**Just Like Me: Examining Vote Choice and Party Leaders in Quebec**

By David Trotter

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**Introduction**

In May of 2011, political pundits and election experts were shocked when the New Democratic Party won nearly 43% of the vote in the province of Québec during Canada’s federal election. Prior to this election, the NDP had only won two seats in the province, both of those during by-elections. Now, the NDP had won 49 seats in the province, and formed the official opposition to the Conservative Party in the federal parliament. The Liberal Party suffered a major defeat in Québec, winning only 16.5% of the vote, which was their worst performance ever in the province.

Many contributed the strong support in Québec for the NDP to its leader, Jack Layton (Belanger and Nadeau, 2012). But just three months after the election, Jack Layton died of cancer. Many expected this to be the end of the NDP’s success, especially in Québec. Traditional wisdom dictated that the only reason the NDP won Québec was because of Jack Layton’s personality (Belanger and Nadeau, 2012). In the weeks and months following Layton’s death, two members of Parliament who were elected under the NDP banner in Québec defected to other political parties. In the case of Lise St-Denis, she stated that she was leaving the NDP for the Liberals because “voters voted for Jack Layton, Jack Layton is dead”.

Even after Jack Layton’s death, support for the NDP remained high in Québec. For a period of time, the NDP’s poll numbers in Québec were higher than the actual vote totals in for the party in the 2011 election. Even though many had written off the party after Layton’s death, the NDP still remains strong within the province and, to this day, are actually on track to keep the same amount of seats that they had one 2011 (CROP, 2013). Why is this the case?

As was mentioned previously, Jack Layton is considered the main reason why the NDP won Québec in 2011. But what made this year different than any other years? Jack Layton had been the candidate for the NDP in 2004, 2006, and 2008, but the party only saw minimal growth. Jack Layton himself had not changed anything regarding his stance on the issues. The NDP did not make any drastic changes to their platform or their positions on issues. So why was Jack Layton able to perform well in 2011 but did not previous elections? The man and his party didn’t change, but other political parties, political leaders, and political issues had changed. Yet those who argue that Layton was the main reason that the NDP won Québec in 2011 cannot account the party’s continued support in the province two years after his death, or previous elections when the NDP performed poorly.

When trying to explain certain electoral phenomenon in Québec, much of the research is centered on specific dynamics of a particular election. But are there some factors in Québec voting behavior that are actually systemic and not election-specific? This paper will argue that leaders who have a closer connection to Québec will perform better in federal elections in the province, while those with a weaker connection will usually perform poorly. This approach might sound straightforward, but it has yet to be tested in a way which shows long-term voting behavior. As in the case of 2011, researchers only look at Jack Layton’s win within the scope of that particular election. But again, they cannot explain the reason why Jack Layton had failed in the other elections in which he contested. This research seeks to answer why Jack Layton succeeded in 2011, as well as why he failed in previous elections, by showing that there are systemic reasons for Layton’s victory, as well as other candidates in the past.

**Literature Review**

Most of the literature focused on Québec looks at vote choice by examining the issues during specific campaigns. On the other hand, less is focused on party leader choice and the effect of that choice on the Québec electorate. When party leader is the focus of vote choice, however, most examinations are done on an election-by-election basis. There is rarely discussion among scholars about whether party leader selection and the Québec electorate reaction to that selection is systemic rather than an election-by-election phenomenon.

Prior to 1993 most election studies on Canadian federal elections treated Québec as just one province among many in the Canadian Confederation. Even political parties that were specific to Québec performed poorly in federal elections prior to 1993 (Fraser, 2001). But with the emergence of the Bloc Québécois, with the popular Lucien Bouchard as its leader, elections in Québec were no longer dominated by the Liberal Party. Since this election, studies have examined Québec separately from the rest of Canada (Gidengil, 2012).

Lemieux and Crete (1981) are some of the only scholars who look at the long-term impact of leader choice and Quebecker vote choice. Their findings conclude that Liberal Party leaders with a strong attachment to Québec, or someone who identifies as a francophone, is more likely to win Québec than those who do not have this identification. But their study is confined to the Liberal Party because, at the time of their publication, the Liberal Party dominated Québec politics. While their literature explains the situation before 1980, it cannot explain voter behavior since 1993, as the Bloc Québecois has been a major influence in Québec’s federal elections. Therefore, while their research is interesting, it no longer holds true today.

