

**SECULARISM OR NATIONALISM? PARTISAN DIFFERENCES IN QUÉBEC'S  
BILL 21 DEBATE**

by

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Secularism or Nationalism? Partisan Differences in Québec's Bill 21 Debate

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in Political Science

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## **Abstract**

In 2018, the government of the province of Québec put forward and passed Bill 21, An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State, which proposed, among other measures, to ban public servants from wearing religious symbols at work. While ostensibly seeking to further secularism in the province, an analysis of the legislative debates makes it clear that the main question at issue was one of nationalism rather than secularism. Further, parties' voting patterns were not split according to the more classic Québec party divisions of left-right economic positioning and stance on separatism. This thesis puts forward an analysis of the legislative debates surrounding Bill 21, using qualitative coding and textual analysis to determine party priorities in presenting opposition or support for the bill to the public in a highly mediatized debate.

While each party puts forward a distinct narrative of what it means to belong in the Québec nation in these debates, party positioning on Bill 21 can be explained by speakers' positioning on a plural-monist axis related to questions of nationalism, intersecting with normative ideals of how restrictive or inclusive the idea of the nation should be. This finding has interesting implications for the study of integration measures in other subnational states—notably, that understandings of nationhood, and who should be included in it, may prove more influential in shaping integration policy than other traditional party markers, such as economic left-right positioning or positioning on questions of separatism.

## **Lay Summary**

This paper examines the arguments put forward by the four main parties represented in the Québec provincial government in the highly mediatized debate surrounding Bill 21, An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State. Subnational states such as Québec may use different justifications for coercive integration measures, based on cultural distinctiveness from the larger state. Thus, some classic axes of party positioning in subnational states, such as on independence and economic issues, were less informative of party positioning on Bill 21. Rather, party positioning on the questions of pluralism—whether immigrants should completely assimilate into a host society or retain more religious and cultural rights—and national belonging—whether the culture of the subnational state should be ‘protected’ from the cultural threat of immigration or whether it should be bolstered through the addition of new members of different cultural backgrounds—informed the debate and parties’ support or opposition to the bill.

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Sarah Despatie.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

BTC : Bouchard-Taylor Commission

CAQ : Coalition Avenir Québec

MNA : Member of the National Assembly (Québec provincial legislature)

PLQ : Parti Libéral du Québec

PQ : Parti Québécois

QS : Québec Solidaire

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION – BILL 21, LEGISLATIVE DEBATE, AND NATIONALISM**

In June 2019, the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) provincial government passed Bill 21, an Act Respecting the Laicity of the State. This bill proposed to enshrine in legislation the secularism<sup>1</sup> of the Québec State, notably by prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols by some categories of public servants while at work, and ordering that public services must be both given and received with an uncovered face. It also modified the Québec Charter of rights and freedoms to specify that exercising one's fundamental rights must be done in the context of respecting the secularism of the State. Although it allowed workers currently in their jobs to keep working in the same positions, it effectively banned the hiring and promoting of workers who wear religious symbols, many of whom are racialized and religious minorities.

In the provincial legislature, Bill 21 gave rise to robust debates that revealed party positioning on issues outside the classic questions of Québec provincial politics. While parties have long positioned themselves clearly on the left-right axis of economic policy and on the separatist-federalist axis on sovereignty, these axes did not predict party voting behavior on Bill 21. This paper proposes an analysis of the legislative debates surrounding Bill 21 to determine party priorities on questions of integration, and concludes that party positioning on questions of national belonging and on pluralism inform positioning on questions of integration such as Bill 21, more so than the more classic left-right economic and separatist-federalist axes.

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<sup>1</sup> Some scholars distinguish between the words secularism and laicity, the latter being a Québec model of secularism. Many Québec government documents translated to English also use laicity, as a direct translation of the French word *laïcité*. In this paper, I will be privileging the use of the English word secularism.

This paper uses legislative debates as a tool to define party positions on secularism legislation and nationalism, for four reasons. First, legislative debates are rich, publicly accessible sources of data that allow for an in-depth analysis of the public records of Members of the National Assembly (MNAs). Secondly, because clips of debates are often used by the media, parties, and by MNAs themselves to share their words with voters, they (at least in theory) have an interest in presenting a coherent and thoughtful critique or appraisal of the bill they are discussing in case a clip of their speech finds itself in a news report or is shared by an opposition MNA (Proksch & Slapin 2012, p.521-522). Thirdly, debates are more useful than votes in signaling policy positions, as they allow for a far more nuanced argument; even in cases where party discipline is strong, debates allow MNAs to voice what they think are the bill's shortcomings while still toeing the party line (Bäck & Debus 2016, p.62-63). Finally, MNAs' speeches signal responsiveness to the electorate, and allow for a more detailed, flexible, and individual analysis of party positions than party manifestos (Fernandes et al. 2021, p.2-3). Therefore, the speeches making up the debate on Bill 21 in the National Assembly are a rich source of data that allows for research into the policy positions MNAs wish to convey to voters, what arguments they use to do so, and what those arguments tell us about the ways in which parties conceptualize secularism and national belonging in Québec.

The discussion over secularism in Québec is longstanding, and inextricably entwined with that of nationalism. Since the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, the importance and presence of religion in the public sphere has steadily waned, and the narrative of emancipation from the Catholic Church has led to widespread distrust of religion (Zubrzycki 2016). Prior to Bill 21, other parties in power attempted—some successfully—to regulate religious

symbols in public spaces; notably the Parti Libéral du Québec's (PLQ) Bill 94 in 2011, the Parti Québécois's (PQ) Charter of values in 2013, and the PLQ's Bill 62 in 2017. In the province, these bills brought forth heated discussions on secularism; but because most of the debate has focused on religious symbols worn by religious minorities whose increase in numbers is mostly due to immigration, the issue of secularism also involves discussions on immigration, minority nationhood, and of who belongs in Québec society. Legislating secularism also brings forth issues such as the place of religion in public life where the white francophone majority, though mostly non-practicing, belongs to a religion that does not require religious symbols, while some minorities, many of whom are racialized, do wear religious symbols that also serve as identifying markers.

This paper traces the argumentation used by MNAs during the legislative debates on Bill 21, showing that each party presented clearly distinct policy positions and expressed different priorities in critiquing or supporting the bill, and that party positioning on questions of national belonging and pluralism, rather than positioning on the left-right economic axis and on questions of separatism, ultimately shaped the debate. Starting with the major social, historical and political cues that have informed secularism legislation over the past decade, this paper then explores the theoretical underpinnings of nationalism in sub-national states, identity construction, and belonging to the national community, before proposing a mechanism for party positioning on Bill 21 and presenting the methods used for the collection and analysis of legislative speech data. It analyses these data, presents the results of this analysis, and, finally, discusses the implications for the state of nationalism in Québec and other subnational states.

## **CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT**

### **2.1 Secularism in Culture and Politics**

For much of the history of the province of Québec, the Catholic Church exercised tremendous power in the province's society and institutions. However, the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s was characterized by large-scale abandonment of church attendance and an effective end of church control in education and healthcare. Since then, religiosity levels in Québec are the lowest in Canada, and although the majority of Québec residents (over 80% in 2011) are nominally Catholic, religiosity levels are low: fewer than 10% of residents of Québec attend religious gatherings every week, and the numbers are even lower for young people (Zubrzycki 2016, p.146). While the Quiet Revolution was characterized by many cultural shifts, according to Dufresne et al., its central legacy is secularism (2019, p.677).

The separation of Church and State is doubly important in Québec because it is “intrinsically tied” to Québécois national identity—it is central to the province's distinctiveness from the rest of Canada, due to a paradoxical combination of a French-speaking and Catholic cultural landscape with secular and progressive politics (Zubrzycki 2016, p.145, 147).

### **2.2 The ‘Reasonable Accommodation’ Debate**

*Legislating* secularism in Québec, while not particularly recent, began in earnest in 2006 following public debate on the goal of providing ‘reasonable accommodations’ to religious minorities by public institutions and in public spaces. Specifically, the debate centered on the perception held by many francophone Québécois that public institutions were too accommodating of requests by religious minorities (Zubrzycki 2016, p.150). In response

to public and media outcry, the Liberal Jean Charest government created the Commission on Practices of Accommodation Related to Cultural Differences, headed by Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor (commonly dubbed the Bouchard-Taylor Commission (BTC)). It was charged with exploring “the meaning and practice of Québec’s official secularism in the face of increasing religious pluralism created by diverse immigrant populations” (ibid., p.152).

The report submitted by the Bouchard-Taylor Commission was criticized both by political establishment players and minority groups. The Parti Québécois government that had ordered the report considered that it was an appeal to political correctness rather than a response to concerns about reasonable accommodation (Howard-Hassmann 2018, p.150). Infamously, Premier Jean Charest rushed to pass a motion to keep the crucifix hung in the National Assembly mere hours after the report was submitted, against the report’s recommendations (Zubrzycki 2016, p.165).

To Bilge, the debate on accommodation that centered on the BTC report consultations was racially structured, in that French-Canadian Québécois positioned themselves as legitimate deciders of the nation’s boundaries, and that the focus of contention was often more about the acceptability of diversity in the public space than about the power structures that put white Quebecers in the position of deciding belonging (2013, p.158, 166). Similarly, Mahrouse argues that the Commission’s work ended up reinforcing the exclusion and racialized hierarchy that permeated the accommodation debates pre-BTC (2010, p.85). The focus on interculturalism, rather than multiculturalism, further perpetuated this racial hierarchy, as Mahrouse argues that interculturalism’s emphasis on preservation of French

language and culture, itself a minority culture, involves a certain degree of assimilation of religious and ethnic minorities (2010, p.86).

In the aftermath of the BTC's report, it was clear that, in Québec, legislating secularism was just as much a question of immigration as it is of religion. Bouchard (2015), one half of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, makes little mention of immigration and only addresses the issue of religion. But Dufresne et al. argue that because, during the so-called crisis of reasonable accommodation, most highly-publicized requests for religious accommodation were made by religious minority groups largely composed of immigrants, the secularism debate is really more of a debate about immigrant integration than one about religion (2019, p.673).

