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## Pragmatic Conservative Nationalism: The Coalition Avenir Quebec

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**Pragmatic Conservative Nationalism: The Coalition Avenir Quebec**

By

Joshua Nahmias

*An MA Research Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts*

Supervised by Professor Adam Harmes

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
July 28, 2020

## **Introduction**

The Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) is a provincial political party that was founded in 2011 and formed the province's government for the first time in 2018. The purpose of this major research project is to explain the origins and policy preferences of the CAQ. It will argue that the CAQ reflects a "pragmatic conservative nationalist" ideology, and that this is as much a result of a conscious political orientation as it is a necessity in Quebec's politically moderate electoral landscape. The party is the ideological heir and the continuation of the centre-right faction of the Parti Québécois (PQ), most notably represented by Lucien Bouchard, premier from 1998 to 2001. The CAQ is currently led by François Legault, a former PQ cabinet minister who had been recruited to politics by Bouchard himself.

The CAQ attempts to embody Quebec's francophone middle-class, primarily those living in the suburbs and regions of the province. It attempts to coalesce sovereignists and federalists in an effort to improve Quebec and catch up with the economic and social standards of its provincial neighbours. The party generally accepts the premise of Quebec's generous welfare state (the "Quebec model"), with the intention of better orienting it to the needs of the middle class. In practical terms, this means lowering the fiscal burden of Quebecers, promoting entrepreneurialism, and simplifying the state all the while investing heavily in basic public services and infrastructure projects.

Since 2018, the CAQ has implemented several reforms, its "flagship" being Bill 21, which bans public personnel in positions of authority from wearing religious symbols. While ambitious, the CAQ consistently chooses compromise over ideological purity. This is most often observed when the government moderates its legislative proposals to the benefit of impacted

stakeholders. This is a necessity in Quebec's political landscape, as entrenched interests such as the province's public sector unions, federations, and associations hold significant organizational power.

To demonstrate the argument that the CAQ represents "pragmatic conservative nationalism," the paper will be organized as follows. The essay will begin by reviewing the existing academic literature and discourse surrounding the CAQ. There is a debate on whether the party even has a coherent ideology. Some believe it to be a platform of electoral opportunism on the part of Legault, who took advantage of both the failure of the Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ) to obtain power, as well as the fall in support for Québécois sovereignty.

Others posit that the CAQ represents a positive and permanent evolution to Quebec's previous rigid "federalist-sovereignist" divide. They argue that the CAQ's attempt to "renew" the national question through the pursuit of an unambiguous nationalism instead of sovereignty. Former Université Laval sociologist and current CAQ caucus member Jean-François Simard promotes this point of view. He argues that a vigorous nationalist outlook is the only way Quebec can assume its full potential and maintain its balance of power with the rest of Canada.<sup>1</sup>

The second section will focus on the elements that led to the founding of the CAQ, including a historical explanation of the parallels between the CAQ and Lucien Bouchard's PQ. This section will also explain why it was necessary to form a new party rather than reform an existing one. Essentially, the PQ represented by leaders Andrés Boisclair, Pauline Marois, and Jean-François Lisée marginalized centrist and centre-right voices within the party.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-François Simard, *L'Idéologie du Hasard: Retour Sur La Question Nationale* (Anjou: Fides, 2018), 4.

The third section will explain the policy preferences of the CAQ, and provide an overview of how the party has conducted itself in power. It will provide an outline of several of its reforms, covering the sections of identity and immigration, the economy, education, and healthcare. The essay will conclude by providing a summary of the aforementioned sections and reinforcing the thesis.

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## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1 Academic Discourse

There are several schools of thought with regard to the reasons behind the CAQ's creation. Some argue that Legault had created the CAQ as an opportunistic personal vehicle to take power. These critics, including former PQ premier Pauline Marois, view Legault as a “turncoat” to the cause of sovereignty, having recently served as a member of the Parti Québécois as early as 2009.<sup>2</sup> Others, such as political ally Simon Jolin Barrette, believe Legault simply came to the conclusion that Quebec would not be holding a third referendum on sovereignty anytime soon, and that focusing on this subject would lead to a waste of time and resources.<sup>3</sup> Thus, depending on one's point of view, the CAQ was created out of either a conscious betrayal of sovereignty for opportunistic reasons, or the realization that Quebec had entered a new political paradigm and that a political party needed to be created to address this issue.<sup>4</sup>

The nature of CAQ's political orientation is contested. While political scholars have generally recognized the party to be of the centre-right, widespread consensus on the party's ideological positioning ends there. Some have claimed the party to be of the “right,” akin to a provincial version of the federal Conservative party of Canada (CPC).<sup>5</sup> According to University of Alberta political science professor Frédéric Boily, the main reasoning behind this claim harkens back to the merger between the ADQ and the CAQ. The ADQ was generally considered

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<sup>2</sup> André Pratte, “La Fidélité de M. Legault,” *La Presse*, August 30, 2012, <https://www.lapresse.ca/debats/201208/29/01-4569408-la-fidelite-de-m-legault.php>.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Jolin-Barrette, *J'ai Confiance: réflexions (sans cynisme) d'un jeune politicien* (Montréal: Québec Amérique, 2018), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Simard, *Idéologie du Hasard*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Frédéric Boily, *La Coalition Avenir Québec*, (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2018), 35.

to be the more individualistic, neoconservative party of the two, having made several fiscally conservative propositions in its electoral platforms, such as encouraging private healthcare, reducing government spending, and lowering taxes.<sup>6</sup>

The ADQ's electorate were largely generation X voters concentrated in Quebec city and the Beauce region, and was supported by popular right-leaning talk radio stations such as CHOI Radio X.<sup>7</sup> These stations were often also supportive of the Conservatives, which had contributed to that party's breakthrough in the province during the 2006 and 2008 elections. The CAQ has adopted several elements of the ADQ's previous campaign platforms, such as abolishing school boards and scheduling a referendum on the subject of adopting a mixed proportional representation electoral system. As such, many have linked the CAQ as the spiritual successor of the ADQ, with the ADQ perceived as a former organization partner of the CPC.<sup>8</sup>

Others, such as UQAM professor and sociologist Gerald Larose, have stated the CAQ is a "club" that represents a regression to Quebec's pre-Quiet Revolution days, similar to a modern day Union Nationale.<sup>9</sup> Larose claims the party is indistinguishable from the PLQ, citing the shared candidates of both parties such as Dominique Anglade and Gaetan Barrette. According to this theory, the CAQ's pretension of being a "coalition" is false. All 125 candidates in each election were approved directly by the leader, making it a party solely in the image of Legault. Furthermore, those in riding associations hold little power within the party.

Many within this school of thought believed that the CAQ would "commercialize" the Quebec state and turn back the clock on the Quebec model, such as clawing back such services

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Andrea Lawlor and Éric Bélanger. "The Blue Electorate in Quebec and Support for the ADQ and the CPC" *Conservatism in Canada*, (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 299.

<sup>9</sup> Gerald Larose, "La CAQ n'est pas une Coalition, mais un Club," *Le Devoir*, April 25, 2018.



as the province's universal daycare system, universal medical insurance, public automobile insurance, low tuition fees, and affordable electricity.<sup>10</sup> This point of view is common among centre-left columnists suspicious of those perceived to be to the right of Quebec's consensual status-quo.

Some have painted the CAQ as an “empty shell” without a concrete ideological foundation.<sup>11</sup> It has been described as a “one man party” led by Legault, rather than one made up of a strong team. In this way, the CAQ has been compared to leader-dominated parties, such as Silvio Berlusconi's *Forzo Italia* and Emmanuel Macron's *En Marche*. According to this theory, the CAQ's policy orientation merely represents the whims of its leader, and as such cannot be identified or defined in any meaningful way. Additionally, party members and fellow caucus MNAs have little input in the party's platform and decision-making.

Opponents of the CAQ have often used this “all-powerful” leader theory to criticize the party. The PLQ often claims that François Legault is merely “improvising,” making it difficult to find any logic or coherence in the party's political decisions.<sup>12</sup> In their view, this leads to policy decisions that are purely electoral and make little sense for the long-term future of Quebecers. For example, PQ leader Jean-François Lisée accused Legault of electoralism when proposing to reduce immigration by 20%.<sup>13</sup> Lisée stated that the percentage proposed by the CAQ was arbitrary, and that the PQ would rely on the auditor general's judgement to make its own decision in terms of setting an immigration threshold for the province.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Boily, *Coalition Avenir Québec*, 46.

<sup>12</sup> Alain Laforest, “Le PLQ accuse la CAQ d'improvisation dans une nouvelle publicité,” *Le Journal de Montréal*, <https://www.journaldequebec.com/2018/03/19/video-le-plq-accuse-la-caq-dimprovisation-dans-une-nouvelle-publicite>.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Bellrose. “Lisée s'attaque à la crédibilité de Legault,” *Le Journal de Québec*, September 16, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

A more positive view of the CAQ was promoted by conservative sovereigntist Mathieu Bock-Côté, a sociologist and lecturer at HEC Montreal. According to him, only a new “proposition” would restore the trust voters have in their political institutions. Bock-Côté claimed the CAQ potentially represented “new leadership” and could propose reforms that Quebec’s current political class did not have the courage to support, including lowering immigration thresholds, expanding state laïcité, and making more forceful demands to the federal government for further autonomy.<sup>15</sup>

Mathieu Bock-Côté argues that Legault still retains his sovereigntist beliefs, but has decided not to pursue sovereignty out of an understanding that it is no longer a salient issue among the general public. According to Bock-Côté, sovereigntists “provide an excellent answer to a question that Quebecers no longer ask.”<sup>16</sup>

This view, that Quebec has entered a new cycle, is promoted by former Université Laval sociologist, former PQ minister and current CAQ caucus member Jean-François Simard. Simard describes himself as a “pessimistic sovereigntist” and believes that Quebec nationalism has evolved to a new phase: accommodation with Canada.<sup>17</sup> According to him, Quebecers neither feel “colonised or oppressed” by Canada, and yearn for a “release” from this debate.<sup>18</sup>

This disinterest in the national question was precipitated by the rise of the left-right cleavage in Quebec’s politics. Université Laval professor and sociologist Simon Longlois has argued that three events in Quebec’s politics illustrate how Quebec’s federalist-nationalist cleavage has been supplanted by the traditional left-right axis: The crisis of reasonable

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<sup>15</sup> Pierre Dubuc, *PKP dans tous ses états*, (Montréal: Les Éditions du Renouveau québécois, 2015), 64.