Gidingil et al. (2012) takes a comparative look at Québec politics between the years of 2000 and 2008. The study argues that evaluations of party leaders vary from election to election. Overall, this research argues that “assertion that elections hinge on the popularity of the party leaders may make good copy and help sell newspapers, but they do not accurately characterize voting behavior in Québec during this period any more than they do in the rest of Canada” (Gidingil et al. 2012, 168). While this research does state that leaders can make a difference on an election-by-election basis, language and the sovereignty issue play more of a role in voter choice in Québec. Still, their findings do not include the 2011 election. But the authors acknowledge that the electoral anomaly in 2011 in Québec should be explained in further research.

Fournier et al. (2012) argue that the main reason the New Democratic Party won in 2011 in Québec was because of a rainbow coalition of different parties supporting the NDP. Supporters from the Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois, and Conservative Party each contributed to the total vote for the NDP in the province. The reason this was the case was because of the popular support of Jack Layton in Québec. Of those who supported the NDP, 36% said they supported the party because of Jack Layton. The reason why Fournier et al. stated that this was the case was because of a strong performance by Jack Layton on Québec television. They also researched the possible decline in Québec sovereignty as well, but concluded that this did not play a role in support for the NDP, as both hard and soft sovereigntist supported the NDP in 2011. In addition, Fournier et al. looked at the parallels between Bloc Québécois support and increased sovereignty discussion during the campaign. Their findings concluded that when the Bloc Québécois spoke more about the sovereignty issue, their percentage of support decreased. The benefactors of this decrease were the New Democratic Party, as both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party also saw a decrease in votes during this time. While Fournier et al. do notice this trend, they also argue that this trend did not lead to a decrease in support for Québec sovereignty.

Gauvin et al. (2013) present in their argument that the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party became nearly inseparable on most of the federal issues during the 2011 federal election. But unlike Fournier et al., their argument is that sovereignty did, somewhat, play a role in the eventual outcome in Québec. The authors explained that most elections are examined in a two dimensional fashion where left-right ideological shifts are the primary focuses of studies. In this case a third dimension needs to be added which is the issue of sovereignty. While views toward sovereignty had not changed drastically, the salience of the sovereignty issue was not as strong in 2011 as it was, for example, in 1993 or 2006. Because of this lack of saliency, the NDP became the natural choice of previous Bloc Québécois voters in the 2011 election because of their left-of-center views they shared with the Bloc Québécois.

Belanger and Nadeau (2012) also recognize the shift in support from the Bloc Québécois to the NDP primarily because of the issue of sovereignty. The main goal of the Bloc Québécois, they argue, was to paint the New Democratic Party as just another Federalist party while the Bloc Québécois remain the only party which protected Québec’s interests. As been argued by other authors, Belanger and Nadeau state that the issue of sovereignty was not salient during this election. In addition, short-term factors, such as the image of party leaders, did play more of a role in this election than in previous elections. Overall, the authors argue that “Quebeckers sympathy towards Jack Layton and their lack of deep reservation about the NDP were necessary conditions that led a large number of Bloc Québécois supporters to defect” (Belanger and Nadeau 2012, 130). Belanger and Nadeau also conclude that voters who supported the Bloc Québécois mostly did so on issues specifically regarding Québec while those who supported the NDP either liked Jack Layton or had more broad issues relating to Canada in general.

**Methods and Data**

The main goal of this research is to show that a political party leader’s connection to Québec can be a determining factor on how well they perform in the province, and thus can explain the results of the 2011 federal election in Québec. Many of those who casually follow Québec politics from the outside might incorrectly think that having a knowledge of the French language essentially connects a political party leader to the province. But since the era of televised elections, most of the party leaders have been required to at least have some working knowledge of French in order to win the leadership convention of their political party (Frizzell et al, 1990). Therefore, just knowing French does not explain if a party leader has a connection to Québec.