The Commission's work and report made clear that the debate about reasonable accommodations was really about defining the boundaries of belonging in the nation and discussing the state of Québec's national identity. To Zubrzycki, the BTC's work became a questioning on the place of the province's Catholic heritage, and how it could or should fit within Québec's newer, secular identity (2016, 153). Further, Bilge posits that the debate was "a ritualized enactment of national belonging" in which white Québécois asserted their position as those who decide on the conduct of others (2013, p.164). Even more, to Bakali, the consultations served as a process of determining who did and did not belong in the nation (2015, p.422). Thus the Commission and its consultations set the stage for debates ostensibly about secularism to be more about defining borders of national identity, using racial and ethnic terms, than about separation of Church and State.

The Commission also introduced the notions of interculturalism and open secularism to the debate in the province. Interculturalism was presented as the Québec version of Canadian

multiculturalism, the latter being critiqued for creating “silos” in Canadian society—meaning segments of the population that interact mainly along ethnic or cultural lines, and do not form a common culture (Bouchard 2015, p.68). By contrast, Bouchard’s interculturalism considers the minority formed by Québec within Canada, and proposes a policy of “cultural convergence”, in which French is the language of public and civic life, values and norms are legislated, and the shared public culture is constructed by all people of all heritages; however, French-speaking Québec culture occupies pride of place as a concession to Québec’s minority status within the country (Bouchard 2015, p.44-46). The metaphor for interculturalism is of a three-strand braid, in which one strand represents the majority culture (Francophone Québécois), another the minority culture (presumably immigrant culture(s)), and the third represents the shared (and thus public) national culture (ibid., p.47).

Bouchard further elaborates on the notion of inclusive (or ‘open’) secularism, arguing that interculturalism and secularism cannot be debated separately given the linkages between religious and ethnic diversity in Québec (2015, p.116). This model of secularism subordinates religious expression to “the fundamental values of Québec society”, notably equality between men and women, and allows for the banning of religious symbols for employees of the State whose job puts them in a position to wield coercive power over others (with the exception of teachers) in order to preserve an image of objectivity (2015, p.122, 123). However, Bouchard defends the right to wear religious symbols outside of these contexts (2015, p. 128). He also cautions against using the argument of religious (specifically Catholic) objects and artifacts having a “heritage value” to the majority culture to justify clearly non-secular provisions (2015, p. 133). He proposes inclusive secularism

to be a middle ground between a republican model, which does not value diversity in the public space, and “individualist neoliberalism”, which fails to consider the importance of collective rights and values (2015, p. 135). Mancilla notes that there are three main elements to open secularism: integration of diversity within the Francophone majority, dialogue between the majority and religious minorities, and a critical appropriation of heritage—the latter taken to mean that immigrants are encouraged to retain elements of their heritage compatible with common values (Mancilla 2011, p. 799).

The years following the publication of the BTC report were peppered with legislative bills proposing to legislate on different aspects of Québec secularism, reasonable accommodation, and identity<sup>2</sup>. The most well-known and publicized of these was Bill 60, a Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests. It is more commonly known as the Charter of Québec Values.

The Charter of Québec Values was presented by Pauline Marois’s Parti Québécois (PQ) government in 2013. Its stated purpose was to reaffirm the secular status of the State, and to highlight that the individual rights and freedoms outlined in the provincial Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms must be exercised in a context respecting the following values: gender equality, French as the common language, separation of Church and State and State religious neutrality, and respect for Québec cultural and heritage symbols. It

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<sup>2</sup> Notably : Bill 95, An Act to establish guidelines governing accommodation requests within the Administration and certain institutions, which was introduced in 2010 by the Liberal government but never passed; Bill 394, An Act to amend the Act respecting immigration to Québec and other legislative provisions in order to facilitate the integration of immigrants in the labour market, which was introduced as a Liberal party private member’s bill in 2013 but never passed; and Bill 62, An Act to foster adherence to State religious neutrality and, in particular, to provide a framework for accommodations on religious grounds in certain bodies, which was introduced by the Liberal government in 2015 and passed in 2017.

aimed to do this by banning public sector employees—including teachers and childcare workers—from wearing ‘conspicuous religious symbols’ at work (Bill 60, *Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests*, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 40<sup>th</sup> Legislature, Québec, 2013). The Bill created great controversy and was the subject of intense media coverage. The PQ had also organized a working group to inform the drafting of the Charter, which, similarly to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, held public hearings that were widely scrutinized as it soon became clear over the course of the consultations that the PQ government was unwilling to negotiate on the key proposals of the Charter, even though it welcomed public expression of discontent (Laxer 2019, p. 157). Ultimately, due to the PQ calling, and subsequently losing, an election in early 2014, the Charter never became law. However, it set the stage for legislating secularism in a stricter sense, and for debates on religious symbols in the Legislature to become an important part of media debates as well.

### **2.3 Recent Changes in the Québec Political Landscape**

The 2018 election brought to power the Coalition Avenir Québec—a younger, centre-right party focused on autonomy within the federation rather than fully-fledged independence from Canada—to power for the first time, disrupting the longstanding electoral battle between the centre-federalist Parti Libéral du Québec and the centre-left-sovereigntist Parti Québécois and making significant gains at these parties’ expense in many of their traditional French-speaking ridings outside of Montreal. The PLQ was left with seats mostly in ridings with large immigrant or English-speaking populations in and near Montreal, while much of the PQ’s support crumbled in favour of the left-sovereigntist

Québec Solidaire (Hale 2019, p.6, 16). Hale argues that this significant shift in party support indicates a fragmentation of the nationalist spectrum, from a more strictly sovereigntist-federalist (PQ-PLQ) spectrum to one in which the CAQ represents national-conservative ideals, Québec Solidaire (QS) represents socialist ideals, and the PQ represents a hybrid form, and in which each party ties its form of nationalism to its ideal of statist interventionism (2019, p.22). Ultimately, however, regionalism and the ethno-linguistic divide played the largest role in shifting the PQ-PLQ duopoly, with the CAQ making gains at the expense of the PQ and PLQ in most French-speaking regions, both urban and rural, outside Montreal and its suburbs; QS benefitted the most in French-speaking urban regions in Montreal at the expense of the PQ, and the PLQ performed best in ridings with smaller French-speaking populations (ibid., p.25, 28).

Shortly after the CAQ's win in 2018, Bill 21, An Act respecting the Laicity of the State, was put forward and was passed in June 2019. While similar in many ways to Bill 60, notably in barring public servants from wearing religious symbols at work, Bill 21 *explicitly* modifies the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms to emphasize that individual freedoms must be exercised in the context of respect for State secularism and neutrality (Bill 21, *Act respecting the laicity of the State*, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Legislature, Québec, 2019).

Bill 21 represented a change in nationalist politics from differentiating between Québec and the rest of Canada, to emphasizing the Québec state's desire and expectation for immigrants to adhere to French Canadian values and culture (Béland, Lecours & Schmeiser 2021, p.194). Koussens argues that it represents an ideal of nationalist secularism, a reactionary piece of legislation designed to uphold the values of the primacy of French, assimilation of immigrants, and preservation of French and Catholic heritage (2020, n.p.).

Thus it is clear that nationalist sentiments not only are present in secularism legislation in Québec, but also that they have evolved to focus more directly on questions of subnational identity since the Bouchard-Taylor Commission submitted its report in 2007.

### **CHAPTER 3: NATIONALISM IN SUBNATIONAL STATES**

Categorizations of nationalism are tricky, but there are some main distinctions. Dupré proposes three types: ethnic, civic, and civil; in which ethnic nationalism is highly assimilationist, and is based on language, race, regionalism, religion and customs (2012, p.231). Civic nationalism is based in elements of the political or legal system—there is a distinction between liberal and republican civic nationalism; the former in which cultural retention is encouraged but only in the private sphere, while the latter is assimilationist but based on democratic values (ibid.). Finally, civil nationalism is essentially, or at least functionally, official multiculturalism, in which cultural retention is encouraged in the public as well as private sphere (ibid., p.232). Civic nationalisms are often portrayed as liberal and inclusive, and present in countries where the boundaries of the nation match the boundaries of the state (Barker 2015, p.34). In contrast, sub-state nationalisms, in which the boundaries of the nation do not match the boundaries of the larger state, are characterized as illiberal and exclusive (read: ethnic nationalism), thus translating to policies hostile toward immigrant minorities (ibid.). However, this characterization is flawed: sub-national states react in a variety of ways to incoming migration flows, including both civic and ethnic elements, notably by including sub-state cultural content such as an official language and national symbols, thus creating their own “majority nationalism projects” in a subnational context (ibid., p.34-35).

In subnational states, nationalism continues to garner support in part due to the creation of autonomous political structures, such as the National Assembly in Québec, which allow sovereigntist politicians to “assert the nation” at the provincial level (Lecours 2012, p.274). The type of electoral system used in sub-state governance structures matters. For example,

the Flemish proportional representation system in Belgium encourages party differentiation and allows for smaller parties with ethnic or linguistic agendas to become part of coalition governments, thus incentivizing small parties to promote explicitly anti-immigration policies (Erk 2014, p.224). While the Québec legislature is elected using a first-past-the-post system, this does not mean that anti-immigrant policies cannot be passed; rather, that they must receive support from a plurality of MNAs.

In immigrant-receiving countries, national minorities such as Québécois francophones forge identities in opposition to the national majority—English-speaking Canada—as well as in opposition to immigrants, for whom the national minority is a regional majority (Laxer, Carson & Korteweg 2014, p.133). National minorities may conceive of immigration and citizenship as part of their goals of self-determination, in which regional citizenship, as an identity, implies belonging to the political community (Hepburn 2010, p. 506). The receptiveness of regional parties depends on the degree of polarisation of immigration in the region, the status of language as a sub-national marker and requirement for membership, and the level of control sub-state governments have over immigration policy (ibid., p. 520-522). For example, Scotland is particularly receptive to an open and inclusive citizenship policy (ibid., p. 513), given that immigration is widely viewed as a desirable solution to an ageing population, language is not a salient issue, and immigration is a responsibility of the central government in London, and thus not viewed as a salient issue of legislative debate at the regional level.

While formal citizenship does not exist in Québec, the concept of citizenship as a form of national belonging has been used as a tool of nation-building—notably by the Parti Québécois to pursue its goal of statehood in the 1980s and 1990s. More recently, during

the debates on reasonable accommodation and on the Charter of Values, citizenship has explicitly shifted to an idea symbolizing belonging in the political community, in which “sharing and respecting values (such as secularism) [is] an essential requirement of citizenship” (Xhardez 2020, p. 809). Indeed, addressing issues related to collective identity and national belonging is a small gesture of self-determination used to legitimize the Francophone majority determining the terms of belonging (Iacovino 2015, p.54).

