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THE CRIC PAPERS

# Bilingualism: Part of Our Past or Part of Our Future?

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Centre for Research and  
Information on Canada

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# Acknowledgements

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# Methodology

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This paper reports on the attitudes of Canadians to language and bilingualism. Because Francophones in Quebec are almost unanimous both in their support of the official languages policy and in their interest in learning a second language, the paper distinguishes between their views and the views of Anglophones in the other nine provinces. The latter group is the primary focus of the analysis, simply because there is a much wider variation in opinion among Anglophones than among Francophones. While the distinctive views of the Anglophone minority in Quebec and Francophone minorities in the other provinces are important, they are not reported on here, for two reasons: because the public opinion surveys analyzed for this paper were not designed to tap into the views of these two minority communities, the sample sizes are too small to allow reliable reporting of results; and these two minority communities are highly supportive of bilingualism. Instead, the paper focuses mainly on the views of the English-speaking majority outside Quebec. It is this community which, from time to time, has called into question some aspects of the official languages policy. The paper does take into account the views of Allophones – those who usually speak a language other than English or French in the home. Allophones are often treated separately from Anglophones because, by virtue of speaking a language other than English, they inevitably approach issues related to language and bilingualism from a very different perspective than do Anglophones, who not only form the majority in Canada, but whose main language is the *lingua franca* of the Western world. Finally, at times the paper compares attitudes, not of language groups in Quebec and in the rest of Canada, but simply of Quebecers and other Canadians. This occurs when data referring both to region and to language group are not available. Given the concentration of Francophones in Quebec and Anglophones outside Quebec, the comparison of the views of Quebecers and other Canadians stands as an acceptable (if imperfect) approximation of the views of the two majority language groups.

The paper cites data from a number of CRIC surveys. The methodological information regarding these surveys is as follows:

**CRIC, 2001:** Portraits of Canada 2001. Telephone survey of 2,940 Canadians, conducted in two parts. Environics Research Group surveyed 1,939 people in the nine provinces outside of Quebec between October 1 and October 10, 2001, while CROP surveyed 1,001 people in Quebec between September 28 and October 14, 2001. The data from the two parts of the survey were combined in order to calculate results for the whole of Canada. The results of surveys of this size have a margin of error of approximately plus or minus 1.8 %, 19 times out of 20.

**CRIC, 2002:** CRIC survey on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The survey was conducted on behalf of CRIC by Environics Research Group. Environics contacted 1,402 Canadians 18 years of age and over by telephone between February 11 and 17, 2002. A survey of this size has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.6 percent, 19 times out of 20.

**CRIC, March 2003:** Survey conducted on behalf of CRIC by Environics Research Group. 2,012 people were surveyed between March 7 and March 27, 2003. Results of a survey of this size are considered accurate to within plus or minus 2.2 percent, 19 times out of 20.

**CRIC-Globe and Mail Survey on the New Canada:** Survey designed by CRIC, The Globe and Mail, and the Canadian Opinion Research Archive. It was carried out between April 21 and May 4, 2003 by Ipsos-Reid. A representative sample of 2,000 randomly selected Canadians was interviewed by telephone. A survey of this size has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.2 percent, 19 times out of 20. The survey sample included 1,000 respondents between the ages of 18 and 30, and 1,000 respondents 31 years and older.

**CRIC, December 2003:** CRIC Survey on Official Languages. Survey of 2,002 Canadians 18 years of age and over conducted on behalf of CRIC by Environics Research Group, by telephone between December 11 and 29, 2003. Results of a survey of this size are considered accurate to within plus or minus 2.2 percent, 19 times out of 20.

# Introduction

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Language is a defining feature of Canada's social and political reality.

Over many years, Canada's linguistic duality has underpinned both political conflict and the search for political accommodations. By the 1960s, the injustices suffered by linguistic minorities had fuelled both modern Quebec nationalism and a push for reform by the federal government, which, in 1963, established the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. The Commission was a driving force behind the adoption of official bilingualism, a pan-Canadian social reform whose impacts continue to be felt. Today, the country still struggles to strike the right balance in ensuring the equality of its two official languages, and the rights of those who speak them. This challenge must now be met in the context of Canada's deepening multiculturalism.

This paper, using public opinion research data, looks at attitudes to bilingualism as the country embarks on the next major language initiative – the federal government's Action Plan for Official Languages. The plan follows up on a commitment in the January 2001 Speech from the Throne to advance bilingualism in a number of areas of Canadian life.

Perhaps its most ambitious single goal is to double the number of high school graduates with a working knowledge of both French and English within ten years.

The 2001 Census shows that among Canadians whose mother tongue is English, 10% know both official languages. Only 7% of Anglophones, living outside Quebec, are bilingual in French and English – an increase of only one percentage point since 1991. Within Quebec, 37% of Francophones speak both official languages. While the rate of bilingualism has been increasing steadily among Francophones in Quebec in all age groups, the same is not true outside the province. Among Anglophones outside of Quebec aged 15 to 19, there was a slight decrease in the percentage who could speak both official languages – a fall from 16% in 1996 to 15% in 2001.

Canada's increasing cultural diversity also has an impact on language. In its analysis of 2001 Census data, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages concluded that, as Canadian society becomes more diverse, it is becoming more difficult to label a Canadian as simply "Anglophone" or "Francophone". However, while Canada's linguistic composition is increasingly complex, with individuals often having multiple linguistic and cultural heritages, English and French, by far, are still the languages most often spoken in Canada. According to the Census, only 2% of Canadians know neither of the country's official languages, and English or French is the language that 9 out of 10 Canadians speak most often at home.

While it will take a major effort to meet the action plan's goals, past experience provides grounds for confidence.

## Introduction

Much has been achieved in the four decades since the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was established by the Pearson government to propose policies that would strengthen and vouchsafe Canada's language duality.

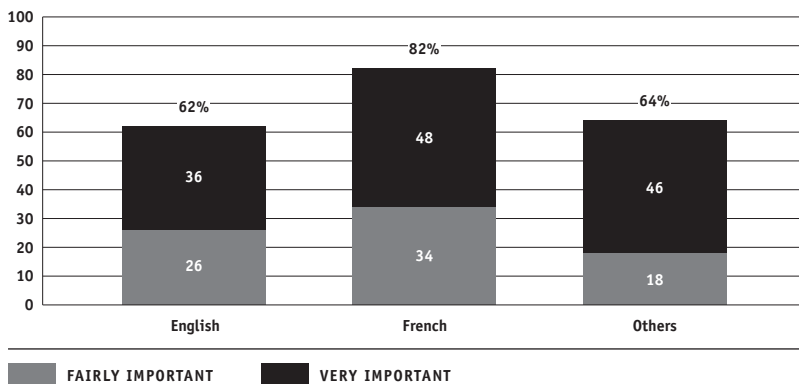
In 1969, the same year that the Commission delivered its final report, Parliament adopted the Official Languages Act. The Act recognized English and French as the official languages of all federal institutions in Canada, and committed the government to offering its services in both official languages where numbers warranted, and to encouraging the increased participation of Francophones in the federal public service.

In 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was proclaimed. It entrenched major constitutional guarantees for the status of both official languages at the federal level, and also for the rights of official-language minorities in every province and territory.

In 1988, Parliament passed a new version of the Official Languages Act. As well as updating a number of policies and practices existing in federal institutions, it set out a number of general priorities. They included equality of English and French in federal institutions, especially with regard to the provision of services to the public, and a commitment to develop and strengthen Anglophone and Francophone minority communities, as well as to promote the two official languages within Canadian society.

**FIGURE 1** IMPORTANCE OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION (1963), BY LANGUAGE GROUP

How important to the future of Canada do you think this commission is?



Source: CIPQ, 1963

These gains have not come without controversy. Changes that one language community views as too timid have sometimes been viewed by the other as going too far. On occasion, accommodations reached among political leaders have sparked angry criticisms from the grassroots. At key moments in the country's history, language issues have raised tensions between the English- and French-speaking communities, putting the country's reputation for tolerance to the test. Despite progress in securing official status for both the English and French languages, it is fair to ask how just how supportive of bilingualism the Canadian public really is.

Four decades ago, the signals from the public were mixed.

In 1963, as the Royal Commission began its work, a CIPQ poll showed that a majority of Canadians – regardless of language – felt the Commission was important to Canada's future (see Figure 1). French-speakers were most enthusiastic, with 82% saying its work was important. However, clear majorities of Anglophones and Allophones (62% and 64% respectively) took the same view.

Yet in 1965, when Canadians were asked if they believed Francophones want too much from the rest of Canada, a majority of Anglophones and members of other language groups agreed this was the case (61% and 51%, respectively). Not surprisingly, French-speaking Canadians held the opposite view. Two-thirds (67%) felt they did not expect more from Canada than they deserve (see Figure 2). Thus agreement that looking into language issues was important to Canada's future clearly did not translate into a consensus as to how much needed to change.

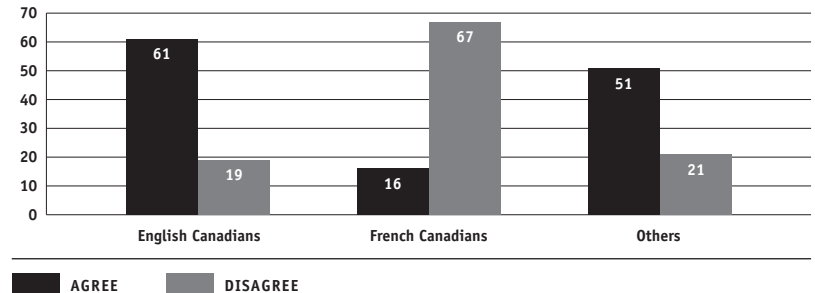
How much has changed in 40 years? This is the question that this paper sets out to answer. It will track the evolution of attitudes toward bilingualism in Canada since the Royal Commission was first established, and explore, in detail, the current state of the public's views. In Part 1, we examine the evolution of public opinion on different dimensions of bilingualism to isolate key trends over the last four decades. In Part 2, we focus on the recent data and explore contemporary attitudes toward language and bilingualism. Based on the findings, we draw some general conclusions about what the future might hold.

