

# TO STAY OR GO: QUEBEC TEN YEARS LATER

## Introduction

### Focus

In October 1995, Quebec came extremely close to separating from Canada. This *News in Review* story will examine the 1995 referendum and will explore whether or not relations between English and French Canada have improved over the past 10 years. We shall also review the election of the new leader of the Parti Québécois.

### Definition

*Quebec sovereignty* means independence from Canada. This term is used interchangeably with *separation* because if Quebec gains independence it will separate politically from Canada.



Sections marked with this symbol indicate content suitable for younger viewers.

Could it happen again? On October 30, 1995, Quebec came within 55 000 votes of separating from Canada. Canadians were shocked that the vote was so close and relieved that, for the time being, Quebec would remain a part of Canada. Now that 10 years have passed, many English Canadians believe that Quebec separatism is no longer a threat. But events in Quebec over the past few months tell a different story.

The Parti Québécois (PQ) elected a new leader on November 15, 2005. During the leadership campaign, attention once again became focused on separation. The PQ is a political party that advocates national sovereignty—or independence—for Quebec. The new leader, André Boisclair, stated during his campaign that if the PQ won the next provincial election in Quebec, he would hold a referendum on sovereignty shortly thereafter.

But right now, the Quebec Liberal Party, led by Jean Charest, is in power in Quebec. So does that mean Canada is “safe”? In the short-term, yes. But Quebec will have a provincial election in 2008 at the latest, and, at that point, the Liberal government may be defeated by the PQ. And it appears that a large percentage of Quebecers are still in favour of sovereignty for Quebec. A poll conducted in October 2005 by the Strategic Counsel for *The Globe and*

*Mail* found that 48 per cent of Quebecers would vote “Yes” to sovereignty if a referendum were to be held immediately.

Another referendum in Quebec may be inevitable, but maybe the results will not be as close as they were in 1995. Perhaps by examining the 1995 referendum we can learn why Quebecers were feeling so alienated from the rest of Canada. Then all Canadians can work to improve relations between French and English Canada. As well, since the 1995 referendum the federal government has passed The Clarity Act. This act is intended to ensure that any question posed in a sovereignty referendum is clear and easy to understand. The act also gives the federal government the power to decide how wide the margin of victory would need to be before sovereignty was declared for Quebec.

And there is more reason for hope. A poll conducted by the Centre for Research and Information in Canada in October 2005 indicated that more than 60 per cent of Quebecers agree that the province benefits from being part of Canada. In particular, Quebecers feel they benefit from Canada’s international stature, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, social programs, and protection from terrorism. Perhaps all Canadians can use these important shared elements to negotiate and build a new future together.

## To Consider

1. How might Canada change if the province of Quebec were to separate?

Consider the following themes:

Politically

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Economically

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Socially/Culturally

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Militarily

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2. How would the separation of Quebec affect the policy of bilingualism in Canada?

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3. How would you personally feel if Canada no longer included Quebec? Explain in detail.

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## Video Review

Watch the video and respond to the questions in Part I.

### Part I

1. How close was the vote in the 1995 sovereignty referendum?  
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2. Record the names of the leading contenders in the 2005 Parti Québécois leadership race, as well as their position on sovereignty.

**Candidate name**

**For or against sovereignty**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

3. One of the major changes in Quebec since the 1995 referendum is the growing support for sovereignty among recent immigrants to Quebec.

a) How much of a change has occurred?  
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b) List three reasons *why* this change has occurred.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Another major change since the 1995 referendum is the attitude of the business community in Quebec.

a) What was its attitude in 1995?  
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b) How does this community feel now and why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. How do citizens living in Quebec currently feel about the idea of a referendum?  
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6. Do you think that André Boisclair's admitted use of cocaine will hurt his electoral chances? Explain.

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7. Should past drug use play a role in a politician's political future? Explain.

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## Part II – Discussion and Analysis

In the video you learned that former Parti Québécois leader Jacques Parizeau angered a lot of people by blaming the defeat of sovereignty in the 1995 referendum on "the ethnic vote." In small groups, explore what Parizeau said, what he may have meant, and analyze the potential impact of his comment. You may choose to view the video a second time before undertaking this exercise.

### What he said

"It's true, it's true that we have been defeated, but basically by what? By money and some ethnic votes, essentially. So all it means is that, in the next round, instead of being 60 or 61 per cent to vote 'Yes,' we will be 63 or 64 per cent and it will suffice. That's all."

