



# 2020 Survey of Canadians

## REPORT 3: IDENTITY, VALUES and LANGUAGE

### PART III: **LANGUAGE**

#### **Final Report**

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**Environics  
Institute**  
For Survey Research

**CANADAWEST  
FOUNDATION**

  
CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE  
CONSTITUTION FÉDÉRALISME

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BRIAN MULRONEY  
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# Executive summary

Previous surveys have confirmed that language is an important part of most Canadians' personal sense of identity; that majorities in Canada support the policy of official bilingualism and believe it's important that their children learn to speak a second language; and that most Quebec francophones believe that the French language in Quebec is threatened.

The 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey revisits the question of whether the French language is threatened, but with two important variations. First, all Canadians – and not just those in Quebec – are asked about whether the French language in Quebec is threatened. Second, all Canadians are asked the same question about the French language *outside* of Quebec.

The survey shows that there's a large gap in views between anglophones and francophones with regard to the security of the French language, with anglophones being much less likely to say that the French language, whether in its majority

or minority situations, is threatened. While anglophones (both inside and outside Quebec) are less likely to say that the French language is *not* threatened outside Quebec than within the province, a slim majority still take this view.

The survey also finds that, since 2001, Quebec francophones have become more concerned about the security of their language.

Finally, the survey finds that there's a significant difference in the perspectives of francophones inside and outside of Quebec on the question of the security of the French language in Quebec. While Quebec francophones share the concern of other francophones about the security of the French language in parts of Canada outside of Quebec, this concern is not entirely reciprocated. No doubt, francophones outside Quebec perceive the French language in Quebec to be much more secure than is the case in their own minority situation outside of the province.

# About this report

This report is the third in a series that presents the results of the Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey of Canadians, a national public opinion study that gives voice to Canadians on the future of the federation.

- The **first report** in the series focused on the evolution of attitudes related to federalism, regionalism and nationalism; and more specifically on the related issues of energy and climate change policies in Canada.
- The **second report** examined how resources and powers are shared within the federation; and the expectations that citizens have of the different orders of government when it comes to addressing the key issues that affect the country.

- The **third report** explores issues relating to identity, values and language.

The third report is published in three separate parts. This document constitutes Part III and explores attitudes of French- and English-speaking Canadians toward the security of the French language, both on its majority (inside Quebec) and minority (outside Quebec) situations. Part I focuses on the evolution of the Canadian identity; while Part II covers the extent of value differences across the country, particularly as they relate to religion, and the question of how the state, in a secular society, should exercise its religious neutrality.

## The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey of Canadians

The Confederation of Tomorrow survey was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with four leading public policy organizations across the country: the Canada West Foundation, the Centre d'analyse politique – constitution fédéralisme, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, and the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government. It was conducted online (in the provinces) and by telephone (in the territories) between January 13 and February 20, 2020, with a sample of 5,152 Canadians aged 18 and over.

All the reports from the survey, as well as data tables presenting the detailed results of each survey question, are available on the Environics Institute's website at <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects>.

# Introduction

Language has always been one of the dividing lines of Canadian politics. Throughout the country's history, conflicts have emerged both between the two linguistic majority communities – the French-language majority in Quebec and the English-language majority in the rest of Canada – and between each linguistic majority community and its respective English- or French-speaking minority counterpart. Official language policies themselves, particularly as they pertain to the protection and promotion of official language minorities – have on occasion been especially controversial.

Both the 2019 and 2020 editions of the Confederation of Tomorrow surveys of Canadians addressed the issue of language. The 2019 edition of the survey produced several findings:<sup>1</sup>

- Four in five (83%) Canadians said that their language is an important part of their personal sense of identity.
- Three in four Canadians (77%) strongly or somewhat supported the policy of official bilingualism, and a similar

proportion (72%) said it's important that children in Canada learn to speak a second language.

- Seven in ten (70%) Quebec francophones said that the French language in Quebec is threatened.