No one should underestimate the emotion that language issues generate, or be complacent about the significant achievements of the past four decades. However, this study does show that official bilingualism rests on a solid foundation of public support. In fact, if anything has changed, it is that bilingualism has become more relevant to Canadians today than in previous decades.

Moreover, while it is clear that those who will implement the action plan have their work cut out, there is an openness among most Canadians to learning the other official language. There are qualifications and exceptions, and the overall picture has grown more complex as today's multicultural reality brings languages other than English or French to the top of the minds of many Canadians. But if rates of English-French bilingualism appear low today, or increase little in coming years, despite the federal action plan, it is not because of lack of public support for bilingualism, or failure to recognize the importance of speaking both English and French.

**FIGURE 2** DO FRENCH CANADIANS WANT TOO MUCH? (1965), BY LANGUAGE GROUP

Do you agree or disagree that "French Canadians are asking the rest of Canada for more than what they have a right to expect?"

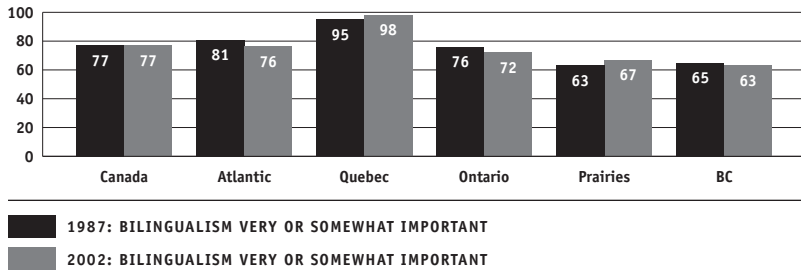


Source: Social Research Group, 1965

# Part 1: The Evolution of Public Opinion on Bilingualism Since 1963

**FIGURE 3 SUPPORT FOR TWO OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

How important is preserving French and English as the two official languages of Canada? (Figure shows the proportion saying it is very or somewhat important.)

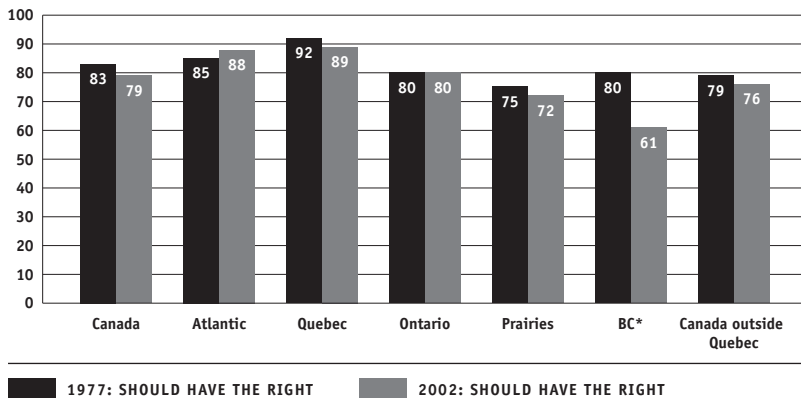


Source: Charter Study, 1987 / CRIC, 2002

**FIGURE 4 SUPPORT FOR RIGHT TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES IN FRENCH**

1977: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with the view expressed: all Canadians should have the right to receive services from their federal government in either French or English (Source: Southam Press & Goldfarb, "A Searching Nation.")

2002: Do you think French Canadians living outside of Quebec should or should not have the right to have federal government services available in French? (Source: CRIC.)



\* Note: Sample size for BC for 2002 is too small to be reliable.

Attitudes towards bilingualism have been regularly analyzed from different angles and perspectives over the past four decades, allowing us to identify certain key trends.

## STABLE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR BILINGUALISM

Throughout Canada's history, there have been occasions where Canadians have been polarized along linguistic and regional lines by political events. In recent decades, disputes over such matters as energy policy, the federal government's role in social policy, and – above all else – constitutional reform initiatives have put the spotlight on what divides the country, rather than what unites it. The late 1980s and early 1990s, in particular, were marked by the emergence of a divisive debate on language issues as the Quebec government overrode the Charter of Rights to protect its French-only sign law, and certain communities outside Quebec reacted by proclaiming themselves unilingually English. Despite such clashes, when tracked over the long term, public support for bilingualism has not waned.

For example, between 1987 and 2002, surveys asking if it is important to preserve French and English as Canada's two official languages showed no significant change in responses (see Figure 3). Support for this policy has remained strong, with roughly eight in ten (77%) Canadians saying they believe that preserving English and French as the two official languages is important.

Similarly, there has been no real change in support for the idea that Canadians should have the right to receive federal government services in either English or French. This right was supported by about eight out of ten Canadians in 1977, and by the same proportion 25 years later (see Figure 4).

## Part 1: The Evolution of Public Opinion on Bilingualism Since 1963

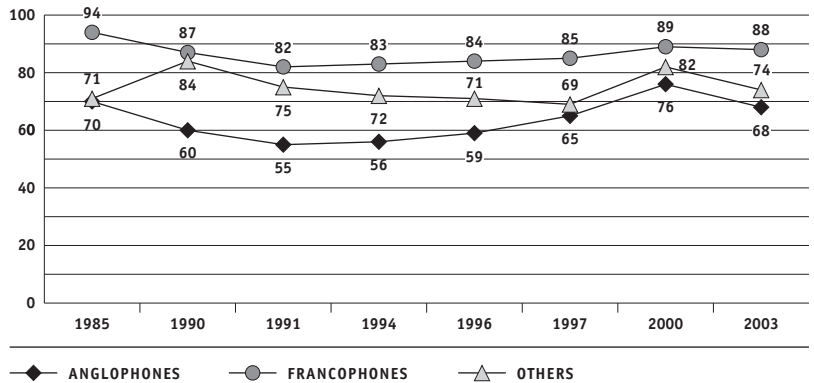
Questions that have been asked more regularly show fluctuations in responses from year to year, but confirm that there has been no erosion of support for bilingualism over time. Consider the issue of national identity. Many advocates of bilingualism – including the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism itself – have suggested that bilingualism helps define us as Canadians. Over the last 20 years, a majority of Canadians have agreed consistently. Francophones are more likely than others to agree that bilingualism is important to the Canadian identity. But the proportion of Anglophones who hold this view has remained steadily above 50% and, currently, stands at an impressive 68% (see Figure 5).

Pollsters have also asked about the notion of “bilingualism for all of Canada” – a vaguely worded concept that tends to attract only modest support. However, the key point here is the trend over the last quarter century. Support fell in the early 1990s in a period of economic recession and during a crisis of national unity unleashed by the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, followed by the failed Charlottetown Accord and the subsequent return of a PQ government in Quebec. Since then, support has bounced back. After reaching a low of 46% in 1991, the proportion in favour has been well over 50% since 1997. Today, support is roughly as high as it has been at any point since the late 1970s. This is true in all regions, including the West (see Table 1).

Not surprisingly, Francophones have remained most supportive of “bilingualism for all of Canada.” Support among English-speaking Canadians is lower. In 2003, 46% of Anglophones conveyed support for bilingualism in questions worded this way, an increase of just 2% since 1977, but up significantly from the low point of 32% in 1991 (see Figure 6). It is important to note that Allophones are much more supportive than Anglophones – a point we will return to in Part 2.

**FIGURE 5 | BILINGUALISM AND THE CANADIAN IDENTITY**

How important are the following to the Canadian Identity? *Bilingualism*. (Figure shows percent saying it is very or somewhat important.)



Source: Environics Focus Canada / Canadian Opinion Research Archive, Queen's University

**TABLE 1 | IN FAVOUR OF BILINGUALISM FOR ALL OF CANADA BY REGION**

Are you, personally, in favour of bilingualism for all of Canada? (Figure shows percent saying they are in favour.)

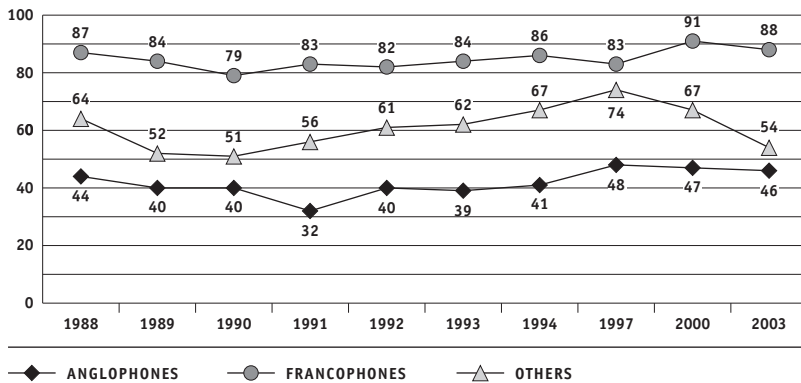
	1977	1978	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1997	2000	2003
Canada	51	54	55	51	50	46	50	51	53	57	57	56
Quebec	85	84	86	85	79	83	81	85	86	84	89	89
Atlantic	48	52	45	44	36	35	43	45	50	59	60	54
Manitoba	30	32	37	30	27	28	34	28	29	42	46	49
BC	30	46	43	36	42	32	32	36	44	44	44	46
Ontario	43	44	46	41	44	33	46	43	42	51	47	45
Alberta	28	36	41	35	29	30	31	32	35	36	40	41
SK	30	32	39	25	30	28	28	29	37	49	37	36

Source: Environics Focus Canada

## Part 1: The Evolution of Public Opinion on Bilingualism Since 1963

**FIGURE 6** IN FAVOUR OF BILINGUALISM FOR ALL OF CANADA

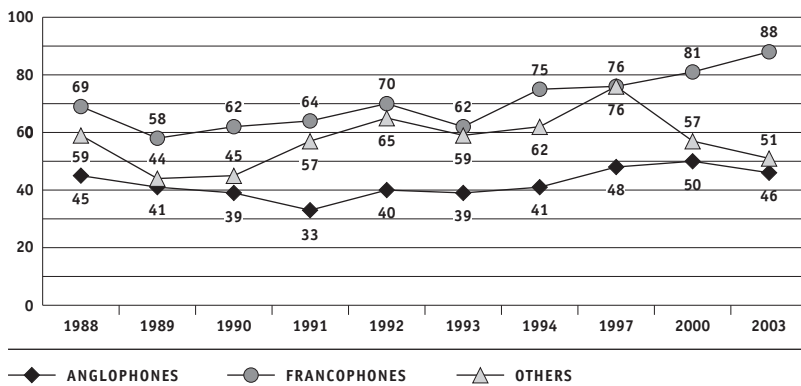
Are you, personally, in favour of bilingualism for all of Canada?  
(Figure shows percent saying they are in favour.)



