—	.07 (.01)	.04 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Periphery Gaspésie	—	—	—	.00 (.01)	-.04 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Hinterland-Other	—	—	—	-.04 (.01)	-.06 (.01)	-.07 (.01)
Constant	.52 (.04)	.38 (.04)	.37 (.04)	.81 (.04)	.64 (.05)	.66 (.04)
R-Squared	.57	.61	.57	.65	.42	.52
Adjusted R-Squared	.56	.60	.56	.64	.42	.51
Standard Error of the Regression	.08	.07	.07	.05	.07	.06
Number of Cases	755	755	755	1822	1822	1822



On the other hand, sovereignty attracted unusually high levels of support in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, one of the more isolated regions of Québec.

By examining of the impact of linguistic ability on support for sovereignty, one can find more evidence that contact may reduce support for sovereignty outside of CMA Montréal. There is empirical support for Hypothesis 3, though not Hypothesis 5: support for sovereignty declines as the percentage of bilingual francophones increases. Although the correlation between the share of francophones who speak English and support for sovereignty or pro-sovereignty parties in Montréal is very similar to the correlation between francophone bilingualism and support for sovereignty outside of the Montréal region, the multivariate analyses presented in Table 4 indicate a stark regional difference. While bilingualism among francophones is consistently related to support for sovereignty in all three of the elections examined here outside of Montréal, the coefficient on francophone bilingualism achieves statistical significance at the  $p < .05$  level only for the 1998 election in Montréal. Even the models for the 1998 elections suggest a much weaker relationship between linguistic ability and support for sovereignty in Montréal than outside the Montréal region; the coefficient on the percentage of francophones who know English in the Montréal model is only around one-third the size of the coefficient in the non-Montréal model. Contact with non-francophones appears to reduce support for sovereignty in Montréal, but ability of francophones to speak English does not.

In the multivariate analyses of the election results outside of Montréal conducted using the 1995 data, a one standard deviation increase of 18% in the percentage of bilingual francophones decreased support for sovereignty among francophones by 3%. A similar change reduced support for the BQ in 1997 and the PQ in 1998 by around 4%. The level of francophone bilingualism increases as the percentage of francophones in a unit of analysis decreases. However, these findings cannot be attributed simply to greater contact between francophones and non-francophones or to the Outaouais valley, which comprises only 16.7% of total bilingual individuals outside Montréal CMA, as we have separately controlled for both the percentage of francophones and region. We suspect that bilingualism makes it possible to have more meaningful contact due to greater linguistic ability. Francophones who speak

English are additionally more likely to access English-language Canadian and American media and culture. Perhaps greater familiarity with the prevalent media and culture in the rest of Canada also results in smoother and more meaningful contacts between francophones and non-francophones. Francophones who speak English may also oppose sovereignty at higher rates because they have higher-level jobs than do other francophones and have a greater vested interest in preserving the status quo.

Contrary to Hypotheses 4 and 6, there appears to be no significant relationship between the percentage of non-francophones with knowledge of French and francophone support for sovereignty in the Montréal CMA (Weighted Pearson's Correlations for Montréal are .18 for 1995 and 1997, and .21 for 1998). For the three elections examined here, the coefficients on the percentage of non-francophones who know French were close to zero. Although this may suggest that Quebecers are not motivated to support sovereignty by linguistic insecurities, the ability of non-francophones to speak French may be unrelated to support for sovereignty for other reasons. Areas with a high concentration of non-francophones already tend to be where resistance to sovereignty is most intense and where the threat of partition or unrest is greatest, so the ability of non-francophones to speak French may have relatively little additional impact on francophone views. One must also recognize that Quebecers, particularly Montréalers, are highly mobile within the CMA. Individuals choose to live in particular neighborhoods. Those francophones who choose to live in a neighborhood with many non-francophones are probably less likely to feel linguistic insecurity than are others.

In another sense, these results are surprising. Although non-francophone support for sovereignty has remained quite low, the share of non-francophones who speak French has steadily risen, especially among younger non-francophones. Knowledge of French by non-francophones undoubtedly enhances their ability to carry out day-to-day activities and participate in Québec's larger culture. However, it has not resulted in any shift in francophone support for sovereignty.

