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Distinct in the House of Commons: The Bloc Québécois as Official Opposition

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Le succès électoral du Bloc québécois était prévisible. Il s'est également avéré significatif à court terme et aura des implications majeures dans les mois à venir. La première section de ce chapitre explique le caractère prévisible de la performance du Bloc, en montrant que le nouveau parti représentait une part importante et stable de l'électorat québécois. La deuxième partie traite du rôle du Bloc québécois à Ottawa et souligne, en particulier, la proximité idéologique du parti et de son électorat. Enfin, la troisième partie discute des possibilités qui s'offrent au Bloc et au Parti québécois dans la bataille référendaire qui s'amorce, insistant notamment sur les perceptions des électeurs moins décidés. En conclusion, une brève discussion suggère que le Bloc pourrait demeurer un acteur important dans les années à venir, même si les souverainistes perdaient leur référendum.

In the days following the October 1992 referendum, much was said about the possible closure of Canada's constitutional debate. Peter H. Russell, in particular, pleaded for an end to "mega constitutional politics," and predicted that ambitious constitutional proposals would "find no support from political leaders or the general public."[1] A poll conducted a week after the referendum confirmed that Canadians were unwilling to resume constitutional discussions: at the time, 69 percent of Canadians outside Quebec and 55 percent in Quebec supported the idea of a five-year moratorium on constitutional talks.[2]

The Quebec question, however, remained unaddressed. At the outset, the Meech-Charlottetown constitutional process was an attempt to accommodate Quebec within the framework established in 1982, and in this respect nothing was resolved. The simple demand for recognition included in the Meech Lake Accord was unacceptable in "English Canada,"[3] and the more elaborate compromise ratified in Charlottetown was also rejected by a majority of Canadians. Following the 1992 referendum, there was nevertheless a widespread

impression that a major crisis had been averted: Patrick J. Monahan, for instance, argued that "the prospects for convincing Quebeckers to remain within Canada appear significantly more promising at the end of 1992 than they did in the months immediately following the failure of the Meech Lake Accord."[4] Likewise, Guy Laforest noted that two months after the referendum "Robert Bourassa was still the leader of the Quebec Liberal Party and the Premier of Quebec, and nobody talked about the constitution." Even the notion of a distinct society had been set aside.[5]

The idea that Canada was ready to return to politics as usual appeared convincing. When the 1993 federal electoral campaign began, many observers, in Quebec as well as in the rest of Canada, predicted Quebecers would forget their flirt with the Bloc Québécois to vote for a party that could take power. Even the re-election of the Quebec Liberal Party seemed possible.[6] These expectations proved wrong, of course, and the Bloc Québécois became the Official Opposition in the House of Commons. But how predictable and how significant was the Bloc's success? And what did it mean in the short run for Quebec and Canadian politics? More important, can the Bloc's 1993 gains be interpreted as a first-period lead in the three-peroid game of independence envisioned by Jacques Parizeau?

This chapter takes up these three questions and argues that the electoral success of the Bloc Québécois was predictable, meaningful in the short run, and significant for the coming months. The first section deals with the 1993 elections, and suggests the outcome was predictable because the party represented an important and stable part of the Quebec electorate. The second considers the meaning of the Bloc's presence in Ottawa, and argues that the new party expresses rather adequately the vision of the country shared by its supporters. Finally, the third section discusses the role the Bloc will play in the coming months, in light of its first year as Official Opposition. The conclusion argues that the Bloc Québécois could well play an important role in the coming years, even if the Parti Québécois fails to win its referendum on sovereignty.

FROM MINOR PARTY TO OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

When the Bloc Québécois was formed, in the weeks following the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, it constituted little more than a small group of MPs disappointed with the Conservative or Liberal party.[7] Denied official party status in the House of Commons, the new party faced hostility in both the House and public opinion outside Quebec, where it was perceived as less than entirely legitimate. In Quebec, however, the Bloc was in tune with public opinion and, with the tacit support of Robert Bourassa, it reached politicians well beyond the ranks of Parti Québécois sympathizers.[8] In the years after 1990, it would almost always lead in the polls, to reach levels of support around 40 percent in

the months preceding the 1993 election.[9] The 1992 referendum, with 57 percent of Quebecers voting No, demonstrated the enduring political relevance of the constitutional vision defended by the Bloc Québécois.[10] It also tested the party in action, strengthened it, and helped define its links with the Parti Québécois.[11]

Despite such steady support, and notwithstanding the referendum results, a number of observers believed the Bloc Québécois would not fare well in a general election. This prediction was based on the common perception that Quebec votes as a block in federal elections, usually for the winning party.[12] It was expected that, in the end, Quebecers would desert the Bloc Québécois and turn to the party most likely to take power. Accordingly, the Conservatives and the Liberals tried to woo Bloc supporters by arguing that a vote for a party that could not take power was a wasted vote or, worse in the minds of the Conservatives, an indirect vote for Jean Chrétien.[13]

