

COMMUNITY VITALITY: WHAT IS IT AND HOW DOES IT APPLY TO ENGLISH-SPEAKING QUEBEC?

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Community vitality is what empowers a group, whether it's a linguistic or cultural minority, to navigate change without losing itself. For linguistic minorities, this means holding onto their language, cultural practices, and community networks, while maintaining institutions and achieving a level of relative prosperity. Community vitality frameworks provide a lens for understanding the challenges faced by linguistic minorities, such as Quebec's English speakers. By examining demographic strength, institutional support, and social status, researchers can identify factors contributing to the community's current vitality and help identify strategies for improving future vitality prospects.

The Frameworks

Researchers have been looking at the concept of community vitality as it applies to sociolinguistic groups since the mid-20th century. "Ethnolinguistic vitality" was mapped out in a 1977 publication that explored how **demographic factors** (population size and distribution), **institutional control and support** (media, schools, hospitals), and **social status** (socioeconomics and language prestige)

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determine the likelihood of an ethnolinguistic minority thriving while coexisting with other linguistic groups.⁴ Subsequent work has built on this, creating objective and subjective ways to measure community vitality.⁵

The federal government developed its own framework based on this research to enhance the vitality of Canada's official language minority communities.⁶ This framework rearranges the three-part focus to consider **the individual** (integrating a sense of belonging into the status factor), **the community** (strength of leadership and ability to mobilize), and **the environment** (considering institutional support, as well as economic and social integration). It also examines how a minority community relates to the wider linguistic environment, and how demographic factors and language practices influence community longevity or renewal.

In a 2017 study, the federal government applied a model with related criteria to compare vitality indicators of Quebec's English-speaking official language minority community (OLMC) with Francophone OLMCs outside Quebec.⁷ While the indicators were divided up further to allow for a more detailed analysis, they generally aligned with the three factors from the earlier framework: demographic, institutional support, and social status.

This brief relies primarily on this original three-factor method of assessment (Figure 1). If a community has enough members and strong control over key institutions (like education, healthcare, and media), and enjoys social prestige, it's more likely to keep thriving. But when these pillars are weak, a community is at greater risk of being absorbed into the majority culture.⁸

⁴ Howard Giles, Richard Y. Bourhis, and Donald Taylor, "Towards a Theory of Language in Ethnic Group Relations," in *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*, ed. Howard Giles (London: Academic Press, 1977), 309, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265966525_Giles_H_Bourhis_RY_Taylor_DM_1977_Towards_a_theory_of_language_in_ethnic_group_relations_In_H_Giles_Ed_Language_Ethnicity_and_Intergroup_Relations_pp_307-348_London_UK_Academic_Press.

⁵ Richard Y. Bourhis et al., "Assessing 40 Years of Group Vitality Research and Future Directions," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 38, no. 4 (September 2019): 410, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1177/0261927X19868974>.

⁶ Canada, Canadian Heritage, Official Languages Branch, "Framework for the Vitality of Official Language Minority Communities (OLMC)," Government of Canada, October 27, 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-languages-bilingualism/publications/vitality-minority-communities.html>.

⁷ William Floch, Elias Abou-Rjeili, and Martin Durand, "Composite Indicators for Community Vitality: Quebec" (Official Languages Branch, Canadian Heritage, November 14, 2017), https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/pch/CH14-37-5-2011-eng.pdf.

⁸ Richard Y. Bourhis et al., "Assessing 40 Years of Group Vitality Research and Future Directions," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 38, no. 4 (September 2019): 410, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1177/0261927X19868974>.

Measuring Community Vitality

Figure 1:
Three Factors for Measuring the Vitality of a Language Community

Demographic Strength	Institutional Control & Support	Social Status
	Formal and informal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of speakers • Fertility/mortality rate • Marriage within and outside the group • Passing the language to the next generation • Emigration/immigration • Age distribution • Distribution of speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concentration in national/ regional/urban areas - Proportion of speakers relative to other groups - Presence in historical ancestral territory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education (elementary, secondary, university) • Political institutions • Government services (health, social services, transport, post office, judiciary) • Media (radio, TV, newspapers, internet) • Linguistic visibility in public spaces • Police and military • Economy (commerce, industry, finance) • Cultural industries (music, literature, theatre, dance) • Sports and leisure • Religious institutions • Leadership and community networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical prestige of the community relative to others • Current social status of the community relative to others • Status of the language relative to others at various levels (local to international) and language laws • Socioeconomic status of the community relative to others

