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Social Movements and the National Question in Quebec: The Institutional Legacy of a Cleavage

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Abstract

By taking a historical perspective on the higher education and the housing sectors in Quebec, we demonstrate how the political cleavage around the national question has had long-term effects on the dynamic of contention in these two sectors. At a general level, the presence of this cleavage has favoured the adoption of institutional arrangements related to funding that have allowed the reproduction of social protest over time. Nevertheless, the institutional arrangements vary from one sector to another: in the case of higher education, Bill 32, adopted in 1983, facilitated the division of the student movement into two branches and, to some extent, its dynamism; in the case of housing, the AccèsLogis program and the *contribution au secteur*, implemented in 1997, ensured the selection of claims for social housing and favoured the grouping that leads this issue. In both cases, the national question is at the heart of the process that led to the adoption of these policies.

Résumé

En posant un regard historique sur le secteur de l'éducation supérieure et celui du logement au Québec, nous montrons comment le clivage politique autour de la question nationale a eu des effets à long terme sur la dynamique de la contestation dans ces deux secteurs. À un niveau général, la présence de ce clivage a favorisé l'adoption d'arrangements institutionnels liés au financement ayant permis la reproduction de la protestation sociale à travers le temps. Néanmoins, les arrangements institutionnels à l'œuvre varient d'un secteur à l'autre : dans le cas de l'éducation supérieure, la loi 32, votée en 1983, a facilité la division du mouvement étudiant en deux branches et assuré en quelque sorte son dynamisme; dans le cas du logement, le programme Accès Logis et la contribution au secteur, mis en place en 1997, ont assuré la sélection des revendications en faveur du logement social et favorisé le regroupement qui porte cet enjeu. Dans les deux cas, la question nationale est au cœur du processus ayant permis l'adoption de ces dispositions législatives.

Introduction

Béland and Lecours (2006) have shown that nationalist movements affect the structure of the welfare state. They convincingly demonstrate that in the case of Quebec, the subnational state has sought organizing solidarity within the subnational territory, especially since the 1995 referendum. Quebec has thus adopted distinct social policies (and a unique subnational configuration) that have put pressure on the federal government and on other provinces. Haddow (2015), in an exhaustive comparison with Ontario, has apprehended the presence of nationalism in Quebec as an ideational mechanism that, by interacting with some institutional mechanisms (intermediation of interests, party system and state intervention), has had an indirect impact on the development of social and economic policies since the 1980s. Rioux (2020), for his part, argues that nationalism has had a direct impact on economic development. Many scholars in Quebec argue more generally that the question of the political status of Quebec in the Canadian federation has resulted in the emergence of a "Quebec model"—a distinct Quebec approach to politics—that differs from what exists elsewhere in Canada (see, for example, Bourque, 2000; Côté et al., 2007; Rigaud et al., 2010; Vaillancourt and Favreau, 2001).

The majority of these studies assume that the national question—a political issue that remains unresolved in Quebec society—has had a uniform impact on policy development across all sectors, whether they see that issue as anchored in social and political forces, as a collective (dominant) identity or as a global mechanism that influences political dynamics (see, for example, Bourque 2000; Hamel and Jouve, 2006). This assumption clearly overlooks the complexity of the question.

There is a similar blind spot in the literature on social movement studies. Specifically, in the political process approach tradition, as exemplified by Tilly (1978), McAdam (1988) and Tarrow (1998), all collective actors in a given society are supposed to meet the political opportunity structure in the same way, and thus they are supposed to have equivalent opportunities for mobilization. This theoretical framework does not differentiate based on the policy sector in which the actor is intervening (Ancelovici and Rousseau, 2009; Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Goodwin and Jasper, 2004). Giugni (2008), on the other hand, proposes considering "policy-specific opportunity structures." This approach allows us to see and analyze the ways in which different political contexts affect the potential for collective action.

In this article, following Giugni, we propose to unpack the role of the national question in Quebec policy regimes by tracking it over time in two public sectors: higher education and housing. These two sectors are rarely considered in research on welfare states, which generally focusses on work issues (including retirement and family policies), health, and social assistance (as in the work of Esping-Andersen, 1990). But higher education and housing are particularly important sectors for Quebec's national development and its position within the Canadian federation. They are also two sectors over which the Quebec government has a strong (even quasi-exclusive) jurisdiction. Facilitating access to university for francophone students has been a significant struggle for Quebec nationalist provincial governments since the 1960s; housing, meanwhile, has become an increasingly provincial affair since the federal government handed the sector over to the provinces in the 1990s.