<sup>16</sup> Antoine Robitaille, “Point Chaud - L’échec du souverainisme,” *Le Devoir*, February 20, 2012. <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/343174/point-chaud-l-echec-du-souverainisme>.

<sup>17</sup> Simard, *Idéologie du Hasard*, 54.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 51, 191.

accommodations, the student strikes of 2012, and the arrival of Stephen Harper's Conservative government.<sup>19</sup>

The crisis of reasonable accommodations was sparked when the Supreme Court of Canada overturned a Montreal school board decision to ban a 12-year old Sikh boy from wearing a Kirpan (ceremonial dagger) in his classroom. This, along with other accommodations for religious minorities, frustrated the francophone majority who historically opposed the intrusion of organized religion in public institutions. The crisis had important political consequences, most notably in boosting the ADQ to first opposition status in the National Assembly following the 2007 election. Mario Dumont, the leader of the party, had been the most vocal political leader with regard to his opposition towards the accommodations.

The Parti Québécois's brand was notably the most negatively impacted by the ADQ's rise in popularity. The ADQ split the francophone vote and relegated the PQ as the second party of the opposition for the first time since 1976. However, this new status quo proved to be fleeting when the PQ yet again became the official opposition following the 2008 election. Importantly, the 2007 election proved that the Parti Québécois was vulnerable from its right flank from nationalist voters who were searching for a viable alternative other than the provincial Liberals.

The 2012 student crisis was linked to the Charest Liberal government's decision to dramatically raise university tuition rates. This unsurprisingly angered students, and many took to the streets to protest. The current "co-spokesperson" of the left-wing Quebec Solidaire, Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, was a significant student leader and organizer during the protests. His decision to join Québec Solidaire, along with many other militants within the student movement,

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<sup>19</sup> Qtd in Boily, *Coalition Avenir Quebec*, 31.

marked an important rupture of the Parti Québécois's monopoly over the province's progressive voters.

The election of the federal Conservatives in 2011 to majority status also signalled an important rise of the left-right cleavage. Quebecers voted *en masse* for the NDP, precipitating an “Orange Wave” which lost the Bloc Québécois all but four of the 47 seats the party obtained in 2008. The Conservatives were also able to successfully neutralize provocative sovereigntist discourse from the Marois PQ government, elected with minority status in 2012.<sup>20</sup>

These events demonstrated that Quebec's politics no longer operated primarily on the national question. Quebecers had become more concerned with questions of identity, primarily with regard to the reasonable accommodations crisis. Quebec's youth increasingly prioritized left-right issues such as tuition rates and the environment. The shutting out of the Bloc in 2011 – despite an important resurgence in the 2019 federal election – also represents the desire of Quebecers to focus on left-right issues at the expense of the national question. This corresponds with former Canadian prime minister Jean Chrétien's famous quip: “the constitution does not bother the unemployed man in Gaspésie.”<sup>21</sup>

### 1.2 Primary Source Discourse

Since his debut in politics, Legault has often discarded the use of ideological etiquettes; particularly those labeled to him. He has stated that the terms “left” and “right” are reductionist and not useful in Quebec's current political context.<sup>22</sup> However, when pressed, Legault has

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<sup>20</sup> Carl Vallée, “La Stratégie Payante du Désengagement,” *L'actualité*, September 5, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Qtd in Frédéric Bastien, *Après le naufrage: refonder le Parti québécois*, (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 2019), 73.

<sup>22</sup> François Legault, *Cap sur un Québec gagnant: Le projet Saint-Laurent*, (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 2013), 42.

described himself as being of the “efficient centre-left.”<sup>23</sup> He has also been described by colleagues as a “social-democratic capitalist.”<sup>24</sup> This, owing to his beginnings as being one of the co-founders and CEO of Air Transat.

Despite admissions of adhering to centre-left ideology, Legault is most comfortable stating that he is a pragmatist. The party’s literature reflects this line of thinking. The CAQ’s 2012 platform specifically states that it is

Public interest, not an ideological presupposition, must guide government action [...]

A Coalition Avenir government will choose the most appropriate action depending on the situation, not ideology.<sup>25</sup>

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.<sup>26</sup>

Legault’s book, *Cap sur un Québec gagnant* (“Towards a Winning Quebec”) provides a view into his political priorities. It demonstrates Legault’s vision for Quebec, which is embodied through his “Saint-Lawrence project.” The project involves the creation of economic clusters along the Saint-Lawrence river, which would promote collaboration between practical university research and business. He compares his vision to that of Silicon Valley’s technology cluster, in which Stanford University was an essential element.<sup>27</sup> The government would play an active role

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Ouellet, “Legault est déçu du refus de Facal,” *Le Devoir*, November 23, 2010, <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/311542/legault-est-decu-du-refus-de-facal>.

<sup>24</sup> Radio-Canada, “D’homme d’affaires à politicien,” *Radio-Canada*, February 27, 2014, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/547249/francois-legault-biographie>.

<sup>25</sup> *Enough, Vote for Change!: Revival Plan for Québec*, (Coalition Avenir Quebec, 2012), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Bastien, *Après le naufrage*, 32.

<sup>27</sup> Legault, *Cap sur un Québec gagnant*, 93.

in the plan by investing in the required infrastructure and research, as well as promoting entrepreneurialism. The book also makes mention of exploiting Quebec's natural resources, and imitating the Norway approach of balancing environmental responsibility with resource development. In general, *Cap sur un Québec gagnant* reflects Legault's general preference towards economic priorities.

However, the book highlights Legault's desire to preserve Québec's distinct identity.<sup>28</sup> In this regard, Legault cites sovereigntist Mathieu Bock-Côté, who argues that Quebec's "common project" should be sovereignty.<sup>29</sup> While agreeing with Bock-Côté on the necessity of protecting the collective identity of Quebecers, Legault believes that the province's collective project should be economic: that Quebecers' standard of living must catch up with the rest of the country. And this, through the Saint Lawrence project. Legault explains that a common project revolving around the national question would be unfeasible considering the current political context and divisiveness surrounding the issue.<sup>30</sup> According to Legault, "sovereigntist" and "federalist" could very well be terms of the past, and will likely not be relevant in future elections.

Legault believes that Quebec made the most progress during the Quiet revolution, when the PLQ and the Union Nationale both subscribed to a position of reinforcing Quebec's place in the Canadian "ensemble."<sup>31</sup> However, he argues that the Parti Québécois has not contributed to reinforcing Quebec's balance of power with the rest of Canada, stating, "The National Assembly

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 70.

has less powers today than it had the moment of the first government of the Parti Québécois in 1976.”<sup>32</sup>

Legault argues the PLQ and the PQ benefit from the national question by polarizing Quebecers and forcing them to make a choice between the two parties. Legault’s solution, on the other hand, would be to bring Quebecers together by uniting them around a common project, similar to that of the Quiet Revolution. In his view, a united Quebec with a stronger economy and less dependence on equalization will change the balance of power in Canada to Quebec’s favour.

Simon-Jolin Barrette provides another view into the CAQ’s ideology with his book *J’ai Confiance*. *J’ai Confiance* is a reply to Lucien Bouchard’s *Lettres à un Jeune Politicien* (Letters to a Young Politician), an essay the former premier wrote to encourage young people to become more involved in politics.

Barrette is one the most important members of Legault’s government, serving in several ministerial roles simultaneously, including Minister of Justice and Minister for Laicity. He was notably responsible for the tabling of Quebec’s laicity legislation, Bill 21, which faced significant resistance from the opposition parties, the media, and important provincial stakeholders. As one of the youngest members of Quebec’s national Assembly at the age of 33, Barrette provides a millennial perspective behind the ideology of the CAQ.

Like Legault, Barrette believes that Quebec has been at an impasse since the 1995 referendum. In his view, politicians need to put aside the sovereignty-federalist quarrel and focus on reconstructing a strong Quebec. Barrette personally views himself as being at the “centre” of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 70.

the ideological spectrum.<sup>33</sup> While disagreeing with the lack of state involvement in pre-Quiet Revolution Quebec, he believes the province's communities have lost a sense of solidarity which existed prior to extensive government services and programs.<sup>34</sup> Barrette is also affronted by the province's expensive yet ineffective healthcare system, in which finding a family doctor is increasingly difficult. He deplores the medical federations that stymie attempts at reform in order to protect their interests at the expense of Quebecers.

Similar to Lucien Bouchard and Legault, Barrette laments the fact that Quebec is economically behind the rest of Canada in terms of productivity.<sup>35</sup> Barrette believes the ideal of self-reliance – which he views as essential – is not valued enough in Quebec society. He also views Mario Dumont, former leader of the ADQ, as an important figure for having brought up the idea of generational equity: the idea that Quebec should reduce the debt that baby boomers have left to succeeding generations.

According to Barrette, the CAQ is on the side of the middle class and families, especially those who have a hard time making ends meet. He believes Quebec has changed, and is incredulous about the fact that certain PQ members do not place enough importance on political issues related to Canada, such as the decision to name a Supreme Court Justice from Quebec. For him, Quebec is at a crossroads:

The previous world is ending and a new one is coming. The model that we have known until now no longer responds to our needs. It's not about focusing on the last 50 years. It's about imagining what the next 50 years will resemble.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 123.



