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# The Perception of Parliament and Political Parties in Quebec: An Ethnic Dimension

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Political socialization, which is the generic term used to describe what Almond and Powell called the psychological dimension of politics, has become a major area of investigation in political science.<sup>1</sup> The vogue of psychologically oriented research in political science parallels the growth of popular interest in the field of psychology manifested, for example, by record enrollments in psychology courses on campuses throughout the nation, and by the success of such commercial ventures as *Psychology Today*.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the rapid growth of political socialization, both in the United States and abroad, most studies deal only with a few of the problem dimensions of socialization which Jack Dennis identified in an article published some time ago.<sup>3</sup> Most publications appear to focus on what Dennis calls the system relevance of socialization, that is to say, its impact on political change; and its content by which he implies the components of attitudes including cognition, affect, and evaluation. Other problems which have attracted researchers are the maturation process, that is to say, the development over age of political learning, and the agents of socialization such as the family and peer groups through which attitudes are transmitted.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, *Comparative Politics* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), p. 23. On the rapid growth of political socialization in political science see: Jack Dennis and M. Kent Jennings, "Introduction," "Special Issue on Political Socialization," *Comparative Political Studies*, 3 (1970), p. 136, and William R. Schonfeld, "The Focus of Political Socialization Research: An Evaluation," *World Politics*, 23 (April, 1971), pp. 544-545.

<sup>2</sup> On political socialization in general see: Richard E. Dawson and Kenneth Prewitt, *Political Socialization* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969); Herbert H. Hyman, *Political Socialization* (New York: The Free Press, 1969); and Roberta Sigel, *Learning About Politics* (New York: Random House, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Jack Dennis, "Major Problems of Political Socialization Research," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 12 (1968), 85-144. The following discussion is based on Dennis' article, esp. pp. 88ff.

<sup>4</sup> On system relevance see, for example, the following: Gerald Bender, "Political Socialization and Political Change," *Western Political Quarterly*, 20 (1967), 390-407, and especially David Easton and Jack Dennis, *Children in the Political System* (New York: McGraw Hill, Inc., 1969), esp. chapter 1.

See the following on the components of attitudes: Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963);

Other problem areas seem to have been neglected, in particular, what Dennis calls the sub-cultural dimension of socialization and its cross-cultural manifestations.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of ethnic membership on children's perception of political parties and Parliament in Quebec, an area on which little empirical data is available. The reason for singling out these institutions is that they were most salient among political institutions in young people's minds. The data were derived from a survey of elementary school children undertaken in Quebec during the Fall of 1970 and lasting through March, 1971. In addition to a paper and pencil questionnaire submitted to 960 young people, essays were solicited on a number of topics, and personal interviews were conducted over the course of the survey.<sup>6</sup>

## I

### CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF PARLIAMENT

Young people frequently referred to Parliament as an agency of government during personal interviews. However, since most children referred to the federal parliament, rather than to the provincial parliament, the paper will focus on Parliament in Ottawa.

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and Milton Rokeach, *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1968).

Most studies dealing with the socialization of young people are developmental in nature; see, for example, the works by Robert D. Hess and Judith V. Torney, *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1967) and Fred I. Greenstein, *Children and Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965). On peer groups, see Kenneth P. Langton, *Political Socialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) and M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi, "The Transmission of Political Values From Parent to Child," *American Political Science Review*, 62 (1968), 169-184.

<sup>5</sup> There are some notorious exceptions to this statement, for example, the work by Edward S. Greenberg on differences between black and white children: See Edward S. Greenberg, "Children and Government: A Comparison Across Racial Lines," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 2 (1969), 471-492. On sub-cultural variations see the article by Jaros and his associates on the socialization of children in Appalachia: Dean Jaros, *et al.* "The Malevolent Leader: Political Socialization in an American Sub-Culture," *American Political Science Review*, 62 (1968), 564-575. The lack of emphasis on ethnicity as an intervening variable in the socialization process is evident in a recent article dealing with socialization in Canada in which the author did not focus on ethnicity. See John H. Pammet, "The Development of Political Orientations in Canadian School Children," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 4 (1971), 132-141.

<sup>6</sup> The sample was a purposive sample, and, as such, is not strictly representative. However, in an effort to facilitate sub-group comparisons, the sample was approximately equally divided on the basis of age (grades 4 through 7), socio-economic status, and residence.

Other institutions referred to by children included, for example, the Cabinet (7 references), the Supreme Court of Canada (3 references), and Labor Unions (2 references).