### What he may have meant

Political scientists and others who analyze voting patterns refer to an "ethnic vote" as a vote where members of a given ethnic group strongly support a candidate or an option in a distinct manner. In Quebec, three linguistic groups exhibit specific voting patterns: francophones, anglophones and allophones (residents whose native tongue is neither English nor French). The anglophone (English-speaking) vote is largely federalist—roughly 95 per cent. The francophone (French-speaking) vote tends to split between the federalists and sovereignists—roughly 40 to 60 per cent. The allophone vote is largely federalist—roughly 92 per cent. In the 1995 referendum, the combined allophone and anglophone support for sovereignty was around 3 per cent.

### The potential impact

In your groups, discuss and record your thoughts on the following:

1. Is anyone in your group offended by Parizeau's comment? Explain.
2. Why did Parizeau blame the defeat of the referendum on the "ethnic vote" rather than the anglophone vote?
3. Create a list that explores both the short- and long-term impact of Parizeau's remarks.

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## *A Close Call*

### Archives

To explore audio-visual material on the two Quebec referenda, go to [www.cbc.ca/archives](http://www.cbc.ca/archives) and view the files "À la prochaine fois: The 1980 Quebec Referendum" and "Separation Anxiety: The 1995 Quebec Referendum."

It has been said that in October 1995 Canada reached the breaking point. And that is no exaggeration. The Canada you live in now was almost split apart by a Quebec referendum on separation. When all the votes were counted, a margin of less than 55 000 votes separated the two sides. Let's explore some of the big moments that occurred in this tumultuous year.

### Jean Chrétien Offends Quebecers

"Quebec has about as much chance of becoming independent as Jacques Parizeau has of becoming president of France."

Chrétien made this statement in January 1995 when Jacques Parizeau, leader of the PQ, travelled to France to seek support for an independent Quebec. Chrétien's statement angered some Quebecers, who were already feeling unsupported by the Prime Minister. (When Chrétien was elected in 1993 he refused to re-open constitutional talks between the federal government and Quebec.)

### Lucien Bouchard Returns to Politics

The extremely popular leader of the Bloc Québécois—a federal party committed to a sovereign Quebec—returned to politics in February 1995 after almost dying from a rare disease. In December 1994 Bouchard had suddenly become seriously ill with necrotizing fasciitis, also known as "flesh-eating disease." To stop the spread of the disease and to save his life, doctors had to remove one leg. His return to politics gave a huge boost to the "Yes" campaign. People were very moved that although he came so close to death he had chosen to

return to a cause that he obviously felt was extremely important.

### Sovereignist Coalition Formed

Although Jacques Parizeau and Lucien Bouchard were at odds over the exact way to proceed with the referendum campaign, their differences were put aside when they joined forces with Mario Dumont, leader of the Action Démocratique party. This sovereignist coalition, as it came to be called, offered a partnership to the rest of Canada. It was this partnership offer, known as the June 12, 1995, Treaty, that formed the basis of the referendum question.

### Referendum Question Unveiled

On September 7, Parizeau unveiled the referendum question. The question was: "Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership within the scope of the bill respecting the future of Quebec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?"

The "No" side quickly criticized the question, saying that it was much too confusing and that the separatists were trying to "trick" Quebecers into voting for separation. Jean Chrétien further angered some Quebecers when he stated that because the question was so confusing he would not accept 50 per cent plus one as a majority vote in the upcoming referendum.

Jacques Parizeau explained that he, too, would have preferred a clear question, but that the question was phrased in a broad way to include all the allies for the "Yes" side, not just hard-line separatists.

## **Bouchard Made Chief Negotiator of the Deal**

On October 7, Jacques Parizeau effectively turned over the referendum campaign to Lucien Bouchard by making him chief negotiator of the deal. The “Yes” campaign had been stalled, and Parizeau knew that Bouchard was more popular than he was. This gamble paid off, as interest in the “Yes” campaign increased substantially.

## **The “Yes” Side Moves Ahead in the Polls**

On October 18, for the first time, the “Yes” side moved ahead in the polls. Although it was a small margin (43.6 per cent for the “Yes” side and 42.6 per cent for the “No” side), the rest of Canada was shocked and realized, maybe for the first time, that Quebec really might vote to separate. By October 20 the “Yes” side was ahead by seven full points.

## **The “No” Side Holds a Unity Rally**

The “No” side desperately wanted to let Quebecers know that they did not want them to vote for sovereignty. One way

they did this was to organize a Unity Rally to be held in Montreal on October 27, three days before the referendum vote. An estimated 150 000 Canadians from all over Canada gathered at the Place du Canada and listened to speech after speech in favour of unity. Although high-profile politicians and celebrities attended, many of those who went were high-school students who took long bus rides to Montreal.