Source:

Adapted from Richard Y. Bourhis and Rodrigue Landry, "Group Vitality, Cultural Autonomy, and WellNess of Language Minorities," in Richard Y. Bourhis, *Decline and Prospects of the English-Speaking Communities of Quebec* (Ottawa: Canadian Heritage and Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities, 2012), 25 (5a).

Applying to English-Speaking Quebec

Once considered a powerful and influential minority, the English-speaking community has lost some of its vitality over the past half century. **The English language itself is not considered to be under threat in Quebec, given its international status, but the vitality of English-speaking communities as measured by demographic, social, economic, and political factors has experienced both ups and downs.**

Demographic Strength

Assessing the demographic vitality of Quebec's Anglophone minority involves tracking fertility, mortality, migration trends, and the impact of social and political events on these factors. **The mid-20th century outmigration, driven in part by linguistic tensions, ended in the mid-1980s.⁹ Since then, the number and percentage of English speakers in Quebec have risen, in part because of immigration.¹⁰**

Examining Anglophone minorities in Quebec's 17 regions provides a clearer assessment of their demographic vitality. In recent years the demographic decline has continued for Anglophone communities in regions such as the Eastern Townships, Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine, and the Lower North Shore.¹¹ However, in 14 of the province's 17 administrative regions, the English-speaking population has grown in both proportion and numbers since 2001. This includes Greater Montreal, home to the largest number of English speakers in the province.¹²

Compared with most Francophone minorities outside Quebec, the province's English-speaking OLMC shows more stability. Using indicators that consider variables such as rates of bilingualism, languages used at work, and population growth, a 2017 Official Languages Branch study concluded that **Quebec's English-speaking OLMC had high demolingualistic vitality compared with its Francophone minority counterparts in the rest of Canada.¹³**

Opportunities for more intercultural relations between Anglophones and Francophones are improving in Quebec given census results showing that the rate of French-English bilingualism among English mother tongue speakers was 66.1% in 2001 and 67.1% in 2021, and that, among French mother tongue speakers, it had increased from 36.6% in 2001 to 42.2% by 2021.¹⁴

⁹ Richard Y. Bourhis, "Group Vitality, Language Policies and the French and English-Speaking Communities of Quebec," in *Language, Policy and Territory: A Festschrift for Colin H. Williams*, 2022, 285.

¹⁰ Nicolas Auclair, Catherine Frigon, and Gabriel St-Amant, "Key Facts on the English Language in Quebec in 2021" (Statistics Canada, August 22, 2023), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2023016-eng.htm>. For more details on how social and political events influenced the decline of this population, see Richard Y. Bourhis, "Evaluating the Impact of Bill 101 on the English-Speaking Communities of Quebec," *Language Problems and Language Planning* 43, no. 2 (July 2019): 198-229, <https://doi.org/10.1075/lplp.00042.bou>.

¹¹ Shannon Bell and Patrick Donovan, "Demographic Decline of English Speakers in Certain Regions of Quebec: Research Brief No. 12" (Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN), June 2024), 3, <https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/Brief12ENG.pdf>.

¹² Auclair et al., "Key Facts on the English Language in Quebec in 2021"; Shannon Bell and Patrick Donovan, with the help of Joanne Pocock, "English-Speaking Population Change Over Time Outside Montreal/Laval 2001-2021," Excel spreadsheet (Quebec English-speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN), January 2024), <https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/FOLS2001-2021.Upload.3.xlsx>.

¹³ Floch, Abou-Rjeili, and Durand, "Composite Indicators for Community Vitality: Quebec," 16–21.

¹⁴ Canada, Statistics Canada, "English-French Bilingualism in Canada: Recent Trends After Five Decades of Official Bilingualism," Census of Population 2021, June 21, 2023, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021013/98-200-x2021013-eng.cfm>.

