

## Topic: The Quebec Separatist Movement

### Background information:

The **1995 Quebec referendum** was the second referendum to ask voters in the Canadian province of Quebec whether Quebec should *secede* from Canada and become an independent country. The nationalist-separatist movement had gained momentum and the francophone, or French speaking part of the population, supported the bill to separate from Canada and become a sovereign country.

“The referendum took place in Quebec on October 30, 1995, and the motion to decide whether Quebec should secede from Canada was defeated by a very narrow margin of **50.58% ‘No’ to 49.42% ‘Yes’.**” (93.52% of Quebec’s registered voters voted.)

Retrieved September 16, 2017 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec\\_referendum,\\_1995](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec_referendum,_1995)

1. Watch the short videos and read the articles and then answer the questions.

- Identity Politics, Québec Sovereignty and the head of the Parti Québécois

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IV81cdZmmJ8>

- Should Quebec be Independent? - 2015 (5 minute history of Quebec – a very general overview)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IAk6pgo91M>

- More on rallying for unity

<https://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/28/world/150000-rally-to-ask-quebec-not-to-secede.html>

- Read to page 5 of *The Current Quebec Separatist Debate and Its Influence on the First Nations of Quebec* which is available below

As you read the information and watch the videos, think about what constitutes legitimate grounds for secession, whether from Canada, or from the United States . As you are beginning to see, the question isn't simple and there is more than one perspective from which view the issue.

2. Written assignment: Write (350-400-word minimum, double-spaced) essay using the following questions to guide you: Be sure to answer all of the questions.

- Do you think that a difference of cultural identity and language is enough reason for a province to secede from Canada or a state to secede from the U.S.? Why or why not?
- How did the rest of Canada respond to the referendum in Quebec? In your own opinion, was the demonstration, the unity rally, an *effective way* to persuade Quebecers to stay part of Canada?
- How did the First Nations feel about the referendum? (The First Nations are Canada's equivalent to our Native Americans.) Why did they feel that way?

The current Premier of Quebec, François Legault, is staunchly *against* seceding from Canada. Support for independence for Quebec is down, but support for the French language and culture is still strong. An American company doing business in Quebec must have French on its website. It may have English as well, but if it does not have French, the company will face sanctions from the language police.

- California's population is currently 39.3% Hispanic (\*according to the Pew Research Center's tabulation of the 2018 Census) and 36.6% White. If Spanish were a required language for all business and public service announcements, would that make a difference to you? Why or Why not? Do you think it would change anything in the culture of California?
- How important is the language you speak in relation to the cultural norms of the community where you live? Can you be said to be an active part of a community if you do not speak the language? Give reasons for your answer.

Make sure to **answer all 11** questions to receive full credit for the assignment.

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*Excerpted from*

The Current Quebec Separatist Debate and Its Influence on the First Nations of Quebec

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## **Abstract**

Quebec has a long history of political struggles for autonomy, stemming back to Britain's conquest of New France in 1759. Since then, tensions have increased between Anglophone and Francophone Canada. These tensions are manifested in the current separatist movements, which first gained substantial ground in the 1960's. The Parti Québécois, an influential political party in Quebec calling for sovereignty, has been the main driver for independence. The separatists want an independent Quebec, and often base their nationalism on a French-Québécois identity, including French as the primary language and a shared identity going back to the French settlers. However, as they define their own unique culture, and pit Quebec against the rest of Canada, separatists marginalize or ignore minority groups and the First Nations of the province. Despite this fact, the First Nations are crucial actors in the separatist debates, and their position sheds light on a seldom-seen dimension of Quebec separatism. The First Nations have a long history of inhabiting the region, and place great importance on the territory of their ancestors. Through the use of international standards and local organizations, First Nations vocally assert their position against separatism. Some of the main issues they see as pertinent in the separatist debates are issues of land rights, resource management, and their right to self-determination. For this reason, it becomes clear that separatism does not only concern French-Quebec and English Canada, but that it concerns the First Nations as well. In this paper, I provide an overview of these debates, placing them in the context of the history of the First Nations, indigenous issues internationally, and current First Nations responses to separatism. I argue the Quebec separatist debates and the First Nations' responses expose the complexities of separatism and the longstanding tensions between the Canadian government and indigenous groups.