Source: Environics Focus Canada / Canadian Opinion Research Archive, Queen's University

**FIGURE 7** IN FAVOUR OF BILINGUALISM FOR YOUR PROVINCE

Are you in favour of bilingualism for your province?  
(Figure shows percent saying they are in favour.)



Source: Environics Focus Canada / Canadian Opinion Research Archive, Queen's University

The same trend is clear when Canadians are asked about bilingualism in relation to their own province. While support among English-speaking Canadians in provinces outside Quebec has been relatively low, it has not declined over the long term. In 2003, 46% of English-speaking Canadians favoured bilingualism for their own province, a level that is higher than that obtained in the late 1980s and the early 1990s (see Figure 7). However, it is also notable that the gap between Francophones and Anglophones on this question is quite large.

The data reviewed so far have shown that while support for bilingualism fluctuates from year to year, over the long term it has been stable. In no instances is support significantly lower today than when surveys on the subject began two decades or more ago, and in some cases, it is marginally higher. Thus, far from eroding, support for bilingualism has been surprisingly resilient – and this despite political crises that tended to put the two official-language communities in opposing camps.

There is, however, one area where surveys suggest there has been a dramatic change in views: French language education outside Quebec. Unfortunately, no organization has tracked the same question over time, and so we must base conclusions on an imperfect comparison of somewhat different questions (the earlier questions, for instance, make more specific reference to funding). Nonetheless, the figures in Table 2 clearly show that forty years ago, Canadians outside Quebec were heavily opposed to public funding for French language schools in their provinces, whereas today, they are heavily in favour. This is a dramatic shift in public opinion. It is tempting to credit some of this turnaround to a greater awareness of minority rights (including minority language rights) resulting from the adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. However, the level of support shown in the 1977 survey suggests that the change in opinion occurred earlier, possibly in the wake of the work of the Royal Commission and the subsequent adoption of the Official Languages Act.

## Part 1: The Evolution of Public Opinion on Bilingualism Since 1963

Finally, it is worth considering the interest Canadians show in learning to speak the other official language. In this case, we are talking about support for bilingualism as the individual capacity to speak more than one language, and not bilingualism as a government policy, or linguistic duality as a characteristic of Canadian society as a whole. At the time the Royal Commission's investigations were underway, there was considerable openness among English-speaking Canadians to learning French. Roughly seven in ten agreed that "it would be a good thing if everyone in Canada spoke both French and English," and that "English speaking children should learn French in primary school" (see Table 3). Subsequent polling, however, appears to show that interest in learning French has waned over time. In 1981, for instance, only 56% of Anglophones agreed that it is important to be able to speak both of Canada's official languages; similarly, in March 2003 only 55% of Anglophones outside Quebec agreed that "it is important that children in my province learn to speak French."

The lower levels of agreement with these statements, however, may have more to do with the wording of the specific question than with changes in opinion over time. Questions that ask whether learning French is important, rather than whether it would be a "good thing," might inevitably attract less support among Anglophones. This interpretation seems likely, given the lack of change over time in the answers to another question asking simply whether respondents wished they could speak French. As Table 3 shows, in 2003, among those living outside Quebec, the number agreeing that they wished they spoke French was not only very high, but is unchanged since 1977. The most likely scenario, then, is that support for learning French has remained stable over time, although the actual level of support varies considerably, depending on the precise nature of the questions asked. In the absence of better tracking of the different survey questions over time, however, this conclusion must remain somewhat tentative.

**TABLE 2 SUPPORT FOR FRENCH LANGUAGE EDUCATION (OUTSIDE QUEBEC)**

Question (Abbreviated)	Survey Details	Sub-Sample	% in Support
Support Funding for French Catholic Schools Outside Quebec	1965 Social Research Group	English Canadians	14%
Support Funding for French Schools Outside Quebec If Not Catholic	1965 Social Research Group	English Canadians	17%
Support Provinces Providing Opportunities and Facilities for Education in French Wherever Practicable	1977 Southam Press & Goldfarb "A Searching Nation"	Canada outside Quebec	79%
Support Right to French Language Education Outside Quebec	1987 Charter Study	Canada outside Quebec	76%
Support Right to French Language Education Outside Quebec	2002 CRIC	Canada outside Quebec	81%
Support Right to French Language Education Outside Quebec Where Numbers Make Costs Reasonable	2002 CRIC	Canada outside Quebec	91%

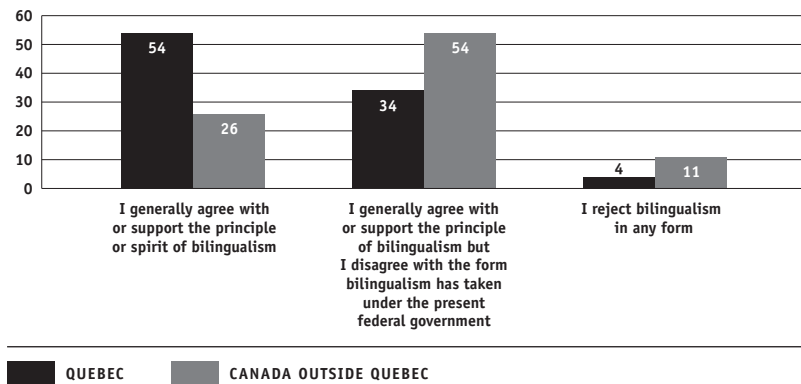
**TABLE 3 LEARNING FRENCH**

Question	Survey Details	Sub-Sample	%
Do you think it would be a good thing if everyone in Canada spoke both French and English?	1965 Social Research Group	English Canadians	69% (Yes)
Do you think that in Canada, English speaking children should learn French in primary school?	1965 Social Research Group	English Canadians	73% (Yes)
Agree or disagree that "You wish you could speak French."	1977 Southam Press & Goldfarb "A Searching Nation"	Canada outside Quebec	74% (Agree)
Would you say it is important or not important to be able to speak both of Canada's official languages?	1981 Enviroics Focus Canada / Canadian Opinion Research Archive, Queen's University	Anglophones	56% (Important)
Would you say it is important or not important to be able to speak both of Canada's official languages?	1985 Enviroics Focus Canada / Canadian Opinion Research Archive, Queen's University	Anglophones	62% (Important)
Agree or disagree that "It is important that children in my province learn to speak French."	March 2003 CRIC	Anglophones outside Quebec	55% (Agree)
Agree or disagree that "You wish you could speak French."	December 2003 CRIC	Anglophones outside Quebec, who did not say they already speak French	75% (Agree)

## Part 1: The Evolution of Public Opinion on Bilingualism Since 1963

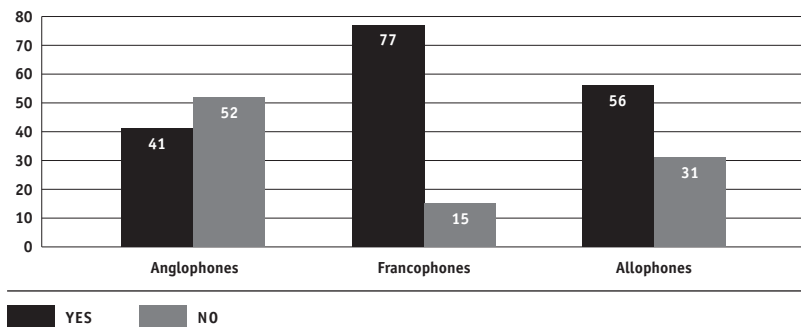
**FIGURE 8 BILINGUALISM AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (1977)**

Which of the following statements comes closest to expressing the way you personally feel?



Source: Southam Press & Goldfarb, "A Searching Nation", 1977

**FIGURE 9 SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA ACTIVELY SUPPORT BILINGUALISM? (1988)**



Source: Environics Focus Canada / Canadian Opinion Research Archive, 1988.

### DIVISIONS OVER THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN PROMOTING BILINGUALISM

Anglophones and Francophones agree on certain aspects of official languages policy, such as whether the federal government should provide services in both English and French. But they do not see eye to eye on how active the federal government should be in promoting bilingualism. In contrast to Francophones, Anglophones, in general, have resisted putting more government effort and resources into promoting bilingualism. This means that while there may be cross-community support for the principle of bilingualism, there has not been a shared understanding of how the policy should be implemented and, especially, on how much effort the federal government should invest in its application.

For example, in 1977, more than half of Canadians outside Quebec (54%) agreed generally with the principle of bilingualism but said they disagreed with the form bilingualism had taken under the then federal government. In contrast, only 34% of Quebecers held this view. A majority of Quebecers (54%) gave unequivocal support to the principle of bilingualism, compared with only 26% of those outside the province. What is revealing, however, is that only 11% of those outside Quebec said they disagreed with bilingualism in any form (see Figure 8). Opposition seems to be directed to the actions of the federal government, rather than to bilingualism itself. As will be argued below, this distinction is key to understanding public opinion on the issue.

The same division of opinion is evident on a variety of questions asked in the past 25 years. In 1988, for instance, a majority of Francophones agreed that the Government of Canada should actively promote bilingualism, while a majority of Anglophones disagreed (see Figure 9). Throughout this period, a plurality of Anglophones felt that too much was being done to promote bilingualism, while a majority of Francophones took the opposite view (see Table 4). In 1977, 41% of Anglophones felt that too much effort was put into promoting bilingualism in Canada, while only 27% said that more should be done.

## Part 1: The Evolution of Public Opinion on Bilingualism Since 1963

Three years later, close to half (49%) believed that the federal government was spending too much on the development of bilingualism in Canada, while only 12% thought it was not spending enough. By the end of the 1980s, there had been little change in views, with a plurality of Anglophones saying that too much was being done to promote French or to protect the language rights of French-speaking people outside Quebec. The pattern remained the same in 2000, with 58% outside Quebec saying that we have gone too far in pushing bilingualism – a view shared by only 22% of Quebecers (see Table 5).