Institutional Control and Support

Language laws have had an impact on the institutional vitality of English-speaking Quebec. Since the mid-20th century, the role and influence of Anglophones in sectors such as education, public services, healthcare, and community media have diminished. **Quebec government laws restricting access to English-language schools for immigrants and Francophones had the intended effect of reducing the size of the English school system by nearly 65% from 1971 (256,251 students) to 2018 (96,235 students)**, resulting in numerous school mergers and closures.¹⁵

Since the 1970s, mother tongue Anglophones have numbered between 9% to 13% of the Quebec population. However, **Anglophones make up only 1% of the public servants** working in the Quebec Government, and this, despite efforts by the public administration to improve their representation.¹⁶

English speakers have a qualified right¹⁷ to receive health and social services in English. While healthcare reforms have centralized some services, **strong community advocacy has preserved access to health and social services**, though the effects of Bill 96 remain uncertain.¹⁸

Since 2008, 22% of the province's community media closures or transitions to online-only content have been bilingual or English-only publications.¹⁹ However, **the English-language cultural sector is an outlier**. English-speaking Quebec artists and creators have experienced success in the 21st century as a result of ease of linguistic access to the international stage, though some English-language cultural output struggles for visibility in regional settings.²⁰

¹⁵ Bourhis, "Evaluating the Impact of Bill 101 on the English-Speaking Communities of Quebec," 27.

¹⁶ Celine Cooper, Patrick Donovan, and Lorraine O'Donnell, *Employment of English Speakers in Quebec's Public Service* (QUESCREN Working Paper No. 1) (Montreal: Concordia University, Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network, 2019), 13, https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/quescren_QPSRPTEnglish.pdf.

¹⁷ A qualified right is one that may be interfered with in order to protect the rights of another or the wider public interest.

¹⁸ Richard Y. Bourhis, "Bilingual Health Care in Quebec: Public Policy, Vitality, and Acculturation Issues," in *Accessibility and Active Offer: Health Care and Social Services in Linguistic Minority Communities*, 349-96 (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2017), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323151104_Bilingual_Health_Care_in_Quebec_Public_Policy_Vitality_and_Acculturation_Issues; Richard Y. Bourhis and Annie Montreuil, "Acculturation, Vitality, and Bilingual Health Care," in *The Oxford Handbook of Acculturation and Health*, 49-74 (Oxford University Press, 2017), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320716912_Acculturation_vitality_and_Bilingual_Healthcare.

¹⁹ Shannon Bell, "Avoiding the News Desert: Addressing Challenges Around Community Media in English-Speaking Quebec: Research Brief No. 10" (Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN), November 2023), https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/Brief_10_ENG.pdf.

²⁰ Guy Rodgers and Marianne Ackerman, *Minority Report: An Alternative History of English-Language Arts in Quebec* (Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2011), 15-7.

Despite experiencing some hits to its institutional infrastructure, the community has displayed an ability to organize and mobilize—a sign of sustained urban and regional community vitality. **In the decades following the mid-20th-century linguistic reorganization in Quebec, several English-speaking community groups emerged with missions to promote and maintain institutional vitality.** Most, if not all, of these organizations receive some share of their financing from either the federal or provincial government, or both. Provincial funding for such efforts significantly increased with the establishment of the *Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise* in 2018.

When compared with many active Francophone OLMCs in the rest of Canada, Quebec's English-speaking minority displays favourable institutional presence in and around urban areas. However, there are still some areas of concern. For example, access to provincial government minority-language services is as much of an issue as it is in many Francophone communities outside Quebec.²¹ Enrollment in minority-language education programs has decreased in Quebec, while it has increased for Francophone OLMCs in the rest of Canada.²² Additionally, where Francophone OLMCs outside Quebec possess a large, complex university research network of collectively more than 37 research chairs and centres, only one such university-based research organization exists for the English OLMC in Quebec.²³

²¹ Floch, Abou-Rjeili, and Durand, "Composite Indicators for Community Vitality: Quebec," 34–7.

²² Canada, Statistics Canada, "Official-Language Minority Communities Dashboard: Enrollment in Minority Language Education Programs, 1993-2021," 2022, <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ede47be0589b4f678fec11e2eff5852/page/Dashboard/>.