Table 1 shows that a plurality of both groups thought that Parliament does "a lot" to run Canada. About one quarter were undecided about its role and the rest thought that it does little or nothing at all to run Canada. The data show that English-Canadian children placed more value on the importance of Parliament in Canada than French-Canadian children.

TABLE 1. How Much Does Parliament in Ottawa do to Run Canada?

	<i>French- Canadians</i>	<i>English Canadians</i>
NOTHING AT ALL .....	9.9	6.3
A LITTLE .....	29.4	25.3
A LOT .....	35.6	41.4
NOT SURE .....	25.1	27.0
TOTAL % .....	100.0	100.0
N .....	565	379
$\chi^2$ 19.603 $p < .05$		

Figure 1 shows that while children's evaluation of the importance of Parliament rose with age, it increased more rapidly among English than French-Canadian children. At grade level 7, for example, 61.5% English-Canadian children, as opposed to only 41.3% French-Canadian children, thought that Parliament does "a lot". On the whole, the development of Canadian children's perception of Parliament followed the pattern of American children's view of Congress.<sup>7</sup>

The data revealed other differences between Anglophone and Francophone children's perception of Parliament. In particular, French-Canadian children tended to refer to the *structural* attributes of Parliament while English-Canadian children tended to see Parliament in terms of its *functions*. For example, in an essay in which children were asked to describe Parliament, 17 French-Canadian pupils (out of a total of 23) referred to the number of Members of Parliament while only three noted the legislative function of Parliament. In contrast, 18 English-Canadian children (out of a total of 27) noted that Parliament makes laws, and not a single child referred to its size. This pattern of response was confirmed by additional data, in particular by a questionnaire item which sought to examine children's perception of the function of government in general which revealed that only 4% French-Canadian children said that the government made laws, while 9.7% English-Canadian children referred to this function. These are some excerpts from essays the children wrote which illustrate the two conceptions of Parliament:

<sup>7</sup> See David Easton and Jack Dennis, *op. cit.*, p. 115 and Robert Hess and Judith Torney, *op. cit.*, p. 34 and pp. 131-32.

per cent

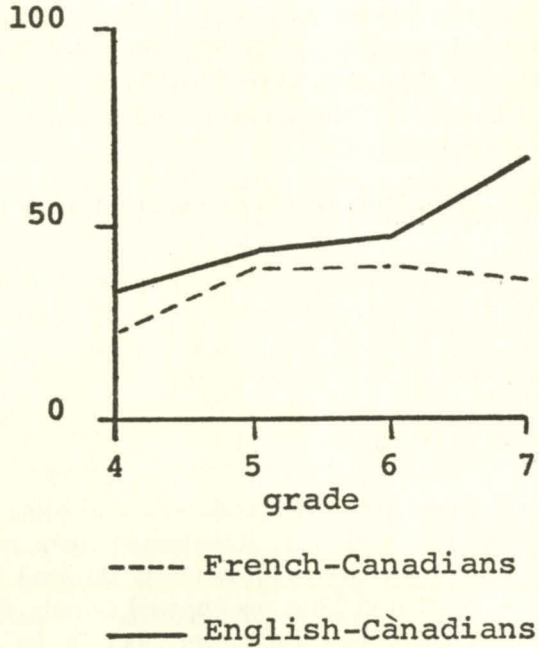


FIGURE 1. Percent, by Grade and Cultural Membership, Who Thought Parliament Plays an Important Role in Canada, (N ranges between 24 and 65)

Parliament is composed of 102 senators and 265 deputies. (French-Canadian, grade 7.)

I don't know who is elected to Parliament, but Parliament has about 400 people in it. (French-Canadian, grade 7.)

Parliament tries to make the country a better place to live. They try to make friends with other countries. The Parliament building is in Ottawa. They decide on bills to make the Canadian people happier. (English-Canadian, grade 7.)

Parliament makes rules and regulations. (English Canadian, grade 6.)