### SUMMARY

So far, our review shows that the principle of bilingualism appears to be as relevant to Canadians today as it was a generation ago. While public support fluctuates in response to political events and economic shifts, over the long term, public support for bilingualism has remained stable, at the very least. In fact, we will see below that younger Canadians are more likely to support bilingualism than their older counterparts, providing some additional evidence that the concept has not lost its currency. It is important to note, however, that support for bilingualism varies tremendously according to the precise wording of the question asked – a point that will be discussed in more detail in Part 2.

Equally enduring, however, has been the sense among Anglophones that the federal government is spending too much time and money on the promotion of bilingualism. Thus there is a difference between the healthy level of commitment among Anglophones to bilingualism as a principle or policy, and reduced enthusiasm for the idea that governments should do more to advance the policy in practice. It is perhaps no surprise that the Anglophone majority in Canada attaches less urgency to language policy than does the Francophone minority. But, as we have seen, the low numbers calling for more government spending or action is not the same as opposition to bilingualism itself. Only one in ten Canadians outside Quebec say they reject bilingualism in any form. It is also

to be expected that the more bilingualism is perceived as affecting the personal lives of English-speaking Canadians – in terms, for example, of diverting tax dollars away from items of higher priority, or of possible fears about reduced employment opportunities among those who do not speak French – the more resistance it encounters. The flip side of this, as we will see in Part 2, is that the more the real intent of the policy is specified, the greater degree of public support it attracts.

**TABLE 4 BILINGUALISM: TOO MUCH OR NOT ENOUGH?**

Sub-Sample: Anglophones only				
Year	Question (abbreviated)	Too Much/ Less Effort	Enough/ Same as Now	Not Enough/ More Effort
1977	How much effort should be put into promoting bilingualism in Canada?	41	27	27
1980	In your opinion, does the federal government spend too much, not enough or just about the right amount for...Development of bilingualism?	49	29	12
1981	How much effort should be put into promoting bilingualism in Canada?	50	29	19
1986	Do you feel enough has been done to promote French?	34	37	24
1989	Do you feel enough has been done to promote French?	40	32	24
1990	...to protect the language rights of French-speaking people outside Quebec?	41	30	20

Source: Surveys cited by George Perlin in "Anglophone Attitudes Towards Bilingualism," in *Towards Reconciliation: The Language Issue in Canada in the 1990s*, ed. by D. Bonin (Kingston: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1992); except for 1980: Environics Focus Canada / Canadian Opinion Research Archive, Queen's University.

**TABLE 5 BILINGUALISM: HAVE WE GONE TOO FAR?**

Do you agree or disagree that "We have gone too far in pushing bilingualism?"

Region	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	DK (%)
Canada	47	46	7
Atlantic	50	40	9
Quebec	22	70	8
Ontario	55	39	6
Prairies	65	28	7
BC	63	33	5

Source: Canadian National Election Study, 2000

# Part 2: Public Support for Bilingualism – The Current Reality

**TABLE 6** LEVELS OF SUPPORT FOR BILINGUALISM – RESULTS FROM DIFFERENT SURVEYS

Survey	Question	Sub-Sample	Result
CRIC, 2001	Canada currently has two official languages – English and French. This means that all citizens can get services from the federal government in the official language that they speak. Do you strongly support, moderately support, moderately oppose or strongly opposed this policy?	Canada outside Quebec	<b>78%</b> strongly or moderately support
CRIC, 2002	Do you think French Canadians living outside of Quebec should or should not have the right to have federal government services available in French?	Canada outside Quebec	<b>76%</b> should
Canadian National Election Study, 2000	Do you agree or disagree that “Federal services should be provided in only one language: French in Quebec, English in the rest of Canada?”	Canada outside Quebec	<b>72%</b> disagree
CRIC, 2002	How important is preserving French and English as the two official languages of Canada?	Canada outside Quebec	<b>70%</b> say it is very or somewhat important
Environics Focus Canada, 2003	How important are the following to the Canadian identity... <i>Bilingualism</i> ?	Anglophones	<b>68%</b> say it is very or somewhat important
CRIC, December 2003	I am going to read you a series of statements. For each of the following please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree... Living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian.	Canada outside Quebec	<b>63%</b> strongly or somewhat agree
CRIC, 2001	Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree that [name of province] should be officially bilingual, meaning that all citizens can get services from the provincial government in either English or French?	Canada outside Quebec	<b>61%</b> strongly agree or agree
Environics Focus Canada, 2003	Are you in favour of bilingualism for your province?	Anglophones	<b>46%</b> say yes
Environics Focus Canada, 2003	Are you, personally, in favour of bilingualism for all of Canada?	Anglophones	<b>46%</b> say yes
CRIC-Globe and Mail Survey on the New Canada, 2003	I will read you a list of things and events that some people say make them proud to be Canadian. I would like you to tell me whether each of these makes you proud to be a Canadian. Please use a scale of 0-10, where 0 means it does not make you proud at all, and 10 means it makes you feel very proud... <i>Having two official languages, English and French?</i>	Anglophones	<b>35%</b> are very proud (score of 8, 9 or 10) <b>55%</b> are proud (score of 6 to 10)

## BILINGUALISM, THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES POLICY AND MINORITY LANGUAGE RIGHTS

Public support in Canada for having two official languages continues to be strong. A 2002 CRIC survey found, for instance, that 77% of Canadians (including 70% of residents outside Quebec, and 98% of Quebecers) said it was important to preserve English and French as the two official languages, compared with 23% (including 30% of those outside Quebec, and 2% of Quebecers) who said it was not important (see Figure 3, page 6).

The level of support for bilingualism, however, depends very much on how the policy is defined – or, indeed, whether it is defined at all. Statements that outline what exactly official bilingualism means, in practice, tend to attract higher levels of support than statements that are more vague. This is illustrated in Table 6. More than three out of four Anglophones support Canada having two official languages – English and French – when this is defined as meaning that “all citizens can get services from the federal government in the official language that they speak.” However, only 46% of Anglophones are in favour of “bilingualism for all of Canada,” a shorter statement that opens the door for very broad interpretations of what such a policy might entail. Similarly, 61% of Anglophones are in favour of their province being officially bilingual when it is specified that this would mean that all citizens could get services from the provincial government in either English or French. However, only 46% are in favour of the more bluntly worded proposition of “bilingualism for your province.”

While delivery of government services in two official languages attracts broad public support, the protections provided to minority language education rights are even more popular. In 2002, CRIC polling found that no fewer than 81% of Canadians outside of Quebec agreed that French-speaking families living in their province should have the right to have their children educated in French. When given an assurance that the number of French-speaking children would be large enough that this education could be provided at a reasonable cost, the number in agreement rose to 91% (see Table 2, page 9).

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The high levels of support for minority language education rights and for the right to government services in either official language suggest that the popularity of “bilingualism” rises to the extent that it is associated in the public’s mind with respecting the country’s diversity and protecting linguistic minorities.

Indeed, backing for bilingualism is higher among those who are supportive of the country’s overall cultural diversity. For example, CRIC’s 2002 survey on the Charter of Rights found that those who approved of the Charter clause upholding the preservation and enhancement of Canada’s multicultural heritage are more likely to say it is important to preserve English and French as its official languages. Similarly, those who say the Charter is a good thing for Canada are more likely to support the two official languages policy.

Even more telling is the fact that in December 2003, 70% of Canadians agreed that having two official languages has made Canada a more welcoming place for immigrants from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds, compared with 28% who disagreed. Agreement among Anglophones outside Quebec stood at 63%; among Anglophones outside Quebec aged 18 to 29, it stood at 72%.

In the public’s mind, therefore, bilingualism and multiculturalism are mutually reinforcing concepts. This is important, for it shows that increased awareness of the country’s multicultural character does not lead to a sense that bilingualism is less relevant. This is a point we will return to below when we discuss the views of Allophones and immigrants to Canada.

Given the linkage between support for bilingualism and support for the country’s wider cultural diversity, and given the extent to which this diversity is valued by Canadians,<sup>1</sup> it is not surprising to find that bilingualism remains an important part of Canadians’ identity. In 2003, according to Environics Focus

Canada, 88% of Francophones and 68% of Anglophones said that bilingualism is important to the Canadian identity. Similarly, in CRIC’s December 2003 survey, 73% of Francophones, 66% of Anglophones and 56% of Allophones agreed that “living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian.” And in the 2003 CRIC-Globe and Mail survey on the new Canada, 75% of Francophones, 55% of Anglophones and 65% of Allophones said that “having two official languages, English and French” made them proud to be Canadian.<sup>2</sup>

While a majority of Anglophones say that bilingualism is important to their identity as Canadians, one note of caution should be sounded – other aspects of the country’s cultural diversity are more highly valued than bilingualism. Multiculturalism, for instance, is said by 86% of the country’s Anglophones to be important to the Canadian identity – 18 points higher than the figure for bilingualism. In the case of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the figure is 94%. If we consider only the number saying these items are very (as opposed to only somewhat) important, the difference is even more stark: 72% for the Charter; 47% for multiculturalism; and 31% for bilingualism.

The same pattern is revealed in the 2003 CRIC-Globe and Mail survey on the new Canada. Forty-one percent of Canadians said that “having two official languages, English and French” made them very proud to be Canadian, compared with 63% who said the same for the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and 54% for multiculturalism. Moreover, 21% say that two official languages make them not at all proud (the comparable figure for multiculturalism is 8%, and for the Charter, 6%) (see Table 7). This suggests that bilingualism is not only a less important source of pride (especially for Anglophones outside of Quebec), but also a somewhat more polarizing issue than multiculturalism and other dimensions of diversity.

1 Andrew Parkin and Matthew Mendelsohn, “A New Canada: An Identity Shaped by Diversity,” CRIC Paper No. 11 (Montreal: CRIC, 2003). Available online at [www.cric.ca](http://www.cric.ca).

