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**QUEBEC'S EVOLVING NATIONALISM:
TIPPING FROM SEPARATISM TO SECULARISM**

by
Amine Brahm

Department of political science
Faculty of arts and sciences

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QUEBEC'S EVOLVING NATIONALISM: TIPPING FROM SEPARATISM TO SECULARISM

Quebec's nationalist evolution has been one of subtleties, where public debates and discourses on identity politics were more than outward calls for sovereignty and separatism. Kenneth McRoberts has previously noted that "the call for separatism is more an expression of deep dissatisfaction with federalism, not an outright desire for Quebec statehood" (McRoberts 2004 in Changfoot and Cullen 2012, 781). Once the beacon of nationalism and electoral mobilization, the mere mention of the dreaded S-word by Parti Québécois (PQ) candidate Pierre-Karl Péladeau was enough to be called an electoral gaffe during the start of the 2014 campaign which later contributed to the party's electoral defeat. (Béland, Lecours and Schmeiser 2021, 190; Nahmias 2020, 24). The tensions between the multifaceted nationalisms which exist in Quebec have never been more apparent than in the 2018 provincial elections, where a historical loss for the PQ has brought it to an unprecedented 17 per cent of the voting share – the lowest since its inception. The PQ, which has long symbolized the tug of war between two major perspectives on nationalism within Quebec – separatism and federalism – now spells out a distinct message: Quebec separatism has fallen out of favor.

And yet, it was not the federalist party of the Parti libéral du Québec (PLQ) which supplanted the PQ, for issues of nationalism remain core in Quebec even to this day – and if neither separatism nor federalism will sway the electorate, then the autonomist party led by François Legault, the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), has certainly demonstrated its firm understanding of the shifting tides of Quebec nationalism. International and even local opinions were quick to relate this emergence of nationalism to southern influences – describing, perhaps naively the Coalition Avenir Québec's victory as proof that a populist wave had spread to Québec, even comparing the CAQ's autonomist leader to American President Donald Trump (Bock-Côté 2020,

75). Contrary to expectations, the decline of separatism has not resulted in the decline of nationalist issues in Quebec, far from it. What Québec has witnessed in the turn of the last decade was the evolution of its nationalism, led by its latest Premier: “Le chef de la CAQ et nouveau Premier ministre du Québec, François Legault, incarnent bien l’évolution du nationalisme québécois de ce point de vue” (Bock-Côté 2020, 77). The phenomenon thus begs the question: how does nationalism evolve, and in the case of Quebec, why has nationalism been framed away from separatism?

Through a review of the literature on Quebec nationalism, this major research paper seeks to answer this question, as well as supplement it with a distinct approach. Authors have primarily centered their perspective around two main approaches. The first focused on the role federalism plays in defining Quebec nationalism. This argument establishes Quebec nationalism as reactionary to Ottawa’s policies and its perceived threat. It also underlines the purpose of Quebec’s identity-building through a desire to distinguish itself from the rest of Canada (Changfoot and Cullen 2012). The second argument presented across the literature is related to Quebec’s shifting sociodemographic makeup. The province’s youth is no longer mobilized by the question of nationalism through separatism, indicating that the issue was and has remained a mostly generational issue (Mahéo and Bélanger 2018). While both arguments present solid hypotheses to understanding the question of Quebec’s shifting nationalism, they tend to pay insufficient attention, I argue in this paper, to the role agency plays in redefining nationalism. Quebec’s political elites, party leaders and intellectuals are essential actors of change and transition, able to deliberately frame and reframe the meaning of nationalism in a way that provides said actors the most benefits. This is clearly evidenced by the CAQ, who has built its electoral strategy on attaining results first rather than adhering to any rigid ideology (Nahmias 2020).

Often understated, agency is essential to understanding how Quebec nationalism has evolved, especially over the last decade. Jaime Lluich's work on the evolution of nationalism in Catalonia and Quebec from the 1970s to the early 2000s offers a key method of analysis that will allow us to incorporate agency in our analysis of change to Quebec nationalism. By undergoing a "temporal variation" which consists of four phases – the emergence of a preexistent ideology, the occurrence of a central state constitutional moment, an impulse from the sphere of sociological nationalism, and the consolidation of a new leadership nucleus – nationalist parties arrive at a "tipping point", through which they can actively set into motion a transition in how nationalism is perceived and framed and cement themselves as the representatives of this new paradigm (Lluich 2010).

This major research paper argues that, once more, a "tipping point" has occurred in Quebec nationalism over the last decade. In order to understand how the long-standing model of separatism evolved into the modern ideal of secularism it is important to study each of these four factors in detail. As it will become apparent throughout this analysis, the CAQ has played a key role across this era of temporal variance, resulting in its current status of defender and promoter of nationalist secularism through the implementation of Bill 21. Before detailing the CAQ's role in this evolution, it is important to consider both institutional and sociodemographic approaches for they serve as essential contexts to this modern era of evolving nationalism.

Literature review

The question of Quebec nationalism offers a rich source of theoretical analysis. This study notes that the literature on Quebec's recently changing nationalism primarily centers around two main perspectives: an institutionalist approach and a sociodemographic one. These perspectives however present certain limits, which shall be mentioned in this review.

Federal institutions: reactionary nationalism, open federalism and neoliberalism

Changfoot and Cullen (2012) delve into the matter of Quebec separatism, and why it has fallen off the agenda through an analysis combining institutionalist and political economy perspectives. The article's thesis is related to the impact that Canada's federal institutions have had in defining Quebec nationalism – mainly through two core policy transitions: open federalism and neoliberalism (Changfoot and Cullen 2012, 781). Through this perspective, Quebec nationalism can be understood as a desire to distinguish itself from the Canadian political community – a strategy which has been qualified as reactionary nationalism (Guay 2007).

Reactionary nationalism hardens and softens both in responses to perceived threats. According to Guay (2007, 81) “La souveraineté est de l'ordre d'une réaction défensive; elle n'est pas une nécessité, mais une possibilité. Elle est brandie lorsque Ottawa ou le Canada anglais heurte le Québec. [...] Ainsi s'explique la variation des appuis à la souveraineté”. Quebec nationalism is inexorably tied to Canadian federalism and what this entails in Changfoot and Cullen's study of federal institutions is a desire for distinction and autonomy, which manifests in response to Ottawa's policies (Changfoot and Cullen 2012, 781). This argument presents the following reasoning: depending on Ottawa's identity-building and cooperation policies with its provinces, Quebec's own identity-building will be impacted.

A demonstration of this argument is apparent in Changfoot and Cullen's analysis. Instead of vying for more power, Harper's federal government adopted a more subtle, indirect style of nation-building and governance, tailor-made for Quebec: open federalism (Changfoot and Cullen 2012, 780). This shift in institutional strategy was "made first and foremost to gain support of Quebec francophones" (Graefe 2008, 60). It is from this institutional federal transition towards open federalism, discrete incrementalism (Montpetit 2008) and neoliberalism that new avenues of co-operation have emerged between Quebec and Canada, "making federal and Quebec government co-operation viable enough to preempt a separatist groundswell and keep separatism off the agenda" (Changfoot and Cullen 2012, 772). These strategies promised reduced interventionism from Ottawa, a greater deference to the provinces, as well as the opportunity for provinces to pursue independent trade agreements and international treaties (Changfoot and Cullen 2012, 777). This nation-building strategy served to foster both Quebec's national identity and autonomy. As Changfoot and Cullen (2012, 780) have noted, Ottawa's strategy "is reflective of the current shape of Canadian federalism, one in which provinces increasingly move in their own direction and negotiate separately with the federal government".

Other authors have also indicated that this strategy by the federal government was associated to a decline in support for Quebec independence. For example, Andrew McDougall (2016, 8) has stated that:

"[...] much of the change in secessionist support reflects the style of government that Stephen Harper has brought in with his concept of "open federalism." His willingness to recognize Quebec as a nation, give it additional latitude on the international scene, and his refusal to meddle in provincial jurisdictions are among the features of this approach."

