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Sovereignty a winner, poll finds, if Quebec gets link to Canada

Prospect of association pushes support to 53 per cent

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OTTAWA – A majority of Quebecers would vote for sovereignty in a referendum if it was coupled with an economic association with Canada, according to the latest poll conducted by Groupe Léger & Léger for *The Globe and Mail* and *Le Journal de Montréal*.

The poll, the first taken in Quebec after Bloc Québécois Leader Lucien Bouchard called for a sharp turn (*virage*) in the Quebec sovereigntists' strategy to include links with the rest of Canada, shows that a promise of an economic association would increase sovereigntist support by almost nine percentage points, from a minority to a majority position.

When Quebecers were asked the simpler question, whether they favoured sovereignty, the support levels were unchanged from previous polls.

If the referendum question was sovereignty combined with economic association, 53.1 per cent would vote Yes, while 46.9 per cent would say No. On sovereignty alone, only 44.3 per cent would say Yes, compared with 55.7 per cent who would say No. In both cases, undecided voters have been removed and the numbers reapportioned according to a formula based on the responses to other questions in the poll.

While the new survey indicates the attractiveness of the sovereignty-association concept, especially among francophones, the actual results could be closer, since the margin of error was approximately plus or minus four percentage points.

Jean-Marc Léger, director of the poll, said the results mean that Quebecers want to be guaranteed an economic association before they take a chance on sovereignty. But he also urged caution, suggesting there was an initial "rainbow effect".

Mr. Léger said that support for sovereignty-association could be expected to decline as respondents become more familiar with it.

The results are based on a telephone survey of 1,002 randomly selected Quebecers begun on Thursday of last week. A survey with a sample of this size would normally have a margin or error of 3.1 percentage points, 19

times out of 20. But on the questions about sovereignty and sovereignty-association, the sample was divided, with half of the respondents asked whether they would vote for or against sovereignty in a referendum and the other half asked about sovereignty-association.

This is a standard polling practice to avoid having the answers to one formulation biasing the responses to the different formulation, but it means the margin of error on both sets of responses is higher because each involves a sampling of half the size.

The actual numbers before the repositioning of undecideds and refusals were as follows: For sovereignty, 38.1 per cent among the whole population (among francophones 44.5 per cent), against sovereignty 49.9 per cent among the whole population (among francophones 43.5 per cent), undecided 7.2 per cent and refusals 4.8 per cent.

On sovereignty-association, 46.2 per cent of the whole population (52 per cent of francophones) would vote Yes in a referendum, 38.3 per cent of the whole population (32.6 per cent of francophones) would vote No,

9.6 per cent were undecided and 5.9 per cent refused to answer.

The survey was taken immediately after the Bloc Québécois convention in Montreal, but it provides only a rough guide to Quebecers' attitudes toward the dramatic shift proposed by Mr. Bouchard, since the Bloc Québécois Leader talked about both economic and political links with the rest of Canada.

The survey does reaffirm, however, the presence of so-called "soft separatists" who are attracted by the concept of more powers for Quebec as long as there is an economic safety net through ties to the rest of the country.

The survey also showed the Bloc Québécois remains popular in Quebec. Asked how they would vote if a federal election were held today, 49.9 per cent of decided voters would support the Bloc, 38.6 per cent would support the Liberal Party, 5.8 per cent would support the Progressive Conservatives, 3.2 per cent would support the New Democratic Party while less than 1 per cent would vote for the Reform Party.

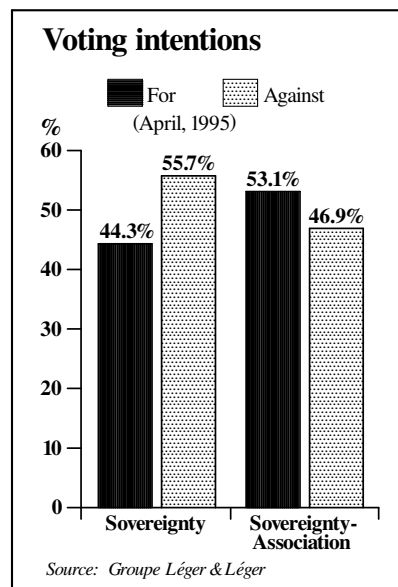
The survey also showed that the Parti Québécois, at 44.7 per cent of decided voters, would have a six-percentage-point lead over the Quebec Liberal Party in a provincial election, while the Parti Action Démocratique would receive the support of 13.2 per cent of the voters.

The apparent boost that the concept of economic association gives the sovereigntist side could be a short-term effect, Mr. Léger said. Sovereignty with an economic and possibly political association with the rest of Canada is currently in the news.

"It's fun, it's different from the proposals by the Parti Québécois," he said, "so they start with a rainbow coalition".

But Mr. Léger said the sovereignty-association proposals of Mr. Bouchard are very similar to the proposal of the late Quebec premier René Levesque in the 1980 Quebec referendum. At that time, support for sovereignty-association was initially very high but dropped to 40 per cent by the time the vote was held.

Léger & Léger/Journal de Montréal/Globe and Mail Poll



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