Francophone children's references to the structure of Parliament and Anglophone children's references to the function of Parliament probably reflect, as Hargrove notes, different "intellectual styles." Hargrove suggests "that French-Canadians are 'Cartesian', employing rationalist, deductive methods and English-Canadians are pragmatic; in-

ductive 'empiricists'." <sup>8</sup> The major reason for the different "intellectual styles" could be that children are exposed to different modes of learning: French-Canadian children tend to be exposed to *a priori* modes of learning while English-Canadian children are more likely to learn by induction.<sup>9</sup>

Another difference between the two groups was that English-Canadian children tended to view Parliament as a dynamic decision-making structure in its own right, while French-Canadian pupils saw it as an intermediate structure which picks the ultimate decision-maker. Such a conception of Parliament may be interpreted in one of two ways. First, it may suggest that French-Canadian children were aware of the parliamentary nature of the Canadian system of government. Such an explanation is unlikely because English-Canadian children, who did not refer to Parliament in this manner, were generally more aware politically and better informed. A second interpretation is more likely and relates to children's attitudes toward political authority. It is probable that French-Canadian children's conception of Parliament as an "intermediate" structure merely reflects their personalized view of political authority and their inability to conceive of it other than as "*man* who tells you what to do."<sup>10</sup> The following two statements support this contention:

[Parliament] is composed of men mostly, not women. Parliament is necessary to pick the President and ministers. (French-Canadian, grade 6.)

Parliament picks important men like the Prime Minister of Canada, or the governor of Quebec. It has about 500 men in it. (French-Canadian, grade 6.)

<sup>8</sup> Erwin C. Hargrove, "Nationality, Values, and Change," *Comparative Politics* (April, 1970), pp. 483-84.

<sup>9</sup> The French-Canadian model resembles the model of learning discussed by Wylie which is prevalent in France. See Laurence Wylie, *Village in the Vaucluse* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 73-77.

<sup>10</sup> French-Canadian children's responses resemble those of children in France reported by Greenstein and Tarrow. See Fred I. Greenstein and Sidney Tarrow, "Political Orientations of Children: The Use of a Semi-Projective Technique in Three Nations," *Sage Professional Papers in Comparative Politics*, 1 (1970).

## II

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties were a second institution of government which appeared to be salient in children's minds: when discussing political leaders children frequently referred to their party affiliation, noting, for example, that Trudeau was a Liberal or that Levesque was the leader of the Parti Quebecois. In addition, some children also viewed government in terms of political parties when asked to describe what government was. An attempt was therefore made to determine the development of children's perception of parties in Quebec and their identification with specific parties.

The party system of Canada differs from that of the United States in two important respects.<sup>11</sup> The first difference is that Canada does not have a traditional two-party system. Meisel writes that since 1935 parties other than the Liberals and Conservatives, which are the major parties, have attracted between one fifth and one quarter of the votes in federal elections. These parties are primarily the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Social Credit Party. Major support for the Liberals comes from the Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and Quebec. The Conservatives find most of their strength among voters of Ontario, while the other two parties are primarily western (Alberta and British Columbia) parties.<sup>12</sup>

A second characteristic of the Canadian party system is that not all parties active on the national level are represented on the provincial level; conversely, some provincial parties are not represented at the federal level. In Quebec, for example, the Conservatives and the NDP are practically nonexistent. In contrast, Quebec has several parties which are active only in provincial politics: the Union Nationale and the Parti Quebecois. Pilot interviews showed that children were substantially more aware of the provincial than the national parties, with one exception: children were all aware of the Liberal Party which is both a federal and a provincial party. Consequently, it seems relevant to deal primarily with children's perception of provincial parties.

### 1. *Party salience*

Table 2 shows that the most salient party among French-Canadians was the Parti Quebecois, followed by the Liberals, the Union Nationale, the Creditistes, and the Conservatives. English-Canadian children were

<sup>11</sup> On the party system in Canada see Hugh G. Thorburn (ed.), *Party Politics in Canada* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1967, 2nd ed.).

<sup>12</sup> John Meisel, "Recent changes in Canadian parties," in Thorburn, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-54.

TABLE 2. Which of the Following are Political Parties?

	French-Canadians		English-Canadians	
	%	N	%	N
Liberals .....	54.8	305	69.6	261
Parti Quebecois .....	67.9	376	61.4	226
Union Nationale .....	54.5	298	56.6	206
Creditistes .....	43.4	237	38.9	142
Conservatives .....	25.2	136	33.4	122

most aware of the Liberals, followed by the Parti Quebecois, the Union Nationale, and the Conservatives. The statistical analysis shows that the difference in salience between the two groups was significant for the Liberals, the Creditistes and the Conservatives.<sup>13</sup>