Past elections suggest this view of Quebec is wrong. In 1979, Joe Clark failed to form a majority government largely because Quebecers remained faithful to the Liberal party, and Trudeau formed a minority government in 1972 for the same reason. Likewise, in 1957, Quebecers ignored Diefenbaker's lead and voted for the Liberals. In the past, Quebecers voted as a block less because they rallied strategically to the winning party than because they acted rather homogeneously, whether their preferred party was leading in the rest of Canada or not.[14] This homogeneity, it should be noted, cut across linguistic lines within Quebec, and cannot be attributed simply to cultural or linguistic factors.[15] The phenomenon was probably a consequence of the limited choice offered to Quebecers. In other words, it was driven by the supply (the partisan options that were offered) rather than by the demand (the autonomous preferences of voters).[16] In Canadian elections, the Conservative Party long constituted "the only serious alternative" to the Liberals. Yet, until 1984 the party remained barely "acceptable" to Quebecers, who consequently turned to the Liberals.[17] As a result, the Quebec vote was relatively stable and homogeneous, but it was also potentially volatile, not deeply anchored in partisan identifications.[18]

A supply-side interpretation of Quebec block voting helps account for the success of Lucien Bouchard's party in 1993. With the development of a new partisan option, the alleged tendency of Quebecers to vote for the leading party would be tested more clearly than ever. The apparent homogeneity of the Quebec vote would also be questioned, with the introduction of an option hardly acceptable to non-francophones. Early in the campaign, a majority of voters confirmed that, indeed, they did not wish to vote for the party most likely to win. Asked whether they agreed with the main parties' argument that a vote for the Bloc was a wasted vote, 63 percent of Quebecers disagreed.[19] Even voters who did not support the Bloc rejected the bandwagon reasoning traditionally associated with Quebec. Early in the campaign, Quebec voters located

themselves according to their relatively enduring political preferences.[20] Only this time, a new option was available.[21]

There is a definite structure to the Quebec electorate, and it can be described with reference to three overlapping dimensions: language, partisan identification, and support for sovereignty. First comes language. As long as the Liberals were the only serious contender, this cleavage remained latent in federal elections. The situation changed in the 1980s, with the inroads made by the Conservatives among francophone Quebecers. In 1988, 49 percent of English-speaking Quebecers continued to identify themselves as Liberals, compared with only 27 percent for francophones.[22] More significantly, in the October 1992 referendum non-francophones voted massively for the Yes, in contrast to Quebec francophones.[23] The 1993 campaign confirmed once again the relevance of language: traditionally less significant in federal than in provincial politics, it became a key factor once a sovereigntist party appeared on the scene. Consistently, campaign polls showed "that 60 per cent of francophones (intended) to vote for the Bloc, while 75 per cent of non-francophones (would) vote for the Liberals."[24] In the end, non-francophones overwhelmingly supported the Liberals, contrary to francophones who preferred the Bloc Québécois.[25]

If we leave aside non-francophones, we are still left with almost 85 percent of the electorate. Here, a second dimension comes into play — partisan identification. Although the Conservative Party did well in Quebec in 1984 and 1988, it failed to take root. Even in 1988, the vote of francophone Quebecers reflected a disaffection with the Liberals more than an attachment to the Conservative Party. Among francophones, only 27 percent identified themselves as Liberals (mostly the older, more religious part of the electorate), but no more than 22 percent saw themselves as Conservatives: 44 percent of francophone voters did not identify with any party. "The antithesis to the Liberal party," concluded the authors of the 1988 federal election study, "was not any specific party so much as the *refus global*, so to speak, to the entire system."[26] In 1993, this large group of non-identifiers constituted the natural target of the Bloc Québécois. Not all of these non-identifiers would rally to the Bloc, however, because a third dimension came into play: support for sovereignty.

On the basis of the two dimensions discussed so far, the total electorate can be divided into three groups: non-francophones who tend to support the Liberal Party and represent about 15 percent of the electorate; francophone Liberals who in 1988 represented roughly 22 percent of voters; and the rest, about 63 percent, being non-Liberal francophones. In 1993, this last group was not entirely available to the Bloc Québécois because it was divided on the question of sovereignty. At the time, 39 percent of the total electorate supported Quebec sovereignty.[27] If we assume these sovereigntists all belonged to the non-Liberal group, we are left with two subgroups of non-Liberals: a sovereigntist group

representing 39 percent of the total electorate and a group of non-Liberal federalists, who accounted for roughly a quarter of the electorate (24 percent).

To recapitulate, going into the 1993 federal campaign, four groups of voters defined the prospects of the different parties: non-francophones (about 15 percent of the total electorate); francophone Liberals (22 percent); sovereigntists (39 percent); and francophones who were federalists but not Liberals (24 percent). On election day, non-francophones and sovereigntists voted essentially as expected, respectively for the Liberals and for the Bloc Québécois. Francophone Liberals also seem to have acted predictably.[28] Most interesting was the vote of francophone non-sovereigntists, who lifted the Bloc's support by more than 10 percentage points above the solid sovereigntist vote (from 39 to 49.3 percent).

