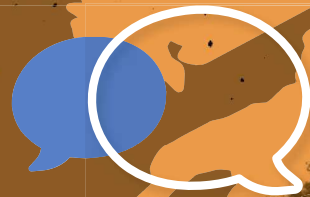




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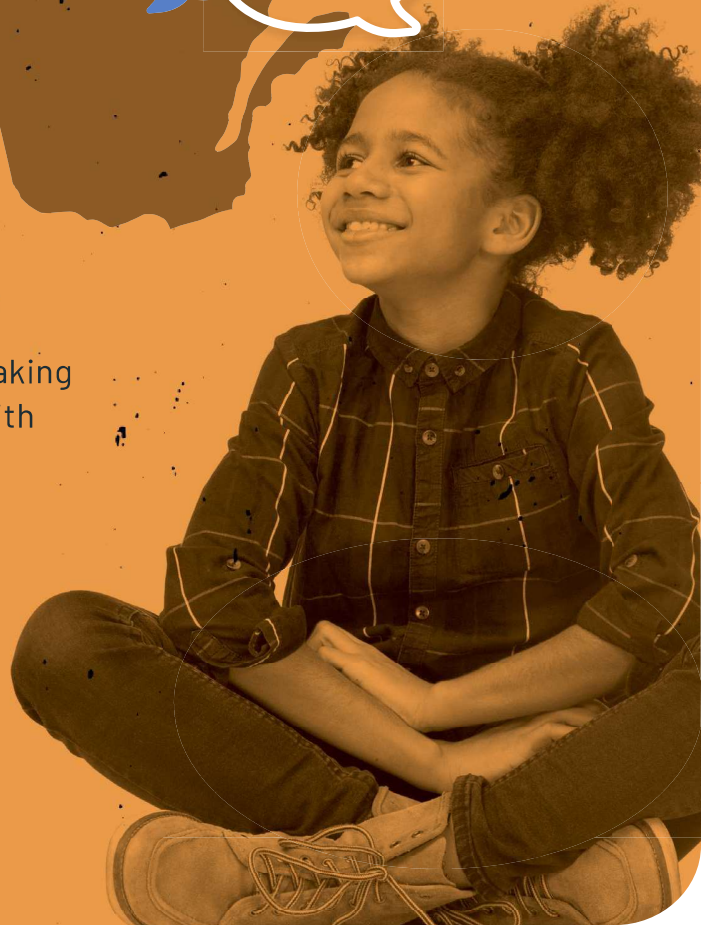
Commissariat
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BUILDING BRIDGES:

Perceptions and realities about the English-speaking communities of Quebec and their relationship with French in Quebec and bilingualism in Canada

REPORT | JUNE 2024



**Building Bridges: Perceptions and realities about the English-speaking communities of Quebec and their relationship with French in Quebec and bilingualism in Canada
Final Report**

This public opinion research report presents the results of qualitative and quantitative research conducted by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada and Environics Research Group.

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Executive summary

Background and objectives

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (the Office of the Commissioner) has observed that, in recent years, the English-speaking communities of Quebec (ESCQ) have been the focus of much public discourse and debate in the province. Survey and census data indicate that, overall, the ESCQ are highly bilingual and value Canada's broader linguistic duality, including the French language. The extent to which the general population is aware of these facets of the ESCQ is not clear, however, and the Office of the Commissioner wished to test the hypothesis that problematic myths may persist.

In light of this context and with the modernization of the *Official Languages Act* by the federal government in 2023, which recognizes the need to "advance the existence of a majority-French society in a Quebec where the future of French is assured," this research project¹ is an opportunity to shed light on the relationship that the ESCQ have with the French language in Quebec and official bilingualism in Canada as a whole. This is also an opportunity to explore how Quebec's English-speaking minority can be considered as bridge-builders or even as a potential ally of the promotion of French in Canada as a whole, with a view to developing a more constructive discourse that better acknowledges their contributions and, ultimately, deconstructs certain misperceptions.

This research project aims to achieve the following key research objectives:

- Explore the nature and extent of certain myths and perceptions among the French-speaking majority and among the English-speaking minority in Quebec about the ESCQ and their relationship with the French language in Quebec and bilingualism in Canada, and identify potential solutions.
- Inform and update the Office of the Commissioner's reflections on the ESCQ.
- Better equip the Office of the Commissioner to help nuance messaging and communications on the ESCQ.
- In as far as possible, help to inform and nuance the perspectives of certain opinion leaders and of certain target populations.

Target audience

The target audience for this research project was the general population in Quebec, 18 years of age and over, segmented into those whose preferred official language is French (Francophones) and those

¹ The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages mandated the study to its Policy and Research Directorate and to Environics Research Group. The project managers were Derek Leebosh from Environics and Robert J. Talbot from the Office of the Commissioner. Other contributors included Philippe Marchand and Brenda Sharpe from Environics, and Clarence Lemay and Charles Taker from the Office of the Commissioner.

whose preferred official language is English (Anglophones²) and also segmented between those in the Montréal and Gatineau areas where there is a larger English presence and those residing in the rest of Quebec, where there is relatively less of an English presence. The method of determining “preferred official language” was the language in which the individual chose to take part in the research.