Although a very interesting approach, it tends to over-estimate the impact of the central state on provincial dynamics, and more importantly on the shape that nationalism comes to take at a specific point in time. By agreeing to concede more autonomy to the whole of its provinces, Ottawa might certainly observe a renewed interest in negotiations, but only when separatist pressures have already waned. Secessionism's ebb and flow in Quebec from the 1970s to the 1990s was certainly influenced by the action of the federal government. As such, federal policies may act as a trigger for nationalist debate, as will be shown later, but on their own, they do not dictate which form of nationalism will be promoted, as internal parties are the means through which a form of nationalism is formalized over another (McDougall 2016, 75-77). Not to mention that the people of Quebec are also voters in federal elections. Despite Stephen Harper's strategy of open federalism, he remained a persistently unpopular choice for Quebecers (McDougall 2016, 8). There must thus be important internal factors which help explain why nationalism has shifted away from separatism, but also the shape it has come to take. If federal institutions alone could dictate which form of nationalism Quebec took, then the federalist PLQ would have never lost the elections after 2006 and identity politics wouldn't still be at the forefront of the province's political agenda. What federal institutions and their strategies provide are essential elements of context. An institutional approach helps understand how certain debates relating to constitutional reform have transpired in Quebec. A noteworthy facet to this approach is that open federalism and the federal government's desire to avoid interfering in provincial jurisdiction will have important repercussions on the debates centered around immigration and secularism in Quebec – but more on that later. Economic growth and increased provincial autonomy are but partial answers to the core question of evolving nationalism. A changing sociodemographic makeup presents a more distinctive approach to Quebec's internal developments.

Generational change and support for Quebec independence

Valérie-Anne Mahéo and Éric Bélanger have studied Quebec nationalism through a generational approach (2018). Based on the theory of generational parties (Lemieux 2011), these authors seek to determine whether a failure to recruit new generations of adherents to a party will cause its inevitable decline.

It is important here to denote the relationship between nationalism and political parties, as the Parti Québécois has been one of the most important representatives of Quebec nationalism after the historical tipping point of the 1970s, which allowed a new form of nationalism to enter the fray: separatism. The PLQ, on the other hand, has represented a more federalist approach to nationalism. Since 1970, these two parties have alternated government, and by the same vein, have competed to spread their vision of nationalism across the electorate. Historically, Quebec nationalism after 1970 has had two dominant currents: independentism and federalism (Lluch 2010, 345).

And yet, since 1994, the steady decline in the Parti Québécois's voting share has prompted authors to look into the sociodemographic makeup of the province in order to identify if the generational party theory might provide an explanation that accounts for both declines: that of the Parti Québécois, and of separatism as the symbol of Quebec nationalism. Mahéo and Bélanger test out two hypotheses. The first is that different generations of citizens were socialized in different sociopolitical environments and have thus developed distinct political orientations and priorities. The second hypothesis is that these different political outlooks affect electoral behavior (Mahéo and Bélanger 2018, 338). The three generations they chose to study are Baby boomers (those born before 1960), Gen X (those born between 1960 and 1979) and finally Millennials (those born after 1979) (Mahéo and Bélanger 2018, 339). The authors argue that the specific context of economic

and linguistic inequalities, followed by rapid economic growth and development during the 1960s in which baby boomers were socialized, provided the Parti Québécois with an opportunity to capitalize on post-materialist issues (Mahéo and Bélanger 2018, 339). The Parti Québécois “presented political sovereignty as a way to further Quebec’s economic, political and social development” (Lemieux, 2011; McRoberts and Posgate, 1983 in Mahéo and Bélanger 2018, 339).

On the other hand, millennials were socialized in a period of improved life possibilities, economic prosperity, rising levels of education, rapid changes in technologies and media, as well a solid basis for the protection of language rights within the province (Mahéo and Bélanger 2018, 340). The authors describe this period as a return to “normal politics”, which they define as “an increased salience of the left-right socioeconomic cleavage and a relative depoliticization of the national question” (Mahéo and Bélanger 2018, 340). Faced with these noticeable contrasts in socialization and contexts, Quebec’s younger generation tends to display certain distinguishing features. They are more likely to be multiculturalist and open to diversity and immigration, a majority of the younger generation is also more inclined to be against the Charter of Values proposed by the Parti Québécois, as opposed to a majority of baby boomers and Generation X, which are in favor of the charter. Finally, they consider Quebec sovereignty to be less of a priority for them, even going so far as to exhibit shockingly low levels of attachments to Quebec – although this does not mean a greater attachment to Canada (Mahéo and Bélanger 2018, 343-345): “The low level of attachment to Quebec among the younger generation constitutes one of the most surprising findings [...] and offers one clear piece of evidence that millennials in Quebec may be disconnected from the perennial national debate in their province”.

Other studies focusing specifically on support for Quebec independence have come to similar conclusions as Bélanger and Mahéo (see Vallée-Dubois, Dassonneville and Godbout 2017;

Dufresne, Tessier and Montigny 2019). These arguments nevertheless present certain limits that will be discussed in the following section. These limits explain why the role of actor agency is such an important component in studying Quebec nationalism and its evolution.

Limits and the role of agency

This overview of the pertinent literature has shown that Quebec nationalism has indeed shifted away from separatism. Authors have explained how Ottawa's strategy has played a key role in Quebec nationalism and nation-building, as well as how an evolving sociodemographic context has steered the nation's youth away from the cornerstone of its nationalism that was PQ separatism. However the question of why Quebec nationalism has specifically shifted away from separatism and instead towards the supposed new beacon of identity politics that is secularism, remains partially unresolved. When Dupré mentions that, "in view of the continuing cultural insecurity of French Canadians and low levels of support for independence, the debates also constituted an occasion to press for measures aimed at enhancing Québec's distinctiveness and autonomy" (Dupré 2012, 230), there is already an initial acknowledgement that indeed support for independence has considerably dropped since the late 1990s. However, Dupré states here that "debates" have arisen within Quebec, indicating that certain key actors actively sought to modify what constitutes nationalism, and which attributes are tied to its framing through dialogue and discourse.

With this subtle introduction of the term “debates”, there are hints spread out across the literature which allow one to realize that the evolution of nationalism is a conscious and deliberate effort. According to Lluch (2010, 339):

“Theories of nationalism have also tended to overemphasize structure over agency. This perspective is unsatisfying. First, it relies on a deterministic view of causation, which even in the natural sciences is no longer the reigning paradigm. It misses the element of contingency in political life, and the interdependency of human actions within and across spatial contexts”.

Institutional and sociodemographic analyses set the stage upon which nationalism is framed and debated. There is no state in which nationalism arises and evolves without conscious human efforts at enacting and promoting said evolution. A relevant limit here is that while the previously reviewed studies present important elements of institutional strategies, such as neoliberalism, open federalism and incrementalism – as well as evidence of sociodemographic changes – these facets are merely the ‘spatial contexts’ which Lluch describes above. On their own, institutions could not usher in the important shift in Quebec nationalism observed in the last decade. Set on the arena provided by what Lluch would describe as spatial contexts – those of Ottawa’s institutional strategies of non-interference and an evolving sociodemographic less inclined to identify with nationalism through separatism – party leaders and intellectuals are the ones who actively frame and orient debates around nationalism, seeking opportunities to overtake the predominant conceptualization of Quebec nationalism and legitimize their own perspective on identity politics, always with the intent of securing electoral power. In the next section, I present a theoretical framework that incorporates and details this key role played by political actors.

Theoretical Framework

Lluch's theory of temporal variation and tipping point

If identity politics in Quebec today have veered away from separatism and have returned to their grassroots considerations of culture, identity and language through a discourse that puts at the forefront the question of secularism, then such a trajectory cannot be perceived as mere coincidence. Author Jaime Lluch details this process of 'evolving nationalism' through two core concepts: temporal variation and tipping point (2010). Temporal variation is defined through a sequential interaction of four factors: the existence of a preexistent ideology, the occurrence of a central state constitutional moment, an impulse from the sphere of sociological nationalism, and the consolidation of a new leadership nucleus (Lluch 2010, 341).

The first of these factors, preexistent ideology, is a historical trace of the belief which seeks to be integrated into "a new political orientation within a national movement" (Lluch 2010, 341). The interpretation of what constitutes a historical trace is vast and allows for several sources of consideration. Intellectuals, literatures, discourses and debates are all elements of this historical trace. So long as an ideology is defined, contrasted and even opposed to others, it serves to clarify what goals it pursues or what shortcomings it attempts to resolve.

The second factor is the occurrence of a central state constitutional moment. A moment which impacts the relationship between the central state and its minority nation. The adoption of a new constitution, the enactment of a constitutional amendment and most importantly, even the proposal of an amendment is of critical importance. Lluch (2010, 342) states how, "the very process of debating and negotiating a constitutional moment is critical because such moments « help to create the political community on whose existence the constitutional order which results

from that process depends »”. Regardless of the outcome of the proposed amendment, what matters most is the interaction between the central state and its embedded nation, for that interaction causes a re-evaluation of the political dynamic between both parties. This initial back and forth serves as the trigger which orients the emerging nationalist party. In the case of Quebec’s relationship with Canada, the Constitutional Acts of 1867 and 1982 have both been sources of great tension. The latter especially, as it imposed a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which was seen as an attempt to remove Quebec distinction under the guise of pan-national humanitarian unity – especially when the province had already established its own Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms in 1976 (Howard-Hassmann 2018, 162). The federal Charter’s long-lasting impacts on Quebec are why the ripples of this constitutional moment continue to stir the nation’s evolving nationalism.