What does it mean to have “a connection to Québec”? In an attempt to try to answer this question, this research has devised something called a *Québec Score* to measure a party leader’s connection to Québec. This score examines seven distinct features which can be identified as having a connection to Québec. These features are as follows:

1. Birth Province - The province where a party leader was born.
2. Childhood province - The province where party leaders spent most of their childhood or primary/secondary education.
3. College/Post Childhood province - The province where a party leader either went to college or spent their years immediately after their secondary education.
4. Riding province - Province where their federal riding is located.
5. Speak French -Party leader’s ability to speak basic French.
6. Speaks French fluently - Party leaders ability to speak French fluently.
7. French Heritage - Is the party leader of French heritage?

The *Québec Score* is on a scale of 0 to 1, with 1 being a perfect *Québec Score*, which indicates that the party leader has a strong connection to Québec. On the other hand, a party leader with zero score has no Québec connection whatsoever. Data to determine whether a party leader holds these qualities was determined by looking at past literature on elections which discuss the French language abilities of a candidate, as well as biographical information from the Parliament of Canada website and CBC video archives of previous debates and reactions to those debates.

Initially, each independent variable was run in a linear equation instead of doing the *Québec Score*. The equation is as follows:

**Quebec vote share % = α + Birth Province + Childhood Province + Post Childhood Province + Riding Province + Speak French + French Fluency + French Heritage**

When doing this equation, the adjusted r-squared is nearly exactly the same as running the much shorter *Québec Score.* This ended up being the case of all tests run for this research. In addition, the *Québec Score* offers a scale of 0 to 1, while running the equation above gives dichotomous “yes-no” answers. Therefore, running the scaled *Québec Score* is much cleaner and easier to work with. Also, since the goal of this research is to combine all of the independent variables to determine vote choice in Quebec, looking at the relationship of just one of the independent variables to the overall vote choice is not necessary.

With the dependent variable being electoral support in Québec, which is measured by vote total percentage in the province, the *Québec Score* is used as an independent variable to measure against this support. In measuring these two, the following two hypotheses have been formulated.

*H1*: If a party leader has a strong connection to Québec (indicated by a high *Québec Score*) his or her party will perform well in Québec. Conversely, if there is a lack of connection to Québec (indicated by a low *Québec Score*), a party leaders party will perform poorly in Québec.

*H2*: If there is lack of a candidate with strong *Québec Score* on the left, but a candidate with a strong *Québec Score* on the right, then Québec voters will vote for candidates on the right because of their stronger connection to Québec.

The way that these hypotheses will be tested this by conducting simple linear regression equations tests using Québec election results and the *Québec Score*. If these are statistically significant, there should be a strong connection between these two variables.

**Results**

The first test that was conducted used OLS and measured the *Québec Score* to overall vote total percentage in Québec for a party leader’s party. This first test was used to see if there was a basic relationship between total votes and the *Québec Score*. When running this first test there is already a moderate relationship between these two variables. The r-squared of this first test is .447. This does show that there is a positive relationship between the two variables.

Even with a relationship being present, there are some possible issues when measuring the *Québec Score* to vote total percentage for the province. For example, there are some party leaders with perfect *Québec Scores*, but because their party is weak federally, they do not have as much success in Québec as other parties. This is particularly the case with the Social Credit candidates, who mostly concentrated on Quebec and not the rest of Canada. To control for these outliers, a new dependent variable was created which takes the difference between a party’s Québec result and the results of that party federally. This should help alleviate any issues regarding smaller political parties competing in Québec. When testing for this new dependent variable, the relationship is stronger between connection to Québec and vote performance in the province. The adjusted r-square is .505, and is statistically significant. This new test shows a stronger relationship between the two variables.

While the two previous tests already show a moderately strong relationship, it must be noted that elections prior to 1993 were dominated mostly by one party. After 1993, and the introduction of the Bloc Québécois, elections in Québec were quite different, giving multiple parties an opportunity to compete. Therefore, conducting tests separately of pre-and post-1993 elections might give a more accurate depiction of the relationship between party leader’s connection to Québec and Québec voting behavior, as these elections are not entirely comparable.

**Table 1: Quebec Score Results**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Quebec Score | Adjusted R-Squared |
| Total Votes in Quebec | .447\* |
| Minus Federal Result | .505\* |
| Pre-1993 | .683\* |
| Post-1993 | .658\* |

\*Significance of .000

When conducting the test of the elections before 1993, there is already a much stronger relationship than the previous tests. The adjusted r-square of this test is .683 and is statistically significant. Therefore, there is a strong relationship between the *Québec Score* and electoral support in the province. The results for the post-1993 test also show a stronger relationship than the original tests. In this test, the adjusted r-square is .658 and is statistically significance.