## 2. Origins of the Coalition Avenir Quebec

### 2.1 Lucien Bouchard and the “Lucids”

The political downfall of Lucien Bouchard within the Parti Québécois contributed to the creation of the CAQ. Bouchard’s government was notable in its pursuit of a balanced budget in the late 1990s. Bouchard had believed, somewhat erroneously, that the 1995 referendum failure was partly a result of Quebecers lack of confidence in the provincial government’s fiscal independence.

In order to pursue this objective, Bouchard notably worked on creating a “convergence” between government, big business and unions. Despite agreement and compromises being reached among the three groups to obtain a balanced budget, the initiative alienated the left-wing faction of the party. Many consider the “deficit zero” objective as contributing to the PQ’s downfall, with hordes of left-wing voters shifting their support to Quebec Solidaire’s political predecessors. Due to mounting pressure within the party’s activist base, Bouchard resigned as premier in 2001. He stated he did not want to end up like René Lévesque, who was “torn apart by his party; screwed up by his critics.”<sup>37</sup>

By 2005, Bouchard and a group of 11 well-known sovereigntist and federalist figures released a manifesto, titled “Pour un Québec lucide” (For a clear sighted vision of Quebec). The manifesto – billed as a “wake-up call” – recommended the government reduce state bureaucracy, consider public-private partnerships, increase tuition fees and privatize certain aspects of healthcare.<sup>38</sup> The manifesto deplored Quebec’s resistance towards change from the

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<sup>37</sup> Lise Ravary, “Quebec’s fascination with Lucien Bouchard still runs strong,” *National Post*, August 28, 2014. <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/lise-ravary-quebecs-fascination-with-lucien-bouchard-still-runs-strong>

<sup>38</sup> Kathleen Lévesque, “Pour un Québec Lucide - Lucien Bouchard en appelle à la responsabilité collective,” *Le Devoir*, October 20, 2005

status quo and critiqued unions, who the writers believed had unfairly monopolized the label “progressive” in order to oppose change. “Pour un Québec Lucide” also spawned a counter manifesto, “Pour un Québec Solidaire,” whose authors went on to create Québec Solidaire in early 2006.

The manifesto’s overriding message is similar to that of Legault’s and Barrette’s books, which deplored the inertia Quebec had found itself in under successive Liberal and Parti Québécois governments. It was also a call to action for federalists and sovereignists to work together to solve Quebec’s problems. Bouchard’s statement that there “is no referendum in sight [...] we are so obsessed with it that today we have challenges practically hitting us in the face” is similar to Legault’s disdain for the national debate.<sup>39</sup>

Lucien Bouchard’s political fate served as a message that the PQ was not a good fit for a fiscally conservative leader. The PQ’s base, eternally waiting for a third referendum, would also be unable to accept a leader who did not view independence as a primary objective. As such, Legault’s nationalist vision could only be possible outside of the PQ.

## 2.2 Creation of the CAQ

Legault began his political career with the PQ in 1998, having served in Lucien Bouchard’s cabinet as Minister of Industry a month before being elected to the National Assembly. He was initially approached to join the party by Jean-François Lisée, who at the time was Bouchard’s political advisor, but would later become leader of the PQ and one of Legault’s primary adversaires during the 2018 election.

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<https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/93003/pour-un-quebec-lucide-lucien-bouchard-en-appelle-a-la-responsabilite-collective>.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Patriquin, “Bouchard Shakes it up, Again,” *Macleans.ca*, March 1, 2010, <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/bouchard-shakes-it-up-again/>.

Legault's career as co-founder and CEO of Air Transat had made him a well-respected figure among Quebec's elite. Shortly after being elected, Legault was named Minister of Education. An accountant by profession, Legault stood out by implementing a results oriented-approach in his ministry. To the chagrin of some in the public service, he mandated that school boards post the drop-out rates of students in their jurisdiction.<sup>40</sup>

Following Lucien Bouchard's resignation and retirement from politics in 2001, Legault served as Minister of Health in Bernard Landry's government from 2001 to 2003. The PQ would be defeated by the Charest Liberals in the 2003 election, forcing Legault and the rest of the party to the opposition back benches.

From 2003 to 2009, Legault publicly contemplated becoming leader of the PQ, but never carried through with the idea. This was partly due to the fact that his ideological centrism was alien to a party mostly dominated by left-leaning supporters. Party activists had been disenchanted by Lucien Bochar'd's decision to pursue a zero-deficit budget and did not want another centrist PQ leader to oppose the already centre-leaning provincial Liberals led by former Progressive Conservative Jean Charest.

Little surprise then, that Andres Boisclair and Pauline Marois – both associated with the left-leaning faction of the party – were the subsequent party leaders after Bernard Landry stepped down in 2005. Boisclair and Marois both made it clear to those on the right that they were not welcome in the PQ. Boisclair was a fervent adherent of "civic-nationalism" and attempted to cut the link between culture, language and history with nationalism, which dissatisfied right-leaning

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<sup>40</sup> Legault, *Cap sur un Quebec gagnant*, 68.

sovereignists.<sup>41</sup> Pauline Marois, for her part, went so far as to say that conservative sovereignists should not vote for the party in 2012.<sup>42</sup>

Legault's tenure with the PQ ended in 2009. He had been reportedly discouraged in a caucus meeting in 2008, after his proposition to raise user fees in order to fund healthcare and education was met with disapproval by his colleagues.<sup>43</sup> Pundits speculated that Legault was interested in getting back to the world of business, and lost motivation to stay in politics.<sup>44</sup>

On the same day of his resignation, Bouchard gave Legault a call and urged him to "think about his political future."<sup>45</sup> This was a call to action to create a new political party, ostensibly around a platform similar to that of the "Pour un Québec Lucide" manifesto. Although Legault initially ignored the advice, this would change in 2010. Legault invited 17 figures to discuss forming a platform for a new political party. These figures included former PQ politician Joseph Facal (who served as President of the Treasury Board under Bouchard), as well as former ADQ president and Université Laval political scientist Guy Laforest.<sup>46</sup> Legault reportedly attempted to recruit both Lucien Bouchard and Phillipe Couillard as leader of the new party, but neither accepted the invitation.<sup>47</sup>

In February 2011, Legault as well as co-founder and business leader Charles Sirois released *Agir Pour L'avenir*, a manifesto for a "movement" named Coalition pour l'avenir du

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Dutrisac, "Le PQ, La Diversité," *Le Devoir*, May 05, 2017, <https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/editoriaux/498070/le-pq-la-diversite-et-le-nationalisme-civique>.

<sup>42</sup> Tommy Chouinard, "Conservateurs Sovereignists: Marois Corrige Le Tir," August 26, 2012. <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/elections-quebec-2018/201208/26/01-4568245-conservateurs-souverainistes-marois-corrige-le-tir.php>.

<sup>43</sup> Alec Castonguay, "Behind the Scenes of the CAQ," *Macleans.ca*, April 16, 2012. <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/failure-to-launch-once-a-threat-to-the-provincial-liberals-the-caq-has-stumbled-badly/>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Québec. The manifesto was axed on two objectives: reestablishing trust in Quebec's public institutions and putting an end to the division generated by the sovereigntist-federalist debate.<sup>48</sup> These objectives had significant contextual meaning. Since 2009, the reigning PLQ government led by Jean Charest had been plagued by corruption charges. The Charbonneau commission revealed links between the financing of the Liberal party and the granting of government contracts to certain construction firms.<sup>49</sup> As such, restoring trust in public institutions was a salient political issue in 2011. Secondly, many felt that the main two parties spent too much time debating the national question at the expense of other issues. Quebecers had moved onto other subjects, the 2012 "student spring" protests being a primary example.

The manifesto laid out the Coalition's four priorities: education, health, the economy, and the protection of language and culture. Twelve prominent members of Quebec's civil society signed the manifesto, including future CAQ caucus members Lionel Carmant, Marie-Ève Proulx, and Jean François Simard. The Coalition became a formal political party in November 2011, and modified its name to Coalition Avenir Québec. Its logo, a multicolored letter C, emphasized the "coalition" element and ideological ambiguousness of the new party.

Behind the scenes, Legault viewed a merger with then centre-right Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ) as necessary for the survival of the party.<sup>50</sup> This, because the ADQ was competing for many of the same votes as the CAQ, making it impossible for the CAQ to obtain a majority government in the first-past-the-post system. The ADQ, seen by many as a provincial branch of the federal conservatives, reached its zenith in the 2007 election after becoming the

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<sup>48</sup> "Coalition pour l'avenir du Québec - L'amorce d'un 'Dialogue,'" *Le Devoir*, February 22, 2011, <https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/idees/317284/coalition-pour-l-avenir-du-quebec-l-amorce-d-un-dialogue>.

<sup>49</sup> Éric Bélanger and Eva Falk Pedersen, "The 2012 Provincial Election in Quebec," *Canadian Political Science Review* 8, no. 1, 2014, 142

<sup>50</sup> Castonguay, "Behind the Scenes of the CAQ."

official opposition. However, it quickly fell into difficulty after losing the majority of its seats in 2008.