2 Respondents were asked to use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means they do not feel proud at all, and 10 means they feel very proud. These figures refer to the percentage given a score of 6 or higher – that is, any score above the half-way mark of the scale. Figures in Table 7, below, are calculated differently.

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**TABLE 7** PROUD TO BE CANADIAN

I will read you a list of things and events that some people say make them proud to be Canadian. I would like you to tell me whether each of these makes you feel proud to be a Canadian. Please use a scale of 0-10, where 0 means it does not make you feel proud at all, and 10 means it makes you feel very proud. You can use any number between 0 and 10. How about...?

		Very Proud (8, 9, 10)	Neutral (3 to 7)	Not At All Proud (0, 1, 2)
The Charter of Rights and Freedoms	<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>6</b>
	Anglophones outside Quebec	61	32	7
	Anglophones outside Quebec, 18-30 years	70	28	3
Multiculturalism	<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>8</b>
	Anglophones outside Quebec	55	35	9
	Anglophones outside Quebec, 18-30 years	70	27	3
Having two official languages, English and French	<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>21</b>
	Anglophones outside Quebec	34	39	27
	Anglophones outside Quebec, 18-30 years	42	42	16

**TABLE 8** SUPPORT FOR OFFICIAL BILINGUALISM AMONG ANGLOPHONES, BY REGION (OUTSIDE QUEBEC), AGE AND GENDER

Canada currently has two official languages – English and French. This means that all citizens can get services from the federal government in the official language that they speak. Do you strongly support, moderately support, moderately oppose or strongly opposed this policy?

Sub-Sample: Anglophones outside Quebec	Atlantic		Ontario		West	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
18-34 years	88	92	79	93	85	87
35-54 years	83	88	71	79	62	74
55 years plus	73	88	78	78	49	75

Note: Average for all Anglophones outside Quebec = 77%  
Source: Portraits 2001

### DEMOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS: REGION, AGE AND GENDER

As mentioned, there are significant regional differences in attitudes. Of course, Quebec, as the country's only majority Francophone province, consistently stands out as more supportive of bilingualism than the rest of Canada. But among majority English-speaking regions, there is often a sizeable variation in opinion. Atlantic Canadians are the most supportive of bilingualism, westerners are the least, and Ontarians are somewhere in the middle. This pattern is clearly shown in Tables 8 and 9. It is important to note, however, that this does not mean that westerners are necessarily opposed to bilingualism. The number of western Canadians agreeing that it is very or somewhat important to preserve French and English as the two official languages of Canada, for instance, is well over 60%.

Secondly, age is an important factor. Those in the younger age groups are more likely to say that preserving French and English as the two official languages of Canada is important, that having two official languages makes them very proud to be Canadian, and that they support official bilingualism defined as the delivery of federal government services in both languages (see Table 9). Finally, gender is important, with women being more supportive of bilingualism than men.

What is perhaps most important for understanding the politics surrounding official bilingualism is that these three factors – region, age and gender – intersect in a revealing way. Further analysis shows that age and gender differences are not of the same magnitude in all regions of the country (still focussing, for the purposes of this discussion, on Anglophones outside Quebec). As shown in Table 8, on the question of support for official bilingualism, age and gender differences are very small in Atlantic Canada, only moderately greater in Ontario, but much more pronounced in the West. What this means, more precisely, is that while young people in the West (of both genders), and women in the West (of all age groups), look very much like their counterparts in the rest of the country, older men in the West do not. This allows us to modify the three general-

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izations we made above. It turns out that it is not the case that support for bilingualism is lower among all westerners, all older age groups, and all men. Rather, it is older men in the West who are significantly less supportive of official bilingualism, and this is in fact the only one of the sub-groups under discussion here whose support is greatly below average on this question.

The situation is less clear-cut in the case of other bilingualism-related issues. For instance, on the question of whether it is important to preserve French and English as Canada's two official languages, or of whether having two official languages makes you feel proud to be Canadian, there are important age and gender differences in Atlantic Canada and Ontario – not only in the West. Nevertheless, in these cases, men in the West and westerners from the older age groups are clearly the least supportive of bilingualism. For instance, only among men in the older age group (that is, age 55 years or more) in the West, does a majority take the view that the preservation of French and English as Canada's two official languages is not important. Similarly, men in the West, and westerners aged 55 and over, are the most likely sub-groups to say that having two official languages makes them feel not at all proud to be Canadian.

It is one thing to identify this pattern, but quite another to explain it. A variety of factors relating to the history and political culture of the region could lie behind the distinctive views of western Canadians, and of men and older residents in the region in particular. One possibility is that the often critical views that these individuals tend to have of government in general, and of the federal government in particular, colour their perception of official languages policy. The prevalence of views associated with "western alienation" is well-known, and the greater scepticism within the region to the view that governments can have a positive impact on people's lives has also been documented.<sup>3</sup> It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that bilingualism attracts some opposition not because of lesser support for Canada's linguistic duality, but because of greater frustration with government policies emanating from Ottawa. This would apply particularly to policies

**TABLE 9** SUPPORT FOR TWO OFFICIAL LANGUAGES, BY AGE, GENDER AND REGION

How important is preserving French and English as the two official languages of Canada - is it very important, somewhat important, or not important? (Source: CRIC, 2002)

Sub-Sample: Canadians outside Quebec	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
18-34 years	40	37	23
35-54 years	32	35	33
55 years plus	27	37	36
Men	31	36	34
Women	37	36	26
Atlantic	42	34	24
Ontario	39	33	27
West	24	41	35

I will read you a list of things and events that some people say make them proud to be Canadian. I would like you to tell me whether each of these makes you feel proud to be a Canadian. Please use a scale of 0-10, where 0 means it does not make you feel proud at all, and 10 means it makes you feel very proud. You can use any number between 0 and 10. How about... Having two official languages, English and French?

(Source: CRIC-Globe and Mail Survey on the New Canada, 2003)

Sub-Sample: Anglophones outside Quebec	Very Proud (8, 9, 10)	Neutral (3 to 7)	Not At All Proud (0, 1, 2)
18-30 years	43	44	14
31 years plus	32	45	24
Men	29	45	26
Women	42	44	14
Atlantic	58	33	10
Ontario	44	42	15
West	37	44	19

Canada currently has two official languages – English and French. This means that all citizens can get services from the federal government in the official language that they speak. Do you strongly support, moderately support, moderately oppose or strongly oppose this policy?

Sub-Sample: Anglophones outside Quebec	Support	Oppose
18-34 years	87	14
35 years plus	73	27
Men	72	27
Women	82	18
Atlantic	86	14
Ontario	79	20
West	73	26

<sup>3</sup> For further details on these attitudes, see "Portraits of Canada 2002," CRIC Paper No. 8 (Montreal: CRIC, 2003). Available online at [www.cric.ca](http://www.cric.ca).

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that are perceived as responding to the needs of other regions – notably Quebec – rather than those of the West. Indeed, there is some circumstantial evidence for this. As shown in Figure 10, those westerners who express frustration with the working of the federation are less likely to support official bilingualism than are those who are not.

### LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE

While most Canadians support official bilingualism, a majority is also supportive of bilingualism on a personal level, in the sense of expressing a desire to be able to speak both official languages. At the same time, it must be noted that the two official languages are not the only ones that attract the interest of Canadians, as many focus on the importance of learning to speak languages other than English and French.

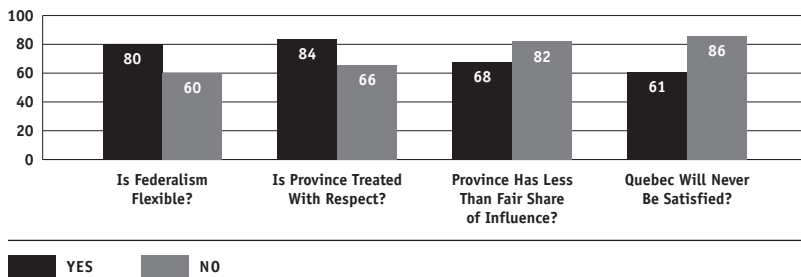
CRIC's December 2003 survey on official languages found that no less than 77% of Anglophones outside Quebec said that it is important for their children to learn to speak a language other than English; in Quebec, fully 98% of Francophones said it is important for their children to learn to speak a language other than French (see Figure 12, page 21).<sup>4</sup>

The importance attached to learning a second language is further demonstrated by the following findings from the same study (see Table 10):

- 88% of Canadians agree that “in today’s global economy, people with an ability to speak more than one language will be more successful”;
- 85% of Canadians agree that “learning a second language is one of the more fulfilling things that you can do for yourself as a person”;
- 47% of Anglophones outside Quebec agree that “in Canada, English is the only language you need to know in order to be successful,” while 53% disagree.
- Only 23% of Canadians agree that “learning a second language is one of the least important subjects for students to study in school,” while 77% disagree.

**FIGURE 10** BILINGUALISM AND “WESTERN ALIENATION”  
LEVELS OF SUPPORT FOR OFFICIAL BILINGUALISM  
ACCORDING TO VIEWS ON FEDERALISM.  
RESPONDENTS IN SASKATCHEWAN, ALBERTA AND BC ONLY.

How to read this graph: the figures show the percentage of each group of respondents who are in favour of bilingualism. Respondents are divided according to their answers to other questions about federalism in Canada.



Question used to measure support of bilingualism: Canada currently has two official languages – English and French. This means that all citizens can get services from the federal government in the official language that they speak. Do you strongly support, moderately support, moderately oppose or strongly oppose this policy?

This explanation is imperfect. Atlantic Canadians are equally frustrated with the working of the federation, but are much more supportive of bilingualism than westerners. And women in western Canada are as disenchanted with government as men, but are more supportive of official languages policy. Nonetheless, there are grounds to suggest, as mentioned briefly above, that the greater degree of opposition to bilingualism found among some groups of Canadians can be explained by their heightened suspicion of federal government initiatives generally.

<sup>4</sup> Respondents who did not have children living at home were asked about “children in your community” rather than “your children.”

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It is clear, then, that Canadians attach considerable importance to the ability to speak more than one language. Given that 87% of Anglophones outside Quebec are unilingual, according to the last census, the finding that only 43% agree that English is the only language needed to succeed in Canada is especially revealing. In fact, the CRIC survey shows that even 51% of unilingual Anglophones outside Quebec disagree with the notion that English is the only language needed, again testifying to the degree to which the ability to speak more than one language is valued.