After the election, a debate ensued on the meaning of the vote between those who stressed its protest character and those who saw it as a more meaningful event that confirmed the results of the 1992 referendum. Robert Bourassa, for instance, argued the Bloc's victory in Quebec could be seen as a protest vote and would not have lasting consequences. In the same vein, Jean Chrétien explained on election night that good government would be sufficient to convince Quebecers they were wrong to distrust him and his party.[29] More systematically, Stéphane Dion stressed the electorate's high level of dissatisfaction with traditional parties and with politics, the fact that among ten issues voters were most preoccupied by unemployment and least concerned by constitutional questions, and the knowledge voters had that Lucien Bouchard could not take power.[30] Against this interpretation, others claimed the success of the Bloc Québécois meant something fundamental had changed in Canadian politics. Before the campaign was over, for instance, a *Globe and Mail* editorial stated the strong showing of the Bloc Québécois could not be reduced to a protest and was instead the outcome of a "logic built up over time."[31] In his analysis of the election results, Jean-H. Guay substantiated this view with three arguments: first, at 77.8 percent, the Quebec participation rate was the highest since the 1958 election, a fact that hardly suggested a disaffected electorate; second, since the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, Quebec polls consistently ranked the parties as they ended after the election, indicating the outcome was not a temporary upset; and third, a riding-by-riding analysis of the vote for the Bloc indicated it was strongly correlated with the the 1992 referendum No vote and strongly associated with stable characteristics of the electorate.[32] If jobs or economic dissatisfaction had been the main concern of Quebecers, added Guay, they would have voted for the Liberal Party, the party that placed these issues at the top of its platform.[33]

In his analysis of the individual determinants of the vote of non-sovereigntist francophones, André Blais offers elements that could be seen as supportive of both interpretations. On one hand, he finds that the Bloc Québécois attracted

less well-off voters who considered that their own economic situation had deteriorated. This finding reinforces the impression of an economic protest vote, which would have raised Bloc support from 39 to 49 percent. On the other hand, Blais also finds attachment to Quebec or to Canada to be by far the best predictor of whether non-sovereigntists voted for the Bloc or for the Liberal Party, a finding that best fits Guay's interpretation of the vote as a consistent expression of identity.[34]

Canadian elections are always, to some extent, determined by economic conditions. A rise in the unemployment rate, in particular, is costly for the incumbent party.[35] What changed in 1993 was that new parties could capture the vote of dissatisfied Canadians. In Quebec, the Bloc was best placed to do so because it attracted the vote of both sovereigntists and non-sovereigntists who identified primarily as Quebecers. Bouchard's party may also have benefited from negative evaluations of the economic situation, but this factor explained at best a gain of a few percentage points. While some may have expressed a protest, it seems fair to conclude that most Quebecers voted rather naturally for the party that best represented their vision of themselves and of the country. The 1993 election, argues sociologist Pierre Drouilly, allowed the expression at the federal level of a Quebec electoral formation that goes back to the 1970s and that has progressed ever since. Indeed, the vote for the Bloc mirrored quite closely the regional distribution of the Parti Québécois vote.[36] The 1993 election revealed less a change in Quebec voters than a change in the options they were offered in federal politics.

A LOYAL OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

The vote had not yet taken place before much concern was expressed outside Quebec about the role the Bloc Québécois would play as the Official Opposition in the House of Commons. In the days after the election, there were discussions on the legitimacy and even legality of an Official Opposition based in a single province and dedicated to the sovereignty of that province. There were even talks of a Holy Alliance of federalist forces to counter the sovereigntist threat. These discussions were not devoid of irony: for years Canadians outside Quebec had complained Quebec had too much clout in Cabinet; now that Quebecers had massively voted for the opposition, some seemed to think Quebec had too much clout in the opposition.

Given such apprehensions, the first months of the Bloc as Official Opposition turned out rather well. Lucien's Bouchard's opening speech in Parliament outlined his vision of the country and his sovereigntist objectives, and it was badly received outside Quebec, as a confirmation that not much could be expected from the Bloc Québécois.[37] In the following weeks, however, the

party took pains to play in a respectful and rather conventional way the role of the loyal opposition.

The Bloc basically cast itself as a party that would defend policies valued by all Canadians. Explaining, for instance, that his party would defend the integrity of the country's social programs, Lucien Bouchard noted it was "a strange paradox that a sovereigntist party from Quebec will be the only party fighting to preserve the main value of Canada."[38] The Bloc supported universal social programs, the elimination of family trusts and business tax loopholes, and the pursuit of Canada's peacekeeping effort in Bosnia. In the debate over the sale of Ginn Canada to Paramount Communications, a debate almost ignored in Quebec, the Bloc also stood up in defence of Canadian cultural industries. Meanwhile, Preston Manning and the Reform Party called for a withdrawal in Bosnia, taxes that were simply lower, drastic cuts in social programs, and a non-interventionist, market-driven cultural policy. On the four questions — foreign policy, taxation, social programs, and cultural policy — the Bloc Québécois stood closer to traditional Canadian values and policies than did the Reform Party. Also intriguing was the two parties' attitude towards the law and order issues. Faithful to the traditions of a country often portrayed as law-abiding, the Bloc Québécois repeatedly demanded that the RCMP intervene to stop cigarette smuggling. Preston Manning, by contrast, sounded like a Republican from California when he called, at about the same time, for nothing less than a "tax revolt"![39]

Six months after the election, the Bloc Québécois had earned respect as a credible official opposition, more effective in the House of Commons than the Reform party.[40] One journalist wrote provocatively that Lucien Bouchard could even turn "into the best opposition leader in recent memory."[41] For the Bloc Québécois, success and legitimacy as official opposition are important not so much because they may disturb the Chrétien government but rather because they give credibility to the sovereigntist project.[42] The party's position, however, is ambiguous. A Quebec columnist wrote with irony that Bloc MPs are working so hard at upholding Canadian values that they could end up nominated as honorary presidents for the Calgary Stampede.[43] The Bloc Québécois may in fact have modified Quebecers' perception of the House of Commons. The new opposition increased considerably the use of French in the House, regularly raised questions of interest to Quebecers, and brought the Quebec debate on sovereignty to Ottawa. In doing so, the Bloc unavoidably increased the House of Commons' relevance for those Quebecers who had paid little attention in the past. "I hope we are not working for federalism" mused Lucien Bouchard late in March 1994. Two months later, Jean Chrétien observed that, indeed, the presence of the Bloc Québécois in Ottawa had helped improve his image in Quebec.[44] True enough, the Liberals have progressed in Quebec since the election. These gains, however, cannot be attributed to the presence of the Bloc