Thirdly, the previous trigger results in an impulse or feedback from civil society. Here, political actors from the minority nation will contribute to debates and discourses, reaffirming their stances, reviewing their initial ideology and structuring it around certain key members of the intelligentsia. It is during this time that leaders emerge, and the structure of the political organization clarifies itself. This process is especially noteworthy in the modern era, as information and discourses are accessible in unprecedented ways. Mass media plays an important role in vehiculating national discourse – even influencing or promoting it at times. McDougall (2016, 13) adds to this point by stating that “both scripted and unscripted comments in the media from policymakers, officials, and other relevant participants are an important element offering insights into events. In addition, the tone and content of editorial and opinion pieces can offer clues as to what the « attentive public » is thinking at a particular time and how effective actions of policymakers are proving to be.” Cultural and language groups also become important allies:

solidifying the organization's ideology, selecting its leaders and eventually moving on to the final step – consolidation and legitimization.

Finally, temporal variation ends with the forming or re-forming of a leadership nucleus and its subsequent consolidation. Lluch mentions (2010, 343) that emerging political parties need not be entirely novel. Indeed, this process both implies and allows for a degree of circularity. Lluch's tipping points can thus be visualized as the angular changes of a larger cyclical process. In the period of consolidation, it is often important to cement the transition, usually through the implementation of a new constitution, a constitutional amendment or simply a new law. Under this perspective, the CAQ's strong desire to pass Bill 21 at all costs makes it an apparent instrument of consolidation, as will be detailed later. Many of the choices and strategies employed by the CAQ and its leader François Legault are examples of deliberate strategic implementations of Lluch's model – from his self-branding as a successor of the UN's nationalism (Fraser 2019), to comparisons to UN leader Maurice Duplessis by his political adversaries (Bellerose 2021). These four sequential factors culminate in a tipping point, where the emerging political party has cemented itself as the representative of this evolved form of nationalism.

Once temporal variation has occurred, the subsequent political party may trigger a “tipping point”, through which “a novel political orientation within the national movement is successfully established within the sphere of formal institutional politics” (Lluch 2010, 341). This represents the new paradigm through which nationalism is approached or debated. The culmination of the CAQ's strategy is the tipping point from which separatism has been replaced by secularism as the key defining symbol of Quebec nationalism.

While Lluch has studied the evolution of nationalism which occurred between 1976 and 2005, the last decade represents an important paradigm shift in Quebec's identity politics. This

modern era of evolving nationalism merits a closer look. By utilizing Lluch's theory of temporal variation and tipping point, it is evident that both structural and sociodemographic factors serve important roles as spatial contexts, but it is the proactive discourses and strategies employed by certain key actors which set into motion the transition from one form of nationalism to the next. As mentioned above, these have been narrowed down to political actors and their leaders; their relevance is explained in the next section.

Key actors: political parties, leaders and the usage of law-making

Lluch (2010, 341) specifically mentions "intellectual developers" as impactful actors which allow for the integration of a new political orientation. In this research paper, the representatives of Lluch's "intellectual developers" are political parties and their leaders due to their ability to formalize national sentiment into an organized group of representatives. While opinions on nationalism and its different subsets may vary infinitely from individual to individual, the decision here to focus on political parties and their leaders is an extension of Lluch's theory. As ideologies give birth to political parties formed of free-thinking individuals, they serve as both embodiments of national sentiment, as well as actors with agency. There is certainly a point to be made that political parties and their leaders are not the only measures of a nationalist ideology's "intellectual developers", with non-partisan authors, influencers and intellectuals themselves possibly contributing greatly to the consolidation of said ideology. However, this study traces how Quebec nationalism has shifted away from separatism – evidenced primarily by the marked decline of the Parti Québécois' electoral support in the 2018 general election in favor of the Coalition Avenir Québec. It thus seems appropriate to focus primarily on those actors.

When looking at how political parties solidify and consolidate their strand of nationalism, this research paper has chosen law-making as the most pertinent point of focus. The transition to

secularism has not only been an ideological and political endeavor, but also a legislative one (Koussens 2020). Quebec's governments have sought to enforce the secularist shift with the usage of law-making, regardless of their affiliation. Amélie Barras (2021, 288-289) underlines how, from 2011 to 2019, 4 provincial legislative bills have all involved the prohibition of religious symbols or apparels: Bill 94, Bill 60, Bill 62 and Bill 21. Law-making is thus a clear tool of legitimization and consolidation in nationalist discourses and merits careful consideration.

These four factors – coupled with the choice of political parties, leader and law-making as relevant actors and their instruments – will serve as the theoretical framework through which Quebec's shifting nationalism will be studied in this research. They relay how and why nationalism has evolved within Quebec separatism and given way to secularism. Not only do they present important contextual factors, but they also underline how political actors, mainly parties and their leaders have deliberately set themselves on the path of temporal variation in order to reach their own tipping points as the Coalition Avenir Québec has strategically done in order to supplant the Parti Québécois in 2018.

Methodology

This research paper uses Lluch's model to explore the evolution of Quebec nationalism from 2006 and onwards. In providing its account of Quebec's evolving nationalism, it draws on secondary literature tracing the historical course of Quebec nationalism in order to denote key preexistent ideologies – the first of Lluch's factors. These major political events consist of the three alternating governments between 1939 and 2014: the Union Nationale, the Parti Libéral du Québec and the Parti Québécois.

After presenting a timeline of preexistent ideologies, this paper will look at the role key actors have played in strategically selecting which ideology will best serve their political interests. In this case the CAQ and its leader François Legault have drawn from the UN's cultural nationalism, but have also taken a flexible approach to the question of secularism in Quebec. This strategy, which places public interest and adaptability above a firm adherence to a set ideology has been coined as “pragmatic nationalism” (Nahmias 2020). Pragmatic nationalism sets the CAQ apart from the UN, as well as its current rival parties in that its ideological views are secondary to its pursuit of popular support. It is why the CAQ can both promote itself as a firm defender of Quebec's cultural distinction, while also readjusting itself depending on public feedback. Legault's handling of the National Assembly crucifix issue serves as but one example of this pragmatic nationalism.

Next, this paper analyzes the major modern political events which enter Lluch's theory; this refers specifically to the second factor: the occurrence of a central state moment. I propose however an important element of nuance from Lluch's theoretical model. While central state moments are usually efforts by nationalist groups to modify or amend constitutional law, this paper argues that it was a federal moment which triggered the most influential debates on national

identity of the mid-2000s until now: the Multani decision of the Supreme Court of Canada – which set into motion the subsequent Bouchard-Taylor commission on reasonable accommodation (Leroux 2010; Peker 2017). This decision exacerbated tensions between Quebec nationalist identity values and constitutional law. Once again, the federal Charter of Rights and Freedoms was presented as a threat to Quebec’s approach to integration and accommodation – and thus by extension a threat to its autonomy. The Multani decision and the Bouchard-Taylor commission on reasonable accommodation are the main central state moments of the post-2006 era of Quebec nationalism. While the Multani decision is not the sole factor which reignited nationalist debates in Quebec (see Peker 2017), it served as yet another reminder of how federal institutions could be perceived as undermining the province’s cultural sovereignty: this time through the usage of judicial courts and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to overwrite Quebec interculturalism with Canadian multiculturalism (Peker 2017, 15). Immigration and secularism soon became intrinsic matters of national identity and the following ripples these debates had on the spheres of sociological nationalism steadily led to the evolution of Quebec nationalism.

This analysis then delves into the two remaining factors, which are the impulse from sociological nationalism as well as the consolidation of the new leadership nucleus. David Koussens (2020) traces the impacts which the debate on reasonable accommodation and secularism had on Quebec nationalism. He offers a three-way approach which details how secularism itself has gone from an unspoken bastion of Quebec society (Quiet Secularization), into a threatened pillar of the nation’s core (Invisible Secularism) and finally the emerging symbol of Quebec nationalism (Nationalist Secularism).

