

Separatism in Québec

The political movement in the province of Québec that seeks to separate Québec from the rest of Canada is premised on a deep desire to preserve and enrich Québécois culture. The movement to separate from the rest of Canada in order to maintain a distinct French-Canadian identity can be traced back to the early history of colonial Canada, when the British defeated the French and secured possession of the entire Canadian territory in 1763. As the only “vanzhished” European settlers in North America, the Québécois are undeniably unique.

Until Québec experienced its so-called “Quiet Revolution” in the 1960s, when a separatist political party—the Parti Québécois—emerged, French-Canadian nationalism was a largely conservative movement. With the French-Canadian family and Roman Catholic religion at its core, Québec oriented itself around clerical, rural, and agricultural values. Its nationalism was backward-looking and traditional. While numerous scholars have advanced any number of explanations for the rise and persistence of French nationalism in Québec, the most compelling one from our perspective is based on its peripheral status in the national and the global economy.

As the Canadian economy became increasingly integrated into the global economy and, more particularly, into the U.S. economy, Québec found itself less able than previously to benefit from U.S. hegemony. Largely because its identity was based on traditional ideas and practices, Québec was ill-equipped to participate in the revolutionary changes transpiring around it. As western Canada’s economic power increased with the increasing importance of the energy

sector, and as Toronto transformed itself based on the growing service sector, enabling it to become the financial and industrial capital of Canada, Québec was left behind.

Recognizing that these changes posed a major threat to the social, economic, and political survival of Québec’s cultural identity, Québec’s elites saw a way out of peripheralization by opting out of the Canadian national project altogether. Seizing control of the provincial government of Québec, the elites were able to translate their vision for a separate Québec by creating a polity that wished not simply to try to hold on to the old ways, but to achieve complete independence in order to determine their own path through the new economy.

The desire of the Québec separatists to opt out of their regional/provincial status and become an independent nation with a distinct identity became translated into provincial referenda on independence. In both 1980 and 1985 the separatists forced votes that, if they had passed, would have signaled the desire of residents of the province to separate politically from Canada. Both times the referenda failed. In 1995 another referendum was on the ballot asking voters if they wished to stay as part of Canada; in this referendum, “yes” votes to remain in Canada exceeded “no” votes by a very small margin (Figure 5.G).

It is too soon to tell whether Québec will push once more for independence from Canada. There are signs that the province is actually becoming less interested in separation, given its increasing prosperity though incorporation into the global economy. Globalization and Québec’s growing independent relation-

ship with the United States have begun to influence its desire for nation-state status. Some scholars believe that rather than undermining Québécois national identity, NAFTA and Canada’s increasing connections to Europe have enhanced it. In short, there is no clear answer at this point to the question of whether Québec will remain a distinct society within Canada or become a new nation-state. What is clear is that the context for making that decision is rapidly changing, as changes in the Canadian state brought about by globalization have begun to open up ways for Québec to maintain its distinct identity, to prosper economically, and to control more of its own destiny without having to secede from Canada.

In fact, a recent poll shows that for the first time since the 1990s, 50 percent of the residents of Québec support sovereignty for the province. At the same time, however, two-thirds of them indicated they were proud to be Canadian and most still wanted the province to remain part of Canada. In short, it is sovereignty but not separatism that increasingly characterizes the political desire of more and more Québec residents. It would appear that the question of Québec’s relationship to Canada hinges on the attitudes of different generations and time may change which of those attitudes will prevail. Those residents of Québec who opposed separation from Canada, or the “traditional federalists,” were born before World War II and they are dying off. The baby boomers of the Quiet Revolution support sovereignty but wish to remain with Canada. It appears that today’s young adults—the children of Bill 101, the landmark language law from 1977 that put French at the forefront of education—are likely to support independence from Canada. Time will tell whether the right conditions prevail for separation, when this generation holds the reins of power.

Figure 5.G Referendum vote on separation from Canada

The distribution of the vote reflects the ethnic division of upper and lower Québec. While lower Québec is urbanized, with overwhelming numbers of French-speaking Canadians, upper Québec is largely rural and contains mostly non-Francophone communities.