Québécois. They are more likely the result of the final collapse of the Conservative Party in Quebec and of the honeymoon effect that benefits majority governments in their first six months in office.[45] Whatever the case, public opinion on sovereignty remains relatively stable and Lucien Bouchard is still among the most popular politicians in Quebec.[46]

Beyond the fluctuations in opinion polls, Lucien Bouchard and the Bloc Québécois appear quite representative of Quebec public opinion, on a wide range of issues beyond the national question.[47] In the debate on the *Young Offenders Act*, for instance, the Bloc Québécois was in tune with Quebec public opinion when it positioned itself against both the Liberal and the Reform parties, to argue that the Act was too severe.[48] Likewise, on social programs the party's defence of universality appears closer to Quebec than to Canadian public opinion.[49] More importantly, on the constitutional question the Bloc Québécois speaks not only for those who support sovereignty but also for the many Quebecers who think the Quebec government should have jurisdiction over more areas of government activity, alone or with the federal government.[50]

Herein lies the full meaning of the Bloc's presence in Ottawa. First, of course, the Bloc represents the large segment of the Quebec electorate that has unambiguously opted for sovereignty. In addition, as analyses of the vote suggest, the Bloc Québécois speaks for the sizable part of the population that remains attached to what Guy Laforest calls the dualist vision of Canada as two founding nations.[51] Following the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, many of these dualist Quebecers opted or were tempted to opt for sovereignty, but they never had an opportunity to vote on the question. A referendum was held, instead, on the Charlottetown agreement, which was clearly turned down, in a reaffirmation of Quebec's demand for some form of special constitutional recognition.[52]

"I will not talk about the constitution," repeated Jean Chrétien to Liberal militants in May 1994; "I was elected not to talk about the constitution."[53] Liberal voters may have given the government a mandate to avoid constitutional discussions, but this certainly was not the message that came from Quebec. As they supported the Bloc, Quebecers reaffirmed that in their opinion the constitutional issue was not settled. At the end of July 1994, a majority wanted a referendum on Quebec sovereignty to be held, by one party or the other.[54] Unable to get recognition and reform through the constitutional process, Quebecers voted to stand, on the constitution and on other issues as well, as distinct in the House of Commons.

THE MONTHS AHEAD: SOVEREIGNTISTS IN QUEBEC AND OTTAWA

By definition, the position of the Bloc Québécois is ambiguous. As mentioned above, it is not inconceivable to the Bloc that their search for respectability as

a loyal Official Opposition could detract from their promotion of sovereignty. More basically, the role played by the Bloc simply may not be sufficient to create a sovereigntist majority that does not exist at the moment. Among Quebec political scientists interested in public opinion, the dominant impression is that even with so many seats in Ottawa and power in Quebec, sovereigntists will lose their referendum on sovereignty. Indeed, given current public opinion, the task at hand for sovereigntists seems almost impossible. They still have a chance, however: public opinion remains mobile and with the right conditions a winning majority could emerge at the decisive moment.

Support for sovereignty climbed in 1990 — before the failure of the Meech Lake Accord — to peak above 60 percent in the fall of the same year. This shift in public opinion started before the formal rejection of the Accord and probably had as much to do with the debate as with its outcome. In the following months, support for sovereignty diminished. It remains that, at least at one point in time, a strong majority of Quebecers were sovereigntists.[55]

What governs such movements in public opinion? More specifically, what could bring the temporary sovereigntists of 1990 back to sovereignty? Commenting on the debate raised by Lucien Bouchard's visit to western Canada, *The Globe and Mail* suggested recently it was important to "state the facts" to win "the battle of Quebec." These are not "times for pulling punches," concluded the same editorial, and Michael Harcourt, Roy Romanow and others were totally right to denounce separatists when they had a chance.[56]

While it may sound sensible, this type of reasoning assumes a negotiation is about to begin, between two calculating actors pondering the respective advantages of their different options. In fact, public opinion on sovereignty has little to do with such a clear-minded, purposeful process. First, a good proportion of the Quebec electorate has already decided, one way or the other, and is unlikely to be swayed by last minute arguments, promises or threats. Second, the voters that became sovereigntists in 1990 and that could make a difference in 1995 are precisely the least consistent, least informed voters. These individuals tend to be less interested in politics and less anchored in clear positions, and they may not be moved solely by the type of calculus assumed by *The Globe and Mail* editorialists.