The final factor of Lluich’s approach will be studied through the PQ, the PLQ and even the CAQ’s usage of law-making in order to consolidate itself as the new leadership nucleus of

secularism. Throughout this impulse stage, a strong desire for firm legislation on secularism was vehiculated by medias and intellectuals alike. The most important of these primary documents is the CAQ's Bill 21 – the *Act respecting the laicity of the State*. Secularism became a facet of Quebec identity politics through law-making, and it serves as an important tool for parties to formalize themselves as the representatives of this new and emerging nationalism (Barras 2021). With political actors spearheading legislation on secularism, second-hand literature on the instrumental role legislation has played in this debate forms the basis of this final argument (Béland, Lecours and Schmeiser 2021). Legislation is the means through which a party consolidates its “tipping point” and secures its legacy as the champion of a new form of nationalism: “similar to Bill 101’s prominent role in the Levesque government of 1976-1985, Bill 21 will likely be one of the Legault government’s most enduring legacies” (Nahmias 2021, 36).

This latest evolution of Quebec nationalism remains a very recent phenomenon, and while future studies will assuredly continue to further explore the matter, this research paper makes use of both primary documents and second-hand literature in order to study the impact political actors have had in this latest shift. Ultimately, the stability of this tipping point in Quebec nationalism has been somewhat muddled by the all-encompassing debates on health issues and pandemic measures in the 2020s. Nevertheless, the success of the CAQ’s tipping point will depend mostly on its ability to safeguard Bill 21.

In the next section, the three historical parties which served to shape initial preexistent ideologies in Quebec nationalism are detailed. The Union Nationale, the Parti Libéral du Québec and the Parti Québécois have encapsulated different strands of nationalism: autonomism, federalism and separatism. They are vital in understanding how the CAQ, and its nationalism centered around secularism, draws on the Union Nationale’s cultural nationalism.

Historical preexistent ideologies

Union Nationale and autonomism

Before the rise of the Coalition Avenir Québec and its impact on nationalism, Quebec had previously seen three major parties compete to spread their own vision on the matter across two different historical eras. The first of these eras includes the Union Nationale and the Parti Libéral du Québec from 1939 to the late 1960s. This era is marked by clashing ideologies of autonomism and federalism. Then, the 1970s to the early 2000s sees the Parti Québécois replace the Union Nationale, this time pitting ideologies of separatism against federalism.

This three-way approach to Quebec nationalism – autonomism, federalism and separatism – can be thought as the historical traces of how Quebec’s main preexistent ideologies have been portrayed across the literature. Béland, Lecours and Schmeiser denote these three main strands of nationalism as the following: autonomism, which “has essentially sought to protect, and sometimes expand, Quebec autonomy within Canada but without very much engagement with the Canadian federation”, federalism, which “has looked for such engagement with Canadian federalism, often with the objective of promoting decentralist reforms”, and finally separatism, which, “has favoured outright independence” (Béland, Lecours and Schmeiser 2021, 181).

The Union Nationale was a party centered around the autonomist ideology of nationalism. During both of its mandates, from 1936 to 1939 for the first and 1944 to 1960 for the second, the party sought to distinguish itself from the PLQ and oppose the notion of national unity through federalism, and yet kept a clear distance from a secessionist stance (McDougall 2016, 60). Its leader, Maurice Duplessis “never sought the breakup of Canada, nor did he need the idea of secession to keep himself and his party in power. But he did need (and played on) a distrust of the

federative pact, and as a result was very wary and voluble about any perceived transgressions of it” (McDougall 2016, 60). This era of Quebec nationalism is evidently distinguishable from the later secessionist phase. During this time, the qualities exhibited by the Union Nationale and its leader, were the clear and stated opposition against the centralizing federalist forces: “the Duplessis’ « autonomist » program has been described as vague on what it was for but clear in what it was against: in particular, the fight against the growth of the central power in Ottawa” (McDougall 2016, 61).

This era of Quebec nationalism is essential in that it presents a preexistent ideology that is clearly distinguishable from separatism. The Union Nationale has sought a way to pursue identity politics by establishing itself as a fierce critic and opponent of Ottawa’s powers, denouncing its centralizing strategies and yet never establishing its nationalism around independence. Looking at political leaders from the Union Nationale, successors Daniel Johnson Sr. and Jean-Jacques Bertrand have stood as autonomists who followed a strand of nationalism that was neither federalist, nor separatist. “A study of the Union Nationale’s 1976 program, as well as its programs of 1973 and 1966, leads to the following conclusion: the Union Nationale stands for a constitutional solution mid-way between sovereignty-association and traditional federalism. [...] They were not ‘separatist’” (Bernard 1978 in McDougall 2016, 68).

The importance of the autonomist era of nationalism is key, as it denotes the roots of a preexistent ideology fitting with Lluich’s theory, as well as provides empirical proof of the first way in which Quebec nationalism has shifted and evolved through the combination of a temporal variation as well as an important “tipping point”. While often pitted against federalism and the Parti Libéral du Québec, autonomism eventually fell out of favor in the 1970s.

Replaced by the Parti Québécois as the nationalist party, the Union Nationale never won more than 20 per cent of the vote in subsequent elections. The party, then led by Gabriel Loubier, changed its name to Unité Québec in an attempt to break with the past and renew itself. After a bitter defeat in the 1973 election, in which not a single Union Nationale candidate was elected, the party reverted to its original name. Under new leader Rodrigue Biron, the Union Nationale sided with the Yes campaign during the 1980 referendum, which caused the party to crumble and rapidly decline. It won 4 per cent of the vote in 1981 and 1 per cent in 1986 before finally dissolving in 1989 (Lemieux and Harvey 2006, 3-4).

This observation provides an important addition to Lluich's theory. Once an actor takes advantage of a window of opportunity and causes a "tipping point", it is very difficult for the defeated party and its own conception of nationalism to immediately recover. Just as the Union Nationale had great trouble recovering after falling out of favor, so too has the Parti Québécois experienced the same decline following its own tipping point – at the hands of an autonomist party, nonetheless. Interestingly enough, the Coalition Avenir Québec's own leader, François Legault, has emphasized this connection, describing himself as a modern-day UN member (Larin 2019).

Parti Libéral du Québec and federalism

The Parti Libéral du Québec has served as the core federalist presence in Québec: "For their part the Quebec Liberals [...] had definitively come down as federalists by the late 1960s. By then the Liberal Party was committed to remaining inside the country. The Liberal Party's commitment to federalism became very clear after its loss in 1966 to the UN and the period of soul searching that followed that event" (Quinn 1979, 233, 245). Not only were they firm adherents of framing nationalism through a federalist perspective, but they were great proponents of constitutional reform (McDougall 2016, 73). In Lluich's model of temporal variation, the PLQ has historically been the greatest instigator of the second factor – occurrence of a central state constitutional

moment – both during and after its back and forth with the Union Nationale. In 1960, 1962, 1970 and 1973, when the PLQ was in power, their strategy was to pursue aggressive constitutional activism.

It was the party's strategy that the answers to Quebec's identity politics could be attained through constitutional means. This strategy was known as 'constitutional activism' and sought to define Quebec's place in the federation by referring to the nation's constitutional documents and proceeding through constitutional changes (McDougall 2016, 187). For example, in the early 1960s, the PLQ demanded that the federal government retreat from the sectors of health, education and business. Discussions over a separate pension plan for Quebec, as opposed to adhering to Canada's all-encompassing federal plan, also occurred in 1964 while the provincial Liberals were in power. These examples showcase that the PLQ's means of framing Quebec nationalism was done so through regular challenges, debates and attempts at modifying the federal constitution and increasing provincial jurisdictions. Constitutional activism was thought by the party to be the means of solving the issues of identity politics through federal courts and legislation.

For the UN during the 1960s and 1970s, questions surrounding the reform of the constitution, the possible veto of the province, and the individual's relation to the state were useful ambiguities that were to be maintained and exploited when needed. By contrast, the Quebec Liberals sought clarity and change on these topics. Their desire to intervene in the economy more aggressively and elevate French Canadians to a position of equality with their Anglophone counterparts required both an active discussion of these subjects and a clear idea of how they should be resolved (Rocher 2002, 79).

However, at the time, Ottawa's strategy was not yet geared towards impactful constitutional reform and increased decentralization. Given the tensions between the federalist and autonomists strands of nationalism in Quebec, this constitutional activism was met with superficial

changes. While certain concessions were made from the central government to the province of Quebec, Ottawa maintained a strong federal presence in provincial matters. Despite their push for constitutional activism, the PLQ was confronted to the natural follow-up of Luch's theory which are the 'impulses from the sphere of sociological nationalism'. The ineffective, or rather unsatisfactory changes brought about by this period of constitutional activism ignited the spheres of nationalists which sought a new solution to the issue. Autonomism had failed to satisfy the demands of Quebecers, ushering a period of great tension and instability where the emerging party, the Parti Québécois, was consolidated around a firm and distinct view of nationalism – that of rejecting the federal dynamic in which Quebec was, in their minds, left time and time again with non-answers to their demands. And thus a new leadership nucleus was formed around this vision: separatism.