## **Chrétien Makes a Final Appeal**

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, realizing the sovereignists stood a good chance of winning, made a public statement promising a new deal for Quebec within Canada if Quebecers voted to stay. Although he gave an earnest televised address, many felt that Lucien Bouchard’s rebuttal was far more effective.

## **A Heart-stopping Final Vote**

When all the votes were counted, the “Yes” side had 49.42 per cent of the votes, while the “No” side had 50.58 per cent of the votes. Quebecers had voted to remain united with Canada by the slimmest of margins.

## **Analysis**

1. In a small group, select the two or three events of 1995 that you believe had the greatest impact on the outcome of the referendum vote. Record the reasons for your selections and be prepared to defend your choices in a classroom discussion.
2. What lessons can be learned from the 1995 referendum? Specifically, what lessons can Canadians take from 1995 to try to prevent such a close outcome in a future referendum?

# TO STAY OR GO: QUEBEC TEN YEARS LATER

## *PQ Leadership Race*

### Did you know . . .

Supporters of the PQ are sometimes called Péquistes, a word derived from the French pronunciation of the party's initials.

### Further Research

To keep informed about the fast-changing world of Quebec politics, it is worth visiting the official Web sites of the major Quebec political parties. These include the Quebec Liberal Party ([www.plq.org](http://www.plq.org)), the Parti Québécois ([www.pq.org](http://www.pq.org)), and the Action Démocratique party ([www.adq.qc.ca](http://www.adq.qc.ca)). Although the Bloc Québécois ([www.bloc.quebecois.org](http://www.bloc.quebecois.org)) is a federal party, it plays a central role in the provincial politics of Quebec.

The Parti Québécois (PQ) was formed by René Lévesque in 1968. The PQ's primary goals were and still are to obtain political, economic, and social independence for the province of Quebec. When Bernard Landry stepped down as leader of the PQ in June 2005, a leadership race began that was quite sensational. Admissions of cocaine use, attacks on character, and a number of hard-line candidates kept the leadership race dramatic. As well, the front-runner in the race was a young, openly gay

### To Consider

As you read about the entire field of candidates for the PQ leadership, think about which candidate most appeals to you and why. Be prepared to defend your choice.

#### André Boisclair

Considered the leader of the pack from the beginning of the race, Boisclair, 39, garnered a great deal of attention because he is openly gay. Even more media attention was focused on Boisclair after he admitted to using cocaine in the past. Despite the controversy he generated, Boisclair was an experienced candidate, first elected in 1989 at age 23. He actually dropped out of university to run for office and went on to hold down four cabinet posts. Recently, he studied at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

#### Pauline Marois

Marois, 56, was another front-runner and the most experienced candidate. She was a veteran cabinet minister and had held the health, education, and finance portfolios. Marois said that she had dreamed of becoming the first

man named André Boisclair. As the leadership race heated up, a number of candidates joined together in an alliance against Boisclair. Some felt that Boisclair should be disqualified because of his admitted past cocaine use. Others felt that Pauline Marois was the better choice for leader and the most likely to be able to defeat the powerful Boisclair campaign. But despite this, Boisclair won the leadership race on the first ballot and became the new leader of the Parti Québécois.

female premier of Quebec all her life. She first ran for the PQ leadership in 1985, where she placed second.

#### Louis Bernard

One of the hard-line separatists in the group, Bernard entered the campaign pledging moderation but soon started to campaign on sovereignty. Bernard, 68, started his career in government in the 1970s working for Liberal leader Jean Lesage. He rose to become the highest-ranking provincial civil servant but had never been an elected politician.

#### Richard Legendre

Legendre, 52, was another popular candidate. His popularity was largely based on the fact that he was one of Canada's top-ranked tennis players in his youth. He also was an experienced politician, first elected in 2001. He served in Bernard Landry's cabinet.

**Did you know . . .**

The recent PQ leadership race was the first the party has had in 20 years. The last three leaders—Jacques Parizeau, Lucien Bouchard, and Bernard Landry—were uncontested candidates, winning by acclamation.

**Other Candidates**

A number of other candidates also participated in the race. These candidates—Pierre Dubuc, Ghislain Lebel, and Jean Ouimet—were not expected to survive the first ballot and openly told

their supporters to vote for Marois once they were eliminated from the race.

This led to charges from the Boisclair camp that the candidates were involved in an “anybody but Boisclair” campaign.