Kymlicka criticizes post-national models of citizenship and belonging, which pride themselves on having moved past ethnic nationalism toward an overarching identity for the entire country, but which do not address underlying dynamics of national minorities such as Francophone Quebecers (2011, p. 293). Instead, he argues that sub-state nationalist movements are incentivized to recruit immigrants to their project of nation-building by promoting a multi-national form of belonging that is inclusive of different ethnic and religious backgrounds and centers around shared language and values; essentially arguing that immigrants become citizens of the large country precisely by becoming members of the national minority (ibid., p. 294). However, Beaumeister cautions that the cultural survival focus of minority nations on values as well as language and norms may ultimately lead to restricting the freedom of immigrants and minorities because of the pressure to define oneself in terms of cultural (read: subnational) membership rather than by any other affiliation (2003, p.402-404).

Dupré argues that secularism, in Québec, is so entangled with Québec nationalism that it has become an identity marker for members of the French Canadian majority (2012, p.238). Thus, and this was fairly clear from the beginning, the debate on Bill 21 and on the Charter of Values is not only about secularism, or even only about racialized religious minorities

that are the main targets of secularism legislation. The debate is about the Québec state deciding who may and may not fully participate in public life, and who belongs in Québec society, by using secularism ostensibly as a ‘common’ public value in a way that not all residents of the province, particularly racialized religious minorities, can participate.

## **CHAPTER 4: PARTY POSITIONING ON INTEGRATION POLICY**

This section outlines the scholarly literature on partisanship and its interaction with integration and immigration policy in subnational regions and states such as Québec. It explores five possible factors that impact party positioning, and eventually settles on a possible mechanism explaining party positioning in the case of Bill 21.

There are five broad factors that may shape party positioning on immigration and integration policy in subnational states and regions: 1) the party's place on the left-right economic axis; 2) electoral competition with the federal or national level; 3) the party's place on the centre-periphery axis; 3) the party's views on what constitutes belonging to the nation; and 5) the party's place on the pluralist-monist axis.

### **4.1 Left-Right Economic Axis**

Generally, parties that lean left on the economic axis tend to be more supportive of immigration than right-leaning parties (Ellermann 2021, p.53). However, party positioning on the left-right economic axis is not necessarily a predictor for positioning on immigration and integration policy: Abou-Chadi highlights the importance of the institutional context of policy-making in regards to immigration—while European right parties hold stronger anti-immigration positions than left parties, left parties are no more likely to pass pluralist immigration policy in the presence of institutional veto points (2016, p.2091, 2097). Further, the status of the governing party matters: in regional legislatures, majority governments have far more flexibility to enact pro- or anti-immigration legislation than minority governments (Piccoli 2019, p.351). Writing in the context of subnational states with separatist movements, Manatschal et al. argue that left-right partisanship impacts

parties' policy choices in that left parties are more likely to favour less restrictive immigration and integration policies, and right parties are more likely to favour more restrictive policies. However, leftist governments tend to put these policies in place more often when they control regional governments but are shut out of national governments (2020, p.1478). Therefore, contextual factors such as majority or minority government status, the openness of legislative veto points, and the governing party at the national level matter just as much, if not more, than left-right policy alignment in predicting regional parties' stance on matters of immigration and integration.

If parties' position on the left-right economic axis does inform their positioning on integration measures, we would expect to first see left-right positioning align with voting on Bill 21. This is not the case: while the centre-left PLQ voted against the bill and the centre-right CAQ (as the party that presented the bill) supported it, both the leftist QS and PQ had opposite votes on Bill 21. We would also expect economic concerns to be a main topic of discussion in the legislative debates. As economic concerns expressed in the legislative debate are mostly limited to discussions related to labour shortages and career discrimination, this, combined with the lack of alignment between parties' left-right axis positioning and voting behavior on Bill 21, indicates that this factor is unlikely to have been a major force in informing party positioning on the bill.

## **4.2 Electoral Dynamics**

Electoral dynamics also shape party positioning on questions of immigration, both in general and in regional contexts. In some European subnational contexts, regional parties that control subnational governments but are shut out of national governments may use social policies—such as healthcare, or integration measures—to “strengthen distinctive

regional identities and create models of regional social citizenship” (Manatschal et al. 2020, p.1478). Timing also matters—Piccoli demonstrates that immigrant rights in regards to accessing healthcare were expanded in Tuscany and in the Swiss canton of Vaud shortly before elections, becoming electoral issues (2019, p.351). In German, Italian, and Spanish subnational regions, Zuber finds that when leftist regional governments are confronted with right-leaning national governments, this correlates with a lower share of regional assimilationist policies (2020, p.1494). Thus, the electoral environment in which regions form their integration and immigration policy matters as well.

Multi-level party politics are an additional electoral consideration. While some parties only operate at the regional level, some national parties may have regional branches. This is the case with the Parti Libéral du Québec (PLQ) and the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC), as well as the Parti Québécois (PQ) (at the provincial level) and the Bloc Québécois (BQ) (at the federal level). The PQ and BQ have truncated party structures and are thus completely autonomous (Thorlakson 2009, p.166); however, due to their shared central ideology based on Québec independence, both parties act as a multi-level coalition in which the PQ, at the provincial level, holds the reins (Masson & Lachapelle 2018, p.193). The LPC, on the other hand, is semi-integrated with its provincial counterparts at the organizational level, such as campaigning and sharing staff (Pruysers 2015, p.167). Koop argues that although the LPC and PLQ are likely fairly highly integrated at the policy level, the differing party systems between Québec and the federal level, as well as the PLQ’s occasionally nationalist stance, indicates that their integration at the policy level is not complete (2011, p.184). Although integration and policy congruence between the federal and provincial level may have some impact on party positioning in the realm of immigration and integration policy,

such as the use of a multicultural framework by both the PLQ and LPC, this question is outside this paper's realm of inquiry, as it is unlikely to be present in data collected from legislative debates. However, overall it demonstrates the importance of multi-level party politics in influencing regional decisions—that opposition between regional and national governments shapes regional immigration and integration policy, but also that differing levels of integration between parties at the national and regional level may exert different pressures.

### **4.3 Centre-Periphery Axis**

The centre-periphery axis is one of the main axes on which Québec provincial parties are positioned; it is also known as the federalist-separatist axis. On the centre/federalist side of this axis, regional parties push for unity with the national level, while on the periphery/separatist side, regional parties push for increased devolution or independence from the national level. While integration policies related to the cultural-religious domain are particularly salient in strongly separatist regions, not all parties on the periphery side of this axis behave in the same way. Catalonia's approach consists of culturally assimilationist but socioeconomically inclusive policies; Scotland has emphasized multiculturalism as a new basis for the Scottish nation; and Flanders has combined multicultural policies with civic integration requirements (Manatschal 2020, p.1478).

Although the centre-periphery axis is a frequent measure of Québec provincial party positioning, it does not seem to directly predict party positioning on integration or immigration policy in other separatist regions. If it this axis does indeed inform party positioning on Bill 21, we would expect to see alignment between the centre-periphery axis and party voting behavior—however, there is no such alignment: the separatist PQ voted

for Bill 21, while the equally separatist QS voted against it; the federalist PLQ voted against the bill, while the moderate CAQ backed it. Thus it is clear that the centre-periphery axis, although salient in debates relating to identity in subnational states, does not directly inform party positioning on integration policy.

#### **4.4 National Belonging**

Party positioning on the question of national belonging—essentially, deciding who belongs in the subnational community and who doesn’t—especially matters to positioning on matters of integration. Béland and Lecours posit that, in regions with strong minority nationalism, social policy is simultaneously a vehicle for the expression of common ideals or values, as well as a means by which a nation creates and reproduces its own identity (2005, p.680). Thus, both right- and left-wing parties link social policy and national identity by restricting the provision of services provided by the regional state to only people that fit within the subnational framework of belonging (ibid.). Regional governments may attempt to redefine subnational belonging by providing rights that had previously been attributed to national citizenship; they may do this in two ways: by deciding who is eligible to receive public services provided by the regional state, and by determining who can access those services in practice (Piccoli 2019, p.352, 348). European regionalist parties have taken different approaches in reaction to increased immigration: some, such as the Bavarian Christian Union and the Italian Northern League, have taken an anti-integration approach in an effort to “protect local cultures from newcomers”; others, such as the Catalan Convergence and Union Party and the Scottish National Party, have taken an opposite approach which focuses on assimilating immigrants into the nation in order to benefit the project of subnational autonomy by “increasing the number of people claiming

identification with the nation” (Hepburn 2009, p.527). What distinguishes anti-immigration parties from others, then, in a regional context, is the exclusivity of their definition of the nation.

To understand if conceptions of national belonging shape party positioning on integration measures such as Bill 21, first we must demonstrate what parties understand to be belonging in the Québec nation, as there is no widely accepted axis for this measurement. The legislative debates are a useful tool in this analysis. Using Hepburn’s (2009) distinction between regionalist parties that wish to protect minority cultures from immigration and regionalist parties that seek to assimilate newcomers to the nation-building project, we would expect the latter to make mentions of inclusion, expanding the definition of the nation, and express numerical concerns related to a shrinking population. The former, on the other hand, may make reference to protecting values held by the nation, and emphasize the importance of values (such as secularism) to upholding the nation.

#### **4.5 Plural-Monist Axis**

Finally, the plural-monist axis (which can also be described as a cosmopolitan-assimilationist axis) places parties according to the question of *how* immigrants should integrate into a host society. This axis focuses on the cultural and religious rights dimension of citizenship and belonging: essentially, equal treatment and recognition with other groups (Penninx 2005, p.139). On the pluralist-monist axis, the pluralist view is similar to a multicultural one, in which parties favour providing immigrants with increased liberal cultural and religious rights, as well as comparatively easier routes to citizenship (Manatschal 2011, p.339). In contexts such as Québec, where the subnational region offers

no formal citizenship, ‘citizenship’ can be used as a proxy for belonging to the subnational community, if only on the terms of its political leaders.

