

# Canada's Language Divide: Ingroup Linguistic Bias and Support for Québec Sovereignty

**Marcus Macauley**

*Simon Fraser University*

## **Abstract**

*Explanatory variables underpinning individual-level preferences regarding Québec's separation from Canada have been debated among scholars for decades. While it is possible that several contextual and attitudinal factors influence opinions on Québec sovereignty (e.g. retrospective economic evaluations, partisanship, or geographical location), we still do not fully understand why support for separation remains constant despite fluctuating economic, social, and political conditions. In consideration of diverse Canadian literature highlighting the role of language in the sovereignty debate and drawing on recent research concerning arbitrary trait ingroup identification and intergroup relations, this paper examines the extent to which linguistic ingroup favouritism (Linguistic Bias) explains support or opposition to Québec sovereignty. Through statistical analysis of Canadian Election Survey data (2015), I find that individual measures of linguistic bias positively correlate with support for Québec sovereignty across Canada, while particularly pronounced in Québec. Additionally, the results show statistically significant heterogeneous expressed attitudes towards sovereignty among francophones in Québec based on levels of linguistic bias. These findings build on existing literature on this topic and add new dimensions to our understanding of how group-based identities affect individual-level preferences on salient political issues in Canada.*

One of the more challenging and controversial questions in Canadian political science is Canada's national question. At present, Canada remains a cohesive federated union under a singular federal government despite longstanding political efforts to divide Canada along geographical, cultural and linguistic lines. For much of recent Canadian political history, the status of Québec as a sovereign entity apart from the Canadian federal system has been the source of much debate. Often embedded within the philosophical and theoretical arguments for and against Québec sovereignty are assumptive claims regarding the roots of individual-level support for sovereignty. Some posit that prospective economic evaluations of sovereignty are paramount (Blais & Nadeau, 1992), others point to misguided ethnic nationalism (Thomson, 1995), while others yet suggest that historical, linguistic, cultural, and geographic contextual factors work together to fuel separatist sentiments (Pinard, 1992).

While it is possible that several contextual and attitudinal variables correlate positively with support for Québec sovereignty, we still do not fully understand why support for separation remains constant despite fluctuating economic, social, and political conditions. Moreover, few scholars have investigated individual-level sources of support for sovereignty in an empirical manner in recent years (Kam & Simas, 2010; Medeiros, 2017; Piroth, Serré, & Lublin, 2006). In considering advancements in empirical political behavioural research regarding the role of psychology and ingroup identification in political decision-making (Achen & Bartels, 2016; Kinder & Kam, 2009), the aim of this present paper is to examine the extent to which ingroup identities matter for salient political questions in Canada, such as the national question. In this regard, I look to build upon existing literature on Québec sovereignty by further investigating the empirical links between individual-level group identification and support for Québec's separation from Canada.

In light of ample Canadian research highlighting the role of language identity and protection in the Québec's calls for sovereignty (Dion, 1992; Nadeau, Martin, & Blais, 1999; Pinard, 1992), I hypothesize that support for sovereignty is drawn along linguistic lines and that ingroup favouritism (*Linguistic Bias*) is paramount in individual opinion formation on the issue, regardless of geographical location. This theoretical proposition stems from research suggesting that, for those whom group-based identities matter, ingroup identity is maximized when outgroup members are ostracized (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). If sovereignty is understood to constitute a formal separation of opposing linguistic groups in Canada, individuals whom possess higher levels of linguistic bias will likely support Québec sovereignty as a mechanism to protect and increase linguistic ingroup homogeneity, whether anglophone or francophone. Thus, a positive relationship between a general measure of linguistic bias and support for sovereignty should not only be found within Québec, but also in the rest of Canada (ROC).

Further, drawing on findings regarding the effects of perceived threat on intergroup relations (Canetti-Nisim, Halperin, Sharvit, & Hobfoll, 2009), I test claims that the relationship between linguistic bias and support for sovereignty is more robust within Québec than the ROC and that linguistic bias accounts for polarized preferences on the sovereignty among francophone Québécois. Here, regional and linguistic ingroup variation in expressed preferences toward sovereignty are explainable by varying levels of threat. Within Québec, the ever-present threat of language extinction serves as a key factor in making the issue of sovereignty particularly salient

in the geographical region and within the francophone population. As such, we should expect varying effect sizes between geographic regions (QC vs. ROC) and among Québec's francophone population (high vs. low levels of linguistic bias).

Utilizing observational data from the 2015 Canadian Election Study (CES), I construct and compare OLS regression models for Québec only (QC) and ROC survey respondents to assess the validity of these claims accounting for potentially influential variables as identified by related research. Upon analysis, I find evidence that my measure of linguistic bias correlates positively with support for Québec sovereignty across Canada and that this relationship is indeed more pronounced for Québécois survey respondents. Additionally, the results show statistically significant heterogeneous expressed attitudes toward sovereignty among francophones in Québec based on levels of linguistic bias. These findings contribute to literature on individual-level motivations underpinning support or opposition to Québec secession and help address theoretical gaps that exist within competing explanations.

## **Linguistic Bias and Threat**

Drawing on seminal research on the importance of ingroup identification on political decision-making (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Sherif et al., 1961; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this present study examines to what extent favouritism toward one's own language group serves as stable predictor of political preferences on Québec sovereignty. Like other arbitrary group identifiers, such as skin colour, religion, or nationality, language can serve as a recognizable social characteristic used to sort individuals into ingroup and outgroup members within a society (Kinder & Kam, 2009; Maass, Milesi, Zabbini, & Stahlberg, 1995; Sutton & Douglas, 2008). When arbitrary group-based traits, such as language, constitute salient social identities, they become potential criteria for outgroup discrimination and exclusion (Brewer, 1999; Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009). In the context of this present paper, if Québec sovereignty is understood to represent a formal partitioning of the Canadian population based on a salient arbitrary group-based trait (language), it is reasonable to expect that individuals who possess higher levels of ingroup favouritism will support Québec sovereignty.

Social Identity Theory posits that even minimal inter-personal similarities can serve as bases for ingroup favouritism and outgroup prejudice (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, the saliency of any group-based social identity for an individual is conditioned by the social status, perceived legitimacy, and stability of identity groups to which a person belongs (Idem). Thus, an infinite number of social identities likely exist within a given population due to subjective individual identification processes. That said, for Tajfel and Turner, the most salient and stable social identities are those that are hereditary or acquired in infancy and are most difficult to change (such as skin colour and/or mother tongue). Due to their fixed nature, such social identities commonly serve as bases for kinship group and/or community level attachments and consequentially intergroup conflict (Idem).