Methodology

To meet the objectives of this assignment, Environics was retained to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research in collaboration with the Office of the Commissioner.

Qualitative Data Collection

Environics Research conducted a series of six online focus groups in December 2023 in collaboration with the Office of the Commissioner’s Research Team, the objective of which was to explore Quebecers’ perceptions of the English-speaking community in Quebec, its bilingualism and its use of French. The online focus groups were conducted using the Zoom platform. Two sessions were conducted among Francophones in the Greater Montréal and Gatineau areas, where there is a larger Anglophone presence (December 4), and another pair were conducted among Francophones outside of the Greater Montréal and Gatineau areas, where there is less of an Anglophone presence (December 5). A third pair of sessions was conducted in English among Anglophones—one with those living in the Greater Montréal and Gatineau areas and one with those living in other parts of Quebec (December 6).

The 40 people recruited as focus group participants were all 18 years of age or over and included a range of age, education, and ethnic backgrounds. The focus group sessions lasted approximately 90 minutes, and each involved between five and eight participants (out of eight people recruited for each group). Participants were given a \$100 honorarium to thank them for their time commitment.

Statement of limitations: Qualitative research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population, rather than the weights of the opinions held, as would be measured in a quantitative study. The results of this type of research should be viewed as indicative rather than projectable to the population.

Quantitative Data Collection

Environics conducted a random-probability telephone survey from January 11 to 28, 2024, with 1,005 adult residents of Quebec, using industry-standard random-digit dialing techniques, in

² The terms “Anglophone,” “English-speaking” and “English speakers” are used interchangeably for the purposes of this report. Broadly speaking, “Anglophones” refers to individuals whose preferred Canadian official language is English, including people who may have English as a mother tongue, but also people whose mother tongue(s) may be another language but who consider English to be their preferred official language. An analogous definition for “Francophones” is applied in relation to French. Allophones are considered here as those who have a mother tongue other than English or French. While there are many individuals who might identify variously with one, two or all three groups (for example, someone with French, English, and Italian as mother tongues), for purposes of analysis of the study results, focus group participants and survey respondents who chose to participate in English have been categorized as Anglophones, and those who chose to participate in French are categorized as Francophones.

collaboration with the Research Team of the Office of the Commissioner. The objective of the survey was to determine the persistence of the hypothesized myths and to explore opportunities for greater cross-cultural understanding. A survey of this size will yield results that can be considered accurate to within +/- 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Margins of error are larger for subgroups of the population. The distribution of interviews is presented in the table below.

Regional distribution	Total	Montréal/Gatineau	Rest of Quebec	French	English
Number of completed surveys	1,005	565	440	885	120
Percentage of completed surveys	100%	56%	44%	88%	12%
Margin of error @ 95% CI	± 3.1	± 4.1	± 4.6	± 3.3	± 8.9

Contract value

The contract value was \$119,186.75 (HST included).

Report

This report presents an executive summary of the key qualitative and quantitative findings, preceded by information based on an analysis of census and previous survey data conducted by the Office of the Commissioner’s Research Team used to establish potential myths, followed by detailed analyses of the focus group data and the survey data used to explore the nature and the persistence of the hypothesized myths. Provided under separate cover is a detailed set of “banner tables” presenting the results for all questions by population segments as defined by region and demographics. These tables are referenced by the survey question in the detailed analysis.

Analysis notes

The tables in this report showing the quantitative results show the results for all respondents plus a breakdown by French speakers, referred to as Francophones (that is, respondents who chose to respond to the survey in French) and English speakers, referred to as Anglophones (respondents who chose to respond to the survey in English). Survey language is used rather than mother tongue, as the text of some of the questions varied depending on the official language the respondent chose for the survey.

In this report, quantitative results are expressed as percentages unless otherwise noted. Results may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses. Net results cited in the text may not exactly match individual results shown in the tables due to rounding.

Key findings – Overview

The research results confirm the hypothesis that certain myths and misperceptions about the ESCQ persist among the general population in Quebec. Their nature and the extent to which they persist, however, is not such that the situation cannot be improved. Encouragingly, English-speaking and French-speaking Quebecers appear to get along on an individual basis far more than the discourse suggests. Specifically, public understanding could be improved by illustrating constructive examples of ESCQ engagement with French, backed up by factual data, and in particular by fostering more positive

in-person interactions between members of the Francophone majority and the English-speaking minority in Quebec, to the benefit of Canada's linguistic duality more broadly.

Key findings – Background research

- According to available 2021 census data, most English-mother tongue Quebecers can speak French (71% are bilingual), and a majority use it at work, have it as a language of instruction at school, speak it at home or have it as another mother tongue.
- According to public opinion research from 2021–2022, most English-speaking Quebecers consume or engage in cultural products and activities in French, and they are just as supportive as Francophone Quebecers of statements in support of Canada's linguistic duality. Like Quebecers, Canadians outside Quebec also support the *Official Languages Act*.