Up until now, there has been is a moderate positive relationship between *Québec Score* and election results in Québec. When these election results are split between pre-and post Bloc Québécois elections, there is a much stronger relationship. While these linear regressions do show a strong relationship regarding the overall picture, looking at specific elections can show an even stronger relationship for the hypotheses. Appendix A shows the election results and *Québec Scores* for each election since 1968. In most of these elections, those with higher *Québec Scores* usually win, while those who have weak *Québec Scores* usually performed quite poorly.

**Conclusion**

So what happened in the 2011 election? Many might consider the election result a surprise, but was it actually predictable? With the model used in this research, connection to Québec is shown to be quite important in federal elections within the province. When applied to the 2011 election results, this model shows a clear picture.

In this election, both Jack Layton and Gilles Duceppe had high *Québec Scores* (.71 and 1.0 respectively). As for the Liberal Party candidate, Michael Ignatieff, his *Québec Score* was quite low at .29. This means that the battle for Québec was primarily between Layton and Duceppe. But as previous scholarship now shows, the Bloc Québécois decided to campaign on the sovereignty issues instead of traditional left right issues (Belanger and Nadeau, 2012, Gauvin et al. 2013). Because the sovereignty issue was not salient in this election (Belanger and Nadeau, 2012, Gauvin et al. 2013), the Bloc Québécois was no longer campaigning on left-right issues, thus removing themselves from the main political debate on the left and only appealing to voters who consider sovereignty as an important issue. Because the Bloc Québécois removed itself from the battle on the left, Jack Layton and Michael Ignatieff were the only candidates battling for this vote. Since Layton had a much stronger connection to Québec than Ignatieff, he easily won the vote on the left. Of those who voted for left parties (factoring out the Bloc Québécois), 72.5% chose the NDP, while only 23.9% choose the Liberals. Therefore, when the Bloc Québécois is reclassified as being a sovereigntist party and no longer a left party, the Liberals and NDP are the only two parties fighting for this vote, which Jack Layton clearly won.

While Jack Layton did win in 2011, what about the elections in 2004, 2006 and 2008? In this case, the Bloc Québécois was still focused on left-right issues and whether those issues helped or hurt Québec. As for the Liberal Party, the 2004 and 2006 candidate, Paul Martin, had a *Québec Score* of .71. In 2008, Stéphane Dion had a perfect *Québec Score* of 1.0. Therefore, it would have been harder for the NDP to compete for votes on the left.

But what about future elections? Looking ahead at the 2015 election and the polls that are currently in Québec, the *Québec Score* model is still proving to be strong. After the death of Jack Layton in August 2011, many politicos expected the New Democratic Party to collapse, and many of the seats won in Québec would eventually be lost to the Liberals. But the New Democratic Party picked Thomas Mulcair, a Québec native, as their new leader. When Mulcair was elected party leader, the NDP support in Québec rose to 44%, 18 points higher than the Bloc Québecois. The Liberal Party, led by Bob Rae, who only has a *Québec Score* of .29, was 29% behind Thomas Mulcair in Québec (Environics Research Group, 2012).

But Bob Rae was only the interim leader for the Liberal Party. In 2013, the Liberals elected Justin Trudeau as their new leader, who has a perfect *Québec Score*. In the latest poll (at of the time of this paper) both Thomas Mulcair and Justin Trudeau were tied in the polls at 31% (CROP, 2013). Just a change in the Liberals’ leader from someone who has a very small connection to Québec to a person with a very strong connection to Québec has already improved the party’s standing in the province substantially. As for the Bloc Québécois, now led by Daniel Paillé, support still remains low at 18% in Québec. As with the 2011 election, the Bloc Québecois is still campaigning on sovereignty issues instead of traditional left-right issues. Their support for the Parti Québécois’ Charter of Québec Values, which is strongly opposed to multiculturalism, has resulted in sitting members of Parliament for the Bloc Québécois leaving their caucus. Until the Bloc Québécois decides to return to the left-rights political debate, it is highly likely that they will not gain much support in the province, unless support for sovereignty increases by 2015.