²³ Lorraine O'Donnell, "QUESCREN Brief: The Importance of the University Research Ecosystem for Quebec's English-Speaking Official Language Minority Community" (Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN), August 2022), 6-8, https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/QUESCREN_brief_for_Action_Plan_OL.pdf.

Social Status

Canada's two official languages are colonial languages of the French and British empires that ruled much of the western world until World War II. **Today, the status of English as the global lingua franca, as well as being the stronger of Canada's two official languages, gives it unique recognition and drawing power in the rest of Canada and within Quebec. However, the status of English relative to French has diminished in Quebec over the past fifty years.** Since 1974, French has been recognized as the only official language of Quebec, which reduced the legal status of English. The increase in value of the French language over English in the labour market²⁴ is another measure of its loss in social prestige. This has been experienced particularly in some rural RCMs around the province, where the English-speaking population is not renewing.²⁵

In terms of its socioeconomic status relative to other communities, **today's English-speaking population is more likely to struggle with higher unemployment and poverty.** Bill 101 is widely accepted to have been successful in increasing Francophone ownership of the economy, and today's English speakers are more likely to face socioeconomic challenges.²⁶ Since 2006, English speakers in the province have earned lower median wages than Francophones.²⁷ This demographic also includes a higher proportion of vulnerable groups than the Francophone community, such as immigrants and visible minorities, who have a higher rate of socioeconomic challenges.²⁸ **Relative to OLMCs in the rest of Canada, Quebec's English speakers experience very low socioeconomic vitality,²⁹ making this indicator its weakest place within the framework.**

²⁴ Patrick Donovan and Shannon Bell, "Income Disparities Between Quebec's English Speakers and Francophones Over Time" (Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN), August 2024), 5, https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/Brief_14_ENG.pdf.

²⁵ Bell and Donovan, "Demographic Decline of English Speakers in Certain Regions of Quebec: Research Brief No. 12," 6.

²⁶ Donovan and Bell, "Income Disparities Between Quebec's English Speakers and Francophones Over Time," 3.

²⁷ Canada, Statistics Canada, "Table 98-10-0642-01: Average and Median Employment Income by Gender, Census Years 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021, Canada, Geographical Regions of Canada, Provinces and Territories and Census Metropolitan Areas," retrieved April 2024, <https://doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng>.

²⁸ Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN), "A Portrait of Vulnerable English-Speaking Communities in Quebec: Submitted to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages," May 2023, 4, https://sencanada.ca/Content/Sen/Committee/441/OLLO/briefs/2023-04-28_OLLO_SS-3_Brief_CHSSN_e.pdf.

²⁹ Floch, Abou-Rjeili, and Durand, "Composite Indicators for Community Vitality: Quebec," 28.

Conclusion

Community vitality research has developed useful tools for assessing the long-term sustainability of linguistic minority communities, such as English-speaking Quebec. **Socioeconomic challenges have arisen for Anglophones in the past half century**, presenting hurdles for maintaining vitality within the institutional support and social status indicators. **After a decline in vitality indicators following mid-20th-century political changes, the English OLMC fares relatively well in two of the three broader vitality indicators:** demo-linguistic strength, especially in urban areas, as well as institutional control, through its high capacity for group mobilization. **However, socioeconomic challenges have arisen in the past half century**, presenting hurdles for maintaining vitality within the social status indicator, while the status of the English language itself remains strong outside the province as the global lingua franca (Figure 2). Vitality frameworks continue to be refined, notably with concepts such as vitality of memory,³⁰ and updated applications using more recent data would be useful to monitor the sustainability of the English-speaking communities of Quebec.



Growing number of English speakers in most regions of the province

Strong capacity to organize with well-established organizations, but **signs of decline** in the educational and health sectors, as well as community media.

Although it is the global lingua facta, **the status of English** relative to French has **diminished in Quebec** over the years

More likely to **struggle with unemployment and poverty** relative to OLMCs in the rest of Canada and the francophone majority in Quebec

³⁰ Alain Roy, "From Vitality to Vitality of Memory: Conceptual Foundations of the Role of Memory and Heritage in the Vitality of Official Language Minority Communities," January 2021, https://archivesclosm-olmc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Vitality-of-Memory_Concept-paper_final.pdf.

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