The overall salience of the liberal Party may be due to the fact that it is both a regional and a federal party. The higher salience of the Liberal Party among English than French-Canadian children (69.9% vs. 54.8%) results from the fact, as will be shown, that it is perceived by English-Canadian children as an "English" party. The relative salience of the Union Nationale may be due, on the other hand, to the fact that, until 1960, it was the ruling party of Quebec and remains at this time the major opposition party in the provincial legislature. The high salience of the Parti Quebecois is particularly interesting since this party is a newcomer on the political scene of Quebec, having been founded only in 1968.<sup>14</sup> The Parti Quebecois (PQ) is the successor of the new defunct Rassemblement Pour l'Indépendance Nationale (RIN) and has in common with this party the pursuit of the independence of Quebec. While the RIN never gathered more than 8% of the vote during provincial elections, its successor, the PQ, has done substantially better since it received 23% of the vote during the 1970 provincial elections, and was able to send 7 deputies to the provincial chamber.<sup>15</sup> However, the party's leader, René Lévesque, failed to be elected. The Creditistes and the Conservatives are not well known by children, primarily, it seems, because of their limited role in provincial politics.

Table 3 shows that children's recognition of political parties increases with age. However, in all cases, at grade level 7, English-Canadian children were more aware of political parties than French-Canadian children. The percentage difference in party cognition between the two groups ranged between 11.8% for the Parti Quebecois to 47.8% for the Conservatives (at grade level 7).

<sup>13</sup> At the .05 level.

<sup>14</sup> On the Parti Quebecois see Marcel Rioux, *La Question du Québec* (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1969), pp. 112-13.

<sup>15</sup> Rioux, *ibid.*, p. 112; on the R.I.D. see Frank L. Wilson, "French-Canadian Separatism," *Western Political Quarterly*, 20 (1967), pp. 123 ff.



TABLE 3. Party Salience by Grade

GRADES	4	5	6	7	N
Liberals					
FC .....	35.6	55.8	53.9	73.3	305
EC .....	51.5	67.0	84.9	94.9	261
Parti Quebecois					
FC .....	56.3	67.2	70.2	77.9	376
EC .....	47.7	53.5	75.5	89.7	226
Union Nationale					
FC .....	42.9	57.5	53.3	64.7	298
EC .....	41.5	53.1	65.4	89.7	206
Creditistes					
FC .....	26.7	39.1	43.9	63.0	237
EC .....	22.0	29.3	50.0	87.2	142
Conservatives					
FC .....	22.1	28.3	21.8	29.1	136
EC .....	20.3	28.3	37.5	76.9	122

## 2. Party Identification

Table 4 shows children's identification with various political parties. The data show a high rate of identification, evidenced by the fact that nearly all children sampled were able to express a preference for a political party. The Canadian data in this respect resemble American findings, and differ substantially from French data reported by some scholars.<sup>16</sup> Table 4 shows that most children identified with two parties, the Liberals and the Parti Quebecois. The data further revealed

TABLE 4. If You Were Old Enough, Which Party Would You Vote For?

	French-Canadians		English-Canadians	
	%	N	%	N
Liberals .....	27.8	148	70.9	244
Parti Quebecois .....	47.9	255	12.8	44
Union Nationale .....	16.7	89	12.5	43
Creditistes .....	6.2	33	1.2	4
Conservatives .....	1.4	7	2.6	9
TOTAL .....	100.0	532	100.0	344

significant differences in identification according to cultural membership. Thus, 70.9% English-Canadian children, versus 27.8% Francophone children, supported the Liberals. This compares with 47.9% Francophone children who favored the Parti Quebecois as opposed to 12.8% Anglophone children. Because few children of either group identified

<sup>16</sup> On party identification in France and the United States see the classic study by Philip E. Converse and George Dupeux, "Politicization of the Electorate in France and the United States," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 26 (1962), pp. 1-23. For a recent review of the literature on pre-adult party support see Jack Dennis and Donald J. McCrone, "Pre-adult Development of Political Party Identification in Western Democracies," *Comparative Political Studies*: 2 (1970), pp. 243-263.

with the other parties, the following analysis deals only with their support of the Parti Quebecois and Liberal Party.

Figure 2 shows that both French and English-Canadian children increasingly supported the Liberal Party, though the English-Canadian children did so in much greater proportion. At grade level 7, for example, nearly all English-Canadian children sampled said they favored the Liberal Party compared to 47.2% French-Canadian children. On the other hand, at the same level, no English-Canadian child supported the Parti Quebecois, while 49.1% French-Canadian children did. An important question, then, concerns the basis of children's support of these two political parties.