The monist side of the axis includes both universalist and assimilationist views on integration. Overall, it advocates for a uniform culture within the state or subnational region. The universalist view, for which a classic example is the French republican model of integration, advocates for strict neutrality of the state in regards to immigrants’ cultural and religious practices (Manatschal 2011, p.341). The assimilationist view aims for immigrants to reach a high degree of cultural assimilation, and makes few concessions to cultural pluralism; additionally, access to citizenship (or belonging) is hampered (ibid., p.339). While both the universalist and assimilationist view fall under the monist end of the pluralist-monist axis, the main difference between the two views in their approach to individual equality is in regards to citizenship: universalists have a civic-territorial understanding of citizenship and belonging, while assimilationists understand belonging as being part of the state or region’s main ethnic group (Manatschal 2011, p.339). While the federal level controls citizenship in Canada, Québec’s discussion on Bill 21 arguably promotes a more restrictive definition of nationhood.

#### **4.6 Proposed Mechanism: Party Positioning on Integration in Subnational Communities**

The proposed mechanism by which parties come to take position on integration legislation such as Bill 21 is as follows. Parties are first distinguished by their understanding of national belonging, according to Hepburn’s (2009) framework: they understand the nation either as something to be “protect[ed] (...) from newcomers,” or as a project which much be bolstered by “increasing the number of people claiming identification with the nation”. This first distinction is followed by parties’ positioning on the plural-monist axis.

Table 1: Expected Regionalist Party Stance on Integration Policy, According to Positioning on National Belonging and Pluralism

		Stance on National Belonging	
		‘Protect’	‘Expand’
Stance on Pluralism	Monist	<u>Assimilationist</u> Seeks to eliminate salient differences between newcomers and established subnational community.	<u>Uniformist</u> Seeks uniformity within the subnational state, based on common values and characteristics (defined by policymakers). State should be agnostic on questions of cultural and religious practices.
	Plural	<u>Separatist</u> Seeks exclusionary definition to national belonging – consistent with an ethnic understanding of nationhood. However, national belonging is not necessary to live and form community within the subnational state’s territory, outside of the boundary of belonging to the nation. Strong emphasis on collective rights for those that do belong to the nation.	<u>Multiculturalist</u> Seeks to include immigrants in the national project and have immigrants identify with the goals of the nation. Emphasis on expanding cultural and religious rights for newcomers.

If their position in regards to national belonging is ‘protect,’ parties are likely to take one of two positions, based on their plural-monist axis positioning (although it seems unlikely that parties holding the ‘protect’ view would take the pluralist position). The ‘protect’-plural position is likely to be a separatist one, pushing for policies that allow a subnational community to retain strict borders to belonging, meaning that while newcomers may live within the subnational territory, they do not integrate the community. This position would be consistent with ethnic understandings of belonging, emphasis on collective rights held by the subnational community, and conserving values associated with the national community in the face of change brought on by increased migration.

If parties' positioning on national belonging is 'protect,' but they hold a monist position on the plural-monist axis, they are likely to push for policies which eliminate salient differences between newcomers and the minority nation. This is effectively an assimilationist stance. In the Québec context, these salient values and characteristics are likely to be tied to the use of French as well as secularism in the public sphere as a condition for subnational belonging. In the context of the legislative debates surrounding Bill 21, these values are likely to be related to the absence of religious symbols in public spaces, gender equality (expressed as a lack of gendered religious garb), and mentions of incompatibility between so-called Québec values and religious values.

On the other hand, if parties' position on national belonging is 'expand,' their positioning on integration policy is again likely to depend on their placement on the plural-monist axis. The 'expand'-plural position is likely to push for policies that seek to include immigrants in the national project, and push immigrants to identify with the subnational community and its goals, by providing more expansive cultural rights and expanding the boundaries of the subnational community with less regard for uniformity within the subnational state. Concurrently, this position is also likely to push parties to oppose measures that are likely to impede immigrants from identifying with the subnational community, such as prohibiting religious markers in the public sphere. In the context of the legislative debates surrounding Bill 21, these ideas are likely to be represented by mentions of multiculturalism and interculturalism, advocating for civic nationalism, explicit mentions of the need to expand the subnational community, and the protection of minorities' rights to cultural and religious expression.

Finally, if parties hold an ‘expand’ position on national belonging, combined with a monist position on the plural-monist axis, they are likely to advocate for policy that pushes for uniformity within the subnational state. However, unlike the ‘protect’-monist view, which is likely to prefer assimilationist policy, the ‘expand’ monist view is likely to push for universalist policies based on common values and characteristics, while expecting that the regional state stay agnostic about immigrants’ cultural and religious practices in an effort to allow immigrants to identify with the values of the national project without compromising personal beliefs and important cultural practices. In the context of legislative debates surrounding Bill 21, these ideas are likely to be represented by mentions of unity within the subnational community, advocating for open secularism, advocating for civic nationalism, explicit mentions of the need to include immigrants in the subnational community, and emphasizing the French language and openness as a central characteristic of the nation over the importance of keeping religious symbols in the private sphere.

## **CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY AND CODING**

This paper traces different parties' narratives of nationalism in the debate on secularism and Bill 21. In order to do this, I carry out an analysis of the speeches given by MNAs by all four parties in the Québec National Assembly in late May and early June 2019. This includes one speech by the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), 2 speeches by the Parti Québécois (PQ), seven speeches by Québec Solidaire (QS), and eleven speeches by the Parti Libéral du Québec (PLQ). All of these speeches were given during the adoption in principle, after the presentation of the bill, special consultations, and tabling of the consultation committee's report, but before the National Assembly committee deliberated on it. Although the committee submitted three amendments to the report, they were all rejected; thus the bill that was ultimately passed was unchanged from the version debated in the adoption in principle.

Coding follows a two-step iterative process (Charmaz 2006) using Nvivo software. In the first round of coding, each speech is attributed to the party of the speaker, and divided into smaller sections, according to the arguments made by the speaker. The division of these sections is based on 'demands' made by the speaker, such as when an MNA makes an argument as to what should or should not be, or as to what is desirable or undesirable; every section containing such a demand, such as a paragraph or collection of two or three consecutive paragraphs, becomes an individually coded argument (Davidson et al., 2017, p.170). Demands related solely to the actions or trustworthiness of another party are not considered in coding. In the first round of coding, each new argument presented involves creating a new code in Nvivo. Over the course of the first round of coding, arguments that are very similar or identical are grouped under the same codes.

Prior to the second round of coding, all existing codes are reviewed to establish the main categories of argument (both in critique and support of Bill 21) used by MNAs over the course of the debate. The final broad argument categories, whose definitions are outlined later in this paper, are: 1) *the Bouchard-Taylor Commission* and its report; 2) the *Charter of (human) rights and freedoms*; 3) *Discrimination*; 4) *Diversity*; 5) *Implementation of Bill 21*; 6) the *importance of the issue*; 7) *Majority*; 8) *Nationalism*; 9) *Rights*; 10) *Secularism*; 11) *Temporality*; 12) *the Goldilocks code*; and 13) *Wider impacts*. An ‘Other’ code is also included for the few arguments that were not included in the 13 codes previously mentioned.

In the same way as in the first round of coding, the second round of coding also uses demands made by MNAs as the base of the arguments being coded. Each argument is coded for at least one of the 13 main codes established after the second round of coding; however, some codes are subdivided into ‘child’ codes; when this is the case, the ‘parent’ code has a broad coding definition, but the most binding definition is the one assigned to the child code.

The process of using an inductive, two-round method of coding allows for a more nuanced and true analysis of the texts, as it pulls the overall coding themes directly from the text being analysed. While some codes established for the second round, notably *Nationalism* and *Secularism*, are more central to the analysis of the speeches, other codes are more peripheral to the analysis; the latter tend to have fewer child codes, as the parent code captures sufficient nuance. For example, codes such as the *Bouchard-Taylor Commission*, *Temporality*, *Diversity*, and *Importance of issue*, which are present in the debate but are not particularly salient, have no or few child codes.

The *Bouchard-Taylor Commission* code has no child codes. It includes mentions of the Commission's report and recommendations, and mentions of the authors and their separate recommendations and later critiques of the report.

The *Charter of (human) rights and freedoms* code has two child codes. The broad coding definition includes mentions of both the Québec Charter of human rights and freedoms and Canadian Charter of rights and freedoms. The first child code, *Derogatory clause*, is used for speeches defending or critiquing the specific use of the derogatory clause (used to circumvent the Charter's defense of individual rights) prior to passing Bill 21 in the National Assembly. The second child code, *General – Charter*, is used on more general arguments related to the Charter that do not include mentions of the derogatory clause.

The *Discrimination* code has four child codes. The broad coding definition includes mentions of discrimination, such as the potential negative effects of Bill 21 resulting in discrimination, or potential positive effects, such as addressing sources of discrimination. In some cases, MNAs also argue for discriminatory positions which are coded under these codes. The child codes are coded as such: *Career* is used to code for effects of Bill 21 on the careers of people who wear religious symbols—for example, concerns that people may not be able to pursue a career in their chosen profession, or be barred from further advancing in their current profession. *General Discrimination* is used for mentions of discriminatory effects of Bill 21 that are not specific to any other *Discrimination* child code. *Racism* is used for mentions of discrimination due to race, ethnicity, skin colour or appearance. It also includes mentions of discrimination against immigrants (without specification of religion), due to the racialized nature of the debate on immigration in Québec. *Religious* is used for mentions of discrimination toward named and un-named

minority religious groups, people wearing specific and unspecified religious symbols. Finally, *Sexism* is used for mentions of discrimination against women.

The *Diversity* code has no child codes. It is used to code for mentions of plurality, openness, diversity, *le vivre-ensemble* ('living together'), and migrant contributions to Québec society, as well as effects of diversity on societal cohesion.

The *Implementation* code has two child codes. Generally, it covers arguments that raise concerns about the implementation of Bill 21 and its more concrete effects. The first child code, *Professional duty*<sup>3</sup>, is used for mentions of the existing duty of professionals to be impartial in regards to religion and avoiding proselytism. The second child code, *Implementation – General*, includes mentions of Bill 21's shortcomings and oversights in regards to implementation, such as lack of definitions for religious symbols, or lack of parameters for enforcement.

The *Importance of issue* code is used for arguments that mention the pressing nature and importance (or lack thereof) of the issue Bill 21 aims to solve. This includes arguments positing that Bill 21 resolves an important and pressing issue, that the issue exists but is that there are more pressing issues to resolve, or that the issue does not exist or is minor, for example.