## **Introduction**

"Let us be even more clear: Quebec can decide what it wants in terms of its culture, its identity and its development, but it cannot claim sovereignty over a territory which is still, fundamentally, First Nation" (Ghislain Picard, *The Canadian Press* 1). The debates in Quebec over whether or not the province should become independent from the Canadian Federation have covered several decades. These debates are not only of critical importance to those who consider themselves Québécois, but also to minority groups and the First Nations within the province. Over the centuries since Quebec was founded in 1608, the province has developed a unique identity within Canada. Historically, tensions have existed between the Anglophone settlers and the Francophone settlers in Canada, and they continue to exist today. However, it is not as clearcut as simply that Francophone Quebec wants to secede from the rest of Anglophone Canada. Instead, there is much disagreement between the Québécois over the idea of separation, as well as a clash of opinions between the Separatists and the First Nations.

These debates raise not only issues of cultural difference, but also issues of sovereignty, land rights, and politics. Exploring the different sides to the separatist debates, specifically the pro-separation Québécois and the First Nations of the province brings to light the importance and richness of the integration of cultures and the points of

conflict between them. The history of the First Nations in the region of Quebec, the current relationship between the First Nations of Quebec and the rest of the province, common indigenous issues internationally, and the history of separatist movements in Quebec allow for the interpretation and analysis of the responses of and consequences for the First Nations in the event of Quebec's separation from Canada. An independent Quebec would adversely affect the First Nations of the province by perpetuating the tendency of Canadian governments to overlook the needs and rights of indigenous populations; however, the First Nations of Quebec are by no means passive in the separatist debates and would defend their rights should Quebec vote to separate. I argue the Quebec separatist debates and the First Nations' responses expose the complexities of separatism and the long-standing tensions between the Canadian government and indigenous groups.

My research explored the connection between recent separatist debates and the First Nations of Quebec through both a historical and current context. In my research, I used several different methods. Firstly, I looked at current news articles and scholarly journal articles to understand the recent debates over the separatist movement in Québec, from both the side of the Québec government and political parties, as well as the side of the different First Nations present in Québec. I then took a historical and anthropological approach by researching the history of the First Nations in the area and their interactions with the settlers. The sources I used included books, encyclopedias, and articles from scholarly journals. I also looked at common indigenous issues internationally using sources such as United Nations General Assembly resolutions and articles from journals, as well as the history of Quebec separatism. Lastly, I used primary sources including declarations by the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador and a phone interview with the chief of the assembly, Ghislan Picard.

### **The Role of Culture and Ethnicity**

Quebec nationalism is not only a political phenomenon but also a cultural one, and as such, the idea of a distinct cultural identity comprised of language, values, and customs remains at the forefront of discussion. Many scholars have defined and discussed the concept of culture. Two of the most influential have been Renato Rosaldo and Clifford Geertz. Rosaldo discusses the prevalent ideas on culture and control, drawing on Geertz and Victor Turner. Rosaldo sees Geertz and Turner as having similar views, specifically "that culture and society must be regarded as mechanisms of control" (Renato Rosaldo 96). However, although Rosaldo agrees with Geertz and Turner on the link between culture and control, he sees culture as more complex than this: "when the workings of culture are reduced to those of a control mechanism, such phenomena as passions, spontaneous fun, and improvised activities tend to drop out of sight" (Rosaldo 102). Therefore, Rosaldo posits an expanded view on culture to cover more than simply culture as a control mechanism.