In Canada, attachment to one's own language group stands as a notable social identity. Nearly 80% of all Canadians are native speakers of either of Canada's two largest language groups (French and English-speaking) whose concentrated populations largely occupy distinct geographic regions (Québec and the ROC). Though Canada is becoming increasingly

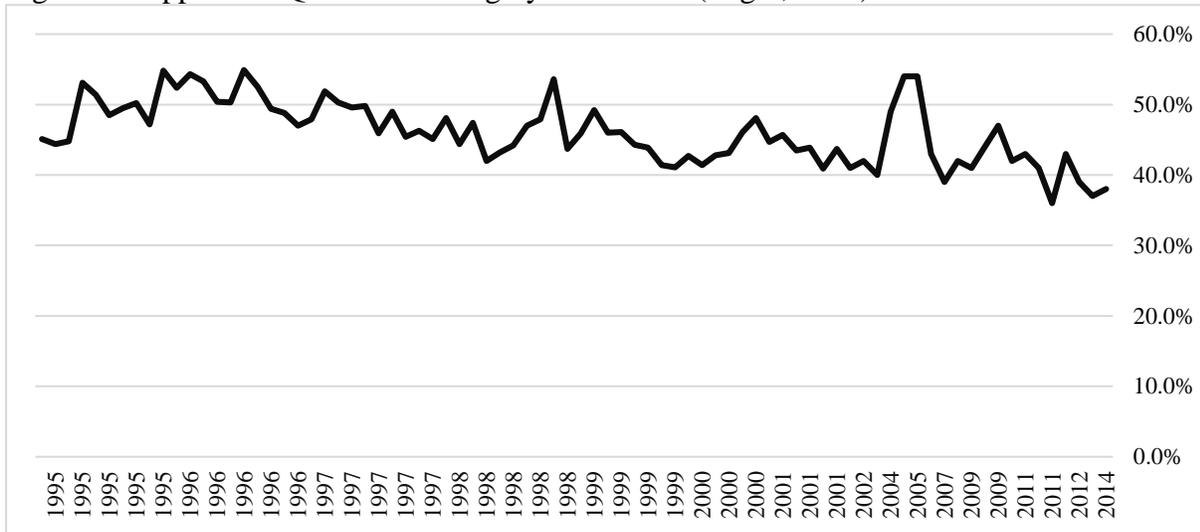
linguistically diverse and citizens of all linguistic backgrounds are increasingly mobile across the country, divisions between French and English Canada have largely defined and animated the political, cultural, and economic conflicts throughout Canadian history. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find a more salient and fixed social identity for most of the Canadian population (perhaps aside from the dichotomous sexual division between men and women). Moreover, existent empirical research on demographic traits most indicative of community level attachment in Canada shows language group to be the identity trait most closely tied to community for both English and French-speaking populations (Pigott & Kalbach, 2005).

Research on arbitrary ingroup identifiers outside of Canada highlight racial or ethnic identities as being politically relevant in combination with population size and geographic location (Posner 2004; Kinder & Kam 2009; Enos 2018). In countries with large ethnic or racial minority populations, higher levels of ingroup identification and often coincide increased intergroup conflict and decreased levels of social trust (Posner 2004). Kinder and Kam suggest that intergroup tension arises from psychological predispositions within individuals to perceive people who are physically similar to themselves more favourably than those who do not (2009). This ingroup favouritism manifests itself in subconscious stereotyping of outgroup members as inherently different from ingroup members and potentially dangerous (Enos 2018). This cognitive shortcut lends impetus for societal divisions and intergroup hostility to emerge based on easily identifiable arbitrary traits.

However, levels of preference toward one's own ingroup vary from person to person. Integrated Threat Theory suggests that the degree to which individuals identify with an arbitrary trait ingroup and express hostility toward outgroup members is dependent on perceived levels of threat at any given time (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009; Stephan et al., 2002). In response to real (tangible resources, territory, or money) or symbolic (ingroup identity, value systems, belief systems, or worldviews) threats, some individuals are increasingly prone to closely identify with their arbitrary trait ingroup that is experiencing threat and become more hostile and exclusionary toward outgroup members (Idem). Accordingly, we should expect that when threatened, individuals who identify most closely with their linguistic ingroups will favour Québec's separation from Canada to further exclude outgroup members and increase ingroup homogeneity. Conversely, we should also expect individuals with lower levels of ingroup preference to express opposition to sovereignty and favour reconciliatory collaboration with outgroup members in the face of threat of national separation.

That said, Québec's separation from Canada is not presently an imminent threat, though support for sovereignty within Québec has remained relatively stable over time. Figure 1 illustrates how support for sovereignty has generally trended downward among residents of Québec since 1995 (apart from a substantial upward spike from 2005-2006), though year to year average support between 1995-2014 stands at approximately 43%. However, despite persistent levels of support, there is no indication that a new referendum on Québec sovereignty is forthcoming (Changfoot & Cullen, 2012). Moreover, given the increased bureaucratic and political barriers generated by the Liberal's 1999 Clarity Act on matters of secession, Québec's chances for achieving independence have become increasingly slim. Thus, at the national level, threat stemming from concerns surrounding Québec sovereignty may be at a relatively low point in contemporary Canadian history.

Figure 1. Support for Québec Sovereignty 1995-2014 (Léger, 2018)



However, given that a substantial level of support for sovereignty persists within Québec and the sovereigntist Parti Québécois still enjoys relative electoral success running on language and cultural protectionist platforms, perceptions of threat linked to sovereignty may remain salient among Québécois. Namely, French language protection and preservation has been shown to be indicative of individual preferences regarding sovereignty (Blais & Nadeau, 1992; Medeiros, 2017). Indeed, Medeiros finds that Québec residents whom perceive the French language to be under threat are more likely to support Québec independence than respondents who do not (2017). Moreover, responses from the 2015 Canadian Election Study mail-back survey confirm a vast difference of opinion between residents of Québec and the rest of Canada regarding the degree to which the French language is believed to be threatened (see Table 1). 51% of Québec’s residents perceive the French language to be threatened while 7% of the respondents in the rest of Canada share the same sentiment. Despite evidence of decreasing likelihood of a new referendum on Québec independence, fears of French language eradication appear to constitute a notable threat among residents of Québec.