Although language variables may be important, other factors also have influence on support for sovereignty. As in past studies, we found that support for sovereignty decreases with age and income, but increases with education. Areas with an additional standard deviation (9%) of residents aged 55 and over cast around

8.5% fewer of their ballots for Yes in the 1995 referenda throughout Québec, though the impact of age on support for the BQ in 1997 or the PQ in 1998 was approximately 20% lower in Montréal and 40% lower outside of Montréal.

Similarly, a one standard deviation increase in income of \$19,637 causes a decline in support for sovereignty in Montréal of around 4% in all three elections. The impact of income outside of Montréal appears to have varied between the three elections. Although there was no statistically significant relationship between income and francophone support for the PQ in 1998, a one standard deviation increase in median income of \$10,517 resulted in a 1% decrease in support for the BQ in 1997. The impact of income was largest in the 1995 referendum; the same increase in median income cut francophone support for the Yes side by 2%. Perhaps francophone voters were most sensitive to the potential impact of sovereignty on their wallets in 1995 because the referendum was the only vote that might actually have resulted in the separation of Québec from Canada and caused the economic harms that some might fear would be associated with sovereignty. Survey research has demonstrated that one's assessment of the likely economic impact of sovereignty is, along with self-identification, a crucial factor in predicting whether an individual will support sovereignty.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, the educated elite have long served as the vanguard of the Québec sovereignty movement. Outside of Montréal, the results indicate that increasing the percentage with a university education and the percentage in the occupational group Science, Teaching, and the Arts by one standard deviation (10% and 7%, respectively) raised support for sovereignty by approximately 2% in all three elections. However, in Montréal, education appears to have no statistically significant direct relation to support for sovereignty, though occupation has a much stronger direct relation. Raising the share of people employed in Science, Teaching, and the Arts by one standard deviation of 7% increases support for sovereignty by 3–4%. The net effect is thus essentially the same both inside and outside of Montréal.

## Discussion

At the local level, contact with members of other linguistic groups seems to decrease support for sovereignty among francophones. In

CMA Montréal, there is a strong, positive relationship between the percentage of francophones and support for sovereignty among francophones. In the rest of Québec, the relatively small number of non-francophones probably precludes any strong relationship between the percentage of francophones and support for sovereignty. However, outside of CMA Montréal, francophones who know English and who inhabit regions of Québec where contact with non-francophones occurs most frequently support sovereignty at a lower rate than do other Quebecers. Though it operates differently inside and outside of Montréal, the Québec case consistently provided evidence in support of the contact hypothesis (with concentrations of non-francophones being crucial in Montréal and bilingualism being important outside of it) during elections held in the mid-1990s.

The desire to protect and enhance the status of the French language in Québec has been a major focus of the PQ in its drive for sovereignty. However, living amongst people who speak a different language does not seem to heighten the sense of linguistic antagonism or insecurity on the part of francophone Quebecers. At a minimum, it creates countervailing disincentives for supporting sovereignty that outweigh any increased insecurities stemming from living in a linguistically mixed context. Francophones living in non-francophone areas are the most opposed to sovereignty and the nationalist movement. More than other areas in Québec, these areas are opposed to linguistic measures and also have the highest levels of linguistic assimilation toward English.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, our analyses yield no evidence that francophones who can speak English support sovereignty because they resent having to use their second language or that the failure of non-francophones in one's community to learn French intensifies support for sovereignty.

Do these findings suggest that we should rethink the assumption that support for sovereignty is motivated by linguistic insecurity? Sovereignists often argue that sovereignty itself would be an important asset in the protection of the French language because it would increase the incentives for newcomers to Québec to integrate into the francophone community, and language is clearly the central component of the Quebecers' conceptions of their self-identity that sets Quebecers apart from Canadians elsewhere. Focusing on the linguistic insecurity of francophone Quebecers is

a strategy often employed by the PQ during electoral campaigns; however, recent PQ governments have been content to maintain the linguistic status quo.