In a presentation at the May 1994 meeting of the Société québécoise de science politique, Jean-H. Guay summarized the results of a new, unpublished analysis that confirms a clear distinction between what could be called coherent and undecided voters. In his view, there are in fact three clusters of voters in Quebec. First, the sovereigntists, who identify themselves as Quebecers, support the PQ and the Bloc Québécois, and voted No in 1992. Second, the federalists, who see themselves primarily as Canadians, support the Liberals in Quebec and Ottawa, and voted Yes in 1992. Third, the undecided, who are more likely to identify themselves as French-Canadians, have fewer years of formal

education, are less informed, and more easily change their position. This third group of voters, the primary target of political strategists, seems to be moved by two types of considerations: first and foremost, a sense of identity as Quebecers, which will be more or less affirmed according to the circumstances; and second, an evaluation of the costs and benefits of the two basic options, the status quo and sovereignty.[57]

Now, what did Harcourt, Romanow, Irwin and others do when they "stated the facts" about separatism? Consider Harcourt's statement, by far the most revealing. If Quebec separates, predicted British Columbia's premier, we will become "the worst of enemies." Such a statement is neither fact nor prediction; it establishes what amounts to a highly conditional "friendship," and can only reinforce Quebecers' sense of identity. Playing with the complex set of cost evaluations, identity perceptions, and emotions that could influence the less committed voters is tricky. A threat meant to raise concerns about costs may just as well trigger a powerful emotional reaction anchored in identity.

In a recent study of Quebec francophones' attitudes towards sovereignty, Richard Nadeau and Christopher J. Fleury show that even sizable shifts in cost-benefit evaluations of sovereignty may not be enough for sovereigntists to obtain a majority in Quebec. A provincewide majority in favour of sovereignty could be created, however, with "a heightened feeling of attachment to Quebec" (assuming cost-benefit considerations do not change). This, argue Nadeau and Fleury, is what happened around 1990, at the end of the Meech Lake debate. For sovereigntists, these findings imply a majority can best be created not by discussing costs and benefits, but rather "by strengthening francophones' attachment to Quebec and weakening their attachment to Canada."[58] If the emotional fuss that accompanies every step Lucien Bouchard takes out of Quebec or Ottawa is an indication of what is to come in the coming months, the chances of sovereigntists are not insignificant. A coast-to-coast emotional debate on the place of Quebec in Canada could move one-time sovereigntists back to sovereignty and create the majority the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois need.

Only sovereigntists need movements in public opinion. In light of current polling, it is unclear why politicians outside Quebec would want to stir up controversies, except for local electoral advantage. Aware of the fact, federal ministers and provincial premiers refrained from intervening in Quebec's 1994 electoral campaign.[59] Given the issue at stake and the state of public opinion in Canada, however, such restraint appears unlikely in a referendum campaign.[60] We just do not know how far the debate will go, and how acrimonious it will become.

CONCLUSION

The presence of the Bloc Québécois in the House of Commons is more than a temporary aberration. When the Meech Lake Accord failed in 1990, a new phase began in Quebec politics, marked by a heightened sense of identity and a strong resurgence of support for sovereignty. The No vote in the 1992 referendum, the Bloc's strong showing in October 1993, and the election of the Parti Québécois in September 1994 were all consistent expressions of Quebecers' perception of their province within Canada. These results were unprecedented because the options offered to voters were also unprecedented. They were predictable, however, given the existing political attitudes and the recent shifts in public opinion that brought a number of francophone non-sovereigntists into the sovereigntist camp, at least for a while.

In Ottawa, Lucien Bouchard and the Bloc Québécois worked hard to function as a respected loyal opposition and, overall, they succeeded. The fact that they will never be a government-in-waiting may have helped them insofar as it made criticism easier. It could also have encouraged exaggerated claims, however. Excesses were avoided and the Bloc represented rather well enduring Canadian values and current Quebec public opinion. Lucien Bouchard even worried that the Bloc could hurt the cause of sovereignty in Quebec. If this was ever the case in the House of Commons, however, Bouchard's trips did much to compensate. As he promoted sovereignty, at home and abroad, the Bloc leader opened up heated debates, which seemed all the more incongruous because polls kept indicating sovereignty was in difficulty in Quebec. Such debates are the best hope of sovereigntists, as they need to awaken strong feelings about Quebecers' identity to win a referendum.

On sovereignty, the three electoral outcomes discussed above did not change basic attitudes all that much. Quebecers demand more autonomy and more powers for their province. They want the referendum on sovereignty promised by Robert Bourassa, but they remain reluctant sovereigntists.[61] Without a major shift in public opinion, sovereigntists cannot win what Jacques Parizeau calls the third period. For such a shift to take place, sovereigntists must to some extent count on the rest of Canada. Canadian politicians and pundits may wish to raise concerns about costs to reduce the support for sovereignty. In doing so, however, they also risk triggering powerful perceptions of identity that could matter more than evaluations of costs and benefits.

Much has been written, in both Quebec and Canada, about the possible consequences of a positive vote on sovereignty.[62] Given the lacklustre victory of the Parti Québécois on 12 September 1994, thoughts must also be given to the possibility that sovereigntists might fail in the last round. What would happen, then, with the Bloc and the Parti Québécois, with Lucien Bouchard and Jacques Parizeau? Some would argue that the two leaders would no longer have

a purpose and mandate, would be demoralized, and be bound to quit, leaving a political vacuum behind them. I think these predictions are exaggerated. Granted, there would be disappointment and a sense of loss. There would also be important departures and calls for revisions and realignments. All the same, one should keep in mind that the two parties have the support of almost half the province, including many non-sovereigntists. This support would not disappear with a negative referendum result.

The Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois stand for sovereignty but, at the same time, they represent the nationalist and the social-democratic elements in Quebec public opinion and society. This explains in part why the two parties reach beyond committed sovereigntists during elections. It also implies that they represent more than the sovereignty project. The two parties incarnate Quebecers' demands for autonomy as well as a left-of-centre vision of governance. Following a referendum defeat, these two visions would be weakened, but not abolished. We cannot exclude the possibility that both the Bloc and the PQ would redefine their roles and work for an autonomous but not sovereign Quebec. "I am there for better or for worse," explained Jacques Parizeau a few days before the Quebec election, stressing he would complete his mandate regardless of the referendum result.[63]

In Quebec, there is a strong perception that following a federalist victory in the referendum, Jean Chrétien would move to redefine and centralize Canadian federalism. There is no doubt that a great opportunity would be offered to him. The prime minister might be tempted, however, to go too far. This, argues Guy Laforest, is what Pierre Elliott Trudeau did when he refused to let the Meech Lake Accord seal definitively his 1982 reforms.[64] If this perception of a centralist offensive is given credence by early, confrontational moves on the part of the federal government, a resurgence of the Bloc and of the PQ as autonomist parties cannot be excluded. After all, a year after the 1980 referendum, Quebecers re-elected the Parti Québécois, which had reduced its program to a simple but powerful idea: "Faut rester forts au Québec."[65] A number of reasons certainly motivated voters in 1981, including their strong dislike of Liberal leader Claude Ryan. Still, it should be kept in mind that even in 1981, following an unambiguous referendum defeat, Quebec's traditional autonomist discourse continued to be a relevant political currency.

NOTES

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1. Peter H. Russell, "The End of Mega Constitutional Politics in Canada?" in Kenneth McRoberts and Patrick J. Monahan (eds.), *The Charlottetown Accord, the Referendum, and the Future of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 218.
2. Julian Beltrame, "Majority Want Canada to Stay United," *The Gazette*, 7 November 1992, p. A1.
3. André Blais and Jean Crête demonstrate with public opinion data that the English Canadian public rejected the Meech Lake Accord and did so essentially because of the distinct society clause. This analysis has never been refuted. André Blais and Jean Crête, "Pourquoi l'opinion publique au Canada anglais a-t-elle rejeté l'Accord du lac Meech?" in Raymond Hudon and Réjean Pelletier (eds.), *L'engagement intellectuel: mélanges en l'honneur de Léon Dion* (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1991), pp. 385-400.
4. Patrick J. Monahan, "The Sounds of Silence," in McRoberts and Monahan (eds.), *The Charlottetown Accord*, p. 246. See also Russell, "The End of Mega Constitutional Politics," p. 218.
5. My translation. Guy Laforest, *De la prudence* (Montréal: Boréal, 1993), pp. 22 and 152-53.
6. See, for instance Russell, "The End of Mega Constitutional Politics," p. 219.
7. Lucien Bouchard left the Conservative government on 21 May 1990 and the Bloc Québécois was officially founded on 25 July.
8. Ibid., pp. 79-88; Lucien Bouchard, *A visage découvert* (Montréal: Boréal, 1992), pp. 344-45.
9. Edouard Cloutier and Diane Carignan, "L'opinion politique québécoise," in Denis Monière (ed.), *L'année politique au Québec 1992* (Montréal: Département de science politique de l'Université de Montréal, 1993), p. 244; Edouard Cloutier and David Irwin, "Les tendances de l'opinion publique," in Denis Monière (ed.), *L'année politique au Québec 1993-1994* (Montréal: Fides, 1994).
10. I have argued elsewhere that the referendum results are politically coherent and cannot be reduced to a protest vote: Alain Noël, "Deliberating a Constitution: The Meaning of the Canadian Referendum of 1992," in Curtis Cook (ed.), *Constitutional Predicament: Canada after the Referendum of 1992* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), pp. 64-81. See also: Richard Johnston, André Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil and Neil Nevitte, "The People and the Charlottetown Accord," in Ronald L. Watts and Douglas M. Brown (eds.), *Canada: The State of the Federation 1993* (Kingston: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University, 1993), pp. 19-43.
11. Jean-François Lisée, *Le naufrageur: Robert Bourassa et les Québécois, 1991-1992* (Montréal: Boréal, 1994), pp. 610 and 614.
12. Paul G. Thomas, "Parties and Regional Representation," in Herman Bakvis (ed.), *Representation, Integration and Political Parties in Canada*, Research Studies of

the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, vol. 14 (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991), pp. 199-200.

13. Denis Monière, "Le déroulement de la campagne électorale," in Monière and Jean H. Guay (eds.), *La bataille du Québec. Premier épisode: les élections fédérales de 1993* (Montréal: Fides, 1994), p. 32.

14. Herman Bakvis and Laura G. Macpherson, "Quebec Block Voting and the Canadian Electoral System," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Calgary, 12 June 1994, p. 15; Richard Johnston, André Blais, Henry E. Brady and Jean Crête, *Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), pp. 199-200.

15. Bakvis and Macpherson, "Quebec Block Voting," p. 15.

16. This argument is to some extent inspired by Maurice Pinard's supply-side interpretation of class voting in Quebec: "Working Class Politics: Interpretation of the Quebec Case," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 7, 2 (1970): 87-109.