Translating Animal Sounds

While a cat obviously sounds the same in any part of the world, the speakers of different human languages render that sound in diverse ways. The chart shows how the sounds of various animals "translate" into different human languages:

	English	Indonesian	Japanese	Greek
Dog	bow-wow	gonggong	wanwan	gav
Cat	meow	ngeong	nyaa	niaou
Bird	tweet-tweet	kicau	chunchun	tsiou tsiou
Rooster	cock-a-doodle-doo	kikeriku	kokekokkoo	ki-kiriki

This table was compiled using information from the web site "Sounds of the World's Animals," at <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/ballc/animals/animals.html>. This is a project of Dr. Catherine N. Ball in Georgetown University's Department of Linguistics. This fascinating web site has the translations of many more animal sounds into a diversity of human languages.

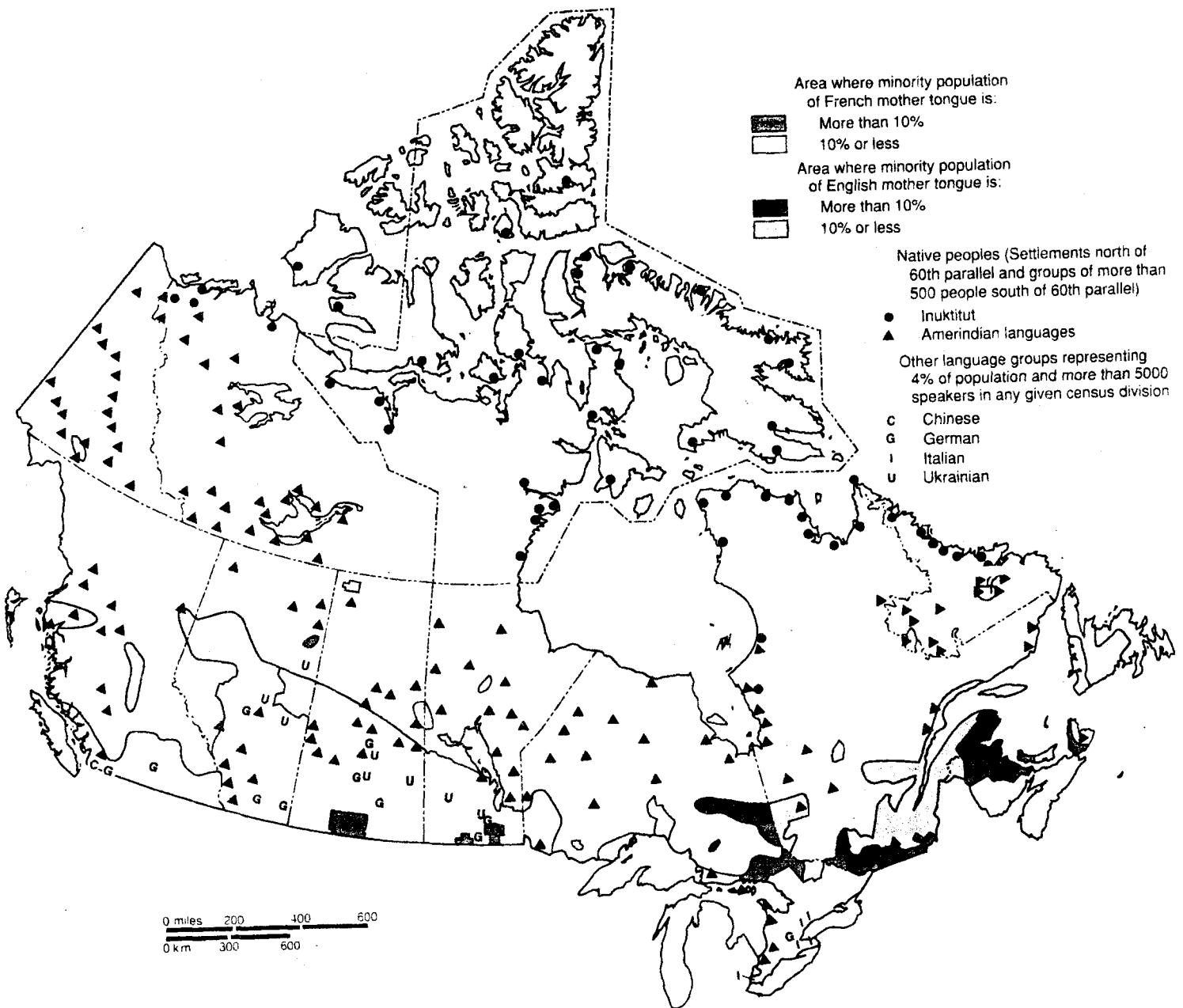


Figure 5.16 Bilingualism and diversity in Canada. The map shows areas of Canada that have a minimum of 5000 inhabitants and include a minority population identified with an official language.