

Insecurities Intact: Thirty Years after the adoption of the Charter of the French Language Quebec majority and minority alike remain pessimistic over respective futures

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It is widely contended that the adoption of the Charter of the French Language in 1977 contributed to the failure of the sovereignty option by diminishing language insecurity amongst the province's francophone population. In effect the existence of Bill 101 presumably made it difficult to argue that language legislation would not be effective while Quebec remained part of Canada. Yet thirty years after the adoption of Bill 101 there is strong evidence to suggest that the insecurity over the condition of the French language has persisted all the same.

Detailed analysis of a survey commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage from Decima Research in November 2006 reveals that the Quebec francophones are more likely to agree that the French language is threatened in Canada than any other francophone community in the country. The relatively small francophone communities of Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Alberta are less pessimistic about the future of the French language in Canada than francophones in Quebec.

In part this gap may be attributable to different expectations about the share the French language should represent in Canada and what the condition of the French language should ideally be in Quebec and elsewhere in the country. But another important contributing factor to such levels of pessimism results from the discourse or message directed at Quebecers about the position of the French language and notably the reminder about its fragility within North America where it represents two percent of the continental population. Stressing this reality risks overshadowing any real gains the French language makes in terms of the numbers of francophones and the of those able to speak the French language.

The latest such reminder of the vulnerability of the French language and culture has come from respected scholars Gerard Bouchard and Charles Taylor in the consultation document for what has become an inquiry into Quebec identity. A possible explanation they offer for the opposition of many Quebecers of French Canadian origin to reasonably accommodating certain minority religious practices is that it represents a protest of a four century's old founding peoples worried about the preservation of its heritage. Their

preferred explanation for the reaction is that it reflects the sentiment of a Quebec French majority that also sees itself as a fragile minority in North America.

Ontario francophones also report a relatively high level of agreement with the view that the French language is threatened in Canada. In effect the larger the francophone community the more likely it appears to feel the French language is threatened in the country. For their part some one in five Anglophones in Ontario and Eastward agree that the French language is threatened in Canada.

Table 1
The future of the French language in Canada is threatened

8-10 on a 10 point scale agree	Francophones	Anglophones
Nova Scotia	46.7 (n=150)	22.6
New Brunswick	47.5 (n=354)	21.9
Quebec	63.5	23.0 (n=558)
Ontario	57.5 (n=659)	19.9
Manitoba	47.8 (n=93)	8.1
Alberta	44.3 (n=117)	11.0

Source: Decima Research for the Department of Canadian Heritage, November 2006

While they are most likely to strongly agree that the French language is threatened in the country, Quebec francophones are least likely to think that it is threatened in their province. Still despite the Charter of the French Language some 38% of Quebec francophones think that the language is threatened in the province a share that is quite similar to that of the francophone population of New Brunswick. Indeed, only in Ontario do a majority of the francophones surveyed agree that the French language is threatened in their province.

For their part, Anglophones across Canada (with the exception of Nova Scotia) are less likely to agree that that the French language is threatened in the provinces than they believe it is in Canada on the whole.

Perhaps the question that needs to be addressed arising from the respective level of insecurity over the future of the French language in Quebec is the extent to which such an important level of insecurity is justified on the one hand and as similarly as we shall observe whether the significant level of insecurity amongst Quebec Anglophones about their condition is warranted.

The future of the French language in my province is threatened

8-10 on a 10 point scale agree	Francophones	Anglophones
Nova Scotia	45.4	23.1
New Brunswick	39.2	11.0
Quebec	38.3	14.6
Ontario	53.7	16.9
Manitoba	44.2	10.0
Alberta	45.2	18.7

Source: Decima for the Department of Canadian Heritage, November 2006

On the basis of age groups as observed below it is the youngest cohort of francophones in Quebec that are less likely to agree that the French language in the province is threatened (one in four) compared with those over the age of 61 where a slight majority hold that view. Amongst francophones outside of Quebec the level of concern is quite similar across the age spectrum. Amongst Quebec Anglophones the older cohort is somewhat more likely than the younger one to agree that the French language is threatened while in the rest of Canada the younger Anglophones are more likely than older ones to agree that the French language is threatened.

Agree/Disagree: The future of the French language in my province is threatened.

8-10 agree on 10 point scale	Francophones in Quebec	Francophones in the ROC	Anglophones in Quebec	Anglophones in the ROC
18-30	25.0	48.5	13.1	23.6
31-45	35.5	49.1	11.5	19.6
45-60	37.7	48.0	13.5	17.5
61 +	51.7	44.5	18.3	16.2

Source: Decima for the Department of Canadian Heritage, November 2006

It is interesting to note that the big gap in opinion as regards the threat to the French language in the province versus the country is amongst the youngest cohort of Quebec francophones (25% in the province versus 58.3% in the country)

Agree/Disagree: The future of the French language in Canada is threatened.