By considering mid- and long-term processes in these two sectors of public intervention, we are able to show that the national question has an effect not only on global political decisions—for example, the formation of the welfare state and the dynamics among political parties—but also on the forms and types of social protest that occur within particular sectors. We develop a path-dependency argument showing how specific institutions, as connected to the national issue, have influenced the way in which protest has been organized in Quebec over time.

We argue that the national question has supported the sustainability of protest in the province but also that the ways it has been anchored within particular institutions have differed. In the higher education sector, institutional arrangements (Bill 32) have established conditions that stimulate *competition* among national student associations, while strongly encouraging mobilization. In the housing sector, institutional arrangements (political measures taken in the 1990s, including AccèsLogis) have contributed to the *selection* of protest issues and of the main collective actors who lead the protests.

In the process of developing our argument, we consulted secondary sources about the higher education and housing policy sectors, conducted six informative interviews with key political leaders and actors of protest in each sector and reviewed documents from main collective actors involved in protests that occurred during the period under study (see online Appendix for details). For our research concerning the higher education sector, we met (in 2019) two leaders directly involved in the student movement in the 1980s and the main person in charge of the first proposal of the law in 1983 that guarantees funding to student associations; we also had the opportunity to review personal archives of the student movement from that time. For our research concerning the housing sector, we met (in 2018) two political leaders in charge of governance in the mid-1990s and the leader of the main social group involved in the sector from 1979 to 2016; we also reviewed the archives of this group.

In the first part of the article, we survey the literature dealing with the national question, in order to situate our argument within this context. In the second and third parts of the article, we focus on the way in which the national question has shaped the higher education and housing sectors, showing how this context has facilitated specific forms of protest.

1. Regarding the National Question

In the Canadian/Quebec literature, the national question has been approached from several angles. Some studies argue that the national question has resulted in the development of a particular Quebec model of governance. Other studies consider the national question as a political cleavage (both within Quebec and within the Canadian federation), shaping both the configuration of political forces and the behaviour of citizens throughout the country. Finally, a third group of studies looks at how the national question in Canada has translated into two distinct citizenship regimes, one in Quebec and one in the rest of Canada. Of course, these three groupings are not exclusive, and individual authors sometimes embrace different perspectives in different studies. This is simply a way of classifying what is generally said about the national issue in the literature from both Canada and Quebec.

The Quebec-model literature emphasizes at least three issues that distinguish the way politics play themselves out in Quebec, compared with the rest of Canada. These include (1) a provincial state that is more interventionist in social and economic development (Rigaud et al., 2010) than the governments of other provinces, (2) the presence of a francophone bourgeoisie called "Quebec Inc." that defends Quebec's economic interests vis-à-vis the rest of Canada and has strong ties with the Parti Québécois (PQ) (Bourque, 2000; Bélanger, 1994) and (3) an approach to politics that can resemble an informal kind of "neo-corporatism." In some sectors (health, education, work relationships and professional training), the Quebec state is more likely than other Canadian provinces to consult social actors (including Quebec Inc.) (Côté and Simard, 2013; Jetté, 2008). As a result, unions and business representatives have usually been included in the major decisions of the state. Examples of this kind of consultation include the two socio-economic summits of 1996 organized by Lucien Bouchard (PQ); the summit on youth in 2000 organized by François Legault (PQ), the summit in 2013 on education organized by Pauline Marois's minority government (PQ) and the summit on food policy in 2017 of the Couillard government (Parti Libéral du Québec [PLQ]). In some sectors, this consultation is codified and formalized (for example, in professional training), while in other sectors, it relies on the political will and practice of the politicians in power. That is why we cannot accurately speak of a formal neo-corporatism in Quebec, as exists in Germany or Sweden.

In the second group of studies, the national question is considered to be divisive: attitudes concerning the political status of Quebec—either as part of the Canadian federation or as a separate entity—are viewed as creating a sharp cleavage within the political system. This cleavage has existed separately from the right/left cleavage both in Quebec and at the federal level (Jenson and Brodie, 1988)—at least in Quebec between 1960 and 2006, when the left-wing party Québec Solidaire (QS) was created. In Quebec, the traditional bipartisanism has been organized around the national question, with sovereigntists opposing federalists in the province (Beauchemin, 2015; Nadeau, 1992). More and less progressive tendencies exist within both camps (Chouinard, 2017). The national cleavage is considered to have organized political life at the federal level (Johnson, 2017), not only through the constitutional debates (Rocher, 2006) but also due to the presence of the Bloc Québécois (Gauvin et al., 2016). Most analysts agree that this national cleavage has progressively declined since the rise of conservative political forces around 2010 (Cochrane, 2010; Fournier el al., 2013).

