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How does Canada's principal linguistic cleavage affect electoral politics? This paper argues that French-English dualism has produced four political outcomes for federal parties. These include boosting a party's cultural credentials, linguistic marginalization, linguistically-defined separate parties, and linguistic message dissonance. In this respect, parties navigate the demands imposed by linguistic difference with varying degrees of success. The political effects of linguistic duality are evidenced in the dynamics of party competition and vote choice.

The paper begins by examining two background conditions which shape party responses to linguistic diversity: the development of language as a political issue and the nature of linguistic diversity. Canada's English-French cleavage is then examined to illustrate these background conditions and contextualize the demands of language politics. Following this, the effects of linguistic duality for party politics are outlined in a fourfold typology (see Table 1). First, a party can boost its cultural credentials through sustained effective communication with its linguistically-defined audience, as accomplished by the Liberal Party. Second, by contrast, marginalization of parties within a linguistic community occurs when

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Robbins-Kanter J. *Party Politics and the French-*

the population, and how they are dispersed relative to the country's electoral system.<sup>16</sup> Beyond a linguistic group's numerical strength, parties may target them for symbolic or ideological reasons.<sup>17</sup>

Lastly, linguistic diversity is the product of the presence of both national minorities and immigrant communities. Parties are more likely to focus multilingual political messaging and outreach to national minorities. This is because these groups' political claims and grie(t) 9 (h) 5 (e) 6 (s) 7 (e) 67 (T 07361 ( ) 9 (h) ) 9 (aq 0









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Relatedly, the 1980s witnessed an end to the solidly Liberal Quebec. Indeed, party images are not impervious to change. Trudeau's 1982 constitutional patriation efforts without Quebec's consent were an affront many Quebecers' conceptions of the Canadian political community and deeply-held facets of identity. Gerard Bergeron writes: "How could some Quebecers not be inclined to take this exclusion





*b.! New Democratic Party*

While facing a different set of challenges in the French-

ce parti comme le sien.”<sup>59</sup> Instead, the NDP was historically viewed as a party of outsiders that embraces anglo-Canadian nationalism and a centralizing view of federalism.<sup>60</sup>

Like other provinces, Quebec has sometimes shown an appetite for anti-establishment politics. Yet when Quebec voters have turned away from the Liberals and Conservatives, the NDP has not typically benefitted from this search for alternatives. Historically, voters in Quebec drawn to economic populism found a voice through the Cr ditistes. As explained by Meisel, “in a sense, the class role performed by the NDP elsewhere in Canada is assumed in Quebec by the rallying of the Cr ditistes.”<sup>61</sup> In more recent decades, the sovereigntist Bloc Quebecois has benefited from more general dissatisfaction with the federal system.

Despite these setbacks, the NDP’s fortunes in Quebec improved dramatically in 2011. Lamoureux argues that this developmoent had little to do with party policies towards Quebec: “la plate-forme  lectorale du NPD ne contient rien sur le Qu bec et qu’elle demeure largement inconnue du public; alors m me que le parti persiste dans ses prises de position et conceptions centralisatrices de la f d ration canadienne.”<sup>62</sup> Instead, Lamoureux argues that the NDP’s rise can be attributed to overriding distaste for the Harper government, and the popularity of NDP leader Jack Layton relative to Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff. Fournier et al. argue that NDP success in Quebec was largely due to the personal popularity of Layton, and the proximity between the NDP’s issue positions and Quebecers’ values.<sup>63</sup> Importantly, both accounts underline the importance of Layton’s French-language outreach. As with the Conservatives, NDP growth in Quebec has been limited by successive party leaders’ lack of fluency in French, which changed under Layton. As an anglophone Quebecer who left for Ontario in his twenties, Layton worked to improve his French when he secured the NDP leadership.<sup>64</sup> Lysiane Gagnon explains that Layton’s down-to-earth unpolished accent and syntax gained favour with Quebecers, “(his) French is colloquial, and his syntax often faulty. His working-class accent sounds familiar, but it is very different from the mainstream accent that is considered the norm...by the news anchors of Soci t  Radio-Canada.”<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, under Layton, the NDP attempted to recruit prominent French-speaking candidates and to develop a made-in-Quebec advertising strategy.<sup>66</sup> Fournier et al. trace the turning point in the NDP’s

where he charmed Quebecers with his colloquial French and cultivated a public image as *le bon Jack*.<sup>67</sup>

The Bloc contested their first federal election in 1993, winning roughly 50 percent of the vote in Quebec and two thirds of the province's parliamentary seats.<sup>73</sup> Blais et al. find that the Bloc's support came primarily from sovereignists, but also from non-



However, support for the Bloc declined significantly during the 2011 campaign. Belanger and Nadeau argue that campaign dynamics in Quebec favoured an insurgent party who could replace the unpopular Harper Conservatives. The Conservatives had offended Quebecers with unpopular cuts to cultural programs, foreign policy decisions, the axing of the federal gun registry, and the appointment of unilingual senior public servants.<sup>80</sup> Yet the Bloc cannot replace the Conservatives since they do not run candidates outside of Quebec.<sup>81</sup>

In attempting to forestall the unexpected NDP surge, the Bloc shifted their strategy to emphasize the sovereignty issue.<sup>82</sup> This sovereignty focus constituted a serious misreading of the Quebec electorate, given the “nationalist debate not being salient at all in the 2011 election.”<sup>83</sup> This was especially true as the NDP benefited from a likeable fluently French-speaking leader, who integrated many of the province’s



Indeed, variation in message framing or content may signal an accountability problem if citizens are unaware of claims underpinning campaigns across the country. Moreover, multilingual politics can imbue rhetoric with a different and potentially more divisive character than is possible when campaigning in only one language. Unilingual voters may encounter messages in another language when a statement attracts significant media attention, yet most campaign messages remain untranslated and unheard by the other linguistic group. In this context, politicians may be less likely to avoid divisive or alienating items which may be overheard by a secondary audience. Therefore, the electoral dynamics of language politics can affect intergroup relations, the inclusion of ethnolinguistic minorities, political accountability, and broader quality of democratic life.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has explained the demands that linguistic difference imposes for political parties. These requirements are shaped by background conditions including the politicization of language and the nature of linguistic diversity. There is significant variation in parties' abilities to respond effectively to linguistic diversity. Based on evidence from Canadian federal elections, the paper has presented a typology with four potential effects of multilingual party politics. These effects include the boosting of parties' cultural credentials, linguistic marginalization, the emergence of linguistically-defined parties, and linguistic message dissonance. Further research is required to determine the scope of dissonant messaging in multilingual countries, as well as its effects on the political process.