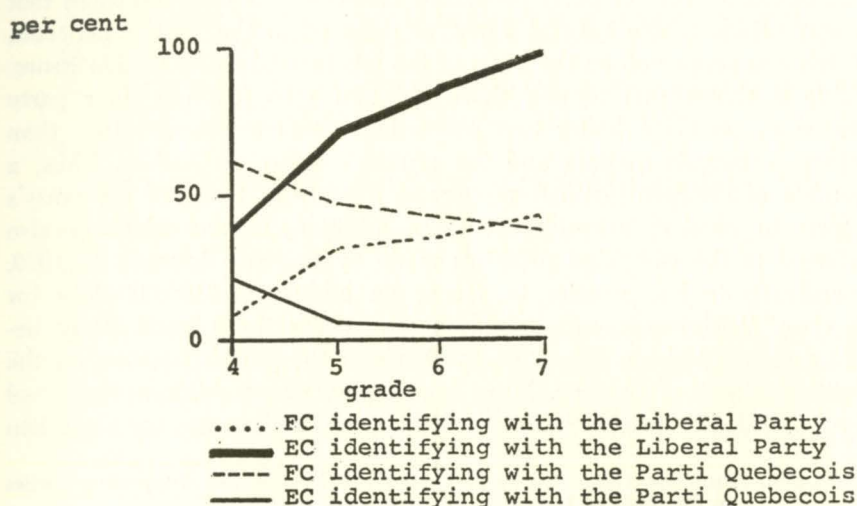


FIGURE 2. Percent, by Grade and Cultural Membership Supporting the Liberal Party and the Parti Quebecois. (N ranges between 18 and 86)

Table 5 shows that 83.6% French and 72.6% English-Canadian children sampled were able to justify their party preference. Children's justifications fell into five substantive categories. The first category includes all references to the *performance* of a political party. Children gave a wide variety of answers which included such justifications as "they are better," "they are serious," "they do more," "they are more honest," "they make better promises," etc. This category is the least specific of all since most references included in it merely reflected a general evaluative judgment without any specific justification. Children justified support of the Liberal Party and the Party Quebecois in terms of performance in roughly equal proportions.

TABLE 5. Why Would You Vote for this Party?

	<i>French-Canadians</i>		<i>English-Canadians</i>	
	%	N	%	N
Performance .....	19.4	78	26.0	74
Issues .....	16.4	65	20.7	59
Cultural Support .....	16.9	67	7.0	20
Leadership .....	9.8	40	6.7	19
Parents .....	9.8	39	4.6	13
Other .....	11.1	46	7.7	22
Sub-Total .....	83.6	335	72.6	207
Not Sure .....	16.4	65	27.4	78
TOTAL .....	100.0	400	100.0	285

A second category of justifications for party support included specific political issues or party programs. However, the data indicated that it was primarily the Liberal Party, as opposed to the Parti Quebecois, which was supported on the basis of the position taken on certain issues. Table 6 shows that among those children who justified their party choice in terms of issues two problems were cited more often than others: economic matters and the political status of Quebec. Thus, a number of children justified support of a party in terms of the party's efforts to combat unemployment. In addition, several children also referred to the campaign promises made by Premier Bourassa in 1970, specifically to his promise to secure an additional "100,000 jobs for Quebec."<sup>17</sup> However, most children who chose the Liberal Party because of its platform did so on the basis of the party's position on the political status of Quebec. More specifically, many children supported the Liberals because they perceived this party as favoring the Canadian

TABLE 6. Problems Most Frequently Referred to by Children Supporting Parties on the Basis of Issues

	<i>French-Canadians</i>		<i>English-Canadians</i>	
	%	N	%	N
Status of Quebec .....	52.3	34	64.4	38
Economy .....	21.5	14	5.1	3
Other .....	26.2	17	30.5	18
TOTAL .....	100.0	65	100.0	59

Federation. This perception reflects, more or less, the actual platform of the party, though it may be pointed out that while the Liberals pursue a policy of strict federalism on the national level, they stress greater autonomy for Quebec on the provincial level.

Children's justification of their support of the Liberals included such comments as "so that Quebec will not separate," "so that Canada

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, Sunday Edition, September 13, 1970, p. 5.

will stay one country," or "they unite the country." Interview data clearly showed that children were quite aware of the position of major parties on the issue of the political status of Quebec. These are some excerpts from interviews:

Q. Which party do you like best?

A. The Liberals.

Q. Why?

A. Well, because they have more English people in it and I don't like the way the Parti Quebecois was going to change Quebec into a country. (English-Canadian, grade 6).