Discussions of a possible merger began in September 2011. ADQ leader Gerard Deltell had told Legault he would be willing to sacrifice the ADQ on the condition that the CAQ “opened the door” to private health care.<sup>51</sup> Revealing a certain moderation, Legault rejected the proposition. However, Deltell as well as a 70.5% of the ADQ’s 2,500 members would support the merger anyways on January 22, 2012.<sup>52</sup> Several ADQ MNAs immediately joined the party’s parliamentary caucus as a result, such as current CAQ Minister of Transport François Bonnardel and Minister of Digital Transformation Eric Caire. Several PQ caucus members, including current CAQ Minister of the Environment Benoit Charette also crossed the floor to join the party. Charette cited his inability to convince the PQ to discard the possibility of a third sovereignty referendum as his reason for leaving the party.<sup>53</sup>

Dominique Anglade, a respected engineer who worked as a consultant for McKinsey and Company, was tapped to become the first president of the party. She would serve in this capacity until 2013, after being unable to win a seat in the 2012 election. She left the CAQ in 2015, citing concerns with its identity and immigration platform, and joined the Liberals to run in a by-election that same year. She is now, ironically enough, the leader of the PLQ – and this, by acclamation when her sole opponent dropped out in the party’s 2020 leadership race.

The CAQ’s 2012 campaign platform reflected its merger with the ADQ, as well as the political context of public disapproval with regard to corruption within the PLQ. Titled “Enough,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Canadian Press, “ADQ Votes for CAQ Merger,” *CBC news*, January 23, 2012, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/adq-votes-for-caq-merger-1.1299035>.

<sup>53</sup> Radio-Canada, “Benoit Charette, cinquième démissionnaire du caucus péquiste,” *Radio-Canada*, June 22, 2011, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/520578/benoit-charette-pq>.

Vote for change!” the platform highlighted that a CAQ-lead government would be “guided by the principles of ethics, efficiency and equity.” The platform laid out five priorities: “sweeping cleanup to eliminate corruption and waste,” “5 more hours of high school weekly,” “a family doctor for everyone,” “\$1,000 tax reduction for middle class families,” and “A Québec owning its natural resources and controlling its economic development.”<sup>54</sup> Alongside these priorities were 94 promises, including cutting the provincial income tax, getting rid of school boards, and cutting 7,000 public sector jobs through attrition.

However, even at this early stage, the CAQ did not view the state as a problem. In its founding document, *Agir pour l’avenir*, the CAQ stated that “[Interventionism] should not be abandoned, as that would deprive [Quebec] of expertise, a laboratory of ideas, and jobs of a high quality.”<sup>55</sup> The CAQ was also criticized by those on the right for wanting to use the Caisse de Dépôt, Quebec’s institutional manager of pensions, to invest in more Quebec companies. Legault was notably troubled by the fact that Québécois companies were being purchased by foreign corporations and that company headquarters were moving outside the province. According to Legault, these headquarters conserved high paying executive jobs that directly benefited the provincial economy.<sup>56</sup>

### 2.3 The 2012 and 2014 Elections

The CAQ highlighted integrity in government as one of its main themes for the 2012 election. The PLQ was in a precarious position; Quebecers deeply disapproved of Jean Charest’s leadership and associated the party with the ongoing corruption scandals engulfing the province. Only 10% of those polled said they were “very satisfied” with the provincial government and

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<sup>54</sup> Coalition Avenir Quebec, “Enough! Vote for a Change,” 7.

<sup>55</sup> Qtd in Boily, *Coalition Avenir Quebec*, 67.

<sup>56</sup> Coalition Avenir Quebec, “Enough! Vote for a Change,” 9.

only 26% were somewhat satisfied.<sup>57</sup> Another important issue for Legault throughout the campaign was eliminating the wealth gap between Quebec and the rest of Canada, notably Ontario. Legault made a point of highlighting the fact that Quebec's GDP per capita in 2011 had dropped to ninth place out of all the provinces in Canada, having been in fourth place when the Liberals took power in 2003.

Legault attempted to promote an image of integrity and claimed to have "free and clean hands," unlike those of his rivals.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the CAQ recruited Jacques Duchesneau, who had been the head of the government's anti-corruption unit and was responsible for leaking a widely-read report linking organized crime and the granting of public contracts to construction firms. Duchesneau was fired by the government for the leak and remained a popular figure among the public.

However, the main campaign issue eventually centered on the national question, allowing the PQ to obtain a minority government. Although initially promising, the 2012 election proved to be a disappointment for the CAQ. The party received 27.1% of the vote and managed to elect 19 of its candidates. It primarily suffered from a lack of awareness among voters, especially compared to the well-known Liberal and PQ brands. The PLQ was able to position itself as the party of the economy while the PQ managed to embody the student movement, in which party leader Pauline Marois actively participated in. However, the CAQ still performed well by reasonable standards, having only been recognized as a political party nine months prior.

The intervening 18 months before the 2014 election were difficult for the CAQ. It was unable to stand out as a viable government in-waiting, and polls indicated it had only 17%

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<sup>57</sup> Bélanger and Pedersen, "The 2012 Election in Quebec," 122.

<sup>58</sup> Gaetan Pouliot, "François Legault chiffre ses engagements," *Radio-Canada*, August 17, 2012, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/574664/caq-cadre-financier>



support among the population.<sup>59</sup> Likely fearing an electoral loss, caucus members like the aforementioned Jacques Duchesneau decided not to run again. Legault stated that this period marked a “struggle for the survival” of the party.<sup>60</sup>

The first stretch of the 2014 election was centered on the Parti Québécois’s proposed Charter of Values. The Charter had several provisions, the most notable of which banned all “ostentatious” religious symbols for those working in the public sector. The CAQ did not oppose the Charter, however its own laicity proposal was significantly less ambitious.<sup>61</sup> The nature of the campaign changed when the PQ announced star candidate Pierre Karl Péladeau, who announced that he was ready to “make Quebec a country.” Thus, the main theme of the campaign yet again shifted to the question of sovereignty. The CAQ found it difficult to promote its platform, attempting to center the campaign on economic promises, such as spending cuts in the province’s health and social service agencies.<sup>62</sup> Legault described his approach as an “anti-campaign,” because he rejected popular positions, like supporting the amphitheatre proposed by Quebec city Mayor Régis Labeaume. The CAQ also promised to eliminate the PQ’s McInnis cement factory in Gaspésie, which was the highest CO<sub>2</sub> emitter in the province, but also provided jobs to the relatively poor region.<sup>63</sup>

Legault performed well in the campaign’s second debate, which allowed the CAQ to obtain 23.1% of the vote and 22 seats. The party made a breakthrough in suburban Montreal; an area which would contribute to its 2018 victory. The Philippe Couillard-led Liberals obtained a

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<sup>59</sup> Boily, *Coalition Avenir Québec*, 72.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Yanick Cyr, "La CAQ Propose Une Charte," *Radio-Canada*, August 27, 2013, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/629146/caq-francois-legault-reaction-charte-valeurs-quebecoises>.

<sup>62</sup> Eric Bélanger and Eva Falk Pedersen, “The 2014 Provincial Election in Quebec,” *Canadian Political Science Review* 9, no. 2, 2015, 117.

<sup>63</sup> Boily, *Coalition Avenir Québec*, 72.

majority, largely thanks to Pierre Karl Péladeau's decision to invoke his support for sovereignty. This time, it was the Liberals who benefitted from the sovereignty cleavage, using the event to coalesce those against sovereignty as well as a general lack of momentum for the issue. The PLQ also benefited from the pro-charter vote being split between the PQ and the CAQ. Probably the most important contributor of the PQ's loss was Marois herself, who performed poorly as premier. This included her failure to follow through on several promises, such as eliminating an unpopular healthcare tax.

#### 2.4 Opposition years 2014-2018

The Liberal's relatively quick return to power, after an 18 month intermission, presented an opportunity for the CAQ to present itself as the party of change. The CAQ took measures to modify its visual branding in order to reflect this new direction. At a general council meeting in 2015, the party revealed its new logo: a light blue coloured "CAQ," with a Fleur-de-Lys inserted in the Q. This rebranding gave the party a clear visual identity, as opposed to the multicolored C. The CAQ became visually identifiable as a nationalist party, taken from the blue of the Quebec flag.

The CAQ made a significant nationalist turn in November 2016. It adopted a permanent constitution, with the first article defining the party as a:

Modern nationalist party whose primary objective is to ensure the development and the prosperity of the Quebec nation within Canada, all while defending with pride its autonomy, language, values, and culture.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> "CAQ Constitution Permanente," Coalition Avenir Quebec, 2016, 4.

The CAQ's nationalism was solidified through the presentation of the "Samson report." The report proposed several significant measures to protect the French language, such as a law that would explicitly state that the "integration of immigrants to the francophone majority is a fundamental responsibility of the state."<sup>65</sup> Other measures in the report included instituting obligatory French classes for newcomers, ensuring that all government communications to immigrants would be in French, and changing Quebec's selection of immigrants to favour those with jobs in regions outside of Montreal.

The report provided poll results that made it clear why this was a significant political issue: 77% of francophones felt that French was losing ground in Quebec, while another 88% believed that it was important to protect French in the province. In terms of the policies proposed in the report, 93% of the francophones polled supported obligatory french classes for immigrants and 70% believed that a knowledge of French should be required in order to settle in the province.<sup>66</sup>

This proposal, which Legault would cite for years during parliamentary sessions, gave the CAQ an aura of legitimacy when presenting itself as a nationalist party. The poll results made it clear that Quebecers increasingly felt the Liberals were not doing enough to protect the French language.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, it was likely this indifference towards nationalism which damaged the credibility of the Couillard PLQ the most.

The CAQ, however, benefitted the most from the weakness of its primary adversary, the Parti Québécois. Following the resignation of Pauline Marois, Quebecor media mogul Pierre

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<sup>65</sup> "Mieux réussir la francisation des néo-Québécois," Coalition Avenir Québec, 2016, 6.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Guillaume Bourgault-Côté, "Les Politiques Couillard Déplaisent," *Le Devoir*, November 21, 2015, <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/canada/455905/sondage-leger-les-politiques-couillard-derangent>.