8-10 agree on 10 point scale	Francophones in Quebec	Francophones in the ROC	Anglophones in Quebec	Anglophones in the ROC
18-30	58.3	54.6	22.7	23.4
31-45	67.4	52.7	19.1	19.0
45-60	64.0	51.5	24.4	17.1
61 +	60.3	47.9	23.0	17.6

Source: Decima for the Department of Canadian Heritage, November 2006

Quebec Anglophones are often described as a group that need not worry about their community's linguistic future in contrast with francophones outside of Quebec who it is held need to be constantly vigilant if they wish to preserve their language and culture. Despite this characterization the 2006 Decima survey commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage reveals that Quebec Anglophones are the least confident amongst the country's language minorities about the likelihood of the communities in their region to continue to exist in the future. As to anglophones ability to remain strong in the future only franco-Albertans are less confident. These results testify to a continuing malaise in Quebec's Anglophone community three decades after the adoption of the Charter of the French Language.

Totally confident/Not confident at all: The likelihood that the Anglophone/Francophone community in your region will continue to exist in the future

8-10 Totally Confident	Official Language Minorities
Nova Scotia	56.2
New Brunswick	69.0
Quebec Anglophones	50.7
Ontario	64.5
Manitoba	60.4
Alberta	53.0

Source: Decima for the Department of Canadian Heritage, November 2006

The capacity of the <Anglophone/Francophone> community, in your region, to remain strong in the future

8-10 Totally Confident	Official Language Minorities
Nova Scotia	51
New Brunswick	68.1
Quebec Anglophones	46
Ontario	58.8
Manitoba	60.1
Alberta	39.1

Source: Decima for the Department of Canadian Heritage, November 2006

When it comes to living in the minority language over the next five years it is Alberta francophones that were most likely to agree that it would be more difficult. Still nearly 3 in 10 Quebec Anglophones felt that way.

Just thinking of your region, how easy or difficult do you think it will be to live in <English/French> in 5 years time? * OIgroups * Province

	More Difficult	The Same	Easier
Nova Scotia	24	64.7	11.3
New Brunswick	11.8	52.3	35.7
Quebec Anglophones	28.9	58.0	12.0
Ontario	30.4	46.2	23.4
Manitoba	31	58.1	10.9
Alberta	37.7	41.0	21.3

Source: Decima for the Department of Canadian Heritage, November 2006

As to the ability to retain young people in their regions francophones in Alberta and Nova Scotia were least confident followed by Quebec Anglophones.

Totally confident/Not confident at all: The ability of the <Anglophone/Francophone> community to keep young people in the region.

8-10 Totally Confident	Official Language Minorities
Nova Scotia	20.8
New Brunswick	29.9
Quebec Anglophones	26
Ontario	41.9
Manitoba	36.3
Alberta	20.1

Source: Decima for the Department of Canadian Heritage, November 2006

As to the level of satisfaction with the services offered in the minority official language in the region it is Alberta francophones followed by Quebec Anglophones.

Satisfied/Dissatisfied: Services offered in <French/English> in your region

8-10 Very Satisfied	Official Language Minorities
Nova Scotia	66.7
New Brunswick	65.7
Quebec Anglophones	52.5
Ontario	61
Manitoba	69.8
Alberta	47.4

Source: Decima for the Department of Canadian Heritage, November 2006

When it comes to the level of satisfaction official language access by type of services offered it is in the area of employment that Anglophones are the least satisfied of any language minority and amongst the least satisfied in the area of legal services and court proceedings (with only Alberta francophones less satisfied). When it comes to media and communications Anglophones are the most satisfied and they are amongst the most satisfied when it comes to arts and culture (with only New Brunswick francophones expressing more satisfaction).

Satisfied/Dissatisfied: Services offered in <French/English> in the following sectors

8-10 Very Satisfied	Employment Services	Media and Communications	Arts and Culture	Legal services or court proceedings
Nova Scotia	55.3	55.2	38.3	52
New Brunswick	59.2	67.2	51.1	60.9
Quebec Anglophones	25.6	74.9	49.6	37.5
Ontario	47.8	61.5	38.8	51.2
Manitoba	60.2	60.3	35.1	45.9
Alberta	28.8	50.0	24.1	33.7

What might be attributable to the malaise felt by the Anglophone community thirty years after the adoption of the Charter of the French Language? Some may contend that it is a lack of contact with the francophone population of Quebec. Yet according to the Decima survey Quebec Anglophones have as much contact with francophones as do francophone minorities with Anglophones elsewhere in the country.

Thinking about your personal contact with <Anglophones/Francophones>, would you say you have regular contact with more than two persons in the other official language community...

	Anglos	Francos in ROC
Nova Scotia	39.4	95.4
New Brunswick	65.6	95.2
Quebec	95.0	39.0
Ontario	33.6	96.2
Manitoba	49.1	100

Alberta	44.4	93.3
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Finally as to the importance of being able to live in a minority official language it was in Ontario and New Brunswick where the highest percentages said this was very important a sentiment held by some three in four Quebec Anglophones surveyed.

How important is it, or would it be, to you to be able to live using <English/French>?

8-10 Very Important	Official Language Minorities
Nova Scotia	65.6
New Brunswick	82.2
Quebec Anglophones	74.2
Ontario	85.3
Manitoba	79.2
Alberta	70.6