**Discussion**

1. Which of the above candidates do you think was best suited to lead the PQ? Explain.

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2. Which of the above candidates do you personally consider the best? Why?

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3. Boisclair is the first openly gay person to be elected as leader of a Canadian political party. Do you think this is significant? Explain

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4. Do you think sexual orientation has any bearing on a person’s ability to be an effective politician? Explain.

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5. Some people feel that Boisclair’s admitted cocaine use while serving in a provincial cabinet position will come back to haunt him in the next provincial election in Quebec. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

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# TO STAY OR GO: QUEBEC TEN YEARS LATER

## *The Clarity Act*

### Definitions

A *federalist* is someone who wants Quebec to remain within Canada.

A *separatist* is in favour of Quebec independence.

*Unilaterally* means performed or done by one person or entity.

*Secession* is another term for separation or withdrawal from Canada.

Almost immediately after the Quebec referendum, federalists blamed the close result on the referendum question itself. They claimed that the question might have confused some voters.

The question was: “Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership within the scope of the bill respecting the future of Quebec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?” (A copy of the June 12 agreement was sent to every household in Quebec before the vote.)

Another major complaint of the federalists was that Quebec had passed a law stating that the province had the right to declare independence unilaterally. Many Canadians felt that it should not be legal for Quebec, or any other province, to be able to declare themselves independent from Canada.

To clarify this point, on September 30, 1996, the federal government submitted three questions to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court responded that Quebec, in fact, did *not* have the right to unilateral secession.

After the Supreme Court ruling, the federal government drafted The Clarity Act. The act stated that any future referendum would have to be on a “clear question” and that it would have to represent a

“clear majority” for the federal Parliament to recognize its validity. The meaning of both a “clear question” and a “clear majority” is left unspecified in the act, meaning that the federal government can decide upon its definition even after a successful referendum.

The Clarity Act contains the following elements.

- The House of Commons has the power to decide whether a proposed referendum question is considered clear prior to a public vote.
- The House of Commons has the power to determine whether or not a clear majority has expressed itself in any referendum.
- Any question not solely referring to secession is to be considered unclear.
- All provinces and the First Nations are to be part of the negotiations.
- The House of Commons can override a referendum decision if it feels the referendum violates any of the tenets of the Clarity Act.

Federalists are hopeful that the establishment of The Clarity Act will prevent a future Quebec referendum with such close results. Separatists, however, argue that the Clarity Act simply demonstrates the federal government’s disregard for the Quebec people by basically giving the federal government a veto over any future referendum vote.

### Activity

Form small groups that contain at least two members who will play the role of separatists and two who will play the role of federalists. Within your groups:

1. Draft your own “clear” question that could be used in a referendum on sovereignty.
2. Discuss what would constitute a clear majority in a referendum vote.

# TO STAY OR GO: QUEBEC TEN YEARS LATER

## *Timeline*

### **Did you know . . .**

Prior to its use during the October Crisis, the War Measures Act had only been used during the First and Second World Wars.

The political movement for Quebec separatism began in the 1960s. Over the decades there have been periods when demands for Quebec's separation from Canada were very vocal and even violent. And there have been periods when the issue of Quebec separatism was all but forgotten. The following timeline highlights some of the major moments in Quebec separatism to this day.

### **The Quiet Revolution, 1960-1966**

The birth of the sovereignist movement of Quebec is generally considered to have started in the 1960s with the Quiet Revolution. The Quiet Revolution is the name given to the period of Quebec history extending from 1960 to 1966. During this time, Quebec went through a revolution of ideas, moving forward from the traditionalism and conservatism that had been a dominant force in public policy and society up to that point. It was a time of great political, social, and economic reform.

### **The Parti Québécois, 1968**

The use of the word *sovereignty* and many of the ideas of this movement originated in the mid-1960s and resulted in the birth of the Parti Québécois (PQ) in 1968. The goal of the PQ is to increase the independence of Quebec, eventually leading to full political independence from Canada.

### **The FLQ, 1963-1969**

Although the Quiet Revolution was renowned for its non-violent progress, there were a number of people who decided the best way to reach the goal

of independence was to engage in violent activities. This group named itself the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ).

Between the years 1963 and 1969, members of the FLQ engaged in over 200 violent political actions such as bombings and bank hold-ups to bring attention to their goal of Quebec independence from Canada. Their targets generally included anglophone-owned businesses, banks, and mailboxes near the homes of prominent anglophones in the wealthy Westmount area of Montreal.