Karl Péleadeau became leader of the party, staying on for a year before resigning for familial reasons. In 2016, the PQ's new leader Jean-François Lisée launched merger negotiations with Quebec Solidaire. These negotiations were carried out in an attempt to coalesce sovereignist and left-wing voters under one party. The rationale was that the PQ would emerge post-merger with enough support to defeat the Liberals in the next election.

Jean-François Lisée's bid for a PQ-QS merger was a significant miscalculation which ended up benefitting the CAQ. Firstly, the attempted merger alienated centrist PQ voters who found that Quebec Solidaire – a party that promised to “nationalize the means of production” – too radical. Secondly, the merger attempt made the PQ appear weak: it was an admission that it was unable to win without access to Quebec Solidaire's voters. Columnists – predominantly nationalist francophones who wrote for the popular *Journal de Montréal* – criticized the party when the merger was rejected by a two-thirds majority of Quebec Solidaire's membership in an annual party congress meeting.<sup>68</sup>

The conduct of the PLQ under Phillippe Couillard also benefited the CAQ. Couillard's devotion to Canadian federalism, embodied through his proposal for constitutional negotiation with the federal government (“Quebecers: Our Way of Being Canadian”), was deemed as timid in comparison to Quebec's historic position on the issue.<sup>69</sup> The perception of Couillard as a radical federalist was compounded by his attacks against the PQ and the CAQ, accusing them of encouraging the “demon” of intolerance for proposing policies such as the Charter of Values and

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<sup>68</sup> Jean François Lisée, *Qui veut la peau du Parti Québécois?* (Montréal: La Boîte à Lisée, 2019), 32.

<sup>69</sup> Marcel Perron, "Quand Le Rêve Fédéraliste Du Premier Ministre," *Le Soleil*. August 22, 2015. <https://www.lesoleil.com/opinions/carrefour-des-lecteurs/quand-le-reve-federaliste-du-premier-ministre-couillard-de-vient-un-cauchemar-18cdbc509ac68aa369afe99b884ab0bd>.

mandatory French tests for immigrants.<sup>70</sup> These attacks did not sit well with francophone voters, who were mostly supportive of these measures.

The turning point for the Liberals came in 2017, following the January Mosque shootings in Québec City. The PLQ announced it would be holding consultations on “systemic discrimination” in the province. This proposal proved to be extremely unpopular amongst francophone voters, with the Parti Québécois claiming that the Liberals were putting “Quebec on trial.”<sup>71</sup> The Liberals would go on to lose a vital by-election in an electoral stronghold – Louis-Hébert – to the CAQ. The CAQ’s victory was all the more astonishing due to the margin of victory: it won 51% of the vote, with the PLQ at 18.71%. This was the same riding the PLQ had won in 2014 with 49.22% of ballots cast. The by-election was described as a shock for the PLQ and marked the beginning of the CAQ’s ascent to power. Quebecers began to view the CAQ as the viable alternative to the Liberals, and the party consistently polled above the PLQ until election day in 2018. This, at the expense of the PQ, who were thereafter considered as a second-tier party unable to shift the winds of an inevitable CAQ victory.

### 2.5 2018 Election and Majority Government

The main theme the CAQ promoted during the 2018 campaign was change. Francophone Quebecers were highly dissatisfied with the incumbent Liberals, with polls indicating 17% support.<sup>72</sup> The CAQ’s slogan was “Maintenant” (Now) and the party’s main message was that it would “do more, do better” than its rivals.

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<sup>70</sup> Robert Dutrisac, “Couillard met le Québec en garde contre ses ‘démons,’” *Le Devoir*, November 16, 2015, <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/455360/couillard-met-le-quebec-en-garde-contre-ses-demons>

<sup>71</sup> Catherine Solyom, *Québec Plans Public Consultations on Systemic Racism*, (2017).

<sup>72</sup> Marie-France Bazzo, “Le PLQ et la Question du vote francophone,” *L’actualité*, September 12, 2018, 2018. <https://lactualite.com/politique/elections-2018/le-plq-et-la-question-du-vote-francophone/>.

The CAQ campaigned as a party of the centre. It promised to increase spending for education, healthcare, and new infrastructure. This included instituting free and non-obligatory four-year-old universal kindergarten, a policy that Legault considered to be the most important of his campaign.<sup>73</sup> He claimed that universal kindergarten would be essential in improving education outcomes for children. In terms of healthcare, Legault promised to make family doctors more accessible, and to reduce wait times for emergency health care. The party also promised to build new modern elderly care facilities, billed as “Maisons des aînés,” which would be smaller than the current CHSLD centres but provide more intimate care.

The CAQ emphasized its nationalist proposals during the 2018 election. The party gave itself the objective to obtain more autonomy for Quebec within Canada and promised to institute a laicity bill which would ban teachers, judges, police officers, and prison guards from wearing religious symbols. The goal of this legislation would be to “finally put an end” to the debate regarding the place of religious symbols in Quebec society, an issue that first gained prominence during the crisis of reasonable accommodations back in 2006.

The CAQ promised to reduce immigration by 20%, or to 40,000 from 50,000. The talking-point for this measure was “en prendre moins, mais en prendre soins” (take in less [immigrants], but take care of them).<sup>74</sup> This was a reference to the Liberals, who had raised immigration thresholds without simultaneously increasing the budget for integrating newcomers in Quebec society; a major issue for francophones. Another proposal was a mandatory “values test” that immigrants would need to pass with a 75% score in order to become citizens. The

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<sup>73</sup> François Messier, “La Maternelle Pour Tous Les Enfants,” *Radio-Canada*, February 14, 2019, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1152874/depot-projet-loi-maternelles-4-ans-roberge-commissions-scolaires>.

<sup>74</sup> Alexandre Shields, “La CAQ, le fond et la forme,” *Le Devoir*, December 13, 2019, <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/563784/le-gouvernement-legault-un-an-plus-tard>

proposed multiple choice test would ask questions relating to Quebec culture, like gender rights, secularism, and same sex marriage.

Legault's rhetoric was also distinct, emphasizing the importance of listening to the "majority," while not deviating to a populism akin to Donald Trump.<sup>75</sup> Legault viewed this idea of respecting the "majority will" as necessary for maintaining social order. In practical terms, this translated into proposals like the laicity bill and mandatory French courses. Legault's rhetoric was in contrast to that of Phillippe Couillard's, who was Trudeauesque in his defense of individual rights, specifically those of the allophone and anglophone minority. This contrasting rhetoric defined the conflicting visions of the CAQ and the PLQ more than any other policy.

The CAQ had proposals that can be considered to be "left-of-centre." It promised to replace the first-past-the-post system with a mixed-proportional electoral system. The CAQ also made a commitment to have a gender-balanced cabinet, likely in an attempt to address charges that it was a party that mainly appealed to men.<sup>76</sup> Legault promised to increase the salary of teachers, an effort he considered would make the profession more valued in Quebec's society.

The party took measures to reassure voters of its moderation. It removed the words "oil" and "fracking" from its platform to eliminate suspicion it supported oil exploitation.<sup>77</sup> It also eliminated the word "natalité" (birth), after being accused by critics that its promise to give \$1,200 per year to families with a second or third child was a modern day "baby bonus."<sup>78</sup> The

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<sup>75</sup> Pierre-Yvon Bégin, "Legault Se Compare à Trump." *La Tribune*, November 14, 2016, <https://www.latribune.ca/opinions/legault-se-compare-a-trump-26956e17f427a645a43209d35da56856>.

<sup>76</sup> Richer, Jocelyne. "La CAQ à La Conquête Du Vote Des Femmes." *Le Devoir*. April 03, 2018. <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/524285/la-caq-doit-conquerir-le-vote-des-femmes>.

<sup>77</sup> "La CAQ efface les mots 'Pétrole' et 'Gaz de Schiste' de son programme," *Radio-Canada*, September 2, 2018, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1121316/petrole-gaz-de-schiste-debat-radio-canada-legault-elections-environnement-ressources-naturelles>.

<sup>78</sup> Charles Lecavalier, "La CAQ Raye Le Mot Natalité," *Le Journal De Montréal*, September 2, 2018, <https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2018/09/02/la-caq-raye-le-mot-natalite-de-son-site-web>.

party minimized the importance of certain candidates, such as economist Youri Chassin who had worked for the libertarian-oriented Montreal Economic Institute think tank.<sup>79</sup>

The party was however criticized for not giving issues of the environment a more prominent role in its platform. This, even though it promised to “make a concrete effort to invest in the green economy [...] protect fragile ecosystems and play an essential role in the fight against green gases.”<sup>80</sup>

The 2018 election was unique in that it represented the first time the primary theme of the campaign did not revolve around the question of sovereignty. The Liberals ran a campaign with relatively centrist policies, with some left-leaning proposals such as making public transportation free for students and the elderly and enlarging dental care coverage for children from age 10 to 16.<sup>81</sup> The PLQ’s slogan, “to facilitate the lives of Quebecers,” highlighted the party’s priority to improve the material outcomes for those living in the province. Couillard was however plagued by a public desire for change after 15 years of near-consecutive Liberal governments. The premier’s popularity among francophones had also plummeted due to his ardent defense of federalism and minority rights.

The PQ ran a campaign axed on the importance of state intervention. Lisée promised to delay a third referendum until a second majority mandate in 2022, thus ensuring that the question of sovereignty would not appear during the campaign. One of the party’s main taglines, “Un état au régime ou au gym?” (a state on a diet or at the gym?) emphasized the party’s preference for

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<sup>79</sup> Charles Lecavalier, "Une Escouade économique Caquiste," *Le Journal De Québec*, August 29, 2018, <https://www.journaldequebec.com/2018/08/29/caq-une-escouade-economique-sans-le-bouyonnec-et-chassin>.

<sup>80</sup> “Programme électoral 2018.” Coalition Avenir Québec, 2018, 16.