Even though this research has been able to show a strong connection to answering the first hypothesis, it is much harder to answer to second hypothesis. The main reason for this is because there are only two cases in which this hypothesis holds true, the 1984 and 1988 elections when Brian Mulroney, a Québec native with a strong *Québec Score*, defeated the Liberals by strong majorities in both of those elections in Québec. Even though there are these two cases, it is highly unlikely that there will ever be a situation where only the party on the right of the political spectrum will have a candidate with a strong connection to Québec. This is primarily because of the Bloc Québécois. As long as the Bloc Québécois has candidates running in federal elections (which would presumably have a perfect *Québec Score*) it might be hard for the Conservatives to be competitive in Québec again. While the second hypothesis does hold true for 1984 and 1988, it is only helpful in explaining these two cases. Therefore, arguing the second hypothesis is quite difficult with the current data.

This research shows that whether a party leader has a strong connection to Québec or not can determine how that leader’s party performs in a federal election. Between 1968 and a hypothetical 2015 campaign, those parties who have a leader with a strong connection to Québec usually perform far better than a party who has a leader which lacks this connection. Therefore, using the *Québec Score* in conjunction with understanding the political landscape in Québec does seem to show some accuracy in predicting election results in the province.

**Appendix A: Quebec Scores and Federal Election Results in Quebec from 1968-2011.**

1968 Federal Election - Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Trudeau | 1 | 53.6 |
| Stanfield | 0 | 21.4 |
| Douglas | 0 | 7.5 |
| Caouette | 1 | 16.4 |

1972 Federal Election - Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Trudeau | 1 | 48.9 |
| Stanfield | 0 | 17.4 |
| Lewis | 0.57 | 6.8 |
| Caouette | 1 | 24.3 |

1974 Federal Election – Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Trudeau | 1 | 54.1 |
| Stanfield | 0 | 21.2 |
| Lewis | 0.57 | 6.6 |
| Caouette | 1 | 17.1 |

1979 Federal Election – Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Trudeau | 1 | 61.7 |
| Clark | 0.29 | 13.5 |
| Broadbent | 0.14 | 5.1 |
| Roy | 1 | 16 |

1980Federal Election – Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Trudeau | 1 | 68.2 |
| Clark | 0.29 | 12.6 |
| Broadbent | 0.14 | 9.1 |
| Roy | 1 | 5.9 |

1984 Federal Election – Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Mulroney | 0.86 | 50.2 |
| Turner | 0.29 | 35.4 |
| Broadbent | 0.14 | 8.8 |

1988 Federal Election – Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Mulroney | 0.86 | 52.7 |
| Turner | 0.29 | 30.3 |
| Broadbent | 0.14 | 14.4 |

1993 Federal Election – Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Bouchard | 1 | 49.3 |
| Chretien | 1 | 33 |
| Campbell | 0.14 | 13.5 |
| McLaughlin | 0.14 | 1.5 |

1997 Federal Election – Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Duceppe | 1 | 37.9 |
| Chretien | 1 | 36.7 |
| Charest | 1 | 22.2 |
| McDonough | 0.14 | 2 |
| Manning | 0 | 0.3 |

2000 Federal Election - Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Chretien | 1 | 44.2 |
| Duceppe | 1 | 39.9 |
| Day | 0.14 | 6.2 |
| Clark | 0.29 | 5.6 |
| McDonough | 0.14 | 1.8 |

2004 Federal Election – Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Martin | 0.71 | 33.9 |
| Duceppe | 1 | 48.9 |
| Haprer | 0.29 | 8.8 |
| Layton | 0.71 | 4.6 |

2006 Federal Election – Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Martin | 0.71 | 20.7 |
| Duceppe | 1 | 42.1 |
| Haprer | 0.29 | 24.6 |
| Layton | 0.71 | 7.5 |

2008 Federal Election – Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Dion | 1 | 23.7 |
| Duceppe | 1 | 38.1 |
| Haprer | 0.29 | 21.7 |
| Layton | 0.71 | 12.2 |

2011 Federal Election – Québec

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Québec Score | Québec % |
| Ignatieff | 0.29 | 14.2 |
| Duceppe | 1 | 23.4 |
| Layton | 0.71 | 42.9 |
| Haprer | 0.29 | 16.5 |

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