17. Johnston, Blais, Brady and Crête, *Letting the People Decide*, pp. 70 and 199.

18. Bakvis and Macpherson, "Quebec Block Voting," p. 7.

19. André Pratte, "Sondage SOM: un vote pour le Bloc n'est pas un vote perdu," *La Presse*, 17 September 1993, p. A1.

20. In 1993, concludes one of the contributors to the Canadian election study, there was "no trace" of a bandwagon effect in Quebec. André Blais, "Quebec: Raising the Stakes," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Calgary, 12 June 1994, p. 13.

21. Of course, the availability of a new option is not in itself sufficient. In 1945, for instance, a poorly organized, ideologically divided Bloc populaire failed to attract voters that were still attached to Mackenzie King and the Liberal Party. See Paul-André Comeau, *Le Bloc populaire, 1942-1948* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1982), pp. 129, 318-40, and 432-39.

22. Johnston, Blais, Brady and Crête, *Letting the People Decide*, p. 91.

23. André Blais, "The Quebec Referendum: Quebeckers Say No," in McRoberts and Monahan (eds.), *The Charlottetown Accord,* pp. 202-3.

24. André Picard, "BQ Still the One to Beat in Quebec," *The Globe and Mail*, 13 October 1993, p. A5.

25. Blais, "Quebec: Raising the Stakes," p. 4.

26. Johnston, Blais, Brady and Crête, *Letting the People Decide*, p. 92.

27. Blais, "Quebec: Raising the Stakes," p. 5.

28. Ibid., pp. 4-5. At 33 percent, the Liberal share of the vote was not out of line with the results obtained in 1984 and 1988, 35 and 30 percent respectively. Jean-H. Guay, "Les résultats électoraux au Québec," in Monière and Guay (eds.), *La bataille du Québec*, p. 134; Pierre Drouilly, "L'élection fédérale du 21 novembre 1988 au Québec: une analyse des résultats," in Denis Monière (ed.), *L'année politique au Québec, 1988-1989* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1989), p. 112.

29. Gilles Lesage, "Bourassa heureux du gouvernement majoritaire," *Le Devoir*, 27 October 1993, p. A4; Jean Dion, "Les priorités de Chrétien: les hélicoptères et l'aéroport Pearson," *Le Devoir*, 28 October 1993, p. A1.
30. Stéphane Dion, "La sécession du Québec: évaluation des probabilités," *Relations internationales et stratégiques*, 13 (printemps 1994), pp. 216-17.
31. "The Referendum Is Not Over," The *Globe and Mail*, 1 October 1993, p. A22. This editorial was quoted approvingly by Lucien Bouchard in his March 1994 Washington speech ("Towards Quebec's Sovereignty," Notes for a Speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 2 March 1994, pp. 14-15).
32. Guay, "Les résultats électoraux au Québec," pp. 128-73. See also Alain Desruisseaux and Alain-G. Gagnon, "Le succès du Bloc québécois dépasse le vote de protestation circonstanciel," *La Presse*, 10 novembre 1993, p. B3.
33. Guay, "Les résultats électoraux au Québec," pp. 149-73.
34. Blais, "Quebec: Raising the Stakes," pp. 6-13; Guay, "Les résultats électoraux au Québec," p. 173.
35. Richard Nadeau and André Blais, "Explaining Election Outcomes in Canada: Economy and Politics," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 26, 4 (December 1993), pp. 775-90.
36. Pierre Drouilly, "L'élection fédérale du 25 octobre 1993: une analyse des résultats," in Monière (ed.), *L'année politique au Québec 1993-1994*.
37. "No one," wrote the *Toronto Star*, "can force a proud and patriotic people — French and English, native and immigrant — to indulge endless propaganda from a self-professed prophet of national rupture." "Bouchard Begins by Trying to End Canada," *Toronto Star*, 21 January 1994.
38. Susan Delacourt, "Bloc Plans to Defend Safety Net," *The Globe and Mail*, 13 January 1994, p. A1.
39. Edward Greenspon, "Tax Revolt Brewing Manning Warns Ottawa," *The Globe and Mail*, 2 February 1994, p. A4; Don Gillmor, "Lucien in the Sky with Diatribes," *Saturday Night*, June 1994, pp. 71-72.
40. Tu Tranh Ha, "Bouchard's Bloc: Official Opposition Knows How to Play the Game," *Calgary Herald*, 4 May 1994; Susan Delacourt, "Reform's Show Ain't Got that Zing," *The Globe and Mail*, 5 April 1994, p. A6; and Susan Delacourt, "Coach to Sharpen Reform's House Act," *The Globe and Mail*, 20 April 1994, p. A1.
41. Gillmor, "Lucien in the Sky with Diatribes," p. 38. See also Warren Caragata, "Stars on the Hill," *Maclean's*, 6 June 1994, pp. 10-12.
42. Chantal Hébert, "Les artisans du succès du Bloc," *La Presse*, 2 April 1994, p. B5.
43. Jean Dion, "Le Canada de Lucien Bouchard," *Le Devoir*, 29 January 1994, p. A1.
44. Chantal Hébert, "Le Parlement canadien à l'heure du français," *La Presse*, 29 January 1994, p. B4; Susan Delacourt, "Bouchard Says Quebec Starting to Care About Ottawa," *The Globe and Mail*, 25 March 1994, p. A1; and Susan Delacourt, Edward Greenspon, and Hugh Windsor, "Thriving in Quebec, PM Says," *The Globe and Mail*, 21 June 1994, p. A1.