Table 1. In your opinion, is the French language threatened in Quebec? (CES 2015)

Region	Yes	No	Not Sure
QC	51%	41%	8%
ROC	7%	71%	22%

### *Hypotheses*

In consideration of existing research on the sources of support for sovereignty and the application of broader theories of ingroup identification and intergroup relations, this present paper offers three hypotheses to be empirically tested while controlling for competing explanations. First, I expect my measure of linguistic bias to correlate positively with support for sovereignty, regardless of location of residence within Canada. According to theoretical expectations, individuals whom possess higher levels of linguistic bias will view Québec’s separation from Canada as a method to increase linguistic ingroup homogeneity and further

exclude outgroup members. Thus, as level of linguistic bias increases, support for Québec sovereignty should increase as well.

- H1: As linguistic bias increases, support for Québec sovereignty increases

Second, if linguistic bias matters, it matters more for residents of Québec. Due to ever-present threat of language eradication among Québec's majority francophone population, the relationship between linguistic bias and support for sovereignty is likely more pronounced in Québec than the rest of Canada. As the region with the largest proportion of Canada's minority linguistic group, it is logical to infer that the issue of Québec sovereignty would be more salient within Québec.

- H2: The positive relationship between linguistic bias and support for sovereignty is more pronounced in Québec than in the rest of Canada.

Lastly, if increased levels of linguistic bias correlate positively with support for sovereignty, then the inverse may be true as well. Thus, linguistic bias may explain heterogeneity of opinions on sovereignty within Québec as I expect varying levels of linguistic bias to correspond with distinctly different positions on the topic.

- H3: Varying levels of linguistic bias help explain heterogeneous attitudes toward sovereignty in Québec.

## **Competing Explanations**

In review of empirical research on individual-level variables related to support for Québec sovereignty, two distinct approaches are preeminent in the study of individual motivations underlying support for sovereignty – which Mendelsohn aptly labels *The Montréal* school, made up primarily of rational choice scholars from the Université de Montréal, and the *Socio-psychological* school led by Maurice Pinard (2003). Both schools grapple with common themes surrounding the national question, including economic implications, language protection, and Québec relations with the federal government; however, the schools diverge in terms of methods employed and framing of the meaning of Québec sovereignty to individuals and groups. That said, each approach improves upon what is known about support for Québec sovereignty and present opportunities for further empirical investigation.

### ***The Montréal School***

The Montréal school is comprised of scholars who contend that individuals rely primarily on prospective evaluations of Québec's fortunes in the event of formal separation from Canada. Leaning primarily on quantitative survey analysis techniques, Montréal school scholars contend that individuals who view sovereignty as economically beneficial for Québec are more likely to support sovereignty (Blais & Nadeau, 1992). Similarly, if respondents view sovereignty as a method to protect the French language, then they are more apt to show increased levels of support for sovereignty (Idem). Thus, if individuals believe that separation from Canada would

improve economic standards of living in Québec and further protects linguistic rights for French speakers, then support for sovereignty is perfectly rational. Theoretically, this approach closely matches broader rational choice explanations within political science by which individuals support policy choices and political leaders that maximize one's own personal utility (Downs, 1957). For proponents of this school of thought, sovereignty is framed as a self-interest driven decision that relies primarily on hypothetical evaluations of potential future outcomes (Nadeau et al., 1999). Here, individuals consider their personal experiences related to economic fluctuations and language protection and make a rational decision on whether sovereignty would ultimately be a cost or benefit to them.

However, a lingering challenge to rational choice models appears relevant for Montréal school scholars as well: what factors account for variation in individual assessments of future costs or benefits? In the case of support for Québec sovereignty, why is sovereignty rational for some and not others? To date Montréal school adherents have made efforts to account for opinion variance by examining the role of risk aversion as a potentially influential mediator of support for sovereignty (Kam & Simas, 2010; Nadeau et al., 1999). However, these studies arguably lack internal validity due to non-inclusion of possibly confounding variables (Nadeau et al., 1999) and suffer from variable endogeneity where survey questions used for measures of independent and dependent variables are too closely matched, conflating predictor and outcome observations (Nadeau et al. 1999, Kam & Simas 2010). Thus, there remains room for more comprehensive research on the sources of individual preferences regarding Québec sovereignty. That said, the Montréal school empirical contributions offer evidence that economic interests and language protection considerations are useful for understanding individual-level support for sovereignty. In this present study, I control for the potential effects of rational economic evaluations in my multivariate regression models and consider the effects of language threat on opinion evaluations.

### *The Socio-Psychological School*

In contrast to the Montréal school, *Socio-psychological* school adherents contend that support for Québec sovereignty stems primarily from contextual and deep-rooted ethnic grievances that have evolved over time within Québec (Mendelsohn, 2003). Pinard argues that a range of regional specific factors, including relative socio-economic power and status dynamics as well as cultural threats, amplify ethnic and cultural differences between the Québécois and the rest of Canada leading to calls for formal separation (Pinard, 1992). Pinard does not ignore the economic implications of Québec sovereignty, rather he contends that economic attitudinal rationalizations are symptomatic of increasingly pronounced ethnic and cultural divisions that exist within Canada (Idem). Utilizing historical opinion polls and descriptive statistics, Pinard suggests several influential societal factors combine to produce conditions necessary for Québec sovereignty to become a reality (Pinard, 1992; Pinard & Hamilton, 1986). Here, individual hypothetical cost-benefit projections of life after sovereignty are thought to be heavily affected by contextual variables that frame individual decisions. Thus, support for sovereignty is a result of Québécois populations increasingly viewing themselves as ethnic minorities within a country that does not understand their distinct culture, language, history, or existing grievances with Canada's federal system.

The socio-psychological perspective offers us perhaps a more nuanced and complex explanation on the roots of support for Québec sovereignty than the Montréal school, however Pinard's work does not conclusively identify a primary motivation for individual preferences beyond increasing self-identification as an ethnic Québécois. If Québec's unique history, culture, and socio-economic status within Canada is central to understanding calls for sovereignty, then should we simply expect Québec residence to correlate positively with support for sovereignty? Pinard fails to expand upon how fluctuating Québécois identity can be adequately measured on an individual basis. Instead, he argues that aggregate opinion polls showing increasing attachment to Québec over Canada are reflective of support for sovereignty (1992). However, Pinard's research provides insufficient evidence to make a conclusive empirical argument regarding support for Québec sovereignty. In fact, Pinard's theories on Québécois identification as predictive of support for sovereignty have been found to lack veracity when held up to statistical testing (Mendelsohn 2003).

