The 1995 Quebec Referendum:

With the failure of both Meech Lake and the Charlottetown Accord, the forces of nationalism in Quebec were one again given a boost. The Parti Quebecois was re-elected and they moved quickly to hold another referendum on separatism. Federally, the Progressive Conservatives were almost completely destroyed and the Liberals were swept back into power with a majority government. The rise of two new federal parties, the Bloc Quebecois and the Reform Party, marked a major shift in Federal politics. The Reform Party was a regional protest party from the west, while the Bloc was a Quebec separatist party on the Federal level.

The new Premier of Quebec, Jacques Parizeau, set October 30, 1995 as the date for the referendum.

The question that was asked was:

"Do you agree that Québec should become sovereign, after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership, within the scope of the Bill respecting the future of Québec and of the agreement signed on 12 June 1995?"

Three weeks before the vote a poll indicated that 28% of the voters had not yet made up their minds. The “no” side was disturbed about how unclear the actual process and the referendum question actually was.

With the lead favouring the “yes” side, two weeks before the vote, the Federalist swung into action and held rallies and Prime Minister Chretien made several speeches in support of Canada. Then the single biggest event of the campaign took place on October 27th, just a few days before the vote, when about 100,000 Canadians from all across the country gather in Montreal for a massive Unity Rally which appealed to French Canadians to vote for Canada.

The separatists made preparations to declare separation almost immediately and form a Quebec national army. The PQ planned to seize fighter aircraft from military bases in Quebec if a “yes” vote were successful. The Federalists responded by suggestion that a legal process would be more complicated than a unilateral declaration of independence, and the CF-18 aircraft were taken out of Quebec to avoid a confrontation over them.

The final results of the 1995 Quebec Referendum were:

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | “No” Side | “Yes” Side |
| Number of Votes | 2,362,648 | 2,308,360 |
| Percentage | 50.58% | 49.42% |

In a speech following the referendum, Premier Jacques Parizeau blamed the defeat on “money and the ethnic vote”. This was an attack on the allophone population in Quebec – those having a first language other than French, English, or an Aboriginal language. Parizeau’s angry outburst stained the separatist cause. His career in ruins and his reputation tarnished, Parizeau soon resigned.

To prevent another close call on Canadian unity, Jean Chretien implemented a strategy known as Plan B. One phase of Plan B, known as The Clarity Act, gave the federal government a say on the wording of a future referendum question and on the margin needed to win. It also stated that any referendum result had to be referred to the House of Commons for debate and prohibited a declaration of independence based solely on a referendum result.



Above: Jacques Parizeau