With the rise of the Parti Québécois and its separatist ideology there was a clear strategic intent to supplant the Liberal's strand of nationalism just as they were negotiating the Victoria Charter in 1971. The Liberals had a genuine fear that whatever constitutional reforms they pursued would be deemed too weak, seen as "selling out" and ultimately lead to electoral losses against the Parti Québécois, especially as negotiations were strained to the point of complete paralysis by the "singular vision of the federal Liberals of Pierre Trudeau" (McDougall 2016, 73). Constitutional activism would inevitably result in a failure and the aftermath of this era was what largely motivated the PLQ to move away from this strategy. Debates around the constitution merely exacerbated tensions around nationalism in Québec, and Canada's reluctance to implementing constitutional reforms – mainly due to the rigidity of its constitution – proved to be a hurdle the party was unable to overcome. As McDougall (2016, 187) summarizes, "the most important

influence was the conversion of the Quebec Liberal Party from one of constitutional activism to passivism, in which it sought to drop constitutional change from the political agenda”.

Historical preexistent ideologies: Parti Québécois and separatism

In this period of immense instability, the Parti Québécois was presented with an opportunity to oppose the Liberals in its framing of nationalism through a federalist perspective, shifting the debate away from constant negotiations with Ottawa in the pursuit of independence and sovereignty. “As the first overtly separatist party to take power, the PQ was a game changer in that it had an active interest in bringing to the fore these points of contention in the constitution and exploiting a constitutional crisis for an electoral gain that would ultimately result in Canada’s collapse” (McDougall 2016, 75). McDougall states it clearly here, the agency of political leaders is second to none in understanding shifting nationalisms within Quebec. The era was ripe with instability and tension, as the constitutional crisis paralyzed Quebec’s Liberals and allowed the sovereigntists to seize hold of the nation’s identity politics. Its first marked strategy was a clear and obvious shift away from the federalist strand of nationalism. Concretely, the Parti Québécois had nearly no interest in seeking out a solution within the context of a federal system. The PQ’s strategy of detached disengagement “adhered to a pattern that has characterized its time in power: while it is fundamentally hostile to the federal system, it does very little to actually interfere with or disrupt its operations, with the exception of often not going along with the same playbook as the rest of the country on national platforms” (McDougall 2016, 77). In an effort to distance itself as much as possible from the Liberals, constitutional issues are kept to a bare minimum, with the *Quebec-Canada: A New Deal* document of 1979 merely acting as a precursor to the outright call for secession from the PQ (McDougall 2016, 78).

In the wake of the PQ's electoral victory in 1976, tensions continued to mount as Prime Minister Trudeau held a strongly pan-national ideal of Canada, where Quebec's issues should be settled within the context of federalism and federalism alone. Strategies of neoliberalism, open federalism and discrete incrementalism only came later, from 2006 and onward with Stephen Harper's Conservative government. In centering debates and discourses around Quebec nationalism solely through a centralized view of federalism, Ottawa pushed the PQ further away and consolidated the party's separatist stance. These tensions culminated of course in the referendums of 1980 and 1995 where repeated failures at negotiations led to the greatest clashes between conflicting views of nationalism – federalism and nationalism – shared within the same province. Ultimately, while the separatist pressure led to noticeable evolution in the federalist strand of nationalism, moving away from constitutional activism in favor of passivism, the PQ's failed referendums led to the gradual decline in its electoral support, which has steadily fallen from 1998 until its all-time low of the voting share in 2018.

Following the PQ's decline, intellectual developers have played an important role in framing nationalism away from issues of secession and sovereignty. CAQ leader François Legault has done so by establishing himself and his party as the successors of the Union Nationale's preexistent ideology of autonomism. Grassroot autonomist values of culture, identity and language played significant parts across the then-emerging debates on religious accommodations, ethnocultural diversity and immigration, which dominated Quebec's political discourse around the late 2000s. This process of evolving nationalism away from the PQ's separatism and towards the CAQ's secularism will be detailed in the following section using Lluich's theory. Each of these four interlinked factors serves to illustrate how the CAQ has played such a proactive role in this shift. The agency of political actors such as CAQ leader François Legault cannot be understated

as every stage of this process displays a strategic intent to move identity politics away from separatism in order to secure electoral gains. The first step in this process is by detailing how the CAQ and François Legault, as key actors, have selectively chosen the preexistent ideology that would favor them the most in toppling both the PQ and the PLQ: the UN's grassroots autonomism.

Key Actors

The Coalition Avenir Québec and its autonomist roots

At the head of the Coalition Avenir Québec is leader François Legault, former Cabinet Minister of the Parti Québécois. Between the three strands of nationalism presented above, the one which draws the most coherent ties to the CAQ and leader François Legault is autonomism and most importantly, the UN's autonomism: "the CAQ is in many respects a modern-day UN. It combines an autonomist nationalism with a focus on the Quebec identity, which is very much understood in terms of its French Canadian roots" (Béland, Lecours and Schmeiser 2021, 191). A review of the party's 2012 electoral program intitled *Enough, vote for change!* details this strategy as a core driver of its policy:

To preserve its gains, Quebec must show strong leadership and have a clear and respectful vision of the fields of competence and what type of relation it wants with the federal government. **Not limited in its actions by any considerations of a referendum strategy**, only a Coalition government can demonstrate the leadership and the vision Quebec truly requires.

A Coalition Avenir Quebec government will work **to increase Quebec's autonomy within Canada**. The objective is not to start a war of flags but to make sure that a certain number of strategic policies better meet the needs and values of Quebecers.

A Coalition Avenir Quebec government will present a series of demands in order to expand the responsibilities of the Quebec government not only the language sector, but also in other fields like **immigration, culture**, telecommunications, the environment and energy (CAQ 2012, 90 My emphasis).

In what is certainly a great display of strategizing by the CAQ, its electoral program rekindles the dynamic promoted by the Union Nationale by demanding increased decentralization in sectors of language, immigration and the very broad category of 'culture'. Not only are these

factors the basis of the autonomist ideology, but, as previously seen, autonomism must distinctly distance itself from separatism. Here, the emphasized passages of the CAQ's own electoral program make it clear that it stands in stark contrast to the PQ and the pursuit of secession – just as the UN of old. Based on the foundation laid by the UN, this offers the CAQ two ideological avenues it may base its policies and platform on. The first avenue follows a familiar opposition with the federal government. The second avenue focuses on internal discourse of identity politics. Issues of linguistic rights, culture, immigration and integration thus become key factors of Quebec politics which the CAQ can center their platform around. By underlining the asymmetries between the powers held by the government of Ottawa and the province's desires for increased jurisdiction, for example in matters of immigration and culture, the CAQ can continue the trend of establishing itself as adversaries of the federal government. Policies and debates can be centered around the tug of war between Ottawa and Quebec and a narrative that centers around overcoming the obstacles laid by the federal government may lead to perceived successes and satisfy the CAQ's electoral base.

However, the federal government's strategy is not the same as it was 60 years ago. Neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives seek to oppose themselves to Quebec as they did before. Changfoot and Cullen (2011) have shown that instead of taking a nation-building approach when it comes to federalism, Ottawa has settled for a strategy of open federalism, which disengages any attempt at entering constitutional debates with the province of Quebec. In regards to Bill 21 for example, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has stated that, "by staying out of the fight right now, he can « ensure that it is Quebeckers themselves » making the case to the Quebec government that the law is discriminatory, without giving an « excuse to the Quebec government that this is federal interference » (Trudeau in Zimonjic 2021, 2). This distinct approach of the modern era has made

it less of a fruitful endeavor to fan the flames of the federal-provincial debates and discourses. In a context of open federalism and decentralization, the attitude adopted by the federal government serves to avoid many of the conflicts potentially ignited by the CAQ. However, the party is anything but one-dimensional in its political strategizing. Another important quality of the CAQ, which is often attributed to its leader, is its flexibility. In the face of a non-confrontational federal government, François Legault's 'pragmatist' approach to politics allows the party to reorient itself towards matters rife with political opportunities. The next section details how Legault's personal qualities as a leader have oriented the CAQ's strategy in that direction.