Despite possible theoretical and/or empirical shortcomings, this current paper makes use of findings from both the Montréal and Socio-psychological schools to expand upon what is known about individual and contextual variables linked to sovereignty. Both schools emphasize the importance of French language protection in understanding support for sovereignty within Québec and suggest that regional contextual factors indeed matter. These findings are imperative for situating and interpreting the results of this present research. I build upon these theoretical postulates by unpacking related individual dimensions of identity attached to language protection to account for heterogenous attitudes concerning Québec sovereignty.

## **Data & Measurements**

To adequately test the hypotheses put forward in this paper, I rely exclusively upon individual-level survey response data from the 2015 iteration of the Canadian Election Study (CES). Specifically, this study makes use of observations drawn from the CES phone survey as this portion of the survey contains reliable measures for both our dependent variable and our key independent variable of linguistic bias along with appropriate control variables. The CES phone survey was conducted across Canada within the months of September and October of 2015 with a total number of 3,701 respondents contacted. Due to missing or incomplete observational values for many respondents, the multivariate analysis for this study utilizes responses from a total of 730 survey respondents with complete data. Of these complete cases, I have segmented survey respondents into two separate datasets for comparative analysis: residents of Québec (QC) and individuals who reside in the rest of Canada (ROC).

### ***Dependent Variable: Support for Québec Sovereignty***

To measure support for Québec sovereignty, I make use of a standardized question embedded within the CES that asks respondents to indicate to what extent they are in favour or opposed to Québec sovereignty (See Appendix for full question). Of four possible responses, I have rescaled possible responses to values between 0 and 1, with 0 indicating "Very Opposed" and 1 indicating "Very Favourable". This question slightly differs from binary questions regarding how one may potentially vote for or against a hypothetical referendum for Québec sovereignty (Nadeau et al. 1998, Kam & Simas 2010), however it captures similar and perhaps more nuanced variations in

support for Québec sovereignty. In table 2, we find that within Québec, 44% of those surveyed reported being either ‘somewhat’ or ‘very’ favourable of sovereignty. This average closely corresponds with average support for sovereignty shown in year over year opinion polls in figure 1. While we see only 15% combined favourable support for sovereignty outside of Québec. This measure likely taps a representative poll of national support for Québec sovereignty at the time of survey.

Table 2. Distribution of Support for Sovereignty (ROC vs. QC)

<b>Region</b>	<b>Very Opposed</b>	<b>Somewhat Opposed</b>	<b>Somewhat Favourable</b>	<b>Very Favourable</b>
QC	37%	20%	22%	22%
ROC	65%	20%	8%	7%

***Independent Variable: Linguistic Bias***

For this study, *linguistic bias* constitutes an expressed preference or favouritism toward members of one’s own language group in relation to other language outgroups. Like any other arbitrary group identifier, such as ethnicity or skin colour, language serves as a readily available label to categorize individuals into groups within any given society. Indeed, for some, language identification is a particularly salient trait and can represent an important indicator of ingroup and outgroup affiliation (Kinder & Kam 2009). For my measure of linguistic bias, I aim to capture the extent to which individuals identify with their language group by comparing expressed feelings toward linguistic ingroup members against feelings toward linguistic outgroup members.

In the Canadian context, the most obvious and salient language groups to measure related to the question of Québec sovereignty are those of Canada’s two official languages, English and French. While excluded allophones represent a sizable and growing population in Canada (20%), they cannot be considered a cohesive language group as the umbrella term ‘allophone’ includes speakers of over 200 language groups that are all relatively small in comparison to actual numbers of anglophones (58%) and francophones (22%) within the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2015). The disparity between minority and majority language groups is even more pronounced within the CES data where 59% respondents report English as their mother tongue, while 30% report French, and only 11% report any other language. Moreover, on a practical note regarding exclusion of allophones in this study, coincidentally, no allophone respondents in the CES phone survey answered the survey question regarding support or opposition to Québec sovereignty.

To assess linguistic bias for both anglophones and francophones across both ROC and QC survey samples, I make use of questions from the CES that prompt respondents to indicate on a scale from 1 to 100 how much they like anglophones and francophones within Canada, with a score of 100 corresponding with most liked (See Appendix for full question). Here, I segment respondents into anglophone and francophone subsets (based on reported mother tongue) and subtracted ingroup evaluation scores from outgroup evaluation scores (ex. for anglophone subset:

like anglophone score minus like francophone score). The result of this equation for each individual respondent lends a latent measure of their ingroup preference relative to their language outgroup. Thus, the linguistic bias variable captures the difference between like scores for language ingroup and outgroup members.

It may be useful to note here that this measure is potentially a conservative estimate of actual preferences toward ingroup and outgroup members as responses to this question were recorded via telephone, whereby individuals may be less likely to give overly negative scores for outgroups due to social desirability bias. That said, since I am interested in the relative difference between expressed ingroup and outgroup scores this present measure should adequately capture respondent predispositions related to ingroup favouritism.

Table 3. Mean Like Scores by Linguistic Groups (CES 2015)

Language Group	Like Francophone	Like Anglophone
<b>Francophone</b>	84.169	73.502
<b>Anglophone</b>	65.201	79.320

Commensurate with findings by others on the nature of arbitrary group-based biases (Kinder and Kam 2009), I find on aggregate that individuals evaluate their own language ingroups more favourably than outgroups (Table 3). Francophones tend to like other francophones more than anglophones by over 10 points on average, while anglophones express an even more pronounced level of ingroup favouritism by a 14-point average spread. Paired t-tests confirm the differences of means between ingroup like scores and outgroup like scores are statistically significant. These initial findings lend weight to my theoretical assumptions on the saliency of language as a group-based identifier and potential source of societal divisions. To examine how linguistic bias is related to support for Québec sovereignty by region, I combine individual linguistic bias scores for both anglophone and francophone respondents into a single measure and rescaled to values between -1 and 1 (with 1 corresponding with a maximum score for linguistic bias). This allows me to examine aggregate levels of linguistic bias for each geographical region analyzed in this study.

Interestingly, across Canada we find varying levels of linguistic bias by province. Using provincially pooled survey responses, table 4 shows the province with the highest average levels of linguistic bias to be Alberta with a mean of 0.22 (equivalent to a 22-point spread on the 100-point scale), followed by Nova Scotia (0.19), Québec (0.17), Manitoba (0.17), and Prince Edward Island (0.16). The province with the lowest reported levels of linguistic bias is Saskatchewan with an mean value of 0.05. These descriptive findings are useful as we see some notable cross-provincial variation in linguistic bias. However, a one-way ANOVA test to check multiple difference of means between provinces fails to reject the null hypothesis that the difference between means is 0. For pooled ROC survey respondents, the mean is 0.16, which is not statistically different from the reported QC mean of 0.17 ( $t = -1.3044$ ;  $p = 0.19$ ).