Q. Do you know anything about the Parti Quebecois?

A. They were trying to make Quebec into a separate country.

Q. Don't you like the idea?

A. If Quebec, if they had won and Quebec were a separate country, I'd be back in Alberta or Ontario, the closest spot!

Q. Why?

A. Because I like Canada, that's why! (English-Canadian, grade 5).

Q. Which party do you like best?

A. There are two I like.

Q. Which two?

A. My father and mother are Creditistes, and my brother is Quebecois [Referring to the PQ]. I'm not sure which I like best.

Q. What does the PQ want?

A. It's like the FLQ, but they want to do it quietly ("en douceur"). (French-Canadian, grade 7).

The surprising finding was that only four children, all Francophone as one might have expected, supported the Parti Quebecois because of its platform. This finding is surprising since Table 4 showed that 47.9% French-Canadian children supported this party. Because the Parti Quebecois is a one-issue party, one might have thought that young people gave their support to the PQ because of its stand on the independence of Quebec. Instead, the data show that Francophone pupils' support of this party was based on ethnic considerations.

A third set of justifications of party support advanced by children is related to the cultural or ethnic basis of parties. Table 5 showed that, of those children who were able to justify their support of either the Liberal Party or the Parti Quebecois, 16.9% Francophone and 7.0% Anglophone children did so on the basis of their perception of the ethnic or cultural associations of the party. It was nearly exclusively

for this reason that French-Canadian children chose the Parti Quebecois, not because of its position on the status of Quebec. The Parti Quebecois derived its support from the fact that French-Canadian children viewed it as a "French" party. Children gave such justifications as: "they are for the French," "it helps Quebecois," "there are no English in it," and because "I'm Quebecois," etc. English-Canadian children supported the Liberals for the obverse reason: "they are English," "they are fair to the English," "they take better care of the English people," or some similar justification. The fact that English-Canadian children perceived the Liberal Party as English is interesting since on both the federal and provincial levels its leaders are French-Canadian.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that, for children in Quebec, party platform and the cultural basis of the party are more important predictors of party support than leadership.

Considering that most children supported the Parti Quebecois for cultural rather than political reasons, it is possible to suggest one explanation for the party's success in provincial election of 1970: part of Parti Quebecois' support may have been generated by Francophones' perception of the party in cultural rather than political terms. In other words, one might hypothesize that the Parti Quebecois' success may have been due to the fact that voters saw it as a French party rather than because it favors independence. A vote for the Parti Quebecois may therefore have been a vote of defiance to "les Anglais" rather than a plea for independence.

Children in Quebec offered two more classes of justifications for party support dealing with party leaders and family reasons. Thus, 9.8% French-Canadian and 6.7% English-Canadian children justified their party preference on the basis of the leaders of political parties.<sup>19</sup> Finally, 9.8% Francophone as opposed to 4.6% Anglophone children favored a political party because a member of the child's family, or a friend, supported that party. The fact that French-Canadian children were somewhat more likely to justify their party preference in this manner may be seen, perhaps, as a further manifestation of their *personalized* conception of politics.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, and Robert Bourassa, the Premier of Quebec.

<sup>19</sup> In discussing American data, Greenstein argues that children are, in fact, able to identify with parties because they are relatively stable structures and because they have leaders. See Greenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 77. The data presented here, however, raise some questions about the second part of Greenstein's statement, since it appeared that children identified with parties primarily because of issues and on the basis of their perception of the ethnic basis of parties.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The data presented in this paper showed that, in Quebec, cultural membership shaped young people's perception of politics. The data indicated that children's perception of the function of Parliament, as well as their cognition of political parties and party identification, was strongly colored by their ethnic membership.

It is likely that differences in perception evident within the two cultures result from different focuses of the French and English-Canadian socialization processes. This is clearly illustrated by Anglophone children's concern with the maintenance of the Canadian Federation, and Francophone children's reflection of a certain defiance vis a vis "les Anglais" and a great pride in their "Frenchness." Children's perception of Parliament indicates that differences may also be due to differing socialization processes at work within the two cultures. Thus the *functional* attribute of Anglophone children's perception of Parliament, as opposed to the *structural* characteristics manifested by Francophone children, probably result from the differences in styles of learning within each culture.