<sup>81</sup> "Engagements élections," *PLQ*. September 20, 2018, <https://plq.org/fr/engagements-elections/>.



government spending.<sup>82</sup> Although the party initially ran a strong campaign, PQ leader Jean-François Lisée made a major gaffe during the third debate by making an obscure attack against Quebec Solidaire's party structure. The critique was not particularly well-received by the public, especially since the attack took place during an unrelated debate segment covering healthcare. However, regardless of this error, the PQ had little chance of replacing the CAQ as the alternative to the Liberals, as its poll numbers placed it in a solid third place since 2017.

The CAQ's victory, although somewhat expected, was surprising considering the relatively large margin of seats it received. On October 1, 2018, the CAQ captured 74 of the National assembly's 125 seats with 37% of the vote. The Liberals and the PQ were completely routed, obtaining respectively 31 (24.82%) and 10 (17.06%) seats, down from 68 (41.52%) and 30 (25.38%) seats from the previous election. The CAQ primarily succeeded in capturing regions outside of Montreal, and made surprising breakthroughs in Liberal and PQ strongholds like Outaouais and Saguenay–Lac-Saint Jean. In the first part of his victory speech, Legault marked the historic new stage the election set in Quebec politics, by stating that:

Today, there are many Quebecers that put aside a debate that divided us for 50 years. Today, there are many Quebecers that demonstrated that it is possible for the adversaries of yesterday to work together to build the Quebec of tomorrow.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Marie-Renée Grondin, "'L'état Au Régime Ou L'état Au Gym?' Demande Le PQ," *Le Journal De Québec*, <https://www.journaldequebec.com/2018/01/22/un-etat-au-regime-ou-un-etat-au-gym-demande-le-pq>.

<sup>83</sup> "Aujourd'hui on a Marqué L'histoire," *Radio-Canada*, October 2, 2018, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1127298/francois-legault-coalition-avenir-quebec-lassomption-discours-resultats-elections>.

### 3. The Coalition Avenir Quebec in Power

#### 3.1 Composition of Ministers and Staffers

The CAQ initially followed through on its promise to have a gender-balanced cabinet, with 13 males and 13 females. The majority of ministers chosen had professional backgrounds as journalists (5), lawyers (4), bankers (3), or owners of independent businesses (5). The Montérégie (8), Laurentides (6), Lanudière (3), and Capitale-Nationale (3) regions are the most represented in cabinet.

The majority of the ministers were political novices, but several had backgrounds in other political parties, and had been former members or MNAs for the PLQ (2), PQ (3), or the ADQ (4). This included Marguerite Blais, who had been a popular Minister of the Elderly under Jean Charest (2007-2012) and joined the CAQ in 2018 to ostensibly take advantage of the party's rising popularity. She was again named Minister of the Elderly under the Legault government.

Genevieve Guilbault had been a spokesperson for the Ministry of Public Security under the Liberals, but joined the CAQ in 2017 to run in the Louis-Hebert by-election. She was named Minister of Public Security, Deputy Premier, and Minister Responsible for the Capitale-Nationale (Quebec City) region.

The CAQ poached a large number of staffers from a variety of political parties. However, the most notable inflow of staffers came from the Parti Québécois. This includes several in the premiers office (Manuel Dionne, Pascal Mailhot, Valérie Noël Létourneau).<sup>84</sup> Additionally, out of the 26 ministerial cabinets, 12 chief of staffs were former péquistes.<sup>85</sup> Most of them notably worked in similar positions for the Lucien Bouchard and Bernard Landry governments. This

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<sup>84</sup> "Quand François Legault Recrute Chez Les Péquistes," Radio-Canada, November 1, 2018, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1133167/caq-legault-recrutement-assemblee-nationale-pq-plq>.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

includes Denis Dolbec (Finance) Aleanadre Ramacieri (Economy), and Denis Simard (Health), and Jonathan Valois (Family).<sup>86</sup>

The large proportion of ex-PQ staffers has caused some friction within the party, with one source stating it was “scary” how many “péquistes” held executive positions in cabinets.<sup>87</sup> Appointed by the premier’s office, the ascension of PQ staffers has not always been favourably welcomed by the ministers they work for. The amount of staffers that worked for the PQ under Lucien Bouchard or Bernard Landry further demonstrates the “successor” role the CAQ plays to the PQ party of that time.

### 3.2 Governing Ideology

In many ways, the CAQ government has been a moderate and pragmatic force for change. The government has been focused on fulfilling the promises it had made in the 2018 election, while making compromises and consulting with stakeholders. The CAQ has also largely benefitted from a positive budgetary situation upon its ascension to government. The previous Liberal government had been rigorous with public finances, and left the next administration with a budget surplus of over two billion dollars. Politically, this made life significantly easier for the CAQ in its first few years in power, since it did not have to make difficult decisions such as cuts to public services or tax increases to reach a balanced budget.

Aside from some minor tax cuts, like the uniformization of the school tax, the CAQ has mostly reinvested excess revenue to fulfill its election promises. Far from bringing about a “libertarian revolution,” the CAQ has dramatically increased the budgets of certain departments

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

beyond the rate of inflation, specifically in education and healthcare.<sup>88</sup> It has adhered to the “Quebec model” consensus and has refused to privatize healthcare and other services, like Quebec’s state-owned alcohol distributor SAQ.<sup>89</sup>

For fiscal conservatives, the government has been underwhelming, especially compared to the budgetary rigour of the preceding Couillard government.<sup>90</sup> The CAQ’s budgets have been described as “social-democratic” due to large investments in public services and projects.<sup>91</sup>

The coronavirus has upended the government’s plan to maintain balanced budgets, with a budget deficit of around \$15 billion planned for 2020. The Minister of Finance however has maintained the government will not increase taxes for the remainder of its mandate.<sup>92</sup>

Since late 2019, the Legault government has shifted its priority to focus more on issues of the environment.<sup>93</sup> The government had been previously criticized for not giving the environment enough attention.<sup>94</sup> The 2020 budget was intended to address this concern, with plans for significant expenses in environmental projects and services, such as investments in transportation and subsidies for those purchasing electric cars.<sup>95</sup> The government’s rhetoric has

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<sup>88</sup> Guillaume St-Hilaire, "Le Gouvernement Legault Investit Dans Ses Promesses," *Le Devoir*, March 21, 2019, <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/550341/budget-web-quebec-2019>.

<sup>89</sup> Jean-Michel Genois Gagnon, "Le Monopole De La SAQ Est Là Pour Rester,," *Le Journal De Québec*. April 11, 2019, <https://www.journaldequebec.com/2019/04/11/legault-mise-sur-le-statu-quo>.

<sup>90</sup> Isabelle Porter, "À La Droite De La CAQ," *Le Devoir*, March 18, 2019, <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/550073/titre-a-la-droite-de-la-caq>.

<sup>91</sup> Michel David, "La Social-démocratie Caquiste," *Le Devoir*, March 11, 2020, <https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/chroniques/574634/la-social-democratie-caquiste>.

<sup>92</sup> Tommy Chouinard and Hugo Pilon-Larose, "Déficit "historique" De 15 milliards à Québec," *La Presse*, June 20, 2020. <https://www.lapresse.ca/affaires/economie/2020-06-20/deficit-historique-de-15-milliards-a-quebec>.

<sup>93</sup> Françoise Leguen, "Legault Fait De L'environnement Sa Priorité," *Accès Laurentides*, February 4, 2020, <https://www.journalacces.ca/legault-fait-de-lenvironnement-sa-priorite/>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Andy Riga, "Quebec Budget: CAQ Turns Green with New Environment Focus," *Montreal Gazette*, March 10, 2020, <https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/quebec-budget-caq-turns-green-with-new-environment-focus>.

also changed to reflect this environmental focus, with an increased focus to link issues of the economy and the environment together.

The discourse of the CAQ also varies radically from the preceding Liberal government. Legault has focused on restoring a sense of national pride in the province, something that had been lost under the federalist Couillard and Charest administrations. Some have described the period of 2003-2012 as a “petite noirceur” (little dark-age), an unfavourable comparison to the Duplessis years prior to the Quebec revolution.<sup>96</sup> While perhaps an exaggeration, the new rhetoric of national pride from the premier’s office has made Legault increasingly popular among francophones, and he has described “restoring pride” in Quebec as his most important achievement.<sup>97</sup> The CAQ has won the two by-elections that have occurred since its ascension to power in 2018, both of which were located in francophone-majority ridings previously held by the Liberals.

### 3.3 Legislative Reforms and Compromises

#### *3.3.1 Identity and Immigration*

Issues of identity have played a prominent role in the first two years the CAQ has been in government. This, despite Legault’s preference on issues surrounding the economy and education. Nevertheless, Legault’s positions on these issues have very likely contributed to his enduring popularity as premier. Legault has also signalled his preference for maintaining a strong

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<sup>96</sup> Mathieu Bock-Côté, “Le Retour à La Petite Noirceur,” *Le Journal De Montréal*, December 21, 2019, <https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2019/12/21/le-retour-a-la-petite-noirceur>.