The 2019 survey also revealed some differences in the strength of support for bilingualism, particularly outside Quebec, between the English-speaking majority and the French-speaking minority. In Canada outside of Quebec, majorities of both anglophones (73%) and francophones (92%) strongly or somewhat supported the federal policy of official bilingualism. However, only 35 percent of anglophones *strongly* supported the policy, compared to 81 percent of francophones. Similarly, while majorities of both groups said it's very or somewhat important for their children to learn to speak a second language, only 27 percent of anglophones thought this is *very* important, compared to 81 percent of francophones. There was a sharp difference, then, in the intensity of feeling about language issues between those in the majority situation and those in the minority.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more complete presentation of these findings, see: Environics Institute for Survey Research, *Canada: Pulling Together or Drifting Apart?* (Toronto: Environics Institute for Survey Research, March 2019); and Andrew Parkin, *Official Bilingualism at 50: Are We Taking Full Advantage of Canada's Linguistic Duality?* (Toronto: Mowat Centre, May 2019); both available at <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/confederation-of-tomorrow---2018>.

# The security of the French language

The 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey revisited the question of whether the French language is threatened, but with two important variations. First, all Canadians – and not just those in Quebec – were asked about whether the French language in Quebec is threatened. Second, all Canadians were asked the same question about the French language *outside* of Quebec. The results reveal important differences of opinion, not just between anglophones and francophones, but, in some cases, between francophones in majority and minority situations.

In the case of the French language *in Quebec*:

- 68 percent of francophones in the province say it is threatened, while 25 percent say it is not – figures similar to those reported in 2019.
- Anglophones in the province present a mirror image of their francophone counterparts, with seven in ten (71%) saying the French language in the province is *not* threatened, and only 20 percent saying that it is.

- A similar proportion (71%) of anglophones outside of Quebec agree that French in Quebec is *not* threatened. Fewer (9%) say that it is, while one in five (20%) cannot say.
- Francophones outside Quebec (34%) are only half as likely as their French-speaking counterparts inside the province to say that the French language in Quebec is threatened. A majority of francophones outside Quebec (55%) do not think that the French language in Quebec is threatened.

The question of whether the French language in Quebec is threatened was also asked of all Canadians in the CRIC *Portraits of Canada* survey conducted in 2001. Since 2001, Quebec francophones have become more concerned about the security of their language. For their part, anglophones outside of Quebec have become somewhat less skeptical, with the proportion saying the French language in Quebec is *not* threatened falling from 83 percent in 2001 to 71 percent in 2020. The proportion offering no opinion increased from three percent to 20 percent, likely as a result of the change in the way the survey was conducted.<sup>2</sup>

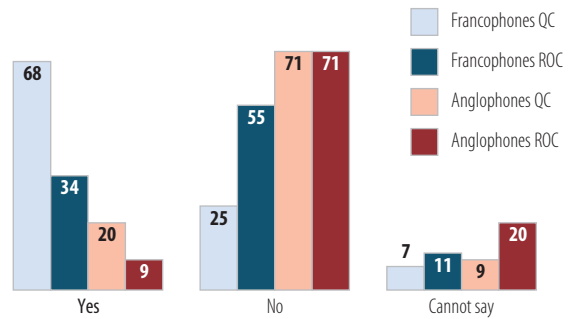
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<sup>2</sup> The 2001 survey was conducted by telephone, whereas the 2020 survey was conducted online. Generally speaking, survey participants are less likely to say they “don’t know” or “cannot say” in telephone surveys compared to online surveys, partly because these responses are not prompted by the interviewer.

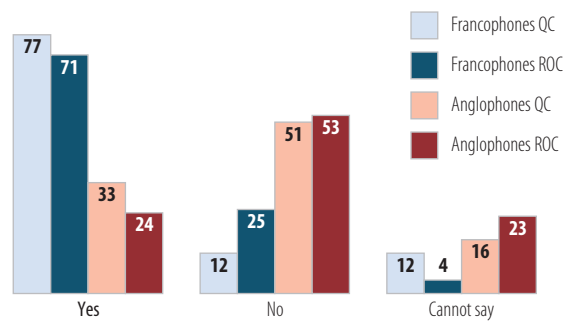
In the case of the French language in *parts of Canada outside Quebec*:

- Seven in ten (71%) francophones outside Quebec say the French language in parts of Canada outside Quebec is threatened, while one in four (25%) disagree.
- Quebec francophones are even more certain that the French-language is threatened outside of the province; three in four (77%) take this view, and only 12 percent disagree.
- One in two anglophones – both inside (51%) and outside (53%) Quebec – think the French language in parts of Canada outside of Quebec is *not* threatened. One in three (33%) Quebec anglophones, and one in four (24%) anglophones outside of Quebec, say that it is.
- Among provinces outside of Quebec, anglophones in Ontario (26%) are more likely to say the French language in parts of Canada outside of Quebec is threatened, while anglophones in Manitoba (19%), New Brunswick (16%), and Newfoundland and Labrador (14%) and less likely to take this position.
- Outside of Quebec, among anglophones, concern about the security of the French-language minority decreases with age. Those age 18 to 24 are about twice as likely (34%) as those age 55 and older (18%) to say the French language in parts of Canada outside of Quebec is threatened.