When thinking about which second language to learn, most Canadians look to the other official language. Most Anglophones express interest in learning French, while most Francophones express interest in learning English. Thus, when asked “if your children were to learn to speak another language, which language other than English would it be most important for them to learn?”, 74% of Anglophones outside Quebec say French. When asked about learning a language other than French, 93% of Quebec Francophones say that it should be English (see Figure 13, page 22). If we look only at respondents who have indicated that it is important that their children learn to speak a second language, the results are the same: within this group, 76% of Anglophones outside Quebec say their children should learn French, while 93% of Francophones in Quebec select English.

Asking two questions – one about the importance attached to learning French, and a prior question about the importance of learning any second language at all – provides valuable clarification. An earlier CRIC survey, conducted in March 2003, found that only 55% of Anglophones outside Quebec say that it is important for children in their province to learn to speak French, while 44% disagreed. At first glance, this appears to contradict the December 2003 finding that almost three-quarters of Anglophones outside Quebec think, that if their children were to learn to speak a second language, then that language should be French. The key point is that, as the December 2003 survey shows, almost one-quarter of Anglophones outside Quebec do not think it is important for their children to learn any second language at all.

**TABLE 10** ATTITUDES TOWARD LANGUAGE AND BILINGUALISM

I am going to read you a series of statements. For each of the following please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. (The figures show the % who strongly or somewhat agree)

	Total	Anglophones outside Quebec	Francophones in Quebec	Allophones (all of Canada)
In today's global economy, people with an ability to speak more than one language will be more successful.	88	88	87	94
Learning a second language is one of the more fulfilling things that you can do for yourself as a person.	85	82	95	86
In Canada, if you speak French as well as English, you have a better chance of finding a good job.	82	77	97	77
Having two official languages has made Canada a more welcoming place for immigrants from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds.	70	63	86	76
Learning to speak French is an important way in which Canadians can help to keep the country united.	n.a.	65	n.a.	n.a.
Living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian.	66	64	73	56
In Canada, English is the only language you need to know in order to be successful.	n.a.	47	n.a.	n.a.
It is more important for children in Canada to learn to speak other languages like Spanish or Chinese than it is for them to learn to speak French.	n.a.	35	n.a.	n.a.
Learning a second language is one of the LEAST important subjects for students to study in school.	23	25	15	33

Source: CRIC Survey on Official Languages, December 2003

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If we set this group of respondents aside, we find that three quarters of the remaining respondents (that is, three quarters of those who say learning any second language is important) pick French as the most important language for their children to learn. As shown in Table 11, this actually represents 57% of the total original group of respondents, which is same as the figure found in the March 2003 survey. Furthermore, the 44% of Anglophones outside Quebec who, in March 2003, disagreed that it is important for their children to learn to speak French, is actually composed of two smaller groups – those who do not think it is important for their children to speak any second language at all, and those who think their children should learn a second language other than French.

The clear implication is that the reluctance among some Anglophones to attach importance to learning French is not due entirely to the sense that it is more important to learn some other language. It also stems from the view among roughly one in four that knowledge of English is sufficient.

The importance attached by the majority to learning the other official language is also made clear in the responses to two further questions CRIC asked in December 2003. The first asked respondents to agree or disagree that they wished they could speak French, or, in the case of Quebec Francophones, that they wished they could speak English. Of course, a number of respondents said they already spoke the second language in question. But the majority of those who did not, said they wished they did (see Figure 11). In Quebec, among Francophones, this figure reached 95%. Among Anglophones outside Quebec, who did not already speak French, 75% said they wish they did. Moreover, as mentioned in Part 1, this figure is roughly the same as that found in a survey conducted more than twenty-five years ago – in the wake of the election of the first PQ government in Quebec and heightened concern about the relationship between English- and French-speaking Canada. This means that the diminished threat of Quebec separation, coupled with the country's growing multiculturalism, have not resulted in a reduced appetite among the country's Anglophones to speak the other official language.

The second question of interest is one that asked respondents to agree or disagree that "it is more important for children in Canada to learn to speak other languages like Spanish or Chinese than it is for them to learn to speak French." This question taps into one criticism of the Government's action plan on bilingualism, namely that a renewed emphasis on English-French bilingualism is misplaced, given that Canada is becoming ever more multicultural and growing numbers speak languages other than English and French.

**TABLE 11 THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING FRENCH: COMPARING RESULTS OF TWO DIFFERENT SURVEY METHODS**

Sub-Sample: Anglophones Outside of Quebec			
CRIC Survey December 2003		CRIC Survey March 2003	
Two questions: A) How important is it to you that [your children/children in your community] learn to speak a language other than English? Is it very, somewhat, not very or not at all important? B) If [your children/children in your community] were to learn to speak another language, which language other than English would it be most important for them to learn?		One question: Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements? It is important that children in my province learn to speak French.	
Important that children learn to speak a language other than English + the most important language other than English to learn is French.	57%*	Agree that it is important that children in my province learn to speak French	55%
Important that children learn to speak a language other than English + the most important language other than English to learn is a language other than French.	18%*	Disagree that it is important that children in my province learn to speak French	44%
Not important that children learn to speak a language other than English.	23%		

\* Explanatory note: of the 77% of respondents who think it is important that their children learn to speak a language other than English, 74% (or 57% of the total sample) say it is most important for them to learn French, and 23% (or 18% of the total sample) say it is most important for them to learn a language other than French.

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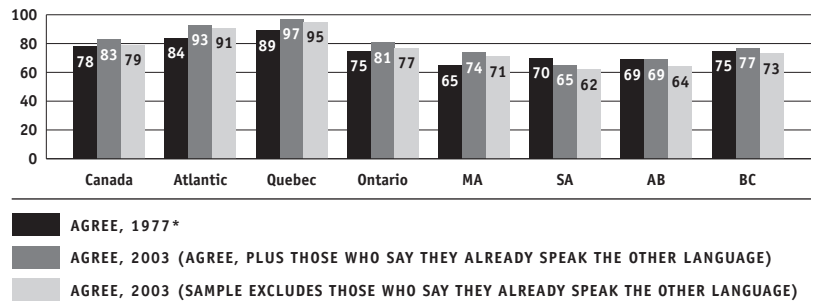
The survey shows, however, that only 35% of Anglophones outside Quebec agree that it is more important for children in Canada to learn other languages like Spanish or Chinese than it is for them to learn to speak French. Sixty-three percent disagree. (There are, however, important regional variations in responses that will be considered below). While languages other than French and English are clearly important to many, French is the most important second language for a majority of non-Francophone Canadians.

It is not surprising to find that those who speak a language other than English or French at home, or those who have moved to Canada from another country, are keenly aware of the importance of learning a second language. Thus 95% of Allophones<sup>5</sup> say it is important for their children to learn a language other than English<sup>6</sup>, as do 87% of immigrants. Similarly, 94% of Allophones and 92% of immigrants say that in today's global economy, people with an ability to speak more than one language will be more successful.

As mentioned, some have argued that, as Canada becomes more and more multicultural, the relevance of English-French bilingualism will decline. Instead of looking to French as a second language, Canadians in growing numbers – whether they are immigrants interested in retaining their first language, or Canadian-born Anglophones interested in learning the languages of their neighbours – will look to other languages such as Spanish or Chinese. As globalization takes root, and the economic and cultural horizons of Canadians expand beyond the borders of North America, the incentive to learn languages other than English and French will become even stronger.

**FIGURE 11 I WISH I COULD SPEAK FRENCH / ENGLISH**

I am going to read you a series of statements. For each of the following please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.  
*You wish you could speak French [in Quebec: English].*



\* Source for 1977: Southam Press & Goldfarb, "A Searching Nation". Note that the results for 1977 do not take into account whether or not respondents said they already spoke French or English. Source for 2003: CRIC Survey on Official Languages, December 2003. Results for Quebec are for Francophones only. Results for regions and provinces outside Quebec are for Anglophones only. Results for all of Canada are for all respondents.

Our analysis shows little evidence of this. In fact, the evidence from the most recent CRIC survey shows that while languages other than French and English are clearly important to many Canadians, French is definitely in no danger of being eclipsed as the most prominent second language in the country.

It is clear that Allophones and immigrants are more likely to pick a language other than French or English as the most important second language for their children to learn. Three-quarters (74%) of Anglophones outside Quebec look to French as the most important second language, and 93% of Quebec Francophones look to English. Only 57% of the country's Allophones look to either English or French. Similarly, 80% of those born in Canada say it is most important for their children to learn to speak either English or French as a second language, compared with 70% in the case of those born outside the country.

<sup>5</sup> The sample size for Allophones in this survey is small (82), and so these results should be treated with considerable caution. The same size for immigrants is much larger (297).

<sup>6</sup> Or French, in the case of Quebec Allophones who were interviewed in French.

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**TABLE 12** VIEWS ON LANGUAGE AND BILINGUALISM, BY RESPONDENT'S PLACE OF BIRTH

Question	Respondents Outside Quebec Only					
	Born in Canada			Immigrants		
	(% agree)			(% agree)		
<b>CRIC, December 2003</b>						
Learning to speak French is an important way in which Canadians can help to keep the country united.	64%			73%		
Living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian.	63%			68%		
Having two official languages has made Canada a more welcoming place for immigrants from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds.	63%			71%		
It is more important for children in Canada to learn to speak other languages like Spanish or Chinese than it is for them to learn to speak French.	34%			43%		
You wish you could speak French.	61%			73%		
In Canada, if you speak French as well as English, you have a better chance of finding a good job.	77%			80%		
<b>CRIC-Globe and Mail Survey on the New Canada, April 2003</b>	<b>Very Proud</b> (8,9,10)	<b>Neutral</b> (3 to 7)	<b>Not At All Proud</b> (0,1,2)	<b>Very Proud</b> (8,9,10)	<b>Neutral</b> (3 to 7)	<b>Not At All Proud</b> (0,1,2)
I will read you a list of things and events that some people say make them proud to be Canadian. I would like you to tell me whether each of these makes you proud to be a Canadian. Please use a scale of 0-10, where 0 means it does not make you proud at all, and 10 means it makes you feel very proud... Having two official languages, English and French?	38%	44%	19%	45%	43%	12%

Immigrants also are more likely to say that it is more important for children in Canada to learn to speak other languages, such as Spanish or Chinese, than it is for them to learn French. Outside of Quebec, 43% of immigrants hold this view, compared with 34% of those born in Canada.