Table 4. Mean Linguistic Bias Scores by Province

Province	NL	PE	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
<b>Mean</b>	0.12	0.16	0.19	0.13	0.17	0.15	0.17	0.05	0.22	0.14

## *Control Variables*

To test the strength of the primary relationship of interest between linguistic bias and support for Québec sovereignty, I have included several potentially influential control variables to my multivariate analyses. Each of these controls have been selected based on relevant research on individual-level motivating factors that may explain support for Québec sovereignty and/or broader political preferences (Mendelsohn, 2003; Nadeau et al., 1999; Pinard, 1992; Piroth et al., 2006). Complete survey questions for each control variable can be found in the Appendix.

- *National Economy Worse* – To date, several notable studies have identified a statistically significant correlation between economic perceptions and support for Québec sovereignty (Nadeau et al., 1999, Mendelsohn, 2003). Individuals who perceive Québec sovereignty to be a sound economic choice for Québec are more likely to support separation from Canada. In such studies, survey respondents are often asked explicitly to indicate whether sovereignty will improve Québec’s economic prospects (Idem). For this present study, I have chosen to utilize a latent measure of individual’s economic perceptions of a hypothetical outcome for Québec by gauging individual’s retrospective attitudes toward Canada’s current national economy.

The logic behind this decision is that those who perceive Québec to be better off economically separate from Canada may inversely also perceive Canada’s current economy performing poorly. This form of individual comparative economic evaluation or “benchmarking” has been shown prevalent in international contexts and may serve as a useful measure here for federal/provincial retrospective evaluations (Kayser & Peress, 2012). That is, individuals are prone to think of local economic performance relative to performance of neighbouring economies. Taken together with evidence that individual retrospective economic evaluations are motivated by personal biases rather than by real-world economic performance indicators (Evans & Pickup, 2010), it is reasonable to tap retrospective assessments of the Canadian economy as a latent preference for how individuals feel about Québec’s future economic prospects.

For this measure I make use of a CES question that prompts respondents to answer whether Canada’s economy has gotten better, worse, or about the same over the past 12 months. Answers here have been recoded as -1 (better), 0 (about the same), and 1 (worse). While this measure is not completely ideal, as several factors may go into one’s retrospective assessment of the national economy (Achen & Bartels, 2016), it avoids conflation of independent and dependent variables by excluding potentially leading inclusion of the term ‘sovereignty’ in the question. Thus, this measure offers us a less endogenous and possibly more reliable variable estimate.

- *Party Identification (dummies): Bloc, Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Green* – It is possible that partisanship plays an explanatory role in individual-level support for Québec sovereignty, particularly Bloc Québécois party identification. As the Bloc was founded on and continues to espouse separatist sentiments, Bloc partisan identification should provide a useful control in multivariate regression. While there is limited empirical research available on the affects of partisanship on support for Québec sovereignty (Mendelsohn, 2003), I have added dummy variables for partisanship for each of Canada’s

national parties to tease out their potential influence on individual preferences. Here, positive partisan identification with a party is coded as 1.

- *Strength of Partisanship* – Like partisanship, strength of partisanship identification could be telling of support for sovereignty as it may account for the most politically engaged and ideologically biased individuals in my dataset. Here, survey respondents were asked how strongly they identify with their expressed partisan identity. Responses are scaled between 0 to 1, with ‘Very Strongly’ coded as 1 and ‘Not Very Strongly’ coded as 0.
- *Interest in Politics* – Individuals most interested in politics may express the most extreme positions on the national question. Research has established that interest in politics does correlate positively with varying forms of political participation and political opinion formation (Brady, Verba, & Lehman Schlozman, 1995; Zaller, 1992). Thus, we may expect that interest in politics closely aligns with attitudes toward particularly salient political topics in Canada. For this question respondents were asked to indicate their interest in politics on a scale between 0 and 10 ranging from 0= ‘No interest at all’ to 10= ‘A Great deal of interest’ have been coded to values between 0 and 1.
- *Demographic Variables (Age, Male, Religiosity, Francophone)* – For demographic variables, I have included dummy variables for reported gender (Male = 1), and francophone identification and have included age along with level of religiosity to rule out potentially spurious findings in multivariate regression.

## Methods of Analysis

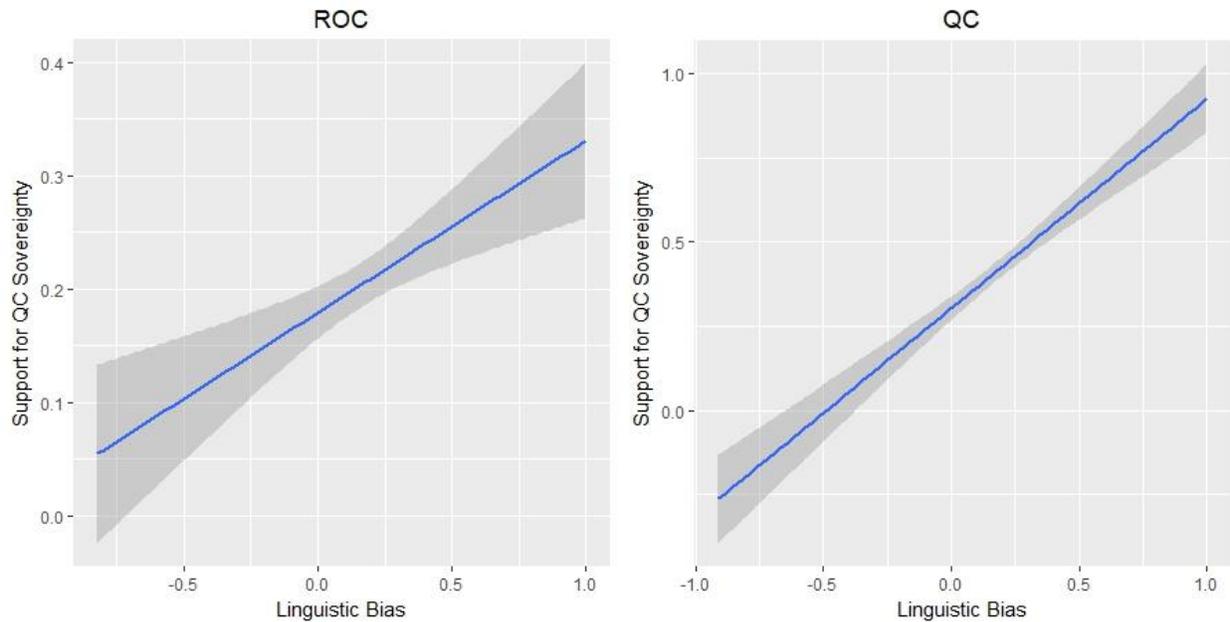
To adequately examine the relationship between linguistic bias and support for Québec sovereignty, I first utilize bivariate OLS linear regression to evaluate the general pattern of the relationship among QC and ROC survey sample populations respectively. Next, I test the primary relationship of interest in the presence of control variables using multivariate OLS linear regression. These methods should allow us to determine the validity of H1 and H2. Finally, I add an interaction term between linguistic bias and Francophone identification (Linguistic Bias\*Francophone) among the Québec survey respondents to appropriately test H3.