By focusing on where a person lives, perhaps we are looking for linguistic conflict in the wrong place or the wrong contextual level. Linguistic relations in Montréal are not based on hostility, and there is no evidence that Quebecers support sovereignty because they resent their non-francophone neighbors. It seems that the main attention of voters is focused on conflictual relations between francophone Québec and anglophone Canada. Simply by watching television, francophone Quebecers are constantly exposed to Canadians with no knowledge of French while anglophone Canadians are almost never exposed to French language and culture. Former Prime Minister Trudeau's vision of a bilingual Canada in which Canadians can live and work anywhere in the country in either official language remains a wish rather than a reality. Where French predominates, many francophone Quebecers seem to see little reason to identify with the Canadian community, and may consider independence a viable option to preserve and to promote francophone identity and collective development. Those francophone Quebecers who have achieved success working in the North American business world or living among many non-francophones, however, are probably more skeptical about sovereignty and remain more strongly attached to Canada. At the same time, the greater economic success of bilingual francophones may heighten the linguistic concerns of other francophones of lower economic status, especially those who are unilingual. Besides age and language itself, social position and linguistic environment are crucial to understanding electoral behavior in Québec.

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Foreign Affairs Canada for providing funding for the project through the Research Grant Program administered by the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

### Notes

1. Pierre Drouilly, *Indépendance et Démocratie: Sondages, élections et référendums au Québec 1992-1997* (Montréal: Harmattan, 1997); David Lublin and D.

- Stephen Voss, "Context and Francophone Support for Québec Sovereignty," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2002).
2. J.W. Berry, "Cultural Relations in Plural Societies: Alternatives to Segregation and Their Sociopsychological Implications," in Norman Miller and Marilyn B. Brewer (eds.), *Groups in Contact: The Psychology of Desegregation* (Orlando, FL: University Press of America, 1984); Hugh Donald Forbes, *Ethnic Conflict: Commerce, Culture, and the Contact Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
  3. For the sake of simplicity, we use the term *bilingualism* to refer to the ability to speak French and English.
  4. Gary King, *A Solution to the Ecological Inference Problem: Reconstructing Individual Behavior from Aggregate Data* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Lublin and Voss.
  5. Our 2,577 units of analysis vary in population from 35 to 21,000. Most units have between 1,500 and 6,000 inhabitants. In Québec's six census metropolitan areas (CMAs), the unit of analysis is the census tract—a division created by the census with an average population of approximately 4,500. In addition to the six CMAs, the census has also defined 25 census agglomerations in Québec. These are urban areas with populations ranging from 15,000 to 99,999. Within census agglomerations, there are no census tracts, only enumeration areas, the smallest units of analysis in the census consisting, on average, of 400 persons. It is not possible, however, to match the enumeration areas to voting sections with much reliability, so these enumeration areas have been grouped into larger units that better correspond with voting sections. On average, these larger units include 1,700 persons. The remaining population lives in municipalities with fewer than 15,000 inhabitants. Each such municipality forms a single unit of analysis.
  6. This is a crucial methodological choice. In our view, language is not a variable fixed by birth, and any person who adopts a new language as the primary language that they use deserves to be considered as a member of that linguistic group. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that those who have come to Québec and have adopted French as their primary language support sovereignty at levels that are nearly equal to the levels of those who have spoken French from birth. Because individuals may speak multiple languages at home, the percentage of francophones in a unit of analysis is calculated by the following formula based on the response to the question, "What language does this person speak most often at home?":  $[(\text{French only} + \text{French and English}/2) + (\text{French and Other}/2) + (\text{French and Two or More Additional Languages}/3)] / \text{Population}$ . The census reports these data by "mother tongue"; however, we can only estimate the percentage of francophones who know English when using language spoken at home.
  7. Our estimate of non-francophone support for sovereignty is less than 1% in each case, whereas surveys tend to place non-francophone support for sovereignty in a range from 2% to 8%. A large poll of anglophones conducted in May 1998, however, showed less than 1% supported the PQ. See Hubert