Additionally, he highlights the importance of change in society, and how cultures and societies do not remain static bounded entities like some have argued. Understanding change in a society is important in the discussion of Quebec separatism, as it is necessary

to understand Quebec as a dynamic province with a unique history in order to understand the relationship between the First Nations and the province. Rosaldo emphasizes the importance of change and negates the idea of culture and society as static entities. He argues for the “processual perspective,” which “stresses the case history method; it shows how ideas, events, and institutions interact and change through time” (Rosaldo 93). Furthermore, in his discussion of Chicano narratives, he furthers his conception of culture by remarking “the Chicano narratives speak to changing conceptions of culture, not only as a concept in social analysis but also as a vital resource for a developing politics of identity and community” (Rosaldo 149). Geertz, in a similar vein, discusses cultural patterns, which he defines as “systems or complexes of symbols” (Clifford Geertz 5). To him, a symbol is “used for any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception; the conception is the symbol’s ‘meaning’” (Geertz 4). The politics of identity and community Rosaldo refers to above, and Geertz’s discussion of symbols relate directly to the creation of a Québécois identity by the separatist parties through the use of a community-based rhetoric such as references to a shared history and common language. The use of a shared history and language is then discussed in terms of ethnicity, in order to further strengthen claims for sovereignty.

Ethnicity is an important concept widely discussed and defined in a scholarly context. As Jack Eller argues, ethnicity is a complex concept that varies from case to case and is not easily defined (Jack Eller 7-8). Be this as it may, he argues “ethnicity is, thus, subjective, even while it is based on, refers to, or invokes ‘objective’ or shared cultural or historical markers” (Eller 90). Furthermore, he goes on to argue that ethnicities are to some extent labels created for administrative reasons (Eller 10). This point is crucial to the discussion of Quebec and its First Nations, as the use of ethnicity creates specific groups, which can be used in political and limiting ways. Looking at ethnicity as it pertains to conflict, Kenneth Christie discusses how the creation of new nations and the increase of ethno-nationalism and nationalistic political groups around the world often lead to security threats and international crises (Kenneth Christie 3). This argument applies to the discussion of Quebec separatism, especially in terms of the rise of ethnonationalism, as separatist political parties see the ethnic category of a French-speaking native Québécois as the basis for their nationalistic movement. Both Eller and Christie discuss ethnicity and its relationship to conflict, a point relevant to the situation in Quebec since the French-Québécois ethnic group is in conflict with other ethnicities such as the Anglophones and the First Nations, specifically over language laws prioritizing French over other languages, as well as over policies concerning land and resource use.

## **Nationalism and the Concept of Community**

Nationalism and community, both key terms used by both separatists and indigenous groups, are distinct but complementary concepts. In her book on the history of Quebec nationalism, Anne Griffin discusses specific concepts she finds pertinent to the

discussion of Quebec nationalism, including those of the ideology of survival, memory, and nation. According to Griffin, “the ideology of survival, as expressed in the motto *Exister c’est survivre* (“to exist is to survive”) has characterized Quebec’s history and her relations with Canada for over 200 years, and it has left a distinct impression on the lives of her people” (Anne Griffin 19). Because of Quebec’s distinct identity and culture, the province feels as though they are fighting to survive culturally. An integral part of the ideology of survival is the concept of memory, which Griffin defines as “an instrument of survival,” as she remarks that memory defines one’s membership in a group as well as serves as an indication of belonging (Griffin 20). In this way memory plays an important role in the formation of nationalism in Quebec. Furthermore, Griffin argues that the ideology of survival and the concept of memory come together to form the idea of a nation, which she defines as “a community which comes into being when a people identifies itself in terms of a distinct history and a common commitment to the future” (Griffin 29). Benedict Anderson takes a different approach to defining a nation, positing two definitions relevant to my research on Quebec separatism, as used together they provide a more in depth view on the concepts of nation and nationalism. Firstly, he defines a nation as “an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Benedict Anderson 6). According to Anderson, a nation is imagined because every member will never know every other member, yet still has an idea of the whole community, limited because it has finite boundaries, and sovereign because of its perceived freedom (Anderson 7). In this definition, he focuses on the nation as a political community, whereas Griffin’s definition focuses on the nation as a cultural and historical community. However, Anderson does take into account the importance of history in the formation of a nation, as he provides a second definition that argues “nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it” (Anderson 12). Quebec nationalism relies heavily on the idea of an imagined political community, as separatists see Quebec as a distinct, limited, and sovereign entity. Furthermore, Quebec separatism is clearly aligned with the memory of New France before it was forcibly integrated into the Canadian Federation.