## Results and Discussion

The initial bivariate results for the relationship between linguistic bias and support for Québec sovereignty show a statistically significant positive relationship among both QC and ROC respondents. Moreover, commensurate with my theoretical expectations, this relationship exhibits a stronger effect among QC respondents. With an OLS coefficient estimate of 0.623 ( $p < 0.01$ ), linguistic bias among QC respondents appears to be closely linked to increased support for sovereignty. For ROC, the coefficient estimate is 0.152 ( $p < 0.01$ ). Figure 2 illustrates the differentiated bivariate trends among these distinct surveyed populations. I should note that when ROC provinces are disaggregated into pooled province estimates, we find that only coefficient estimates from Ontario are statistically significant (0.144;  $p < 0.01$ ). However, all provinces exhibit a positive directional trend. These findings are encouraging as they confirm the

theoretical expectations from H1 and H2 and lend us incentive to further test this relationship for both ROC and QC in multivariate regression.

Figure 2. Bivariate Plot: Linguistic Bias and Support for Québec Sovereignty



In multivariate regression, I find several interesting results that lend us greater insight into support for Québec sovereignty among the Canadian population. First, in examining the relationship between linguistic bias and support for sovereignty between models 1 and 2 in table 4, we find statistical support for H1 and H2. Linguistic bias is shown to have a statistically significant positive relationship with our dependent variable for both ROC (0.100;  $p < 0.1$ ) and QC (0.478;  $p < 0.01$ ) survey respondents and is shown to be particularly pronounced in Québec. Moreover, linguistic bias is shown to be the single strongest indicator of support for sovereignty when controlling for other potentially influential independent variables in both models 1 and 2. Indeed, linguistic bias is the only statistically significant positive predictor of support for sovereignty among ROC respondents and stands out among Québec respondents, trumping both Bloc partisanship (Bloc ID) and francophone identification. These findings suggest that linguistic bias is a stable indicator of support for sovereignty regardless of geographical location. Further, reported levels of linguistic bias appear to be more telling of support for Québec sovereignty than partisanship, economic views, age, or language group membership. That said, given the low R-squared estimate for the ROC model (0.08), these conclusions should be tempered for their ability to explain support for sovereignty outside of Québec. Within Québec, I am more confident of the explanatory power of my findings (model 2 adjusted  $R^2 = 0.557$ ).

Table 5. OLS Multivariate Model Comparison

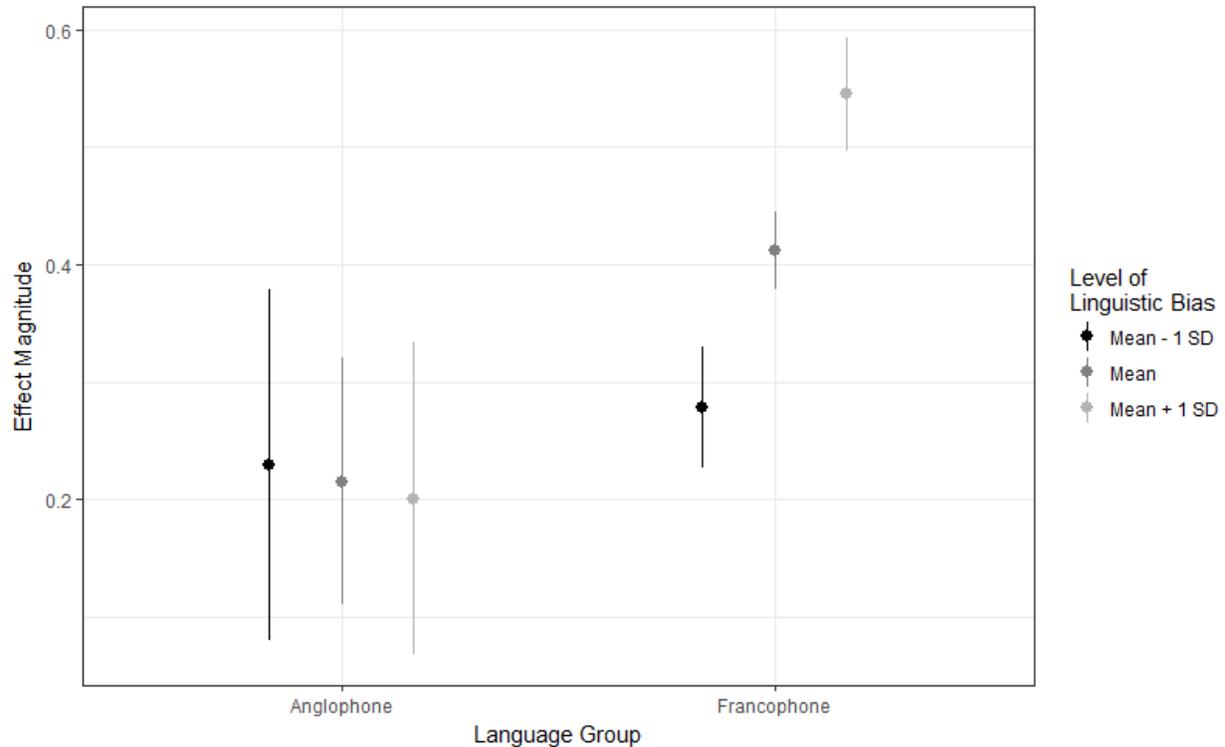
	DV: Support for QC Sovereignty		
	Coefficients (SE)		
	(1) ROC	(2) QC	(3) QC
Linguistic Bias	0.100* (0.059)	0.478*** (0.074)	-0.078 (0.202)
National Economy Worse	-0.029 (0.025)	-0.027 (0.028)	-0.031 (0.028)
Francophone	-0.104 (0.071)	0.208*** (0.057)	0.085 (0.070)
Bloc ID	0.459 (0.306)	0.408*** (0.066)	0.377*** (0.066)
Conservative ID	-0.113** (0.049)	-0.179*** (0.062)	-0.175*** (0.061)
NDP ID	-0.128** (0.053)	0.134** (0.065)	0.109* (0.065)
Liberal ID	-0.160*** (0.047)	-0.145** (0.062)	-0.171*** (0.062)
Green ID	-0.106 (0.074)	-0.093 (0.125)	-0.126 (0.123)
Strength of Party ID	-0.038 (0.040)	0.031 (0.040)	0.043 (0.039)
Interest in Politics	-0.010 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.008)	-0.006 (0.008)
Religiosity	0.034 (0.043)	0.001 (0.055)	0.017 (0.055)
Age	-0.003*** (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Male	-0.004 (0.029)	0.008 (0.035)	0.011 (0.034)
Linguistic Bias*Francophone			0.638*** (0.217)
Constant	0.551*** (0.087)	0.152 (0.111)	0.264** (0.116)
Observations	446	284	284
R <sup>2</sup>	0.080	0.577	0.590
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.053	0.557	0.569
Residual Std. Error	0.294 (df = 432)	0.272 (df = 270)	0.269 (df = 269)
F Statistic	2.900*** (df = 13; 432)	28.357*** (df = 13; 270)	27.699*** (df = 14; 269)