The *Majority* code has three child codes. Generally, it concerns arguments mentioning facets of majority or minority relationships in a democratic context. The first child code, *Majority rules*, is used for mentions of majority mandate in the National Assembly, majority consensus within the population on secularism or support for Bill 21. The second

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<sup>3</sup> The term most used in the Bill 21 speeches is 'devoir de réserve'.

child code, *No majority*, concerns arguments related to lack of majority support, for example that B21 does not have majority support, that it does not have sufficient support to legitimise the use of the derogatory clause, or that minorities do not support the bill. Finally, the third child code, *Protection of minorities*, highlights the need to protect the rights of minorities against the desires of the majority in a democratic system.

The *Nationalism* code has six child codes. The first two codes are for what the speaker is promoting in their speech—either ethnic or civic nationalism. This means that these arguments are coded less for the words they use than for the impression they make, and require some interpretation by the coder. The *Advocates for civic nationalism* code is used for speeches that advocate for liberal (read: individual rights) and inclusive interpretations of secularism legislation (Barker 2015, p.34). Alternately, the *Advocates for ethnic nationalism* code is used for speeches that advocate for illiberal (read: denying individual rights) and exclusive interpretations of secularism legislation (ibid.).

The next two child codes under *Nationalism*, in contrast, revert to taking the speeches at face value as they require less interpretation. The *Bill 21 is civic nationalism* code is ultimately moot, as no speeches explicitly argued that Bill 21 represented a civic form of nationalism. The *Bill 21 is ethnic nationalism* code is used for speeches arguing that Bill 21 represents different facets of ethnic nationalism such as being inward-looking, unjustifiably limiting rights to religious minorities, exclusion from Québec society, division, regression and narrowing from a civic ‘who we are’, a sense of belonging to the French Canadian (ethnic) majority, and fear of others.

There are two final child codes under *Nationalism*: the first is *Promoting Québec sovereignty*, which is used for arguments calling for increased independence for Québec,

within or outside the Canadian federal system. It also includes mentions of the Québec nation and self-determination. The last is *Québec identity*, which codes for arguments that mention a Québec model, Québec values, Québec distinctiveness, societal choices and characteristics, ‘who we are’, and heritage and culture.

The *Rights* parent code has three child codes, all related to the type of rights to which the speaker is referring. This coding category is distinct from *Discrimination* in that it refers to arguments that specifically mention the following *types* of rights, rather than the effect of lack of or inefficient legal protection. *Acquired rights* codes for mentions of acquired rights for workers affected by the measures outlined in Bill 21. It is important to note that Bill 21 included a provision of acquired rights in which workers (specifically teachers) who were already employed at the time of Bill 21’s passing would retain the right to wear religious symbols, but only as long as they remained in the same position. The speeches coded under this child code all refer to this situation. *Collective rights* codes for mentions of rights assigned to a collective group, such as the Québécois nation. Finally, *Fundamental rights* codes for mentions of fundamental individual rights, either by name or by mentioning rights included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms or the Québec Charter of human rights and freedoms, such as liberty of conscience. However, mentions of the specific Charters would instead be included under the *Charter of (human) rights and freedoms* parent code.

The *Secularism* parent code has five child codes. Generally, these codes are used for arguments that refer to the presence of religion in the public or private sphere. The first two child codes are used to evaluate the content of the speech, and for what type of secularism it advocates. *Advocates for closed secularism* is used for speeches that promote

the integration of diversity into the definition of the nation, as well as retaining elements of religious heritage such as religious symbols in the public space (Mancilla 2011, p.799). In contrast, the second child code, *Advocates for open secularism*, is used for speeches that see no value in having diversity in the public space and advocate for banning religious symbols outside of the private sphere (Bouchard 2015, p.133).

The next child code, *Bill 21 is closed secularism*, is used for speeches arguing that Bill 21 is contrary to promoting open secularism, and promotes a version of secularism that is exclusionary and anti-religious. *Bill 21 is open secularism* is used for arguments positing that Bill 21 is inclusive and promotes openness. Finally, *Separation of Church and State* is used for arguments that mention the relationship between Church and State.

The *Temporality* parent code is used to refer to the speaker's opinion on the progressiveness or regressiveness of Bill 21. The *Progressive* child code is used for speeches including mentions of modernity and progressive values, while the *Regressive* child code is used for speeches including mentions of moving backward, old values, and Bill 21 being contrary to modernity.

The *Goldilocks* code is used to evaluate the response of the speaker to Bill 21 in terms of its proportionality, but not to the existence or prevalence of the issue that Bill 21 attempts to resolve. The *Moderate (just right)* child code is used for speeches arguing that Bill 21 is moderate, and is a proportionate response to the issue. The *Not far enough* child code is used for speeches that argue that Bill 21 does not fully resolve the issue, or critiques that it does not include further measures. Finally, the *Radical (too far)* child code is used for speeches that argue that Bill 21 is a disproportionate response to the issue, or that it goes too far in attempting to resolve the issue.

The *Wider impacts* parent code has four child codes, and generally is used for speeches that address an issue outside the legislative arena. The *International* child code is used for speeches that refer to international repercussions of Bill 21, such as an effect on Québec's image on the international scene. The *Labour shortage* child code is used for speeches that refer to the effects Bill 21 would have on the labour supply in sectors that currently face a shortage, such as education. The *State leads by example* child code is used for speeches that refer to repercussions Bill 21 may have in the private sector, outside the official reach of the Bill. Finally, the *Other* child code is used for speeches that refer to other various and infrequent wider implications.

Finally, the last coding category, *Other*, is used to include themes that were very infrequent or otherwise did not fit in with the most common arguments. After the second round of coding, I found arguments containing *School and teaching concerns*, regarding arguments specifically related to the implementation or effect of Bill 21 in schools, within the *Other* code to be frequent enough to warrant a separate sub-category.

Some of these codes do not differentiate between positions that argue for or against Bill 21. However, because MNAs voted on the bill, their overall views on it (whether they are for or against it) are known. Thus this coding does not serve the direct purpose of explaining which arguments are used differently by MNAs that voted for or against Bill 21; rather it serves the purpose of identifying party priorities and the prevalence of different themes of argument. This allows for a better understanding of *how* these themes are used to promote both an argument for or against Bill 21, as well as party understandings of national belonging and secularism.

The main difference between the first and second round of coding, apart from the established codes, is that coded sections could be, and often were, coded to multiple codes rather than a single one. This is because, while the first round of coding accounted for the main thrust of the argument, some coded sections referred to more than one existing code, as none of the parent codes are mutually exclusive.

## CHAPTER 6: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Overall, the analysis of the speeches given by MNAs in the National Assembly on Bill 21 demonstrates a clear divide in party priorities related to presenting opposition or support of the bill to the public. Each party presented a distinct position on the bill, based on differing narratives of nationalism and views on the role of secularism. The following table outlines the number of codes assigned to MNAs' speeches according to party, and divided by the number of speakers per party. This allows for determining, on average, how often every MNA mentions the topics coded, as a proxy for the importance each party assigns to different facets of the debate surrounding the bill. A mention is measured as a main section of an argument, using the paragraph divisions of the parliamentary transcripts as a guide. In the following table, parent codes are highlighted in light blue; child codes are in white<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The parliamentary procedures of the National Assembly allow for different speech lengths depending on the status of the speaker. This helps explain some of the discrepancies in total code counts between parties. Percentages are more useful to the analysis than code counts when comparing parties to each other, in order to determine the weight of each argument as a proxy for the importance parties give to categories of argumentation.

Table 2: Code Counts per Speaker, According to Party<sup>5</sup>

Codes	Party			
	CAQ	PQ	QS	PLQ
<b>Nationalism</b>	<b>6.00</b>	<b>6.00</b>	<b>9.71</b>	<b>3.50</b>
Promoting QC independence	2.00	4.67	2.29	0.20
QC identity	4.00	0.67	2.57	1.80
Advocates for civic nationalism	0.00	0.33	3.71	1.00
B21 is ethnic nationalism	0.00	0.00	1.14	0.50
Advocates for ethnic nationalism	0.00	0.33	0.00	0.00
B21 is civic nationalism	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Secularism</b>	<b>9.00</b>	<b>6.33</b>	<b>2.14</b>	<b>3.60</b>
Separation of Church and State	6.00	3.00	0.57	0.60
Advocates for closed secularism	2.00	3.33	0.00	0.10
Advocates for open secularism	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.50
B21 is closed secularism	0.00	0.00	0.57	1.40
B21 is open secularism	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Rights</b>	<b>8.00</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>1.14</b>	<b>5.70</b>
Fundamental rights	4.00	1.67	1.00	4.60
Collective rights	4.00	0.00	0.14	0.00
Acquired rights	0.00	0.33	0.00	1.10
<b>Discrimination</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>4.29</b>	<b>8.00</b>
Sexism	1.00	0.00	1.14	2.10
Religious	0.00	0.00	1.29	2.50
Career	0.00	0.67	0.71	2.30
General Discrimination	0.00	0.33	0.43	0.80
Racism	0.00	0.00	0.71	0.30
<b>Majority</b>	<b>6.00</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>3.20</b>
Majority rules	6.00	3.33	0.00	0.20
Protection of minorities	0.00	0.00	0.29	1.80
No majority	0.00	0.00	0.71	1.20
<b>Goldilocks</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>5.67</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.10</b>
Not far enough	0.00	4.67	0.00	0.00
Moderate (just right)	3.00	1.00	0.00	0.00
Radical (too far)	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.10
<b>Importance of issue</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>2.71</b>	<b>2.80</b>
<b>Charter of (human) rights and freedoms</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>5.00</b>
Derogatory clause	1.00	0.67	1.29	3.70
General Charter	0.00	0.33	0.71	1.30
<b>Implementation</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>1.57</b>	<b>4.30</b>
Implementation - General	0.00	2.00	0.29	2.80
Professional duty	0.00	0.00	1.29	1.50
<b>Other (incl. school concerns)</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>2.80</b>
School and teaching concerns	2.00	1.67	0.14	2.10
Other	0.00	0.30	0.40	0.70
<b>Diversity</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>0.33</b>	<b>1.29</b>	<b>1.70</b>
<b>Bouchard-Taylor Commission Report</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>0.57</b>	<b>1.70</b>
<b>Temporality</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>0.70</b>
Progressive	2.00	0.67	0.00	0.00
Regressive	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.70
<b>Wider implications</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>1.40</b>
Labour shortage	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.70
State leads by example	0.00	0.00	0.43	0.20
International	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.20
Other	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>46.00</b>	<b>32.33</b>	<b>28.93</b>	<b>45.50</b>

<sup>5</sup> For the same table in percentage format, see Appendix A, p.60

## 6.1 Party Priorities: Nationalism or Secularism?

Despite the overall higher coding count for speeches coded under *Nationalism*, only one party, QS, had a higher coding value per speaker on *Nationalism* codes (33.6% of all codes) compared to *Secularism* codes (7.4% of all codes). However, this does not necessarily disprove the idea that Bill 21 is only about regulating religious symbols in public and civic spaces; rather, the prevalence of *Nationalism* codes indicates that ideas of nationalism are just as present in the debate on Bill 21 as those of secularism. Indeed, while only QS prioritises nationalism themes over secularism themes, the two other opposition parties have noticeably similar levels of coding per speaker for both themes. While 7.9% of the PLQ's speeches per speaker are coded for *Secularism*, 7.7% are also coded for *Nationalism*. Similarly, the PQ has slightly higher coding values per speaker for *Secularism* themes (19.6%), but still has fairly high coding values for *Nationalism* themes (18.6%). Finally, even though the CAQ is the only party to clearly prioritize *Secularism* themes over *Nationalism* themes (19.6% and 13.0% of coding per speaker, respectively), they do not forgo discussions related to nationalism entirely. Thus, while it cannot be concluded that questions of nationalism were *more* important to the debate on Bill 21 than secularism, it is significant that they were at least as important for two parties (PLQ and PQ), more important for one party (QS), and, while less important for the CAQ government, still made a strong presence in debate.