45. Richard Nadeau, "L'effet lune de miel dans un contexte parlementaire: le cas canadien," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 23, 3 (September 1990), pp. 495-96.
46. Cloutier and Irwin, "Les tendances de l'opinion publique;" Angus Reid Group, "The National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll: Canadians' Reaction to the Re-Emergence of the National Unity Debate," 3 June 1994, p. 5.
47. According to CROP president Alain Giguère, Lucien Bouchard "incarnates the very personality of the typical francophone Quebecer, or at least the one to which the latter identifies." Quoted in Don Macpherson, "Reflection: Pollster Finds Bouchard an Archetypal Quebecer," *Gazette*, 2 February 1994, p. B3.
48. Marie-Claude Lortie, "Ottawa durcit la loi sur les jeunes contrevenants," *La Presse*, 2 June 1994, p. A1; Jean-Paul Soulié, "Jeunes contrevenants: des experts contredisent le ministre," *La Presse*, 8 June 1994, p. A6; Gilles Normand, "Lefebvre contre le projet de loi sur les jeunes contrevenants," *La Presse*, 9 June 1994, p. B1; "Les Canadiens aimeraient une loi des jeunes contrevenants plus sévère," *La Presse*, 23 June 1994, p. A17.
49. Quebecers, found Baer, Grabb and Johnston on the basis of early 1980s surveys, "have apparently evolved into the most consistently liberal population in the two countries (Canada and the United States)." While a line can be drawn between "a left-liberal Quebec" and the rest of Canada, note these authors, the Canada-United States border does not define "distinguishable cultural communities." Outside Quebec, only the American south appears distinctive, being more conservative than the rest of North America. Douglas Baer, Edward Grabb, and William Johnston, "National Character, Regional Culture, and the Values of Canadians and Americans," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 30, 1 (February 1993): 28. See also Richard Johnston and André Blais, "Meech Lake and Mass Politics: The 'Distinct Society' Clause," *Canadian Public Policy* 14, Supplement (September 1988), p. S38. More recent survey data that point in the same direction are presented in Jean-François Lisée, "Bons vivants, tolérants, pantouflards...," *L'actualité*, January 1992, pp. 20-26.
50. Richard Mackie, "Quebeckers Want Power Shift, Poll Finds," *The Globe and Mail*, 20 May 1994, A1; and Hugh Windsor, "Provincial Role More Important to Quebeckers," *The Globe and Mail*, 20 May 1994, p. A2. See also Jean-François Lisée, *Le tricheur: Robert Bourassa et les Québécois, 1990-1991* (Montréal: Boréal, 1994), pp. 111-13.
51. Guy Laforest, *Trudeau et la fin d'un rêve canadien* (Sillery: Septentrion, 1992), p. 13.
52. Noël, "Deliberating a Constitution," p. 76.
53. Chantal Hébert, "La question du Québec fait grincer des dents au PLC," *La Presse*, 14 May 1994, p. G1; Lise Bissonnette, "Un psychotronique au sommet: derrière la raillerie, un mépris de la légalité," *Le Devoir*, 17 May 1994, p. A8.
54. Louis Falardeau, "Les Québécois veulent un référendum," *La Presse*, 6 August 1994, p. B1.
55. Richard Nadeau, "Le virage souverainiste des Québécois, 1980-1990," *Recherches sociographiques* 33, 1 (January-April 1992): 9-28.

56. "Time to Be Honest About Quebec," *The Globe and Mail*, 20 May 1994, p. A18.
57. On the latter point, see André Blais and Richard Nadeau, "To Be or Not to Be Sovereigntist: Quebeckers' Perennial Dilemma," *Canadian Public Policy* 18, 1 (March 1992): 89-103.
58. Richard Nadeau and Christopher J. Fleury, "Cross-Pressured Nationalists and the Sovereignty Decision: Evidence from the Quebec Case," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association (New York, 1-4 September 1994).
59. Anthony Wilson-Smith, "Keeping Their Counsel: Canada's Political Leaders Fight Separatism with Silence," *Maclean's*, 12 September 1994, pp. 20-21.
60. Angus Reid Group, "The National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll: Canadians' Reaction to the Re-Emergence of the National Unity Debate," 3 June 1994.
61. Richard Mackie and Rhéal Séguin, "Quebec Wants Charter Settled," *The Globe and Mail*, 22 August 1994, p. A1.
62. See, in particular: Commission d'étude des questions afférentes à l'accession du Québec à la souveraineté, *Exposés et études, Volumes 1-4* (Québec: Assemblée nationale, 1992); Alain-G. Gagnon and François Rocher (eds.), *Répliques aux détracteurs de la souveraineté du Québec* (Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1992); and Daniel Drache and Roberto Perrin (eds.), *Negotiating with a Sovereign Quebec* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1992).
63. Michel Venne, "Si c'est non, Parizeau reste," *Le Devoir*, 6 September 1994, A4. At about the same time, Bloc Québécois MPs started to suggest they would also remain in Ottawa following a referendum defeat. Wilson-Smith, "Keeping Their Counsel," p. 21.
64. Laforest, *Trudeau et la fin d'un rêve canadien*, pp. 168-70.
65. Graham Fraser translated this slogan as "We gotta stay strong in Quebec." *PQ: René Lévesque and the Parti Québécois in Power* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1984), p. 268.