These findings suggest a natural inclination among those with connections to languages other than English or French to pass a knowledge of these languages on to their children. However, this should not be interpreted as evidence of the declining relevance of French in Canada, or of Canada's English-French linguistic duality. As shown in Table 12, in Canada outside Quebec, immigrants are more likely than their Canadian-born counterparts to say that:

- they wish they could speak French;
- living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian;
- in Canada, if you speak French as well as English, you have a better chance of finding a good job;
- learning to speak French is an important way in which Canadians can help to keep the country united;
- having two official languages, English and French, makes them proud to be Canadian.

Perhaps most importantly, immigrants are more likely than those born in Canada to say agree that "having two official languages has made Canada a more welcoming place for immigrants from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds." In Canada as a whole, 75% of immigrants hold this view, compared with 69% of those born in Canada. Among those who immigrated to Canada from a country outside of Europe or the United States, agreement rises to 83%. And 76% of Allophones agree, compared with 64% of Anglophones (but 87% of Francophones). This is a crucial point, for it confirms the relevance of the policy of official bilingualism to new Canadians.

## Part 2: Public Support for Bilingualism – The Current Reality

This is a significant finding of this paper: multiculturalism and bilingualism are viewed by most Canadians as policies that go hand in hand, rather than conflicting with one another. We have seen that a higher interest among some Canadians in learning languages other than English or French can co-exist with support for official bilingualism. It is even likely that those who are interested in retaining or in learning a language other than English or French feel that Canada’s history as a bilingual country has created a favourable context within which linguistic pluralism – and not simply linguistic dualism – can be practiced and accepted.

Turning to what motivates Canadians’ interest in learning a second language, the figures presented in Table 10 (page 17) suggest that two factors are key: the perceived economic benefits, and personal self-improvement. In terms of the economic benefits, 88% of Canadians agree that in today’s global economy, people who speak more than one language will be more successful, and 82% agree that in Canada, if you speak French as well as English, you have a better chance of finding a good job. At the same time, 85% of Canadians agree that learning a second language is one of the more fulfilling things a person can do – suggesting that Canadians’ interest in learning another language is not based solely on an economic calculus.

Other factors, while not quite as important as these, still play a role. Two-thirds of Anglophones outside Quebec say that learning to speak French (or English, in the case of Francophone Quebecers) is an important way in which Canadians can help to keep the country united. Similarly, two-thirds agree that living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian. Thus, an appreciation of Canada’s linguistic duality is partially responsible for Canadians’ interest in learning the other official language.

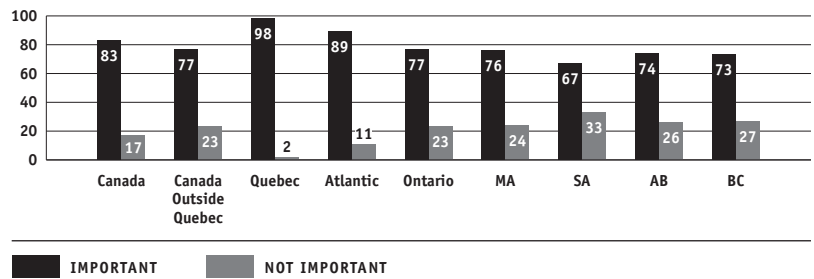
### DEMOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS: REGION, AGE AND GENDER

Differences by region, age and gender again are evident when we consider questions related to the learning of a second language in general, and of French in particular.

The importance attached to learning a second language is strong across the country, but highest in Quebec and lowest in Saskatchewan (see Figure 12). Similarly, while a majority in every region outside Quebec says that the most important second language to learn is French, the number taking this position is much higher in the East than in the West (see Figure 13). The exact same pattern holds for the number saying they wish they could speak French (see Figure 11).

**FIGURE 12** IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE

How important is it to you that [your children/children in your community] learn to speak a language other than English [in Quebec: French]? Is it very, somewhat, not very or not at all important?



Note: Results for Quebec are for Francophones only. Results for regions and provinces outside Quebec are for Anglophones only. Results for all of Canada are for all respondents.

Source: CRIC Survey on Official Languages, December 2003

## Part 2: Public Support for Bilingualism – The Current Reality

There is considerable regional variation in response to several other questions asked by CRIC in 2003 (see Table 13). In particular, on whether learning to speak French is an important way in which Canadians can help to keep the country united, or whether living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian, the results among Atlantic and western Canadians are markedly different.

To a striking extent, Atlantic Canadians consistently stand out as being much more enthusiastic about bilingualism than do people in other regions outside Quebec. While the public opinion survey data cannot pinpoint reasons for this, several factors suggest themselves, including the 400-year history of the Acadian presence in the region, and the influence of New Brunswick as the country's only bilingual province.

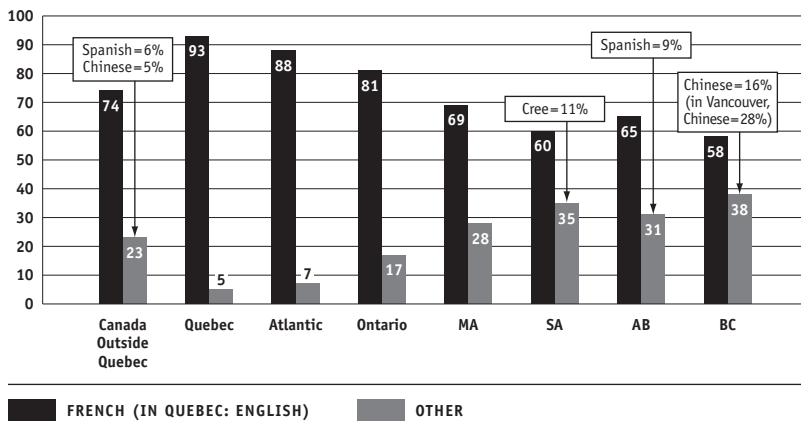
On the opposite coast, British Columbians are also distinctive in their responses, combining a keen appreciation of the value of language skills in general with a higher than average interest in second languages other than French. Among Anglophones outside Quebec, British Columbians are most likely to agree that people with an ability to speak more than one language will be more successful in today's global economy; they are also the least likely to agree that learning a second language is one of the least important subjects for students to learn at school.

At the same time, when asked what language other than English is most important for children to learn, 38% of Anglophones in British Columbia gave a response indicating a language other than French – more than in any other province. In fact, in this province, fully 16% opted for Chinese, and this figure jumps to 28% for respondents in Vancouver. Similarly, at 47%, Anglophones in BC were the most likely to agree that it is more important for children to learn to speak other languages like Spanish or Chinese than it is for them to learn to speak French. It seems reasonable to assume that immigration patterns and the influence of the economy and culture of the Pacific Rim both play a role in shaping these opinions.

This comparison of views on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts illustrates clearly that, while there is cross-country support for bilingualism, different regional realities give rise to distinctive and quite revealing variations of opinion.

**FIGURE 13** WHICH SECOND LANGUAGE?

If [your children/children in your community] were to learn to speak another language, which language other than English [in Quebec: French] would it be most important for them to learn?



Note: Results for Quebec are for Francophones only. Results for regions and provinces outside Quebec are for Anglophones only.

Source: CRIC Survey on Official Languages, December 2003

## Part 2: Public Support for Bilingualism – The Current Reality

There are significant age and gender differences among Anglophones in terms of the importance attached to learning a second language, and particularly French. Young Canadians are somewhat more likely to see the value in learning a second language in general, and French in particular, and women are more likely to hold these views than men.

On whether it is important for children to learn a second language, and whether the most important second language to learn is French, the magnitude of the difference among age groups is very small. There is high support across age groups. Similarly, large majorities in all age groups agree that learning a second language can have economic benefits, can be personally rewarding, and is an important subject to study at school.

There is somewhat greater variation in responses to questions that relate language to statements about Canada (see Table 14). Young people are more likely to agree that learning to speak French is an important way in which Canadians can help to keep the country united, that living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian, and that having two official languages has made Canada a more welcoming place for newcomers. The differences among the age groups are not vast, but the fact that these statements attract highest support among the youngest generation is yet more evidence of the continued relevance of English-French bilingualism in Canada.

It is notable that the differences of opinion between men and women are somewhat larger within the younger generation. This means that, among Anglophones outside Quebec, young men and young women often do not see eye to eye on issues relating to the learning of a second language. For instance, within this group, 64% of women between the ages of 18 and 29 disagree with the suggestion that “in Canada, English is the only language you need to know in order to be successful,” compared with only 50% of men in the same age group. The number of women in this group who say it is important for their children to learn to speak a second language is 87%, 12 points higher than for their male counterparts. And one in

**TABLE 13** VIEWS ON LANGUAGE AND BILINGUALISM, BY REGION

I am going to read you a series of statements. For each of the following please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

	Francophones	Anglophones					
	QUE	ATL	ONT	MA	SK	AB	BC
In today's global economy, people with an ability to speak more than one language will be more successful.	87% Agree	89% Agree	89% Agree	85% Agree	76% Agree	84% Agree	90% Agree
Learning to speak French is an important way in which Canadians can help to keep the country united.	n.a.	85% Agree	68% Agree	57% Agree	54% Agree	57% Agree	59% Agree
Living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian.	73% Agree	78% Agree	67% Agree	56% Agree	51% Agree	54% Agree	58% Agree
Having two official languages has made Canada a more welcoming place for immigrants from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds.	86% Agree	80% Agree	64% Agree	62% Agree	59% Agree	58% Agree	59% Agree
It is more important for children in Canada to learn to speak other languages like Spanish or Chinese than it is for them to learn to speak French.	n.a.	78% Disagree	67% Disagree	69% Disagree	56% Disagree	55% Disagree	50% Disagree
In Canada, English is the only language you need to know in order to be successful.	n.a.	66% Disagree	55% Disagree	52% Disagree	39% Disagree	47% Disagree	47% Disagree
Learning a second language is one of the LEAST important subjects for students to study in school.	84% Disagree	78% Disagree	74% Disagree	73% Disagree	68% Disagree	71% Disagree	80% Disagree
Learning a second language is one of the more fulfilling things that you can do for yourself as a person.	94% Agree	89% Agree	82% Agree	79% Agree	72% Agree	82% Agree	80% Agree
In Canada, if you speak French as well as English, you have better chance of finding a good job.	97% Agree	89% Agree	80% Agree	79% Agree	75% Agree	66% Agree	72% Agree