Key findings – Qualitative phase

- A number of Anglophone and Francophone participants showed a real openness toward and interest in the other. This view was not shared by all, however, and more pessimistic voices sometimes took over in the discussions.
- There was a wide range of opinions within each group, which appeared to be informed first by individual outlook, second by direct personal experiences with the other group (whether positive, neutral or negative), and third by perceptions of the public discourse. Very few had a direct familiarity with statistical evidence supporting (or contradicting) their views.
- With some notable exceptions, Francophones tended to underestimate English-speaking Quebecers' ability to speak French, their use of the language, and their interest in French-language cultural products and events. Many were concerned about the long-term future of French both in and outside of Quebec. Some participants from Montréal and Gatineau were especially frustrated at how much English they heard in their day-to-day lives. They were also skeptical of support for the *Official Languages Act* among Anglophones elsewhere in Canada.
- Among Anglophone participants, recent measures restricting English in Quebec were seen as unnecessary and were a major source of disillusionment. Many were frustrated at being criticized for using English, even if only among themselves, and for being made to feel like they don't belong, despite often trying to use French. Most Anglophone participants said they were happy to use French, but they don't want to feel *forced* to use it or to be told that their French isn't good enough. Some also appeared to be skeptical of Francophone Quebecers' support for Canada's *Official Languages Act*.
- Despite these frustrations, there was an apparent interest—a desire even—among members of both language groups to be understood, accepted or even “liked” by the other. Even some of the more skeptical participants mentioned positive personal interactions that had nuanced their view.
- Many Francophone participants were encouraged by statistics showing English-speaking Quebecers' interest in French-language cultural products or in speaking French, and

suggested that seeing English-speaking Quebecers more present using French in apolitical contexts in culture and in media would be most helpful. Some suggested that a politically neutral entity should publicize data about English-speaking Quebecers' use of French. Francophone participants with more negative views about English-speaking Quebecers were more skeptical of these statistics.

- Some Francophones thought that English-speaking Quebecers can and should be bridge-builders or even “allies” when it comes to informing Anglophones elsewhere in Canada about Quebec and bilingualism. Anglophone participants who had moved to Quebec from elsewhere in Canada were receptive to this idea, citing personal experiences and even pride about explaining Quebec to friends and family “back home” in the province of their birth.

Key findings – Quantitative phase

A. Interactions with speakers of the other official language

- Among Quebecers who have contact with speakers of the other official language (n=909), the vast majority (87%), including 89% of Francophones and 81% of Anglophones, report having positive personal interactions. The rate is particularly high (94%) among Quebecers who interact very often with the other group.
- However, a large majority of Quebecers agree it is a problem that, as a group, English-speaking and French-speaking Quebecers have a lot of misconceptions about each other. This sentiment is shared by both language communities, with 61% of Francophones and 67% of Anglophones somewhat or strongly agreeing.

B. Perceptions about English-speaking Quebecers

- Whereas Anglophones tend to be aware of the use of French by the English-speaking population, Francophones tend to underestimate it; however, a significant minority of Francophones are aware of the extent to which many English-speaking Quebecers can and do use French in an important area of their lives.
- Anglophones are twice as likely (58%) as Francophones (29%) to be aware that most English mother-tongue Quebecers can speak conversational French.
- A majority of Francophones (54%) think it's false that most English mother-tongue Quebecers regularly use French in their daily lives. They are evenly split as to whether it's true that most English mother-tongue schoolchildren in Quebec are either in French-language schools or French immersion programs (44% think this is true, 47% think it's false). In contrast, large majorities of Anglophones (over 70%) correctly believe each of these statements to be true.
- Anglophones are notably more likely than Francophones to be aware that it is false that most working English mother-tongue Quebecers work solely in English (62% vs. 33%). They are also more likely to know that it is false that, when a Quebecer whose mother tongue is

French and a Quebecer whose mother tongue is English have children, most of those children end up with English as their mother tongue instead of French (54% false vs. 35%).

- Most Francophones (56%, vs. 46% of Anglophones) believe it is rare for English-speaking Quebecers to take an interest in French-language culture, and most (73%, vs. 44% of Anglophones) also believe that Canada's official bilingualism is more valued by French-speaking Quebecers than by their English-speaking counterparts. Half of Francophone Quebecers (51%, vs. 35% of Anglophones) think that English-speaking Quebecers mainly keep to their own community and do not interact much with Francophones.
- Whereas most Anglophone Quebecers (64%) are aware that a vast majority of Canadians outside Quebec support Canada's *Official Languages Act*, Francophone Quebecers are more split on the issue (44% believe this to be true, 50% believe it to be false).

C. Looking ahead to the future

- Large majorities of Quebecers agree that using statistics, anecdotes and culturally engaged spokespeople to showcase English-speaking Quebecers' bilingualism would help a little or a lot to improve relations between English-speaking and French-speaking Quebecers.
- By far the strongest support among all groups, however, was for encouraging more positive social interactions between Anglophones and Francophones through activities like youth exchange programs, social clubs, music, sports or other special interests.
- Most Anglophones (77%) and Francophones (71%) agree that English-speaking Quebecers can play an important role as a bridge between French-speaking Quebecers and English-speaking Canadians outside Quebec.