

# Franco-Americans in Maine

## A Demographic Study

### Preliminary Indications

based on

a Public Opinion Survey conducted

by Command Research for the

Franco-American Centre at the University of Maine

August 2012

At the request of the State of Maine Legislative Franco-American Task Force, the Franco-American Centre at the University of Maine has begun an intensive demographic study of Franco-Americans in Maine. That study will be based on a public opinion survey commissioned by the Centre from the Command Research. The survey was conducted in August 2012, with 600 respondents, all self-identified Franco-Americans above the age of 18, and with a margin of error of 3%. The survey yielded 25,000 reference points of data which the Centre with the help of Command Research is only beginning to assess. We are finding much that we now can know that we did not know before. We are also finding much that we now know needs to be a focus for further research. What we can present to the Task Force so far are preliminary indications of what the data shows.

For the most part, where comparisons are applicable, data from the Command Research Survey confirms, details and greatly expands data in the 2010 and 2011 American Community Surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau (the CR survey asks many questions that ACS does not). The 2010 ACS survey, for example, finds that 21.1% of Franco-Americans have college degrees. The CR survey finds that 21% of Franco-Americans have college degrees. In addition the CR survey details that number by age groups and suggests that the number of college graduates between 18-25 is very low whereas the number of college graduates between 26-45 is much higher. Or, to consider another figure, the ACS survey finds that 61% of Franco-Americans in Maine are employed, the CR survey finds that 64% are employed. Among those who are not employed, the ACS survey distinguishes between unemployed Franco-Americans and those outside the workforce. The CR survey does not make this distinction but reports on those Franco-Americans above the age of 18 who consider themselves to be unemployed. Whereas the 2010 ACS survey finds an unemployment rate of 5.6% and an additional 33.2% of Maine's Franco-Americans who are not in the work force, the CR survey finds a 19% unemployment rate and a 15% retirement rate. Here again it details those numbers

by age group. Given that employment and education figures among others in both surveys are equivalent, the CR survey permits us to study the ACS data from a range of nuanced perspectives.

What can we learn from the CR survey? Here are some preliminary indications based on a few of the 25,000 data points (see tables). They should be interpreted as points of departure. They should not be regarded as conclusion.

Employment and Unemployment—Based on those Franco-Americans, 18 and above, who identify themselves as unemployed, the rate of unemployment for Maine Franco-Americans is very high, about 19%. That number is driven for the most part by Franco-Americans between 18-25 who constitute 60% of the unemployed and over 50% of their age group. By comparison, Franco-Americans between 20-45 have an unemployment rate of over 10% and constitute 26% of the unemployed. Franco-Americans between 46-60 have an unemployment rate of less than 4% and constitute only 5% of the unemployed Franco-American population,

Education—The high unemployment figure for Franco-Americans between 18-25 is reflected by levels of attainment in education. While 80% graduate from high school, only around 17% have some college, and only 2% have college degrees. On the other hand, almost 40% of Franco-Americans between 26-45 have college degrees, and 21% of Franco-Americans between 46-60. Among Franco-Americans between 18-25, over 80% are unsure whether a college education is important while less than 15% regard it as important. This contrasts with Franco-Americans over 26, more than 70% of whom think college is important and less than 25% of whom who are unsure.

Two other sets of figures seem particularly telling. 76% of Franco-Americans who have college degrees did not have a parent who had attended college. Of these, 97% believe that college is important for their children. In addition, 52% of all Franco-Americans said that they would be more likely to send children to a community college or public university in Maine if the curriculum did more to highlight Franco-American history, culture, language, and other issues.

Language and Culture—With regard to language, the CR survey data differs significantly from the ACS data. Whereas the ACS finds that 12.3% of Franco-Americans speak another language than English, the CR survey finds that 28% of Franco-Americans regard themselves as fluent in French while another 35% feel they have some French. Few of them are between 18-25, but 17% are between 26-45, 26% are between 46-60, and 75% are over 60. An overwhelming majority of Franco-Americans (96%) believe English is vital for success in school, college, and the workplace, but for a large number of Franco-Americans, French remains *their* language as well.

The CR survey suggests that there is a rough correlation that needs further exploration between pride in culture and economic success. 36% of Franco-Americans feel this pride; it is particularly strong among those 26-45 (over 55%), those between 46-60 (over 74%), and those older than 60 (over 95%). When asked what defines your identity as Franco-American, language was slightly less significant (36%) than last name (38%), but of far greater importance than either were culture and history (46%) and family and traditions

(61%). All of these defining qualities for identity were far less significant for Franco-Americans 18-25 than for those who were older. 54% of self-identified Franco-Americans 18-25 were unsure of what defined them as Franco-Americans; 35% of Franco-Americans 26-45; 9% of Franco-American 46-60; 0% of Franco-Americans older than 60.

**Conclusions**—In these very preliminary results, the Franco-American Centre has correlated the CR survey data for the most part in terms of age group. The data can—and should—be correlated in many other ways as well, in terms of geography, for example, or gender, religious identity, health care, vision of government, etc. This remains to be done. The CR survey provides a basis for substantial research, and the Franco-American Centre will welcome all those who would like to participate in this research. The data itself does not provide the insights a comprehensive demographic study requires. The data provides a new basis for those insights. As Christian Potholm suggests: “the August, 2012 scientific 600 person representative sample of Franco American adults is the first of its kind in the history of Maine. . . . No other ethnic group has ever been surveyed in this fashion, extent and scope. As a result, there is now an in-depth sample of Franco Americans of all current generations, from all locations and of all historical cohorts. The unity, diversity and the richness of Franco American opinion is captured for the first time.” It is now there to study.

**Ages of Survey Participants**

18-25	17%
26-45	39%
46-60	23%
Over 60	20%

**Employment**

Employed		64%
Unemployed		19%
	18-25	Over 50%
	26-46	Over 10%
	46-60	Less than 4%
	Over 60	Over 8%
Retired		15%

## Education

### Level of Attainment

Grade School		4%
High School		67%
	18-25	80%
	26-54	57%
	46-60	67%
	Over 60	72%
Some College		7%
	18-25	17%
	26-45	4%
	46-60	9%
	Over 60	2%
College Grad		21%
	18-25	2%
	26-45	39%
	46-60	21%
	Over 60	3%

### **Importance of a College Education**

Important		60%
	18-25	13%
	26-35	68%
	46-60	76%
	Over 60	66%
Unimportant		6%
Unsure		33%
	18-25	82%
	26-45	25%
	46-60	15%
	Over 60	27%

### **Language and Culture**

#### **French**

Fluent in French		28%
	18-25	2%
	26-45	17%
	46-60	26%
	Over 60	75%
Some French		35%
Little French		28%
No French		24%

	18-25	67%
	25-45	23%
	46-60	13%
	Over 60	2%

**Pride in Culture**

Proud		36%
	18-25	8%
	26-45	57%
	46-60	74%
	Over 60	96%
Not very proud		24%
Don't know		15%

**Franco-American Identity**

Last name		38%
	18-25	10%
	26-45	39%
	46-60	25%
	Over 60	24%
Culture and History		46%
	18-25	1%
	26-45	33%
	46-50	29%

	Over 60	36%
Family and Tradition		61%
	18-25	5%
	26-45	39%
	46-60	26%
	Over 60	29%
Language		36%
	18-25	2%
	26-45	30%
	46-60	25%
	Over 60	42%
Don't know		20%
Don't know	18-24	54%
	26-45	35%
	46-50	9%
	Over 60	