Source: CRIC Survey on Official Languages, December 2003

## Part 2: Public Support for Bilingualism – The Current Reality

**TABLE 14** VIEWS ON LANGUAGE AND BILINGUALISM, BY AGE GROUP

I am going to read you a series of statements. For each of the following please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

	Sub-Sample: Anglophones outside Quebec			
	18-29	30-44	45-59	60 plus
In today's global economy, people with an ability to speak more than one language will be more successful.	88% Agree	88% Agree	86% Agree	90% Agree
Learning to speak French is an important way in which Canadians can help to keep the country united.	72% Agree	65% Agree	60% Agree	65% Agree
Living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian.	68% Agree	65% Agree	59% Agree	64% Agree
Having two official languages has made Canada a more welcoming place for immigrants from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds.	72% Agree	63% Agree	58% Agree	64% Agree
It is more important for children in Canada to learn to speak other languages like Spanish or Chinese than it is for them to learn to speak French.	65% Disagree	67% Disagree	62% Disagree	59% Disagree
In Canada, English is the only language you need to know in order to be successful.	56% Disagree	52% Disagree	51% Disagree	54% Disagree
Learning a second language is one of the LEAST important subjects for students to study in school.	78% Disagree	77% Disagree	78% Disagree	67% Disagree
Learning a second language is one of the more fulfilling things that you can do for yourself as a person.	81% Agree	80% Agree	81% Agree	86% Agree
In Canada, if you speak French as well as English, you have better chance of finding a good job.	76% Agree	74% Agree	78% Agree	82% Agree

Source: CRIC Survey on Official Languages, December 2003

three men in the same age group who do not already speak French do not express regret – that is, they disagree with the proposition that they wish they spoke French – while only one in five of their female counterparts feel the same.

Again, the factors of region, age and gender tend to combine in interesting ways. As shown in Table 15, men in the West are the least likely to say that it is important for their children to learn a second language, and the most likely to say that English is the only language you need. On the issue of whether it is important for children to learn a second language, there is also a noticeable gender gap among the younger age groups in the West. Sixty-six percent of western men between the ages of 18 and 44 say it is important, compared with 79% of women. There is no comparable gender difference within this age group in either Ontario or Atlantic Canada.

This confirms a startling pattern that was observed earlier in CRIC's March 2003 survey. At that time, respondents were asked simply whether or not they thought it was important that children in their province learn to speak French. The difference in the views of younger men in the West is clearly shown in Figure 14. Within this age group, it is only among men in the West that agreement falls below 50%.

These results serve as a note of caution to those who would make generalizations about the attitudes of an entire region. It is true that, on the whole, westerners seem less interested in learning a second language in general, or French in particular. But within the region, some groups – notably women, and especially younger women – tend to be much more supportive than others.

## Part 2: Public Support for Bilingualism – The Current Reality

### SUMMARY

Public support for bilingualism in terms of having two official languages, or in terms of an interest in speaking both English and French, is solid. Results do vary according to the precise wording of the questions asked, but the overview of a range of survey questions leaves no doubt that bilingualism is important to Canadians in every part of the country, although there are significant regional variations in that support. Bilingualism is important to Canadians of all ages, although the young are the most supportive. It is important to those whose main language is neither English nor French, and to those who have immigrated to Canada. It is more, not less, important to those who value Canada's multicultural character. Even though many express an interest in learning languages other than English or French, French is undeniably the second language of choice for a big majority of non-Francophone Canadians. Inevitably, there are some who view bilingualism with scepticism. One in four do not think it is important for children to learn a second language, one in two say that English is the only language needed to succeed in Canada, and one in three reject the idea that bilingualism is part of what it means to be Canadian. Levels of opposition are even higher among certain groups within the population. On the whole, however, Canadian public opinion is favourable to the official languages policy, and open to the recently announced federal government plan to increase the number of Canadians who can speak both English and French. The challenge is to convert this public goodwill into a real commitment to learn a second language. The magnitude of this challenge should not be underestimated.

**TABLE 15 THE IMPORTANCE OF A SECOND LANGUAGE, BY REGION AND GENDER**

How important is it to you that [your children/children in your community] learn to speak a language other than English? Is it very, somewhat, not very or not at all important?

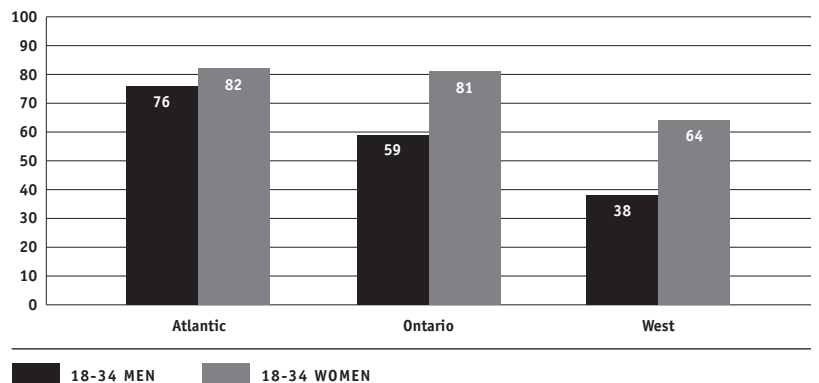
Sub-Sample: Anglophones only						
	Atlantic		Ontario		West	
	Very or Somewhat Important	Not Very or Not At All Important	Very or Somewhat Important	Not Very or Not At All Important	Very or Somewhat Important	Not Very or Not At All Important
Men	87	13	76	24	68	32
Women	90	10	78	21	77	23

I am going to read you a series of statements. For each of the following please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree....  
In Canada, English is the only language you need to know in order to be successful.

	Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Men	44	56	52	48	61	39		
Women	22	76	38	62	46	54		

**FIGURE 14 IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING FRENCH**

Do you agree... "It is important that children in my province learn to speak French?" (% Agree)



Source: CRIC, March 2003

# Conclusion

This study has examined the historical evolution of attitudes to bilingualism since the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was established in 1963.

There are many encouraging findings. These findings, however, also make clear the extent of the gap between Canadians' support for official bilingualism and their desire to learn the other official language, on one hand, and the actual extent of English-French bilingualism, on the other. This is reflected in the number of Anglophones and Francophones who are bilingual, and the much larger number who say that they wish they could speak both official languages, or who say English or French is the most important second language for their children to learn (see Figure 15).

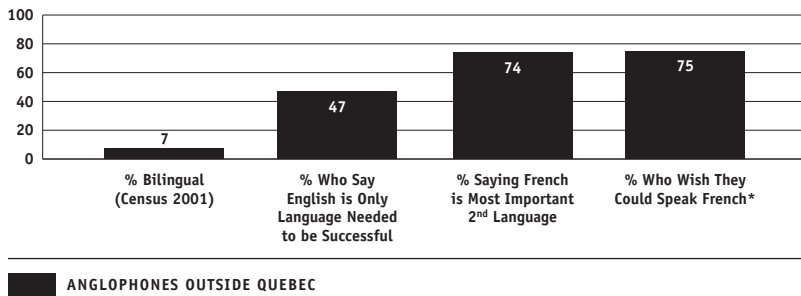
Can this gap between theory and practice be narrowed in the coming years? In general, the survey findings auger well. The federal government's action plan, and the ambitious target of doubling the number of high school graduates with a working knowledge of both official languages within a decade, comes at a time when most Canadians, especially younger Canadians, clearly appreciate the advantages of bilingualism – whether they are seen in terms of economic benefits, personal fulfillment, or making Canada a more welcoming place to immigrants.

The findings analyzed above do have other messages for those interested in promoting bilingualism. Younger Canadians have been raised with bilingualism; they do not remember a Canada before the Official Languages Act or even, in many cases, before the Charter of Rights. However, they are also strong supporters of multiculturalism and internationalism. Advocates of bilingualism should tap into the way in which bilingualism and multiculturalism are seen as mutually reinforcing one another, and stress the benefits of speaking more than one language in the context of a multicultural Canada and a globalized economy.

Stressing the personal and economic benefits of bilingualism may also help to break the link that some Canadians make between the official languages policy and their feelings of alienation towards the federal government and government intervention generally. The less bilingualism is perceived as government-directed social engineering, and the more it is seen as a personal choice that can bring benefits that are relevant to the real lives of citizens, the more receptive the public will be.

While those who plan for the future naturally tend to focus on youth, those in the middle age groups should not be overlooked. Canadians who are currently between the ages of 35 and 45 – precisely those most likely to have school-aged children at home – came of age after the Royal Commission had done its work. However, they may not have had sufficient opportunities to learn a second language. Now, the decisions they will make regarding the education of their children will be key to determining the state of bilingualism in Canada over the next ten to twenty years.

**FIGURE 15** BILINGUALISM IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE



\* Respondents who say they already speak French are excluded from sample.

Finally, a successful effort to increase the number of bilingual Canadians will have to be informed by an awareness that young men and young women approach the issue with differing degrees of enthusiasm. A single-pronged policy that is not sensitive to this reality risks reaching one of the two genders with much greater success than the other.

No one should underestimate the significance of the challenge. As Canadians have been reminded on many occasions, language issues are volatile. What is significant, however, is that despite the tensions that have surfaced from time to time, a majority of Canadians support official bilingualism, favour having their children learn the other official language, and view bilingualism as a defining characteristic of being Canadian. Four decades is not a long time in the life of a country. In that time, Canadians have responded to the major changes that followed the Royal Commission's final report with a remarkable generosity of spirit. That alone is grounds for optimism about the future.





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