**CHART 1**  
Is the French language threatened?  
Is the French language *in Quebec* threatened?



Is the French language threatened in *parts of Canada outside of Quebec*?



Q.6a

*In your opinion, is the French language in Quebec threatened, or not?*

Q.6b

*And what about in parts of Canada outside of Quebec? Is the French language threatened in parts of Canada outside of Quebec, or not?*

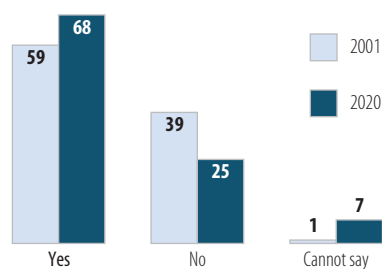


These various results can be summarized as follows. First, there's a large gap in view between anglophones and francophones with regard to the security of the French language, both in its majority or minority situations. And while anglophones (whether those inside or outside Quebec) are less likely to say that the French language is not threatened outside Quebec than within the province, a slim majority still take this view. This gap is not new, but may signal a need for ongoing, or even deepening, dialogue between the country's two official language communities.

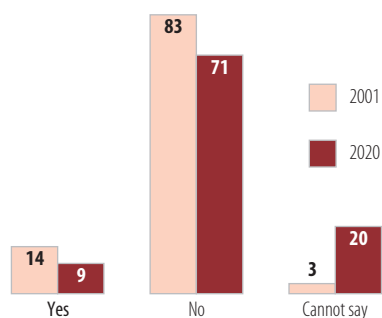
Second, there's a significant difference in the perspectives of francophones inside and outside of Quebec on the question of the security of the French language in Quebec. While Quebec francophones share the concern of other francophones about the security of the French language in parts of Canada outside of Quebec, this concern is not entirely reciprocated. No doubt, francophones outside Quebec perceive the French language in Quebec to be much more secure than is the case in their own minority situation outside of the province.

CHART 2

Is the French language threatened *in Quebec*?  
Quebec francophones



Anglophones *outside of Quebec*?



Q.6a

*In your opinion, is the French language in Quebec threatened, or not?*

TABLE 1

Summary of result of 2019 and 2020 survey questions on language  
2019 – 2020

2019 SURVEY	QUEBEC		REST OF CANADA		
	Francophones	Anglophones	Francophones	Anglophones	Other <sup>3</sup>
<i>Canada currently has two official languages – English and French. This means that all citizens can get services from the federal government in the official language that they speak. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose this policy?</i>					
Strongly support bilingualism	69	67	81	35	30
Strongly or somewhat support bilingualism	89	88	92	73	78
<i>How important is it to you is it that your children (if you have some) learn to speak a second language?</i>					
Very important for children to learn second language	69	71	81	27	50
Very or somewhat important for children to learn second language	93	90	89	63	88
<i>I will read you a number of factors which may contribute to one's personal feeling of identity. For each, please tell me whether each of the following it is very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important to your own sense of identity. YOUR LANGUAGE.</i>					
Language very important to identity	66	50	69	44	40
Lang very or somewhat important to identity	93	84	89	80	86
<i>In your opinion, is the French language in Quebec threatened or not?</i>					
French language in Quebec is threatened	70	13	–	–	–
<b>2020 SURVEY</b>					
<i>In your opinion, is the French language in Quebec threatened or not?</i>					
French language in Quebec is threatened	68	20	34	9	12
<i>And what about in parts of Canada outside of Quebec? Is the French language threatened in parts of Canada outside of Quebec, or not?</i>					
French language outside Quebec is threatened	77	33	71	24	24

<sup>3</sup> The "other" (allophone) group is not included for Quebec because the sample size is too small.

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