<sup>97</sup> Alec Castonguay, “François Legault : Fierté retrouvée,” *L’actualité*, December 4, 2019, <https://lactualite.com/politique/francois-legault-fierte-retrouvee/>

national identity, and has shared social media posts indicating his approval regarding books written by nationalist authors.<sup>98</sup>

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. The bill, officially known as "An Act respecting the laicity of the State," bans new public personnel in positions of authority – judges, police officers, prison guards and teachers – from wearing religious symbols. It also bans face coverings, such as the burqa, from those receiving and providing public services. Legault defended the Bill in a widely shared video on social video, stating that "In Quebec, that's how we live."<sup>99</sup> The Bill was tabled on March 28, 2019 and was passed by invoking the notwithstanding clause despite significant opposition from the Liberals and Quebec Solidaire. The Parti Québécois supported the bill but did not believe it went far enough, stating that it should have covered public daycare workers.<sup>100</sup>

The CAQ made significant compromises in the passing of Bill 21. It ensured that the bill included a grandfather clause that allowed for workers who had already been hired to continue wearing religious garments. The CAQ also decided to take down the cross above the speaker's chair in the National Assembly. The cross had been installed by the Maurice Duplessis Union Nationale government in 1933 and was considered an important "cultural and historical symbol"

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<sup>98</sup> Brendan Kelly, "Profile: Why Do so Many People," *Montreal Gazette*, August 15, 2019, <https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/profile-why-do-so-many-love-to-hate-columnist-mathieu-bock-cote>.

<sup>99</sup> Mathieu Bock-Côté, "Au Québec, C'est Comme ça Qu'on Vit," *Le Journal De Montréal*, April 2, 2019, <https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2019/04/02/au-quebec-cest-comme-ca-quon-vit>.

<sup>100</sup> Stéphanie Marin, "Une Campagne Est Lancé,," *Le Soleil*, September 05, 2019, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/politique/une-campagne-est-lancee-pour-sopposer-a-la-loi-sur-la-laicite-37251fba3d6c0a162318188068a9f9bc>.

for Quebec nationalists.<sup>101</sup> Removing the cross neutralized the criticism of hypocrisy that was labelled to the PQ's Charter of Values during the 2014 election.

The CAQ had proposed to lower immigration to 40,000 in its first year in power and carried out its promise in 2019. However, the government expects to gradually increase immigration to 52,500 by 2022.<sup>102</sup> As such, many have described Legault's decision to reduce immigration as merely "cosmetic with little actual effect on population growth" in the province.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, many nationalists have urged the government to reduce immigration nearer to the province's average intake since 1970 of 33,000 per year.<sup>104</sup> These nationalists fear that the anglicization of Montreal and Laval will be irreversible if immigration rates remain the same. However, the government's decision to increase immigration rates is due to pressure from the business community, who have cited the importance of immigration to respond to the crisis of workforce shortages.<sup>105</sup>

The CAQ has faced difficulties however, with other issues relating immigration. The government had attempted to reform the Quebec Experience Program (PEQ), a program that allowed immigrants a fast-track to permanent residency by obtaining a diploma from a school in the province. Then Minister of Immigration, Simon-Jolin Barrette attempted to reform the program by tightening rules surrounding eligibility. It was his belief that the program was being

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<sup>101</sup> Mathieu Bock-Côté, "Le Crucifix: Un Symbole Historique," *Le Journal De Montréal*, March 23, 2019, <https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2019/03/23/le-crucifix-un-symbole-historique>.

<sup>102</sup> Romain Schué, "Après Les Avoir Baissés," *Radio-Canada*, June 7, 2019. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1175896/quebec-immigration-legault-cibles-augmentation>.

<sup>103</sup> Guillaume Marois, "40 000 Immigrants Plutôt Que 50 000, Qu'est-Ce Que Ça Change?" *Le Journal De Montréal*, <https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2018/12/10/40-000-immigrants-plutot-que-50-000-quest-ce-que-ca-change>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Romain Schué, "Après Les Avoirs Baissés," 2019.

abused, allowing as many as 11,000 new immigrants in the province.<sup>106</sup> However, both participants in the program and the business community heavily attacked the reform, and the government was forced to suspend its changes.<sup>107</sup> It has since unveiled new reforms to the PEQ after consultations with stakeholders, which have been well-received by the business community.

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The CAQ also passed Bill 9, which put in place a mandatory language test that new immigrants are forced to pass. The bill also included a controversial, though heavily watered-down “values test.”

The bill’s objective was to reduce application wait times through a new online application system known as “Arrida.” The goal of the system was to match new immigrants with jobs in the province before arrival. The government has stated that the new system would reduce wait times from 36 months to six months.<sup>109</sup> However, the bill discarded 18,000 of the 50,000 applications in-waiting, forcing potential immigrants to resubmit their applications and start the process from zero, which some critics have described as “anti-economic and inhuman.”

<sup>110</sup> The rationale was to subject these applications to the new Arrima system.

The CAQ’s values test for new immigrants has been put in place since January 1, 2020. Immigrants are asked questions regarding Quebec’s cultural values, such as “Men and Women in

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<sup>106</sup> Patrice Bergeron, and Caroline Plante, “Immigration: Legault Retire,” *Le Soleil*, November 9, 2019. <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/politique/immigration-legault-retire-le-reglement-de-jolin-barrette-c4c8740d17a51da8cc28fbaec1b7d704>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Jocelyne Richer, “Quebec Government Unveils,” *Global News*, May 29, 2020.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7000452/quebec-government-unveils-revamped-peq-immigration-program/>.

<sup>109</sup> Philip Authier, “Immigration Reform Bill Voted,” *Montreal Gazette*,

<https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/immigration-reform-bill-voted-into-law-by-caq-government-despite-opposition>.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.



Quebec have the same rights. True or false?”<sup>111</sup> Those who fail the test three times are forced to resubmit their immigration application from scratch. Legault had moderated his previous position, which would have involved deporting those who had failed the test.<sup>112</sup> The premier has described the test as comparable to “the test that already exists in Canada about knowing Canada, it’s not very different.”<sup>113</sup> His rationale for the test was that “it’s important in Quebec because we are a nation, we are a distinct society, we have our values, we have our charter.”<sup>114</sup> While opponents such as the Liberals have stated that the test “doesn’t seem to serve any need,” nationalist critics believe the test does not go far enough in asserting the province’s values.<sup>115</sup>

### 3.3.2 *Economy, Infrastructure and Transportation*

The party’s main economic objective has been to “catch up” economically with the rest of the country, specifically Ontario. The CAQ has attempted to promote economic development in the province through a mix of moderate tax cuts, deregulation and direct government investment in specific industries. However, there has been no drastic liberalization of the economy. Legault has also reversed from previous remarks that Quebec should no longer receive equalization.<sup>116</sup> He has since defended the necessity of the federal equalization program, despite protest from Alberta premier Jason Kenney.<sup>117</sup>

The CAQ has a balanced approach with regards to support for projects that exploit natural resources. It has been supportive of the GNL Quebec project, which would export natural

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<sup>111</sup> Rachel Lau, “Quebec to Impose a ‘Values Test’ on Immigrants as of Jan. 1,” *CTV News*, October 31, 2019, <https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/quebec-to-impose-a-values-test-on-immigrants-as-of-jan-1-1.4662012>.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Michel Girard, “Legault Vire De Bord Sur La Péréquation,” *Le Journal De Montréal*, August 23, 2019, <https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2019/08/23/legault-vire-de-bord-sur-la-perequation>.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

liquefied natural gas to foreign markets. The project, worth \$9 billion and located in the Saguenay region, would involve the creation of a liquefaction plant in Saguenay and the creation of a pipeline linked to north-eastern Ontario. The government has argued the GNL Quebec would bring jobs to the region and would be an environmentally conscious way to produce energy.<sup>118</sup> However, it has faced opposition from environmental groups, who argue the project would increase the province's greenhouse gas emissions. Support for GNL Quebec is part of the CAQ's pragmatic agenda to boost economic development in Quebec's regions.

However, Legault has opposed other fracking and oil exploration projects, even going so far as to label Alberta's energy as "dirty oil."<sup>119</sup> Although Finance minister Eric Girard has walked back these comments in a column in the *National Post*, the CAQ generally opposes the construction of pipelines transporting Alberta oil, such as the defunct Energy East project.<sup>120</sup> Legault is open to projects so long as they demonstrate environmental sustainability. A large element of GNL Quebec's PR push has been to promote the idea the project is an important element in combating climate change, since liquified natural gas is a "transition" energy that involves fewer CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>121</sup> The premier is also likely conscious of the popularity the project enjoys in the Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean region, in which the CAQ holds four out of five seats. GNL Quebec has also been promoted by popular Chicoutimi-Le Fjord Conservative MP

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<sup>118</sup> Pascal Girard, "Une bonne Rencontre," *Radio-Canada*, January 17, 2020, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1476794/gnl-quebec-environnement-gaz-naturel>.

<sup>119</sup> La Presse Canadienne, "Énergie Sale," *La Presse*, December 17, 2018, <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/politique/politique-canadienne/201812/17/01-5208324-energie-sale-legault-se-defend-contre-les-attaques-de-lalberta.php>.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> "Project Summary," Énergie Saguenay, <https://energiesaguenay.com/en/project/project-summary/>.

Richard Martel, who has been pushing the federal government to lend its support to the project.

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Bill 17 is an example of the CAQ's willingness to promote economic development while consulting with stakeholders. The CAQ passed an extensive reform that allowed Uber to enter Quebec. The bill, which mandates Uber drivers to complete training and pass a test, was heavily criticized by the taxicab industry eager to maintain its monopoly in the province. Taxicab drivers protested the bill, stating that they had paid \$200,000 for "taxi medallions" or permits allowing them to operate.<sup>123</sup> The government, in keeping with its nature of compromise, announced it would be spending \$800 million to compensate drivers for purchasing the medallions.<sup>124</sup>

The government has been supportive of two major infrastructure projects in Quebec City. The city's mayor, Régis Labeaume, has been a promoter for the creation of a "structural public transportation system" in the city via the construction of a tramway.<sup>125</sup> The government has endorsed the plan despite heavy opposition from conservatives in Quebec who felt it represented an expensive boondoggle.<sup>126</sup> Mayor Labeaume had prompted the project, even though he had publicly denounced the construction of a tramway prior to his 2017 re-election.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Pascal Girard, "Richard Martel Demande à Ottawa," *Radio-Canada*, May 6, 2020,

<https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1700608/politique-conservateurs-gnl-quebec-saguenay>.