## 6.2 Governing Secularism: the Coalition Avenir Québec

The CAQ's most coded themes are *Secularism* (19.6% of codes), *Rights* (17.4% of codes), *Nationalism* (13.0% of codes), *Majority* (13.0% of codes), and *Importance of issue* (8.7% of codes). The numerical emphasis on secularism is consistent with the party's argument

that portrays secularism as a core value to the Québec nation, that is present in hearts and minds but remains incomplete in legislative format. The then-Minister of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusiveness, Simon Jolin-Barrette, highlights the emphasis the CAQ chose to place on the value of secularism as a distinctly Québécois policy. This speech, used to present the bill to the National Assembly, cements the idea that in regards to Bill 21, secularism and nationalism go hand in hand.

“(…) currently, secularism remains unfinished in Québec, in fact as in law. This bill aims to give it substance and to complete a significant step forward. What we are proposing is a model of Québec-style secularism that differs as much from French-style secularism as from Canadian-style multiculturalism.<sup>6</sup>

(…)

This is a key issue. It is up to the National Assembly to endow Québec with a model for managing relations between the State and religions that is specific to the province, and faithful to its distinct values. Québec is distinct from Canada and the rest of North America. Québec is a nation. Nobody contests this reality, nor our fundamental right to decide our future and the direction of our society.” Simon Jolin-Barrette (CAQ).

The emphasis on questions of *Majority* and on the *Importance of issue* are consistent with the CAQ’s desire to legitimate the Bill using democratic principles such as support for their majority government, majority support for broadly-defined secularism in public opinion, and the longstanding presence of legislative and societal debates on secularism in Québec since prior to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission in 2007.

“(…) secularism is an important issue for all Quebecers. This bill is intended to be the balanced and pragmatic response to this vast reflection that has animated Québec for so many years.” Simon Jolin-Barrette (CAQ).

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<sup>6</sup> Translations from French are my own.

The CAQ presents a fairly restrictive understanding of national belonging, on the ‘protect’ side of Hepburn’s (2009) framework. The party has fairly high *Nationalism* coding levels (13.0%), and prioritises questions of identity rather than separatism in this discourse, as 66.7% of its *Nationalism*-coded child codes are coded for *Québec identity*, while 33.3% are coded for *Promoting Québec independence*. The following quote shows how the CAQ explicitly links the secularism of Bill 21 with the nation-building project, emphasizing the province’s values (including the value of secularism) as a basis for its distinctiveness.

“It is up to the National Assembly to endow Québec with a model for managing relationships between the State and religions that is specific to it, and faithful to its distinct values. Québec is distinct from Canada and the rest of North America. Québec is a nation. (...) It is up to the elected representatives of the National Assembly to express their opinion of the model of secularism that we wish to have for Québec.” Simon Jolin-Barrette (CAQ)

The CAQ does mention plurality and diversity, and seems ambiguous in its appraisal of it. On the one hand, it seems to mention plurality in order to highlight the challenges associated with it:

“[Bill 21] acknowledges the fact that Québec is becoming increasingly plural, that this reality imposes challenges, and that it is our duty to face them.” Simon Jolin-Barrette (CAQ)

On the other hand, the CAQ also makes a positive depiction of diversity by describing it as something to which to aspire.

“(…) secularism is equality. Secularism is neutrality. Secularism is modernity. (...) This bill aims to thus bring a better balance between individual rights and our national aspirations for a peaceful, welcoming society that is open to differences.” Simon Jolin-Barrette (CAQ)

Thus, in their presentation of Bill 21 to the National Assembly, the CAQ situates itself fairly ambiguously on its understanding of national belonging due to mixed statements on

diversity and plurality. However, the explicit link the party makes between the form of secularism put forward in Bill 21 as a foundational pillar of Québec's subnational community shifts the narrative into a 'protect' form of national understanding.

On the plural-monist axis, the CAQ at first seems to hold an ambiguous position as its MNA makes few mentions of culture, preferring to refer to the importance of the neutrality of the state in regards to religious expression.

“(...) it is clear that religious symbols project a discourse on a person's preferences. The State must be neutral, Mr. Speaker, in fact and in appearance. Further, many representatives of employees in positions of authority in the field have highlighted the importance of the appearance of religious neutrality (...)”  
Simon Jolin-Barrette (CAQ)

However, the party's overall position is consistent with a universalist understanding of the State's role in regulating cultural and religious expression: that is, it favours a uniform culture, or at least the appearance of one, within Québec, and posits that the state should be absolutely neutral in regards to cultural and religious expression in public spaces. Thus, the CAQ positions itself on the monist side of this axis. Overall, the CAQ holds a mild 'protect' position on national belonging, and universalist monist position on the plural-monist axis.

### **6.3 The Sovereignist Old Guard: The Parti Québécois**

The Parti Québécois's most coded themes are *Secularism* (19.6% of codes), *Nationalism* (18.6% of codes), the *Goldilocks* code (17.5% of codes), *Majority* (10.3% of codes), and *Rights* (6.2% of codes). The strong emphasis on both nationalism and secularism is consistent with the PQ's long history as the province's most prominent sovereignist party. The party's emphasis on secularism as an intrinsic part of modern Québec nationalism is a

main theme of its two speeches; insisting on the right of Québec politicians to set the law without interference from within or without the province.

“Why do we have to draft a law on secularism? So that the rules are clear for everyone, that they are written into a law. And no one is supposed to ignore the law. So, we are sending a strong message that Québec, in its modernity, chooses secularism, as others did long before Québec society.

(...)

“Québec society has moved forward, has secularized its health care and educational institutions, then we continued to move forward, then the quest for women’s equality... then we took important steps. And now, I, as a parliamentarian, am watching, in the Parliament of my nation, speeches that tend to prioritize religious faith, [that argue that] religious faith should take precedence over collective rights. This is grave. We’re back to that issue. This is what must be put forward at all costs. When did progressives choose to place religious faith at the top of the cardinal values that guide us? This is a move backwards.” Pascal Bérubé (PQ).

The PQ’s MNAs also put a strong emphasis on Bill 21 not going far enough to satisfy their demands for a full separation of Church and State under the frequent use of the *Goldilocks* code. Notably, they critiqued the mandatory ethics and culture class on the provincial secondary school curriculum, arguing that it should be abolished, as well as the exclusion of private schools from Bill 21’s requirements.

“If we truly want the secularism of the State to be displayed, to be present in the schooling environment, then obviously the private school environment, in large part financed by the State, should also be part of it. For us, it is nonsense that a State which calls itself secular subsidizes religious schools.” Joël Arseneau (PQ).

The PQ presents a strongly sovereigntist position that rests on a ‘protect’ narrative of national belonging. The party has a fairly high percentage of *Nationalism* codes (18.6%), the majority of which are coded for *Promoting Québec independence* (77.8% of *Nationalism* codes). It also has a fairly high coding value for mentions of *Majority*

concerns (10.3%), all of which argue that the majority of public opinion should rule over the concerns of minorities within the province. The party explicitly bases the legitimacy of the bill on the preferences of the (Francophone) majority.

“And you know what? It is not forbidden for a society to make choices according to the majority. We may decide to systematically exclude any debate where lobbyists, individuals, or jurists say: we cannot do this because I feel slighted. If we could reclaim the ‘us’, the inclusive ‘us’, the ‘us’ that ensures that, in our institutions, no one person has any more rights than another; it is the same for everybody. We at the Parti Québécois have believed this for a long time.” Pascal Bérubé (PQ)

“It happens that a nation makes decisions for its future—and this is what the bill will do. It will provide a framework for the future, provide for the evolution of Québec society (...).” Pascal Bérubé (PQ)

Thus, the PQ situates itself squarely in the ‘protect’ understanding of national belonging—as something that must be protected by the institutions of the nation, that is essential to the nation-building project, and that is being threatened by people who wish to contest the legitimacy of the bill by relying on feelings, rather than on collective rights.

In terms of the plural-monist axis, the PQ situates itself on the monist side. The party makes very few mentions of *Diversity* codes (1.0%), and makes it clear that they believe religious symbols and convictions have no space in the public sphere.

“It is a first step, an important first step in our society (...) that there be a willingness that the public sphere, notably schools, be devoid of religious symbols that may resemble in certain ways proselytism. (...) We believe that people who work for the State, which is a privilege, should ensure that when they are teaching or offering a public service, there be no religious symbols for any religion, that there be no religion. (...) Religion is for the private sphere.” Pascal Bérubé (PQ)

This view skews more to the assimilationist than universal side of monism, as the party advocates for a complete lack of religious symbols in the public sphere. While the party advocates for neutrality in that they argue all religious symbols, for all religions, should only appear in the private sphere, they also have very little regard for any plurality of

religious expression. The insistence that religion is still too present in Québec society is telling—the argument is based on the undesirability of the Catholic Church’s past involvement in the provincial State’s affairs to justify current State regulation of individual dress; the presence of any religion must thus be scrubbed from public life. Thus, the party’s insistence that Bill 21 does not go far enough in banning religious symbols pushes its position into an assimilationist, rather than universalist stance.