François Legault, opportunism or pragmatism

Premier François Legault has witnessed both the surge and fall of the Action Démocratique du Québec, as well as the gradual decline of the Parti Québécois, having served as one the latter's key ministers. Given Legault's important role within the party, his expressed disassociation with separatism has led many of his critics to consider him a turncoat – having renounced the vision he ardently defended less than a decade ago (Nahmias 2020, 5). Criticism has also extended to the CAQ itself, noting the party's lack of clear ideological and political motivator, as well as its excessively leader-centric focus. "Certains continuent de reprocher à la CAQ son côté artificiel, c'est-à-dire d'être seulement un « club » plutôt qu'une véritable coalition, ce qui revient à dire que, contrairement à un parti qui est le regroupement de tendances diverses, elle serait seulement l'expression d'une seule tendance, celle de la « régression » à l'avant-1960", Boily (2018, 33) explains. It is of note here that the pre-1960 era which Boily mentions corresponds with the peak of the UN's influence. This is the first glimpse into leader François Legault's deliberate selection of preexistent ideology. This criticism, aimed both at the party as well as its leader, serve as hints which reveal the CAQ's underlying strategy: one where preexistent ideology, as per Lluçh's

model, is meticulously selected rather than organically born. In this regard, leader François Legault exhibits qualities that are reflected across a distinct category of politicians: those formed in the fast-moving world of business and commerce. This style of politician values electoral gains and results above ideology itself and thus, in understanding what these criticisms reveal about Legault's personal qualities, the strategies employed by his party also become clearer.

What the emergence of the CAQ reveals is that these same criticisms have been applied to several modern political parties around the world. By themselves, they are not so much direct signs of an opportunist agenda, but more so mirrors of the current political strategies employed by result-oriented leaders. Unlike the world of business, politics transition at a slower pace – and attributes such as adaptability, compromise and the ability to reorient oneself are more likely to be seen as qualities in the world of fast-paced commerce, rather than political hypocrisy and dishonesty. In this regard, François Legault exhibits several of the qualities that businessmen-turned-politicians display. This leadership model, which Boily (2018, 26) expands beyond the world of business and categorizes as the 'leader-centric party' has seen significant strides across several western democracies. In his analysis, Boily uses leader Emmanuel Macron – and yes, also republican leader Donald Trump – in order to emphasize that the emergence of leader-centric parties in western politics is a conscious strategy; the product of an era marked by great distrust in political institutions (Boily 2018, 37). The culmination of this strategy is that of a model where ideology is selected based on anticipated or observed results: pragmatic nationalism.

CAQ and pragmatic nationalism

The central role of agency in the evolution of nationalism can be attributed to this pragmatic approach. Joshua Nahmias (2020) coins and defines the CAQ's style of pragmatic nationalism as that of a party which makes adaptable and selective use of ideology, rather than adhering to a rigid

ideological stance. This pragmatist approach is in no way concealed from the public – in fact this strategy is explicitly stated at the forefront of the party’s 2012 program.

THE PUBLIC INTEREST ABOVE ALL

The Coalition believes that it is the public interest, not an ideological presupposition, which must guide government action. A Coalition Avenir Québec government will choose the most appropriate action depending on the situation, not ideology (CAQ 2012, 10).

Rather than clinging to ideological discourses even in periods of decline, the CAQ is focused on political gains and progress: “this disdain towards ideology is likely tied towards Legault’s general distrust of the sovereignty debate, which he views as a barrier towards progress. The endless internal debates within the PQ, notably those surrounding the Canadian constitution, likely irritated the business-oriented and naturally pragmatic Legault” (Nahmias 2020, 11). With the models of separatism and federalism both failing to regain momentum over the last decade, François Legault had successfully grasped which issues fueled debates in the contemporary era. Despite the PQ’s decline, issues of nationalism had all but faded with the shift away from separatism, but rather had returned to issues of culture and identity. These grassroots issues were set ablaze by the debates on immigration and reasonable accommodation. Starting in the mid-2000s, the reasonable accommodation crisis proved to be an important impetus of public discourse and electoral gain. The Action Démocratique du Québec and the Parti Québécois had both made favorable strides in instrumentalizing these issues, and with no ideology to inhibit the CAQ, it had free rein to pick and choose which arguments resonated with public interest, and which did not.

The defense of secularism had taken over national debates and the CAQ quickly followed suit by promoting a Charter on secularism:

The adoption of the Lay (Secularism) Charter will result in concrete action as a Coalition Avenir Québec government will amend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (*Charte des droits et libertés de la personne*) to make sure that equality between men and women cannot be subrogated to any other recognized right. This amendment will allow for a further explicit demonstration of the secular character of the Québec State (CAQ 2012, 97).

It could even be argued that during this era, the CAQ, as well as the PQ, had a vested interest in further igniting tensions with the federal government by seeking judicial challenges with federal courts. The PQ sought to promote its own Charter of Values during this time, and exacerbating the perceived threats on Quebec's autonomy in matters of reasonable accommodation would further orient the debate around that key issue. "From a purely political standpoint, however, the tension between the proposed Quebec Charter of Values and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms could have helped the PQ's cause, at least if the Supreme Court of Canada would have ever rejected the Quebec Charter of Values" (Béland, Lecours and Schmeiser 2021, 188).

In both the ADQ's surprising upswing to official opposition, as well as the strong public support towards the PQ's Charter of Values, François Legault benefited from several key opportunities to put into action his pragmatic approach to nationalism. These opportunities came from central state moments which reignited nationalist debates. At the forefront of these debates were two models of secularism and the tensions which ensued when the Federal Supreme Court was seen as imposing the federal model over Quebec's distinct, French approach to secularism. These central state moments turned immigration, reasonable accommodation and secularism into matters of national identity – and sought a remedy from the Canadian Charter – seen as a

constitutional tool which undermined Quebec's distinct cultural secularism. In this manner, these debates tasked politicians with finding a legislative solution to a constitutional problem.

From Separatism to Secularism: An Analysis

The Multani decision: Triggering nationalist debates through a central state constitutional moment

The Multani decision is a landmark case in Quebec identity politics, as it launched the crisis on reasonable accommodation. In 2006, the Supreme Court of Canada overthrew a local Quebec school board's decision to forbid a Sikh student from wearing his *kirpan*. This decision quickly ignited a debate on Quebec and Canada's respective forms of cultural integration. Quebec's approach to secularism closely resembled France's renewed approach to "laïcité", promoting a fervent critique of religion's presence in the public sector where neutrality was essentially associated with the absence of visible religious signs in public institutions, including religious symbols worn by public employees. In opposition, the Canadian model of secularism followed an Anglo-Saxon approach where religious organizations simply lessened their presence in civil society instead (Parenteau 2013).

The Multani decision was a turning point and the primary trigger of a strong ripple effect from Quebec nationalists: "It was seen as delegitimizing Quebec's juridical and legislative independence", Leroux states (2010, 111). Not only was the case seen as a threat against Quebec's autonomy, but it also highlighted the usage of the federal Charter of Rights and Freedoms as a means of erasing Quebec distinctiveness. Following the Multani decision, public outcry demanded constitutional amendments to the Charter, with, for example, the Herouville municipal council urging Canadian minister of immigration, Diane Finley, to revise relevant laws on multiculturalism and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Leroux 2010, 112). The repercussions of the Multani decisions didn't stop at requests for constitutional amendments. In 2007, PLQ Premier Jean Charest put into motion the Bouchard-Taylor commission on reasonable accommodation.

Secularism was at the forefront of national debates, with ADQ leader Mario Dumont championing the conservative stance. His message echoed among Quebec nationalists: “this self-assigned role of collective identity protector made [Dumont] an effective challenger” (Cote 2008 in Leroux 2010, 112).

The Bouchard-Taylor commission dominated Quebec political discourses during that era and despite the crisis proving itself one of perceptions rather than actual threats (Koussens 2020, 22) that singular moment turned secularism from a quiet pillar of Quebec society into a threatened symbol of its distinctiveness within Canada. Ultimately the Multani decision would not be followed-up by any kind of federal interference into the matter of reasonable accommodation. Again, the federal government favored a stance of constitutional passivism. The last thing the Harper government probably wanted after securing cooperation with Quebec, following a separatist wave, was another constitutional crisis. And thus, the debate once again turned inwards. The aftermath of this judicial decision would inevitably cause several intellectuals to seek a means of protecting Quebec secularism from federal undermining through legislative means. Indeed, Koussens (2020, 22) has underlined this sentiment, stating that: “the legislative silence following the « Bouchard-Taylor moment » was certainly a serious political miscalculation, for it opened the door to nationalist discourse capitalizing on the public’s identity worries and malaise”. But before looking at how law-making became an essential part of protecting secularism in Quebec, it is important to consider Lluich’s third factor, which are the impulses from the sphere of sociological nationalism.