<sup>123</sup> Matthew Lapierre, "Uber Is Officially Allowed in Quebec," *CTV News*, October 11, 2019,

<https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/uber-is-officially-allowed-in-quebec-as-province-passes-taxi-reform-law-1.4632378>.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Jean-François Néron, "Le Maire Labeaume Vante Le Tramway," *Le Soleil*, February 27, 2020,

<https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/la-capitale/le-maire-labeaume-vante-le-tramway-dans-des-pubs-videos-e9ed46ec76a666047faa865fadfe8ee8>.

<sup>126</sup> Isabelle Porter, "Les Radios De Québec Se Lignent Contre Le Tramway," *Le Devoir*, December 29, 2019,

<https://www.ledesoir.com/politique/ville-de-quebec/569561/titre-tirs-groupes-contre-le-tramway>.

<sup>127</sup> Stéphanie Martin and Valerie Gaudreau, "Le Tramway Est Mort, Confirme Labeaume," *Le Soleil*, November 24, 2019.

<https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/le-tramway-est-mort-confirme-labeaume-2015-6043a421b6ae53ecc1560efd590f08d8>.

On the other hand, the government supports the “third link,” a project that would connect Quebec City and the city of Lévis via a bridge or a tunnel. The project is favoured by many of the same conservatives who denounce the tramway.<sup>128</sup> The idea of a third link has enjoyed widespread popularity in the region, despite protests from environmentalists and commentators from Montreal.<sup>129</sup> The CAQ has promised to begin construction on a third link before the end of its first mandate in 2022.

Interestingly, the government has changed its discourse regarding the third link. Initially billed as a project that would decongest traffic, the government now considers it to be an important part of its “environmental plan,” since it would include a reserved lane for Quebec city’s proposed public transportation project.<sup>130</sup> This shift towards environmental discourse is likely a response to accusations during the 2018 campaign that the CAQ did not give the environment a prominent enough place in its platform.

The CAQ has provided Investissement Quebec (IQ), the government’s investment arm, an enlarged mandate to accelerate investment in Quebec businesses, prioritize economic development in Quebec’s regions, attract foreign capital and talent, and increase Quebec’s exportation. The government considers IQ to be an essential part of increasing productivity and innovation in the province.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Véronique Racine, "Le 3e Lien Populaire Là Où les Radios Parlées," *Le Journal De Québec*, March 4, 2020. <https://www.journaldequebec.com/2020/03/04/le-3e-lien-populaire-la-ou-les-radios-parlees-sont-ecoutees-estime-cat-herine-dorion>.

<sup>129</sup> Marc-Antoine Lavoie, "" Une Petite élite Montréalaise " Veut Faire Dérailler Le 3e lien," *Radio-Canada*, September 10, 2019, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1293427/montreal-quebec-projet-3e-lien-levis>.

<sup>130</sup> Marc-André Gagnon, "François Legault Défend Le 3e Lien Comme Un Projet Vert," *Le Journal De Québec*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.journaldequebec.com/2019/09/25/francois-legault-defend-le-3e-lien-comme-un-projet-vert>.

<sup>131</sup> "Nouveau Mandat Et Nouvelle Image De Marque Pour Investissement Québec," February 3, 2020, <https://www.investquebec.com/quebec/fr/salle-de-presse/communiques/Nouveau-mandat-et-nouvelle-image-de-marque-pour-Investissement-Quebec.html>.

### 3.3.3 Education

Legault has prioritized the reform of education as a significant aspect of his first mandate. During the election, the CAQ had committed to creating 5,000 four-year-old kindergarten classes. In government, the CAQ has passed Bill 5, which created 2,600 new four-year-old kindergarten classes at a cost per class that is six times higher than what was announced in the CAQ's 2018 platform (\$800,000 versus \$120,000).<sup>132</sup>

The CAQ has also followed through on its promise to abolish school boards and to replace them with service centres. The legislation, Bill 40, was met by heavy criticism from teachers unions. However, the CAQ made a compromise by allowing anglophone school boards to continue holding elections, despite a participation rate of five percent.<sup>133</sup>

The CAQ has promised to replace the Ethics and Religious Culture (ECR) course taught in primary and secondary schools in the province. The course was initially mandated by the Charest Liberals in 2008 in order to “develop ethical thinking and dialogue skills in response to the ever changing cultural and religious landscape, while teaching children about Quebec's religious history.”<sup>134</sup> Many nationalists had accused the course of a sort of “Bill 101 for multiculturalism.”<sup>135</sup> They believed the government had been undermining itself by simultaneously passing a law that removed religious symbols in the public sector while funding a

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<sup>132</sup> Caroline Plante, “Promesses Et Réalités De La CAQ,” *Le Soleil*, December 29, 2019, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/politique/promesses-et-realites-de-la-caq-de627a3c0d49372ec2f5e698520ccd6b>.

<sup>133</sup> Sébastien Ménard, “Rapport Dévastateur Au Ministère De L'Éducation,” *Le Journal De Québec*, September 13, 2019. <https://www.journaldequebec.com/2019/09/13/les-jours-des-elus-scolaires-sont-comptes>.

<sup>134</sup> Rachel Lau, “Quebec Launches Consultations,” *CTV News*, January 10, 2020, <https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/quebec-launches-consultations-to-overhaul-ethics-and-religion-program-in-schools-1.4761394?cache=?autoPlay=true>.

<sup>135</sup> Mathieu Bock-Côté, “La Fabrique Du Multiculturalisme,” *L'Action Nationale*, September 2009, <https://www.action-nationale.qc.ca/tous-les-articles/142-numeros-publies-en-2009/septembre-2009/530-la-fabrique-du-multiculturalisme-le-cours-ethique-et-culture-religieuse-en-contexte>.

course that promoted the wearing of these symbols. Education Minister François Roberge has promised a new course will be instituted as of the 2022 school year after consultations with public stakeholders.<sup>136</sup>

### 3.3.4 Healthcare

Healthcare is often polled as the most salient and important subject for Quebec voters. The CAQ has attempted to tackle two primary issues: ensuring that more people have family doctors – only 75% of Quebecers have one – and decreasing emergency room wait times to 36 hours.<sup>137</sup> In 2019, the CAQ increased spending in the healthcare sector by 5.4%, or \$801 million.<sup>138</sup> The government also invested \$280 million in home health care. The CAQ has followed through in decreasing certain user fees, such as decreasing the cost of public parking near hospitals from \$10 to \$7.<sup>139</sup>

However, one of the most important objectives of the CAQ in healthcare has been to construct new senior care centres, known as “Maison d’Ainés.” It has begun an ambitious plan to add 2,600 long-term beds in these facilities, as well as renovating 2,500 beds that already exist in the CHSLD system. The measure is expected to cost the government \$2.6 billion.<sup>140</sup>

However, the government has failed in negotiating a contract with specialist doctors to reduce their collective pay by \$1 billion per year. This was the result of a controversial agreement settled by the Couillard government and the specialist doctors that many in the public

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<sup>136</sup> Philip Authier, "Year in Review: How the CAQ Put Its Stamp on Quebec in 2019," *Montreal Gazette*, December 28, 2019. <https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/year-in-review-how-the-caq-put-its-stamp-on-quebec-in-2019>.

<sup>137</sup> Aaron Derfel, "Year in Review: CAQ Started" *Montreal Gazette*, December 28, 2019, <https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/year-in-review-caq-started-rebuilding-quebecs-health-network-in-2019>

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

felt was overly generous.<sup>141</sup> Legault's agreement, negotiated by then-President of the Treasury Board Christian Dubé, ended up reducing the pay by merely \$1.6 billion over four years. This money is to be allocated for the creation of an "institut de pertinence" whose mandate will be to find cost savings in the province's healthcare system.<sup>142</sup> Critics warn the institute will add yet another layer of bureaucracy and administration to Québec's already bloated healthcare system.

<sup>143</sup>

#### **4. Conclusion**

The CAQ represents a continuation of Lucien Bouchard's Parti Québécois. Its ideological and practical origins are closely linked to the previous premier. Its nationalism – Bouchard was always a hesitant sovereignist – is a significant part of this connection. The CAQ has displayed a pragmatic conservative nationalism that is well anchored in the ideological disposition of francophone Quebecers.

The party's economic agenda includes a mix of state intervention, deregulation and moderate tax cuts. Far from dismantling the "Quebec model," the CAQ has fortified it with increased public spending and the introduction of new services, and will likely continue along this path in future years.

The party has been conscious of the necessity to compromise in the face of criticism from stakeholders, as can be observed in its legislation for several issues. In terms of its identity and immigration proposals, the CAQ has made sure to follow the will of the majority. Bill 21 is a moderate and popular law that will likely be seen as the government's landmark legislation. In terms of education, Legault has followed in Bouchard's footsteps of adapting Quebec's

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<sup>141</sup> Caroline Plante, "Promesses Et Réalités," 2019.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

education system for young children. The CAQ has made steps to reform healthcare in order to address several of Quebec's systemic problems, specifically with regard to long-term care for the elderly. The CAQ has also adapted its rhetoric and policy decisions in accordance with the rising importance of environmentalism in the political domain.

François Legault's CAQ will likely anchor itself as a first-tier party in Quebec politics for many years to come. In this way, it has replaced the Parti Québécois as the alternative to the Liberals. It reflects the changing desire of francophones, who want a nationalist government with a more centrist outlook.

The CAQ has primarily benefited from a weak opposition. The Liberals, led by former CAQ president Dominique Anglade, have had difficulty in expressing a coherent vision for the province. The Parti Québécois is currently holding a leadership contest that has attracted little interest from the general public. Given the current situation, it stands to reason that the CAQ will be a political force to reckon with for many years to come.



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