“It is time, today, to make a decisive step in the direction that Quebeckers want—to pursue and complete the separation of the Church and the State, which was starts, as we all know, in the 60s and unfortunately has not reached the finality that Quebeckers wished in the last few years. Thus, the wearing of religious symbols, for some, can seem innocuous, but we subscribe to the idea that, in a totally egalitarian manner, people should have total neutrality, even in physical appearance or dress, in the services that are offered to the population and citizens of Québec.” Joël Arseneau (PQ)

Therefore, the PQ places itself on the ‘protect’ side of the national belonging axis, as well as on the monist side of the plural-monist axis, with an assimilationist view of existing plurality.

#### **6.4 Widening the Net of Nationhood: Québec Solidaire**

. Further, the emphasis on individual rights-based coding themes such as discrimination and the Charter is interesting given the contrast with the PQ and CAQ position, which place similar individual rights-based codes lower on their priority list.

Québec Solidaire’s nationalism-coded speeches place a particularly strong emphasis on openness in the collective nation, and inclusion of minorities in the Québécois nation-building project. The party has particularly high *Nationalism* coding levels; most of these codes (38.2% of total *Nationalism* codes) are attributed to speeches that are coded as *Advocates for civic nationalism*, in contrast with the PQ and CAQ’s heavier focus on

identity and independence. Québec Solidaire's MNAs make clear their concern that Bill 21 is likely to negatively affect the image of the sovereigntist movement in the province, depicting sovereigntists as regressive, closed-off, and too concerned with survival of traditional French Canadian (read: ethnic) Québec culture to further the modern nation-building project.

“(…) it is clear and obvious that by taking this path backwards, this same path between a nationalism of withdrawal and protection rather than towards an open and exciting project, a project which has confidence in itself and creates identity rather than falling back on something that is lost in the past, it is clear that by taking this path the bill against religious symbols will continue to taint this wonderful project for Québec's political independence, which is both a historical project and a project for the future, just like the Charter of Values, in 2013, marred it. It brings us back to a nationalism that sounds like *survivance*<sup>7</sup>, that does not want to change anything, that is afraid of anything new, when we should go, as we have at better moments of our history, towards a nationalism that sounds like collective liberation, like getting back to creating our history, our own identity, our own projects.” Catherine Dorion (QS).

Thus, QS clearly expresses an ‘expand’ understanding of national belonging, focusing on inclusion of plurality into the nation-building project and acknowledging that immigrants are part of the national community.

The party also positions itself on the plural side of the plural-monist axis, focusing on maintaining and expanding the rights of minority groups and on emphasizing the value of plurality.

“The Québec that I know values its rights and freedoms. When we say frankly that Bill 21 will suspend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, all of a sudden, support for the government decreases quite significantly. We care about, we believe in our Charter.” Manon Massé (QS).

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<sup>7</sup> In a Quebec context, this term refers to a policy of cultural survival that was based in resistance against English hegemony post-conquest (Jones 2015).

“Québec is a place in the world that is extremely welcoming, (...) where we have extraordinary liberties and it is a place that we are lucky to inhabit, and that has been constructed in a formidable manner. And I feel that, with this bill, we are losing ground on that front, we are making our country a place that is less welcoming, a place where we make people feel that they have no place here, and I am very uncomfortable with that. And it’s not just me, it’s a lot of people, a lot of Quebecers.” Sol Zanetti (QS).

Québec Solidaire explicitly links discrimination against religious minorities and immigrants with Québec’s minority status within Canada, arguing that the province should be in solidarity with its minorities specifically because of its minority status within the larger country. This position is consistent with a pluralist view on questions of immigration and integration.

“The Québec that I know, knows what it is to see its rights violated, because its own rights have long been violated from the other side of the border... which continues to treat it like a child who needs adult supervision.” Manon Massé (QS)

Therefore, QS holds an ‘expand’-plural position on questions of integration and immigration, based on its arguments in favour of civic nationalism, desire to expand belonging in the subnational community, and focus on protecting and expanding the cultural and religious rights of immigrants.

## **6.5 Claiming the Title of Protector of Individual Rights: The Parti Libéral du Québec**

Finally, the PLQ’s most coded themes are *Discrimination* (18.0% of codes), *Rights* (13.0% of codes), *Charter of (human) rights and freedoms* (11.0% of codes), *Implementation* (9.0% of codes), and *Secularism* (8.0% of codes). The strong emphasis on rights-based codes is consistent with the PLQ’s attempt to paint itself as a consistent defender of individual rights.

“(…) we have always been the guarantors of individual freedoms. We have always been the guarantor of the fundamental rights of all Quebecers. So, when I hear from previous governments that “[the PLQ] poisoned the debates”, I’m sorry if, on the contrary, there has been a party that has always been consistent since the creation of the Québec Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that’s the Liberal Party.” Marwah Rizqy (PLQ).

Additionally, the PLQ places strong emphasis on issues of implementation, such as inconsistencies between the law and the rights of workers, the lack of clear definitions of religious symbols, and the potential effect of the Bill on workplaces and social harmony.

The image of secularism conveyed by the PLQ is a traditionally open one, advocating for public servants’ right to wear religious symbols at work while highlighting the history of the provincial State’s emancipation from the Catholic church.

“(…) since the Quiet Revolution, the Québec State has distanced itself from the Catholic church to gradually establish a true separation between the State and churches, effectively establishing the secularism of the State. This secularism, which we qualify as open, is based on the same principles as those defined in the bill, that is to say that the churches and the State are separated, that the State neither favours nor disfavours a religion or absence of religion, that it respects the freedom of worship of its citizens and offers them equal treatment. Open secularism allows for difference, for expression of personal convictions, thus ensuring that the State remains neutral, that is to say that its decisions are free from religious influences. All those who work on behalf of the state, whatever their function, have always been able to wear a religious symbol, such as a cross, a veil, a kippah, because the public sector reflects the diversity of our population and because the wearing of a religious symbol has no impact on decisions rendered by a public official. However, what the bill proposes is another vision of secularism, a shift towards a secularism that sanitizes and excludes, a vision of secularism that violates the rights of those who simply want to practice their work with professionalism and neutrality.” Kathleen Weil (PLQ).

On the question of national belonging, the PLQ places itself on the ‘expand’ side, although the party’s argumentation focuses much more on rights than on questions of nationhood.

To the PLQ, protecting and expanding the rights of immigrants is the best way to promote

inclusion in the subnational community; this position contrasts with the QS position—while both parties hold an ‘expand’ view of national belonging, QS holds that subnational belonging is tied to identifying with the nation and its goals. To the PLQ, to belong is to have access to the rights associated with belonging, in a similar sense to citizenship.

“This government proposes a bill that is divisive, that violates our charter of rights and freedoms—a charter, I remind you, that was unanimously passed in the National Assembly. The charter should be an essential part of our collective identity because it guarantees that freedom and openness, two qualities that have always been at the heart of what we are as a nation, are protected.” Marie Montpetit (PLQ).

On the question of the plural-monist axis, the PLQ clearly holds a plural point of view, and highlights pluralism as a central subnational value. The party places plurality at the centre of its understanding of Québec nationhood.

“Québec has a long history of pluralism that is our strength our pride. Let us remember that (...) Québec became in 1832 the first jurisdiction in the British Empire to grant full emancipation to Jewish people, 180 years ago, following the election of Ezekiel Hart as Member of Parliament for Trois-Rivières and both his expulsions from the National Assembly, because the law required him to swear on the Bible and on his Christian faith, which he obviously refused to do, Madam Speaker. Québec was a pioneer in correcting this injustice (...).” Kathleen Weil (PLQ).

The PLQ’s focus on the protection and expansion of minorities’ cultural and religious rights further cements its position on the plural side of this axis. Thus, the PLQ holds an ‘expand’-plural position on national belonging and on the plural monist-axis, based on its emphasis on minorities’ cultural and religious rights, and insistence on plurality as a fundamental Québec value.

## **6.6 Distinct Narratives: Party Positioning on Pluralism and Nationhood**

This section demonstrates that, while there is significant overlap in parties’ thematic priorities, each party has a distinct narrative in praising or criticizing Bill 21. The themes

of nationalism and secularism, while exhibiting some variation between parties, are heavily intertwined, even during a debate ostensibly addressing secularism legislation. The particular emphasis of the PLQ on rights-based arguments, including *Discrimination, Rights*, and *Charter of (human) rights and freedoms* codes, sets the party apart from the more heavily *Nationalism*-coded speeches given by the other parties. The PQ focuses on the nationalism debate, particularly through the use of speeches coded for *Québec identity* and through justifying an absence of religious symbols in public and civic spaces as a distinctly Québécois value. QS pushes for a more inclusive understanding of sovereigntist nationalism, and the CAQ focuses on secularism as a central tenet of Québec identity, outside of the traditional sovereigntist-federalist axis.

Further, these results support the proposed mechanism, in that party positioning on the question of national belonging and on the plural-monist axis correlate with parties' vote choice and expression of argumentative priorities during the legislative debate.

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The debate explored above makes clear that the issues of secularism and nationalism are closely intertwined in Québec, and that all parties have distinct approaches to praising or criticizing secularism legislation. The debate over Bill 21 was a question of what is ‘reasonable accommodation’ in terms of permitting religious symbols in the public space just as much as it was a larger discussion on the nature of the collective Québécois nation, and to what extent that nation should be defined in inclusionary or exclusionary terms.

It is difficult to characterize the debate by supporters of Bill 21 as one that advocates for outright ethnic nationalism. While one of the two Parti Québécois MNAs who spoke in the National Assembly made a speech that was coded as advocating for ethnic nationalism, it did so by defining the Québec community as francophone, in opposition to anglophones in the province<sup>8</sup>. The speeches given by the CAQ and PQ fail to make any statements that could truly be construed as ethnic nationalism: few are explicitly exclusionary from belonging in the collective nation; rather, they call for the prioritization of ‘collective values’ such as secularism—specifically, in the form of a total absence of religious symbols in public spaces—over individual religious freedoms. Thus they are calling for an increased recognition of collective rights, while also further defining what they believe to be a desirable right for the Québécois collective—once more, that brand of secularism that bans all outward recognition of religion for believers who work in the public sector.

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<sup>8</sup> “Well, I want to tell the anglophone community that, in Quebec, a free and democratic society with a duly elected Parliament of representatives, we are able to make choices for the nation.” Pascal Bérubé (PQ).