Note: \*p<0.1 \*\*p<0.05 \*\*\*p<0.01

Related to existing empirical research on individual level sources of support for sovereignty, these findings make some substantive contributions. First, according to table 5, there is no statistically discernable positive or negative relationship between individual retrospective opinions of the Canadian national economy and support for Québec sovereignty. Despite variation in measurement of economic evaluations, this finding contradicts research from

Montréal school authors and suggests that, in the presence of other possibly influential variables, economic opinions are less predictive of support for sovereignty. Additionally, this may imply that retrospective economic evaluations stem from other sources of individual identity that lead to inherently subjective assessments of economic performance (such as party identification or arbitrary trait ingroup identities). Second, support for sovereignty is not a unique phenomenon restricted to francophone residents of Québec, as posited by Socio-psychological school adherents. While francophone identity appears to be a telling indicator of support for sovereignty within Québec, underlying individual predispositions related to language ingroup favouritism appear to correspond more closely to positions on sovereignty. Language group membership and geographical location alone do not explain support for sovereignty among Québécois.

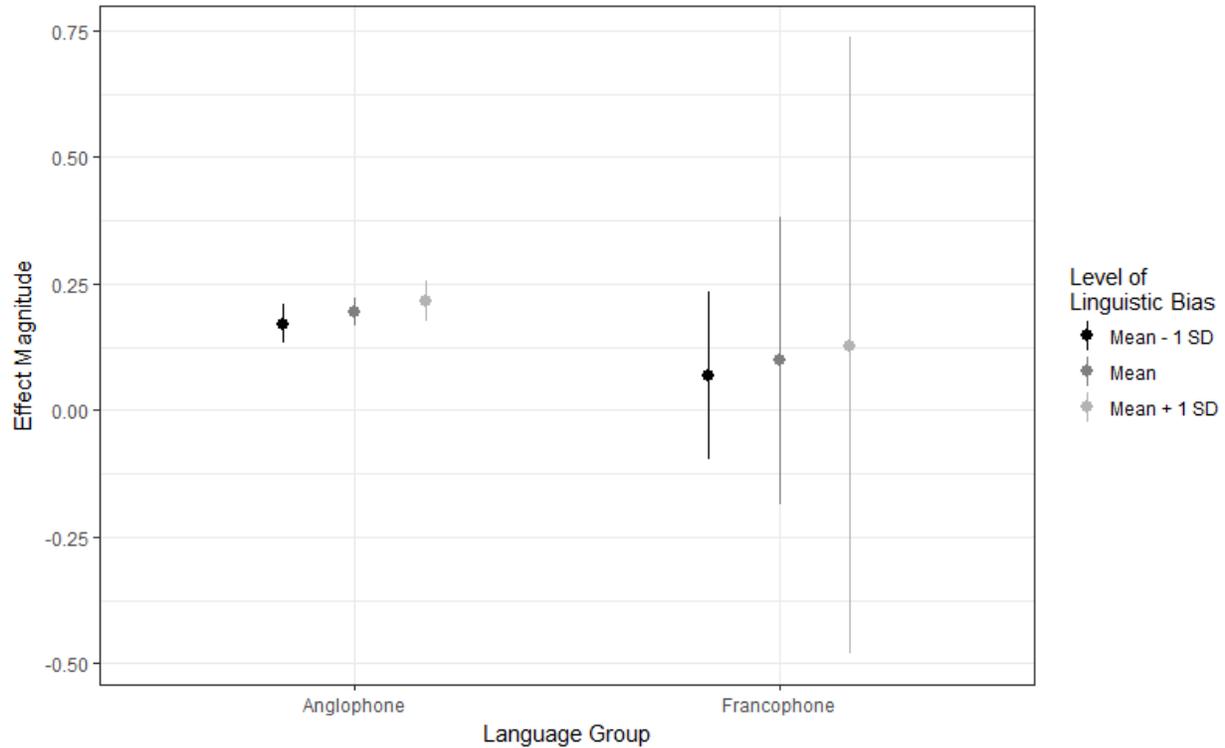
Figure 3. Support for Sovereignty by Level of Linguistic Bias (QC)



Regarding H3, figure 3 illustrates the interactive role of linguistic bias among Québec’s francophone population (interaction term ‘Linguistic Bias\*Francophone’ in table 5, model 3). Here, not only do we find conclusive support for H3, we also find a statistically significant heterogeneous effect for francophone respondents. Comparing mean level responses to +/- 1 standard deviations from the mean, we find that increased levels of linguistic bias correlate positively with support for sovereignty, while decreased levels of linguistic bias show decreasing support for sovereignty among Québécois respondents. This finding indicates that individual levels of linguistic bias are predictive of polarized political preferences regarding sovereignty among Québec’s francophone majority. Compared to ROC respondents, we find in figure 4 that the same patterns of preference diversity do not exist outside of Québec. Serving as somewhat of a robustness check for H3, the interaction effects displayed in figure 4 lend weight to the theoretical proposition that increased levels of language group threat among francophone residents of Québec account for statistically significant heterogeneity of preferences on the issue

of sovereignty. That said, further robustness checks are required to confirm whether these results are linked to a direct measure of threat and to determine to what extent this relationship is stable over time. Given data constraints, this present check must suffice until new data is collected for a more comprehensive evaluation.