The impulse from the sphere of sociological nationalism: from quiet secularization to nationalist secularism

Secularism has always played an important role in Quebec civil society, albeit an initially silent one. “Until Quebec’s passage of Bill 21 [...] on 16 June 2019, neither Canada nor any of its provinces had ever enacted a law explicitly separating church from state, nor had they formally proclaimed secularism in a constitutional text.” (Koussens 2020, 18). And yet secularism had been a core societal project which began with the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. The Quiet Revolution saw a significant portion of Quebec society rally around the rejection of the province’s religious past, as well as promote an increased distance from religious authorities. During the second half of the twentieth century, the nation had slowly come to embrace new social and political institutions, which veered away from firm religious presence. The notion of secularism had been a part of Quebec’s identity long before the CAQ’s rise, but this era was described by Koussens (2020, 18-21) as a period of Quiet Secularization, where the matter had not yet garnered much public notice.

From 2006 onward, the Canadian Supreme Court’s Multani decision brought great turmoil to the notion of secularism in Quebec as seen above. Once again, the province’s distinct approach to handling religious accommodations was placed in stark contrast to Canada’s pluralist and multiculturalist society. From 2006 to 2010, this era of secularism is what Koussens (2020, 19) paradoxically qualifies as Invisible Secularism due to its perceived inefficacy in offering a viable model to Canada’s multicultural approach. It can be argued that rather than calling this era Invisible Secularism, it can perhaps be qualified as Transparent Secularism – one which appears under threat by undermining federal judicial institutions. From 2006 to 2010, secularism in Quebec *feels* transparent, forced to mirror the multiculturalist Canadian model which is promoted by the Charter

of the Rights and Freedoms. The Multani decision and the Bouchard-Taylor commission sent a message to nationalists that Quebec needed a legislative counter to federal judicial interference (Koussens 2020, 23). The desire for strong and clear rules in handling reasonable accommodation was bolstered by many of the nation's intellectuals, with journalists, essayists and politicians joining the debate and promoting Quebec's distinctiveness over the unfit model of Canadian multiculturalism. According to Matthieu Bock-Côté (2020, 77), a vocal critique of Canadian multiculturalism:

Pour le dire d'un mot, le nationalisme s'est moins effondré qu'il ne s'est détourné de la quête d'une indépendance jugée improbable à court terme pour se tourner vers la défense de l'identité nationale, d'autant qu'à partir de la crise des accommodements raisonnables de 2006-2008, l'échec de plus en plus évident de l'intégration des immigrants à la majorité historique francophone et le rôle joué dans cette dynamique par le multiculturalisme canadien se sont imposés comme sujet politique essentiel au cœur de l'espace public.

These comments were echoed by several more Quebec intellectuals (Antonius 2013; Latour 2013; Beauchemin 2004; Chevrier 2013) and marked a crucial turn for identity politics within the nation. Now under threat, secularism was no longer a quiet pillar of Quebec society. Intellectuals brandished Quebec's model of "laïcité" as a cultural heritage which marked Quebec distinctiveness over the Canadian model. Secularism became a value to promote and protect, serving as a symbol of the nation's historical roots. Koussens (2020, 25) states that those who held that view firmly believed, "secularism, in sharp contradistinction to reasonable accommodation, arises from the adoption of legal definitions that can hold up a republican model of secularism as the necessary alternative to Canadian multiculturalism". This outward and expressed desire to safeguard Quebec secularism through legislative means ushered in a new form of secularism which Koussens aptly names Nationalist Secularism.

In defining this modern evolution of secularism, Koussens states that, “Since 2010, successive Quebec governments have been pushed by the media to deal with religious « problems » and have responded by using the legislative apparatus to redraw the outlines of secularism in Quebec. These legislative developments have reinforced what may henceforth be termed a nationalist version of secularism” (2020, 25). The PLQ’s Bill 94 was the first attempt at legislating provincial secularism. It proposed to ban face covering for public service workers or those receiving public service. The Bill was soon trapped in judicial challenges and eventually abandoned for Bill 60, following the 2012 election of the PQ. Bill 60, which would have banned the wearing of religious symbols by all public sector employees, was the object of important debates, but was never implemented as the PLQ regained power during the 2014 general election. Bill 60 was thus abandoned for the PLQ’s ensuing Bill 62, which also prohibited face covering. Following the adoption of Bill 62, the legislation did not end the debate on religious symbols. During the 2018 election campaign, the CAQ proposed to ban the wearing of religious symbols by public sector employees in a position of authority, including judges, crown attorneys, police officers, prison guards and teachers. Following its election, the CAQ government follow through with their electoral proposal, which took the form of Bill 21. What distinguished the CAQ from its predecessors was its usage of pragmatism above ideology.

First, it drew on the four principles which were already outlined in the Bouchard-Taylor report¹ in order to legitimize its approach on secularism by basing it on a historical precedent (Barras 2021, 288). In this period of successive failures at legislative regulation, the CAQ sought to embody this latest evolution of nationalism. In order to establish itself as the champion of

¹ State neutrality, the separation of church and state, the moral equality of persons, and freedom of conscience and religion.

secularism and legitimize itself as the sole party capable of representing Quebec's nationalist interests, the CAQ made use of notwithstanding clauses to implement Bill 21 at all costs, but more on that in the following section. In conclusion, this era which Koussens defined as Nationalist Secularism not only acted as strong societal evidence of how secularism became the new face of Quebec nationalism, but also made law-making the means through which secularism could be promoted and protected.

Bill 21 as a means of consolidating the new leadership nucleus

Bill 21 was passed into law in 2019 by the CAQ. It cemented the party's efforts in championing the shift of Quebec nationalism away from separatism. Neither the federalists nor the separatists could promote Quebec secularism the way the CAQ could, as their respective ideologies inhibited their ability to satisfy nationalist demands. The PQ was tied down once more to debates on sovereignty, even as it sought to promote and adopt Bill 60. Another aspect of note is that the PQ originally criticized Bill 21, stating that it did not extend far enough – not applying to public daycare workers for example (Shingler 2019). This is yet another testament to the CAQ's pragmatist approach, which always sought public approval first, sidestepping unpopular implementations whenever possible. As for the PLQ, their stance on reasonable accommodation merely alienated a greater part of nationalist voters. The PLQ was seen as a mirror of the Canadian multiculturalist model of pluralism (Bock-Côté 2020, 78). After securing an electoral victory in 2018 and rallying even former supporters of the PQ with his promise of a Charter on secularism, François Legault immediately sought to cement his party as the sole representative of Quebec's nationalist secularism through Bill 21.

There is a distinct shift in strategies at this stage, one where the CAQ seeks to consolidate its leadership nucleus – in other words: ensure the longevity of its legacy – through law-making

rather than provoke any more national debates on the issue. Amélie Barras (2021, 289) details this strategy:

Another difference from previous attempts to conceptualize relationships between state and religion in Quebec is the effort to shield the law's model of secularism from judicial review. Articles 33 and 34 of Bill 21 provide for the legislation to operate notwithstanding its infringement of certain rights under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom* and Quebec's *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*. These provisions were included for a number of reasons. One of them is that politicians wanted this legislative project to avoid the fate of Bill 62, the only other bill on the topic that was passed but which was stalled by judicial processes.

Constitutional challenges carried the risk of throwing the nation back into debate, possibly legitimizing rival views on secularism from the PLQ or even the emerging Québec Solidaire. Once the CAQ entered into government, ensuring its legacy on nationalist secularism through Bill 21 became a priority: "these types of legal formalization give credence to laïcité: they anchor it not only in law but also in «public consciousness»" (Koussens and Lavoie 2018 in Barras 2021, 286).

The importance of a piece of legislation like Bill 21 in the debate on nationalism is second to none. It marks a concrete political effort in satisfying public demands for change, as well as the basis for the new paradigm on nationalism. It was nevertheless a strategic use of pragmatic nationalism which has led the CAQ so far, even during the final stages of its consolidation. In what it perhaps one of the most revealing differences in strategy between the PQ and the CAQ, despite affirming himself as a modern UN member and riding upon its legacy, CAQ leader François first declined to remove the crucifix hanging above the speaker's chair in the National Assembly in 2018, citing it as a cultural and historical sign, not a religious one (Riga 2019). Then – unbound by rigid ideological stance as the pragmatist leader is – Legault finally decided to remove that same cross just a year later. The CAQ stands out as a 'results-oriented' party, following the

principles of adaptability and pragmatist above rigid ideology. Despite its considerable efforts in centering Quebec politics around the issue of nationalism, identity politics and secularism, the health crisis of the 2020s has completely swept those issues aside, and left the CAQ leader to make use of his pragmatism in tackling the epidemic. That said, the legacy of Bill 21 offers multiple different avenues as to its future.

