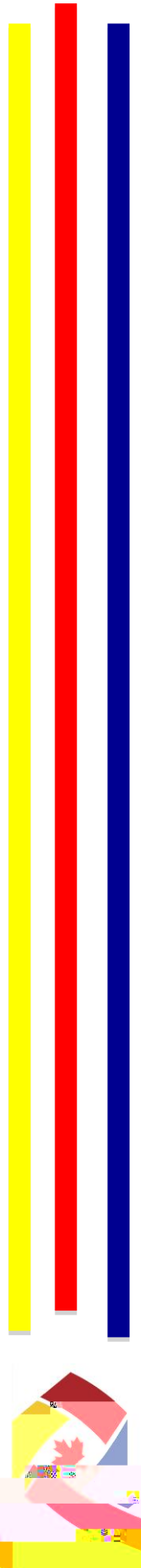


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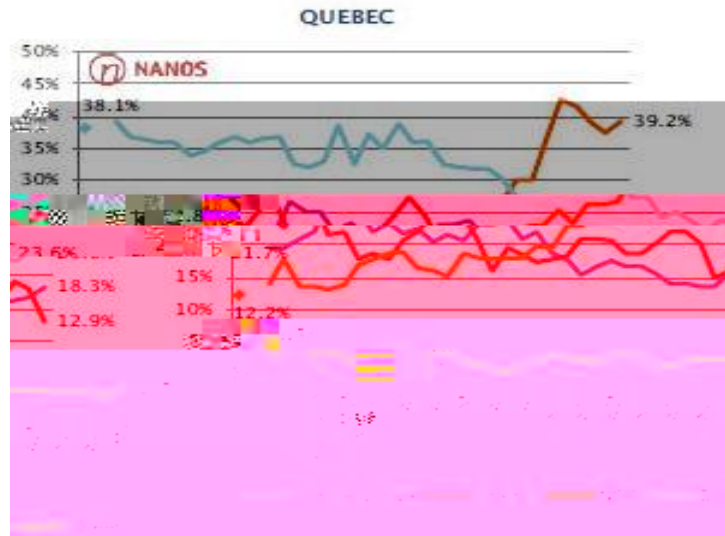
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Figure 1

Evolution of voting intentions in Quebec



The Anglophone/English press' perception of Quebec voters changed dramatically. Some themes are recurring. The first was the hope that a federalist party would win the majority of seats in Quebec for the first time since the BQ emerged in 1993. In a burst of enthusiasm, the *Ottawa Citizen's* Kelly Egan wrote, "The NDP are on the verge of doing something magical in Quebec. Giving us our country back", adding that the BQ was on the verge of being marginalized, she then exploded with joy: "Hallelujah! Good riddance to dem bums. One can only hope this pesky genie is back in the bottle for a very long time. In fact, throw the bottle out to sea" (2011, C1). This strong support for the NDP reflects Quebeckers' desire to enter into a genuine dialogue with the entire national community. Quebec would once again demonstrate both a sound and credible presence in the Canadian arena (Kennedy, 2011, A16; Anderson, 2011).

The second type of perception concerns the possible reasons for this change, pointing to Gilles Duceppe's participation in the April 17 Parti québécois (PQ) convention. He delivered a speech that reiterated the issues at the heart of the BQ electoral platform: sovereignty and the likelihood of holding another referendum in the event that the PQ wins the provincial election. The *Toronto Star's* Chantal Hébert highlighted this, "It is no coincidence that the New Democrats took their biggest leap in the polls on the heels of last weekend's Parti québécois convention and Duceppe's fiery call to arms to his fellow sovereignists" (2011, A6; see also Radwanski, 2011, A14). The NDP has managed to convince the "soft nationalists" to support its party, which, for the most part, addresses the progressive social concerns of Bloc voters (Kheiriddin, 2011b, A4; Simpson, 2011b, A21). The voters' disaffection thus marks a return to the traditional left/right axis at the expense of the divide on constitutional issues (Watson, 2011, A13). This links the two

main arguments that remain that of participating in federal politics because the NDP adopted positions close to the concerns of Quebec voters. This way of thinking is well illustrated by Johnson: "Layton's pitch, fundamentally, is that Quebeckers are wasting their vote on the Bloc when they can get exactly the same policies from a Canada-wide party that can hope someday to form the government or be part of a governing coalition" (2011, A15). In short, during the last two weeks of the campaign, the press celebrated the BQ's fall in support. For commentators, this reflected Quebec voters' fatigue vis-à-vis Gilles Duceppe's uncreative campaign, a decreased sovereigntist fervor and a renewed interest in being part of the Canadian political system.

It is not surprising that many commentators first cheered for the election results, with the BQ's representation being reduced to four seats, 45 fewer seats than it held in the October 2008 election. The evidence was clear: it is possible to win a majority government without Quebec, "with the Bloc sweeping up votes in Quebec, English Canada elected only minority governments in the last three elections. Now, the rest of Canada won't be party to the whims of Quebec voters, where issues like Quebec separatism and multiculturalism have long fragmented the electorate" (*National Post*, 4 May 2011, A3). *The Globe and Mail's* May 3 editorial set the tone that would be shared almost unanimously:

The Bloc Québécois

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Layton (27%) (Léger Marketing, 2011a). There was no reason to believe it would be any different this time.

Second, the federal government and the Conservative Party did not attempt to feed

province (at 44%) and the least to Canada (20%). This ability to identify with the rest of Canada is only slightly higher than that with the rest of the world (17%) (see Table 1) (Association for Canadian Studies, 2009).

Table 1

Identification – percentage / Region

	The World	Canada	Your province	Your city	Your Linguistic Community	Your ethnic group or visible minority	none	I don't know
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Q: There are different ways to describe yourself. Are you:

Source: Association for Canadian Studies, 2010.

A survey conducted in 2010 indicated that 60% of Quebecers have a predominantly Quebec identity (25.7% define themselves as "Québécois only" and 34.4% as "Québécois first"). This identity is even more pronounced among Francophones (70%), while it is much less pronounced among Anglophones (14%) and allophones (25%) (Association for Canadian Studies, 2010). This fact reflects a deepening trend that shows no sign of disappearing. Indeed, a compilation of surveys conducted since 1998, which asked Quebecers how they define themselves, witnessed a growing paramountcy of the Quebec identity while the Canadian identity lost 10 percentage points and competing identities 5 points (see Figure 2) (Lisée, 2011).

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All federal parties will now have to take on the perilous profession of a tightrope walker and learn how to walk the rope if they want to preserve national unity.

Across Canada, the Conservatives increased their support by only 2% from the 2008 elections. They stayed afloat in British Columbia and the Prairies, made some progress in the Atlantic Provinces, but most importantly, they won 22 additional seats in Ontario (with an increase of 5% of votes) and lost 5 ridings in Quebec (with a 5% loss of their support). It is very tempting to govern while excluding Quebec to strengthen their base, particularly in Ontario, and guarantee another majority. In doing so, however, the Conservatives would further alienate Quebec voters and deepen the traditional divide between Quebec and the federal government. They risk reinforcing the disconnect between Quebecers and Canada. They must therefore demonstrate a certain openness. But for the time being, they seem to be moving in the opposite direction. Although some decisions have been well received, such as the decision to settle the dispute with Quebec involving compensation for the sales tax harmonization and the project to build a new Champlain Bridge, other decisions have raised strong opposition, such as abolishing the long-gun registry, Bill C-10, the appointment of a unilingual auditor, the stop and go

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