One issue with this brand of thinking is the size of the public sector in Québec, and the breadth of workers affected by Bill 21. One PQ MNA argues that working for the public sector is a privilege, and as such, that workers should keep their religious symbols to the private sphere or choose another career path<sup>9</sup>. However, given the widespread nature of the Québec public sector—which covers transportation, education, healthcare, as well as government administration—this argument would effectively substantively limit the career prospects of members of religious minorities who wear symbols of their faith. While the PQ MNA argues that this is not discriminatory, MNAs of other parties clearly disagree.

The speeches coded in the context of this paper cannot always be taken at face value. They are not minutes taken during party caucuses, but rather summaries of the parties' desired public image. We can therefore think of parties' priorities in argumentation as their priorities related to the political ideology they wish to convey to the public. In a majority government context, the likelihood of speeches influencing the vote was slim, and thus there is little reason to attempt to appeal to the CAQ to attempt to modify the content of the bill. Indeed, the public for consumption of these speeches is mainly the press and its readers; given the highly mediatized nature of Bill 21 as well as the ideological nature of

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<sup>9</sup> “[This bill] does not discriminate, according to us. We believe that people who work for the State, which is a privilege, should ensure, when they are teaching or offering a public service, that there are no religious symbols, for any religion, no religion. This is the choice we make, it’s the minimum. Religion is for the private sphere.  
(...)

If one choose the public service, one must know the rules. And you know what? There are plenty of fields where people can express their talents. People who are already employed (...) and that wear religious symbols will continue to wear their religious symbols. People who are thinking of going into teaching and that have not yet begun their professional education will know that they have a choice to make between wearing religious symbols and the job they wish to have.” Pascal Bérubé (PQ).

the debate, these legislative debates were likely to be subject to more scrutiny than others. Therefore, the thematic priorities put forward by the different parties can be considered to be an appeal to voters to see their party according to a particular set of values, rather than as a solely argumentative tool on a specific issue.

So what does it matter how parties present themselves to the public in terms of their position on secularism in the public space? First, as explored earlier in this text, the discussion on Bill 21 is truly a discussion of the larger issue of defining the boundaries of national belonging in a sub-national state. Thus, the arguments made by all four parties are ways to represent their conceptions of Québec identity and national belonging to the public in a highly salient societal debate. The PLQ presents itself as the defender of individual rights and of diversity; the PQ presents itself as a party focused on promoting the absence of religious symbols in public as true secularism and as an act of self-determination; QS presents itself as the face of the future of the Québec sovereigntist movement (which includes open secularism); and the CAQ presents itself as a moderate solution-builder for a long-standing issue. All parties aim to portray themselves with a view to defining for voters the place that secularism and religious symbols occupy in the public space and in their conception of the nation.

In addition, all the parties base their arguments within a framework of ‘reasonable accommodation’, in which the Québec political elite, mostly members of the francophone majority (and thus least affected by the legislation), are the ones to decide what is ‘reasonable’ and what is unacceptable in the public space; what values are required for religious minorities to be included in the nation. While they may disagree on the degree of reasonableness of certain symbols in certain settings, all speakers make arguments for

*what* is reasonable, and what values merit inclusion in the Québec nation-building project. Thus, religious groups are put in the position of either accepting or contesting the definition of what is reasonable to the elected majority.

The situation of having members of the majority decide on the acceptability of religious symbols in the public space, and on which values are included within the borders of the nation, might perhaps not put members of religious minorities in such a difficult position if both groups agreed on what is appropriate in public and private spheres, and what values should be included in those values that are held collectively within the nation. However, it is clear that even within the public consultation process for Bill 21, in which members of the Committee on Institutions select members of the public and leaders of organisations to participate, there was significant dissent to Bill 21.

Some speakers during the public hearings on Bill 21, hosted by the Committee on Institutions, were favourable to the Bill, calling it a “unifying” project that represents a version of secularism which promotes “cohesion and harmony” (Chikhi, F., & Kaidi, A., May 7, 2019). However, others were passionately opposed. The representative of the *Association des musulmans et des Arabes pour la laïcité au Québec* argued that the bill went against basic principles of secularism and democratic principles, and was likely to encourage already-isolated religious minority communities to withdraw into themselves (Bouazzi, H., May 8, 2019). Representatives of the *Centre consultatif des relations juives et israéliennes* further argued that the bill was arbitrary, its use of the derogatory clause unjustified, and failed to properly address the issue of state secularism because of its focus on individuals wearing religious symbols rather than on governmental structures and regulations (Cape, D., Yudin, E., & Abécassis, D-M., May 7, 2019). Thus the discrepancy

between representatives of religious-affiliated organisations and the governing political elite is significant, and represents a considerable obstacle to the legitimacy of the bill.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This paper has traced the narratives of provincial party positions on Bill 21, An Act respecting the Laicity of the State, using speeches given by Members of the Québec National Assembly during the legislative debates on the bill in 2018. It demonstrates the considerable overlap between three parties, the Coalition Avenir Québec, Québec Solidaire, and the Parti Québécois, in prioritizing arguments related to nationalism and belonging, while the Parti Libéral du Québec distinguished itself mostly by prioritizing arguments related to individual rights and their protection. While each party had a distinct line of argument, all parties used a ‘reasonable accommodation’ framework in which political elites, rather than members of religious minority communities, traced the boundary of acceptability in the public sphere and of the common values acceptable to the Québécois nation-building project.

This project’s findings—that party positioning on questions of integration depend more on beliefs related to national belonging and pluralism than questions related to positioning on the economic left-right axis or the centre-periphery axis, and that the debate on Bill 21 raised questions of nationalism as much as of secularism—has important implications for the state of Québec politics and of religious minorities in Canada. It highlights the role individual parties have in articulating narratives of national belonging that do not correspond to ideas of national belonging that are used to inform legislation. It also highlights the importance of the legislative narratives of belonging in shaping policy that defines who belongs or does not belong in the subnational community.

This line of inquiry raises interesting questions for the future of research on legislating secularism in subnational states in which secularism and nationalism are closely

intertwined, as well as for further research examining secularism legislation in Québec. Since the issue of legislating secularism is likely to stay salient after the end of the current provincial government's tenure, changes of party priorities over time in regards to presenting themselves as having a particular stance on secularism and its place within the national project are likely to be influential in shaping new secularism legislation. Further, the 2018 election's shift away from the former PQ and PLQ duopoly is likely to continue to affect narratives of belonging as the CAQ's centre-right approach remains dominant, at least until the next election, and as the QS's left-sovereigntist approach encroaches on the PQ's former policy space. Party positioning on questions of national belonging and on pluralism is also likely to keep shifting in response to continuing immigration, demographic change, and the declining importance of separatism as a salient electoral issue. The consistency of parties' narratives of belonging prior to Bill 21 and the Charter of Québec Values is also likely to be a fruitful avenue for further research.

Continuing disagreement between religious minority communities and the State in regards to the place of religion and religious symbols in the public space, as well as over the boundaries of the nation, is likely to stay a rich source for further study of minority-majority relations in subnational states. In particular, the majority or minority status of governments legislating on secularism in first-past-the-post systems, as well as the makeup of coalition governments in other electoral systems in sub-national states, is likely to be an interesting avenue for future research into party crafting of subnational narratives of belonging in immigrant-receiving states.

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## APPENDIX A

Table 2.1: Code Counts per Speaker, According to Party (Percentage of Total Coding)<sup>10</sup>

Codes	Party			
	CAQ	PQ	QS	PLQ
<b>Nationalism</b>	<b>13.0%</b>	<b>18.6%</b>	<b>33.6%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>
Promoting QC independence	33.3%	77.8%	23.5%	5.7%
QC identity	66.7%	11.1%	26.5%	51.4%
Advocates for civic nationalism	0.0%	5.6%	38.2%	28.6%
B21 is ethnic nationalism	0.0%	0.0%	11.8%	14.3%
Advocates for ethnic nationalism	0.0%	5.6%	0.0%	0.0%
B21 is civic nationalism	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Secularism</b>	<b>19.6%</b>	<b>19.6%</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>7.9%</b>
Separation of Church and State	66.7%	47.4%	26.7%	16.7%
Advocates for closed secularism	22.2%	52.6%	0.0%	2.8%
Advocates for open secularism	0.0%	0.0%	46.7%	41.7%
B21 is closed secularism	0.0%	0.0%	26.7%	38.9%
B21 is open secularism	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Rights</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>
Fundamental rights	50.0%	83.3%	87.5%	80.7%
Collective rights	50.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%
Acquired rights	0.0%	16.7%	0.0%	19.3%
<b>Discrimination</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>14.8%</b>	<b>17.6%</b>
Sexism	100.0%	0.0%	26.7%	26.3%
Religious	0.0%	0.0%	30.0%	31.3%
Career	0.0%	66.7%	16.7%	28.8%
General Discrimination	0.0%	33.3%	10.0%	10.0%
Racism	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	3.8%
<b>Majority</b>	<b>13.0%</b>	<b>10.3%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>7.0%</b>
Majority rules	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	6.3%
Protection of minorities	0.0%	0.0%	28.6%	56.3%
No majority	0.0%	0.0%	71.4%	37.5%
<b>Goldilocks</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>17.5%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>
Not far enough	0.0%	82.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Moderate (just right)	100.0%	17.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Radical (too far)	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Importance of issue</b>	<b>8.7%</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>9.4%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>
<b>Charter of (human) rights and freedoms</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>11.0%</b>
Derogatory clause	100.0%	66.7%	64.3%	74.0%
General Charter	0.0%	33.3%	35.7%	26.0%
<b>Implementation</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>9.5%</b>
Implementation - General	0.0%	100.0%	18.2%	65.1%
Professional duty	0.0%	0.0%	81.8%	34.9%
<b>Other</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>
School and teaching concerns	100.0%	83.3%	28.6%	75.0%
Other	0.0%	15.0%	80.0%	25.0%
<b>Diversity</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>4.4%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>
<b>Bouchard-Taylor Commission Report</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>
<b>Temporality</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>
Progressive	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Regressive	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Wider implications</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>3.1%</b>
Labour shortage	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	50.0%
State leads by example	0.0%	0.0%	60.0%	14.3%
International	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	14.3%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

<sup>10</sup> Parent coding categories (in light blue) represent the proportion of total coding taken up by a parent code in terms of the party's total coding; child codes' percentages (in white) represent the proportion within the parent code.