### **The October Crisis, 1970**

In October 1970 the terrorist acts by the FLQ came to a climax with the kidnapping of Quebec's minister of Labor and Immigration, Pierre Laporte, and British Trade Commissioner, James Cross. On October 17 the body of Pierre Laporte was found. He had been murdered. On December 3 the police were able to negotiate the release of James Cross.

### **The War Measures Act Implemented in 1970**

Following the kidnapping of Cross and Laporte, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau took the unprecedented step of invoking the War Measures Act. The War Measures Act (later replaced by the Emergencies Measures Act in 1988) was a Canadian statute that allowed the government to assume sweeping emergency powers. In particular, under this act citizens could be arrested and imprisoned without trial or even being officially charged with a crime.

Once the War Measures Act was

implemented, there were tanks on the streets of Montreal, and heavily armed soldiers were present everywhere. Hundreds of arrests were made in the effort to capture the FLQ.

### **Parti Québécois Elected in 1976**

One result of the October Crisis is that more people began pushing for a political solution to Quebec's concerns. This resulted in the PQ coming to power in 1976.

### **Quebec Referendum, 1980**

The PQ held its first referendum on sovereignty in 1980, but the question was defeated.

### **Repatriation of the Canadian Constitution, 1982**

Quebec opposed the repatriation of the constitution in 1982 because it included a provision for freedom of language in education. Although the constitution continues to apply to Quebec, many Quebecers feel left out of the constitutional process.

### **Failed Attempts at Constitutional Amendments, 1987 and 1992**

The Meech Lake Accord of 1987 attempted to recognize Quebec as a "distinct society" within Canada. The accord would also have transferred new powers to all the provinces. Quebec said that it would accept this deal if it received support from all the rest of the provinces. However, the accord was defeated after Newfoundland and Manitoba withheld their support. In 1992, another constitutional proposal, known as the Charlottetown Accord, was drafted. It called for the decentralization of federal powers, an elected Senate, and recognition of Quebec as a distinct society. In a national referendum held in October 1992, Canadians rejected these constitutional changes.

### **Quebec Referendum, 1995**

By less than 55 000 votes Quebecers chose to remain within Canada.

### **Election of André Boisclair in November 2005**

A resurgent PQ has a new leader who pledges to push hard for a new referendum.

### **Quebec Provincial Election, scheduled for 2008**

## **Activity**

Review the timeline and decide what you consider to be the central themes of French-English relations since 1960. Briefly describe what you feel the likely future of these relations will be.

# TO STAY OR GO: QUEBEC TEN YEARS LATER

## *Activity: The Next Referendum*

### Quote

“Speaking as a committed federalist, this is going to be a very serious opponent. Anybody who underestimates Boisclair does so at their peril.” — Michael Ignatieff, academic and federal Liberal candidate in election of 2006 (*Toronto Star*, November 21, 2005)

The next time the Parti Québécois wins a provincial election in Quebec they will call a referendum on sovereignty. Your task is to determine what can be done now to avoid another referendum, or at least ensure that the outcome is not as close as it was in 1995. In small groups, create a list of possibilities. Be prepared to share them with the rest of your class. The comments on this page may help you with some ideas.

Former prime minister Lester B. Pearson wrote in his memoirs that: “The French in Canada are a nation in the sense that they are a separate people. A separate people, a nation united with other peoples in a single ‘political nation,’ Canada. I see no way of holding our country together unless English Canada adopts a new attitude toward the intention of our French-speaking compatriots to maintain their identity, their culture, and their language as a special fact of life within Canada. Those who persist in telling us that we must do away with this idea, that we must insist on talking about our country, race, and nation as one and indivisible—these are the real separatists.” — quoted by André Pratte, *The Globe and Mail*, “It’s time to talk national unity again,” August 4, 2004

Columnist Martin Lawrence said: “The federal [government] threw down the gauntlet with its Clarity Act, demanding a decisive democratic vote for secession. But what’s so democratic, the sovereignists can argue, about legislation that says a vote of 50 per cent plus one isn’t good enough?” — *The Globe and Mail*, “Parti Québécois and the politics of Quebec separatist movement,” August 19, 2004

Pollster Jean-Marc Leger said: “. . . if we have another referendum, people could say yes, not because they want a country, but because that’s the only way to negotiate a new partnership with Canada.” — *News in Review* video, December 2005

Lucien Bouchard, former PQ leader on the 1995 Unity Rally (via translator): “Our hearts are beating,” he snidely joked. “English Canadians coming here to tell us they love us.” — *News in Review* video, December 2005

### Possibilities Notes

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