



## Jean-François Lisée's win is further evidence of separatism's irrelevance

OPINION

Promising to abstain from holding a referendum in a bid to attain power is an admission of the utter irrelevance of the PQ's raison d'être.



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The new Parti Québécois leader Jean-François Lisée after he was elected at the Parti Québécois leadership event, Friday, October 7, 2016 in Lévis Que. JACQUES BOISSINOT / THE CANADIANPRESS

**Asked about the future of separatism after the 2014 election, Philippe Couillard responded that an idea never dies. The reply displayed humility in victory, but was incomplete..**

An idea may not die, but an idea and its advocates can easily become politically irrelevant. People can still believe in communism, but this idea is a spent political force.

The idea of separatism is not endowed with an inherent right to political relevance. The political relevance of an idea is decided by the governed. The better ideas — like democracy, human rights and federalism — achieve and retain political relevance. Separatism is not one of the better ideas. If it were, a six-word question would have been posed to Quebecers in the 1980 and 1995 referendums. The Parti Québécois governments of the day avoided asking questions as clear and concise as their political objective. We all know why.

Since 1968, the PQ has challenged the federalist idea, to no avail. Quebecers have said no to the idea of taking Quebec out of Canada — twice. There is no interest in being asked again. Like the idea of separatism itself, the PQ has no inherent right to continued political relevance. The choice of Jean-François Lisée as leader speaks volumes to the moribund state of separatism and the party that is its principal advocate. Unless the PQ makes a credible campaign promise to refrain from holding a referendum, its defeat in 2018 is certain. Promising to abstain from the R-word in a bid to attain power is a survival strategy with no guarantee that it will work, but, more important, is an admission of the utter irrelevance of the PQ's *raison d'être*. The idea of separatism may not die, the PQ may continue to draw a membership of sorts accepting the indefinite deferral of the dream, but the PQ will soon be to the Quebec National Assembly what the Bloc Québécois is to the Parliament of Canada: marginal and irrelevant. The opposition parties are predictably taking aim at the "Liberal monopoly on power." This version of a negative campaign strategy rebukes Liberals for winning elections.

Yet a party achieves political success the same way a business achieves financial success: by listening to people and responding to their needs. The use of "monopoly," presumably as a pejorative, will hardly deter people from voting for the party that delivers what they want. The Ontario Conservatives ruled for 42 years (1943 to 1985). The Alberta Conservatives ruled for 44 years (1971 to 2015). Democracy never left these provinces, and their economies thrived. Not all monopolies are bad. Parties deservedly remain in opposition when they try to sell what voters are not buying. The PQ offerings of separatism, referendums and the politics of language and identity will continue to ensure defeat. Understanding that separatism does not sell, the CAQ offers a no-referendum pledge, but prioritizes identity politics and constitutional issues, that is, seeking more power from "Ottawa" over guess what? language. The CAQ is PQ-lite, the diet version. The PQ and CAQ consider the politics of identity their flagship issue and are in a heated agreement in this competition of intolerance. Separatism, language and the politics of identity divide and distract the government and the governed from addressing the real issues of our time. Quebec is rich in natural resources and, more important, in human resources, given our world-class universities and other institutions of higher learning. Few places in the world have the significant bilingual and multilingual workforce we take for granted. For far too long, we have long endured an unacceptable disconnect between Quebec's potential versus the disappointing social and economic results we live with. Quebec has no business being a have-not province. Quebecers are free to demand that their government exclusively dedicate itself to eliminating the serious chasm between where we are and where we should be, and have every right to vote accordingly. We are so done with separatism.

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