Tensions with the federal government are repeated sidestepped by Trudeau's Liberals; if any challenges will be brought against Bill 21, they shall not be federally driven (Zimonjic, 2021). Challenges might however emerge laterally, rather than with the federal government. Several Canadian municipalities have offered financial support in tackling Bill 21, including the city of London (Stacey 2021). Organization such as the National Council of Canadian Muslims have also pledged to challenge the Bill (Javed 2021). However, these challengers will find in the CAQ an adaptable party who is more than willing to concede and compromise when needed in order to maintain its grasp on the nationalist debate. It is likely that even in the case of constitutional challenges, whatever modifications need to be made to Bill 21 in order to safeguard it will surely be implemented. In defending Bill 21, the CAQ solidifies the legacy of this modern political tipping point: that of nationalism through secularism rather than separatism. It serves as proof of how Quebec nationalism evolved and how the CAQ was able to cement itself as the defender of this new form of nationalism better than any other political party.

Discussion

An overview of temporal variation and tipping point through the Coalition Avenir Quebec

Historically, Luch's four interlinked factors of temporal variation have been observed across three different periods of evolving nationalism in Quebec. These changes have occurred from the late 1930 to the 1970s, and then from the 1970s to the mid-2000s. From 2007 and onward, the new catalysts of temporal variation can be observed – the debates on immigration and secularism, symbolized by the Bouchard-Taylor commission as well as the Quebec Charter of Values (Bill 60).

From the CAQ's initial inception in 2012, it had quietly observed the back and forth between federalists and separatists. Its leader, François Legault, had experienced the shortcomings that rigid political ideology carried in Quebec. In an era marked by the decline of separatism, identity politics never waned, and instead reemerged across the debate on reasonable accommodation. In following the way nationalists sought to defend Quebec secularism from the interference of judicial courts and the implementation of new laws to safeguard a now threatened piece of their cultural heritage – the CAQ selectively positioned itself as an autonomist party: a modern UN with the promise of not only protecting, but championing Quebec's latest form of nationalism through a Charter on secularism. An important distinction about the CAQ when looking at its rivals, was Legault's strategic distancing from rigid ideology in favor of pragmatic autonomist nationalism. Just as Quebec nationalism was steadily shifting away from separatism, the occurrence of the Multani decision helped set the CAQ's strategy into motion.

The Multani decision was a key central state moment which had important repercussions on Quebec civil society. This unilateral judicial process brought into question the foundation of

Quebec secularism and once threatened, nationalists sought to protect themselves against any more interferences from Ottawa. Following a passionate debate on reasonable accommodation which began in 2007, several parties sought to answer public outcry for a legislative solution to the perceived threat on Quebec's distinct model of secularism. Following the PLQ's Bill 94, the PQ's Charter of Values was only the second legislative attempt at protecting Quebec secularism, but stood out by its strong popular support. Noticing the Charter's public success, the CAQ's campaign sought to replicate it in its own, "pragmatism" style. The ideology behind the PQ's Charter would serve as fuel for the CAQ, who sought to bypass federal entanglements with the use of notwithstanding clauses and cement itself as the promoter and defender of a new Quebec nationalism: secularism.

Nationalism had certainly evolved during that era. Since the Multani decision, Quebec's approach to secularism had apparently come under fire by the federal government. Secularism had long since been a part of Quebec's heritage and in leading to the Bouchard-Taylor commission, it went from a quiet, unspoken foundation of the nation, into an invisible and vulnerable pillar of society. Debates on secularism became the new vehicle of nationalism. Public discourse following the Bouchard-Taylor commission centered around immigration, reasonable accommodation and the role religion played in civil society. Intellectuals and nationalists had rallied under the desire to see secularism protected and clarified through legislative means. Quebec secularism was distinct from the rest of Canada, and fit more into a French, republican notion of *laïcité* rather than the Canadian, Anglo-Saxon approach to multiculturalist and pluralist secularism. From political parties to intellectuals to political leader, there was a conscious push from many sides to implement a legislative solution to secularism. Armed with an autonomist answer to secularism, which distanced itself both from the federalists and separatists, the CAQ founded its electoral run on

popular nationalist interests when it came to secularism. A push for immigration control, for a test of values and especially for a Charter on Secularism led it to securing a majority government in 2018. One thing remained for the CAQ, which was to consolidate its leadership nucleus and implement its bill on secularism at all costs.

Consolidation of the leadership nucleus is unlike the search for a constitutional state moment, which in many ways is the trigger for instability and change. The CAQ no longer desired to cause ripples with the federal government and introduced Bill 21 with two notwithstanding clauses that would circumvent constitutional challenges. Less than a year after their election, the CAQ would pass Bill 21 into legislature, cementing themselves as proponents of Quebec nationalism and secularism.

Lluch's model presents a perspective on nationalism which is centered around actor agency, while keeping in mind important contextual factors such as institutions and sociodemographic. This analysis had followed the CAQ's cautious and strategic navigation of the instability marked after the 2006 era. Across this temporal variation where separatism no longer served as the model of nationalism, the CAQ succeeded where others failed, in leading the tipping point on nationalism. The successful implementation of Bill 21 should assure the party a certain period of stability, so long as nationalism can remain the focus of public discourse. When economic or health crises impose themselves as the sole focus of electoral debates, it becomes increasingly difficult to center public discourse around identity politics.

Conclusion

This major research paper has sought to answer the question of how nationalism evolves, and in the case of Quebec, why has it been framed away from separatism. In this study, the CAQ has played the most important role in bringing about that shift from the very moment of its inception. Its leader, François Legault, has managed to secure a landmark victory by making ideology second to pragmatism. This is of considerable note, as the debate between strong ideological stances has lasted almost a century – opposing several forms of nationalism which were rooted in a long history of culture and tradition. In appearance, François Legault might just be the new face of a resurrected Union Nationale, donning the historical mantle of Maurice Duplessis upon his shoulders. But the CAQ was always focused on results and adaptability first. It set out with a plan to gain electoral success by championing a nationalist secularism.

Through its pragmatist approach to nationalism, the CAQ has promoted the defense of secularism, culture and measures of immigration control as core facets of identity politics: “l’approche de la CAQ se veut résolument pragmatique. Sa finalité est d’obtenir des résultats concrets. Des résultats qui vont permettre aux Québécoises et aux Québécois d’affirmer leur identité en obtenant la prépondérance des pouvoirs en matière de langue et d’immigration” (CAQ 2015, 7). Legault has always made strategic note of what Quebec nationalists strived for, and through which means those desires could be attained in order to convert them into electoral gains, as was successfully demonstrated in 2018.

In a bold statement to its francophone electoral base, the CAQ had recognized that separatism now stood in the way of governance and that rigid ideological stances would consistently fail to meet nationalist demands one way or another. Promising greater autonomy for Quebec without secession and a ban on religious symbols to impose and protect secularism the

CAQ was the only party to secure electoral victory as well as consolidate its new leadership nucleus by successfully implementing Bill 21 – which it will likely defend at all costs. In this regard the CAQ echoes the voice of modern Quebec nationalism better than any party who attempted to grasp how separatism had fallen out of favor. In both representing the people's autonomist demands, reflecting the image of Maurice Duplessis and at the same time removing the crucifix the UN's leader had once set in the National Assembly, François Legault demonstrates just how keen his ability to balance nationalism and public opinion truly are. It seems unlikely that the CAQ's grasp on a modern nationalism built around secularism will fall out of favor, so long as identity politics can find a way to resurface in public discourse. Seeing how essential this facet of Quebec identity remains even to this day, national distinctiveness might just cling to political discourses, no matter the crisis. So far, the CAQ's branding has remained familiar, but between federalism, autonomism and separatism, will Quebec witness the rise of a new branch of nationalism? Or will the Parti Québécois simply bide its time, waiting for the next period of constitutional tension and instability which neither the federalist PLQ nor the autonomist CAQ will hold the answers for – and once again rise to reenact their own tipping point? So long as Ottawa's government maintains a safe distance from national questions, that outcome seems unlikely.

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