Figure 4. Support for Sovereignty by Level of Linguistic Bias (ROC)



## Conclusions

The findings of this present analysis lend us new insights into individual-level variables underlying support or opposition to Québec sovereignty. Latent linguistic ingroup bias appears to be indicative of individual preferences regarding sovereignty among survey respondents in both Québec and ROC, though this positive relationship is noticeably stronger within Québec. I posit here that linguistic bias is increasingly related to support for sovereignty in Québec due to increased perceptions that the French language is under threat. That is, I argue that francophones who show the most preference toward their linguistic ingroup likely feel most threatened and view sovereignty as an effective measure to protect and preserve their ingroup identity.

Additionally, this paper suggests that linguistic bias plays an important role in understanding heterogeneous preferences regarding sovereignty in Québec. Indeed, polarization of opinion on sovereignty is shown to be closely linked to one's level of linguistic bias among francophone Québécois. Related to gaps in competing theories on sources of support for sovereignty, this paper provides a substantive explanation for varying attitudes toward sovereignty within Québec and shows that individual motivations underlying support for sovereignty are not linguistically or geographically exclusive. While it remains probable that individual's support or opposition to

sovereignty is part of a complex and rational personal cost-benefit calculation, it is also likely that such calculations are influenced by latent psychological evaluations of linguistic ingroup and outgroup populations.

The implications of these findings may inspire further research on the extent to which this relationship holds across time and in relation to varying dependent variables of political interest. Indeed, while these findings are encouraging for increasing what is known about the nature of political preferences toward sovereignty, more research is required to understand the extent and limitations of linguistic ingroup attachment and bias as predictor of broader political attitudes and actions. In addition, a more comprehensive examination of the interactive effects of perceived threat within the Canadian context would add greater insight to these present findings. Namely, direct measurements of perceptions of threat within a representative Canadian survey sample would be beneficial to further test the claims I forward here on the reasons for opinion heterogeneity among QC survey respondents.

Beyond the Canadian context, it may be useful to apply a similar research design to test the relationship between ingroup biases and support for other secession movements around the world, such as Catalonia, Scotland, or Mindanao. Undoubtedly, each movement will possess unique histories and contextual factors that shape the nature of calls for separation. However, given the findings of this present research, it may be generalized that salient politicized social identities can serve as bases for intergroup tension and ultimately motivate individuals to support permanent partitioning of groups. Related to broader theories of intergroup relations, it may be also worth examining in what ways ingroup biases may be conditioned by persistent contact with outgroup members (Allport, 1954). To date, evidence is mixed on the degree to which group-based prejudices change as a function of intergroup contact (Weisel & Böhm, 2015; Wright, Mazziotta, & Tropp, 2017). Investigating whether ingroup biases, such as linguistic bias, fluctuate over time or remain stable individual predispositions would be useful for tracking and predicting ebbs and flows in intergroup tensions.

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## Appendix

### Survey Questions

#### *Support for Québec Sovereignty*

**sov** Are you very favourable, somewhat favourable, somewhat opposed, or very opposed to Québec sovereignty, that is Québec is NO LONGER A PART OF CANADA? **WP**

- (1) Very Favourable
- (3) Somewhat Favourable

#### *Linguistic Bias*

**p\_like\_** How do you feel about the following countries and groups? (Web version: Slide the slider to any number from 0 to 100.) Zero means you really DISLIKE the country or group, and 100 means you really LIKE the country or group. **WP**

**p\_like\_fran** Francophones, people who speak French

**p\_like\_angl** Anglophones, people who speak English

#### *National Economy Worse*

**econ\_ret** Now the economy. Over the PAST YEAR, has CANADA’s economy: **WP**

- (1) Gotten Better
- (3) Gotten Worse
- (5) Stayed About the Same
- (8) Don’t Know
- (9) Refuse to Answer

*Party ID*

**partyid** In federal politics, do you usually think of yourself as a Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Bloc Québécois, Green, or none of these? **WP**

- (0) other (specify)
- (1) Liberal
- (2) Conservative
- (3) NDP
- (4) Bloc Québécois
- (5) Green Party
- (6) None of these
- (8) Don't know
- (9) Refused

*Strength of Party ID*

**pid\_str** How strongly (Party ID) do you feel? **WP**

- (1) Very Strongly
- (3) Fairly Strongly
- (5) Not Very Strongly
- (8) Don't Know
- (9) Refuse to Answer

*Interest in Politics*

**p\_intpol** How interested are you in politics generally? Using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means no interest at all and 10 means a great deal of interest. **WP**

- **0 - No Interest at All to 10 - A Great Deal of Interest**
- 98 - Don't Know
- 99 - Refuse to Answer

*Age*

**age** In what year were you born? **WP** Please type the four-digit year.

*Religiosity*

**relig\_imp** In your life, you would say religion is: **WP**

- (1) Very Important
- (3) Somewhat Important
- (5) Not Very Important
- (7) Not Important At All
- (98) Don't Know
- (99) Refuse to Answer

*Gender (Male)*

**sex\_r** Are you? **WP**

- (1) Male
- (5) Female

*Québec Residence & Province indicator*

**province** Which province or territory are you currently living in? **WP**

- (59) British Columbia
- (48) Alberta
- (47) Saskatchewan
- (46) Manitoba
- (35) Ontario
- (24) Québec
- (13) New Brunswick
- (12) Nova Scotia
- (11) Prince Edward Island
- (10) Newfoundland and Labrador
- (60) Yukon
- (61) Northwest Territories
- (62) Nunavut

*Francophone & Anglophone variable and subset term ID*

**first\_lang** What is the VERY FIRST language you learned and still understand? **WP**

- (1) English
- (5) French
- \*35 Other language choices included as well
- (97) other (specify)
- (98) don't know
- (99) refused

**Bivariate Regression: Linguistic Bias and Support for Québec Sovereignty**

	Support for QC Sovereignty - Coefficients (SE)	
	(1) ROC	(2) QC
Linguistic Bias	0.152*** (0.040)	0.623*** (0.060)
Constant	0.179*** (0.012)	0.304*** (0.018)
Observations	973	622
R <sup>2</sup>	0.015	0.147
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.014	0.145
Residual Std. Error	0.311 (df = 971)	0.362 (df = 620)
F Statistic	14.688*** (df = 1; 971)	106.550*** (df = 1; 620)

Note: \* p<0.1 \*\* p<0.05 \*\*\* p<0.01