- Bauch, "Liberals have anglo vote sewed up, poll indicates," *Montréal Gazette* (29 May 1998), p. A10. These results from EI suggest that non-francophone support for sovereignty is regularly overestimated by surveys.
8. Forbes, p. ix.
  9. Drouilly, pp. 288–90.
  10. Robert A. Young, *The Secession of Québec and the Future of Canada* (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens, 1998).
  11. Drouilly, p. 285.
  12. Maurice Pinard, "Les déterminants psychosociaux," in Maurice Pinard, Robert Bernier, and Vincent Lemieux (eds.), *Un Combat Inachevé* (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1997), pp. 319–22.
  13. Richard Nadeau, Pierre Martin, and André Blais, "Attitude Towards Risk-Taking and Individual Choice in the Québec Referendum on Sovereignty", *British Journal of Political Science* Vol. 29, No. 3 (1999), p. 529.
  14. Richard Y. Bourhis, "Cross-cultural communication in Montréal: Two field studies since Bill 101," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, Vol. 46 (1984), p. 34.
  15. Susan Olzak, "Ethnic Mobilization in Québec", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1982).
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
  17. André Blais and Richard Nadeau, "La clientèle du OUI", in Jean Crête (ed.), *Comportement électoral au Québec* (Chicoutimi, Québec: Gaëtan Morin Editeur, 1984), p. 323.
  18. Edouard Cloutier, Jean H. Guay, and Daniel Latouche, *Le Virage: l'évolution de l'opinion publique au Québec depuis 1960 ou comment le Québec est devenu souverainiste* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1993), p. 125.
  19. This type of self-reported measurement is clearly imperfect. There is strong reason to believe that individuals overestimate their own linguistic capabilities on such questionnaires. See Charles Castonguay, "Getting the facts straight on French", *Inroads*, Vol. 8 (1999), pp. 57–76. Despite these imperfections, it remains the most comprehensive measurement of bilingualism.
  20. Scott Piroth, "Individual Values and Popular Support for a Sovereign Québec," *The Dalhousie Review*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (1998), pp. 94–5.
  21. Cloutier, Guay, and Latouche, pp. 125–7.
  22. Alain G. Gagnon and Guy Lachapelle, "Québec Confronts Canada: Two Competing Societal Projects Searching for Legitimacy," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (1996), pp. 88–9.
  23. Maurice Pinard and Richard Hamilton, "The Class Bases of the Québec Independence Movement: Conjectures and Evidence," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1984), pp. 19–54.
  24. Michael Macmillan, "Québec" in Michael Watson (ed.), *Contemporary Minority Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 123–4.
  25. Robert Huckfeldt, "Political Participation and the Neighborhood Social Context," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 23 (1979), pp. 579–92; Christopher Kenny, "Political Participation and Effects from the Social

- Environment,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 36 (1992), pp. 259–67.
26. Blais and Nadeau, p. 314.
27. Drouilly, p. 285.
28. Harold Clarke, Allan Kornberg, and Peter Wearing, *A Polity on the Edge: Canada and the Politics of Fragmentation* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2000), pp. 274–5.
29. See Luc Bouvier, *Les sacrifiés de la bonne entente. Histoire des francophones du Pontiac* (Montréal: Éd. de L’Action nationale, 2002), and Charles Castonguay, *L’assimilation linguistique: mesure et évolution, 1971-1986* (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Publications du Québec, Conseil de la langue française, 1994).

**Scott Piroth** teaches Political Science and Canadian Studies at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. He is currently working on a book about nationalism in Québec and has published articles on the subject in *The Dalhousie Review* and *Québec Studies*.

**Pierre Serré** is the author of *Deux poids, deux mesures*, a book about electoral behaviour in Quebec. Winner of many prizes, Dr. Serré has written many papers, articles, and book chapters. He is currently preparing a study about irregularities in the 1995 Referendum on sovereignty in Québec.

**David Lublin** is Associate Professor of Government at American University. He is the author of *The Republican South: Democratization and Partisan Change* (Princeton University Press 2004) and the recipient of a 2006 German Marshall Fund of the U.S. Fellowship to continue his studies on minority representation in democratic countries.