The third group of studies stresses that a specific mode of collective representation exists in Quebec, where civic groups sometimes participate in the development and implementation of public policies. This approach has been taken with daycare centres (Jenson, 1998), as well as healthcare, mental health and women's services centres (Hamel and Jouve, 2006). Here, community and advocacy groups are recognized as partners of the state: they have access to financing (White, 2012a, 2012b) and meeting spaces (Laforest, 2000, 2011), and they are frequently involved in policy design. They are also recognized as experts in their own particular domain of intervention. Researchers who emphasize the participation of civic groups in policy making recognize some trends similar to those identified by the Quebec-model group—essentially that politics are done differently in Quebec than in other

provinces—but have developed a less normative approach to studying these systems. For this third group of researchers, state–society relations in Quebec are not considered a fixed model but rather a regime in which path-dependent mechanisms are at play, shaping both public discourse and the range of political practices that are possible. The "Quebec citizenship regime," as Jenson (1998) has named it, is thus anchored in specific institutional arrangements that we are able to analyze.

In this article, we consider primarily how the national question acts as a political cleavage (in the Rokkanian sense of the term—that is, as a political issue sustained by social and political forces), which has partially organized political life in Quebec and determined the political behaviour of collective forces. We also analyze how the Quebec citizenship regime has been built over time in the higher education and housing sectors. As we will see, it is not just a question of how groups position themselves in relation to the national question and the Parti Québécois. The national question encompasses an umbrella of ideas about Quebec's future within which actors have been able to navigate to find common ground and ad hoc alliances that have led to the implementation of important institutional features, which in turn affect the dynamics in the field. So it is not only a classic scenario, in which political actors and interest groups play out their own strategies (for example, student movements playing the card of pro-sovereigntist attitudes vis-à-vis a separatist government during referendums on the political status of Quebec); it is also a scenario in which interests, ideas and institutions are affected by this political cleavage. The national question is thus much more than a political context: it is not something "out there" but rather a concrete element of the political dynamics at work (Dufour, 2020).

We will show that the national question has served as a kind of cement between community groups and the provincial government vis-à-vis the federal in the housing sector, as a way for students to obtain favourable institutional arrangements and as a political opportunity in both sectors around the first and second referendums. Decisions and institutional arrangements still affect the trajectories of the student and housing movements and their dynamics today. We have found a mechanism of *competition* in the student movement and one of *selection* in the housing movement. Both have the same feedback effect in the long term: they facilitate social protest in the two sectors.

2. The Case of Higher Education

Educational issues are particularly relevant to understanding how the national question is part of policy development. In the first section below, we describe the higher education system in Quebec. Then we explain how the 1983 law has both furnished resources and created dynamics that have allowed the student movement to sustain itself over time and to remain a very important collective actor, even in times of turbulence.

The post-secondary regime

Education is a provincial responsibility in the Canadian federation. While the higher education system in Quebec has its origins in a long tradition of institutions

controlled mainly by the clergy (Audet, 1971), its current form was determined by the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Quebec (the Parent Commission), held between 1963 and 1966. According to this commission, education reform was necessary to make up for the low graduation rate of the francophone population. More specifically, the Parent Commission recommended that education needed to be democratized. The commission's report mentioned four areas for improvement: accessibility of education, democratization of authority in education, democratization of local school administrations and democratization of financial and material resources among the different institutions within the school system (Rocher, 2004). The Ministry of Education thus became the second-largest portfolio in Quebec after healthcare. Notably, the creation of this ministry was accompanied by high expectations on the part of the Quebec population, who saw it as a key tool for cultural and national development.

Most of the institutions that are currently responsible for university governance in Quebec grew out of these proposals. Beyond institutions, the Quebec higher education regime is notably characterized by the formal recognition and financing of student associations. In 1983, the *Loi sur l'accréditation et le financement des associations d'élèves ou d'étudiants* (Bill 32) was adopted. This legislative tool introduces three elements that are very important to our study: (1) the formal recognition of one student association within each post-secondary establishment, (2) the exclusivity of representation given to this association within the governing structure of the institution and (3) the requirement, inspired by the financing arrangements of unions (the Rand formula), that higher education institutions collect from students the contributions supporting the association. This is an automatic deduction, but it is not mandatory since students can terminate their membership and be reimbursed. Contributions are determined by the association itself. We should highlight here the specific nature of the Quebec student association structure in the North American landscape. In the United States, most organizing is based on affinity groups—collectives of individuals sharing common interests—whether it is a campus, state or national group (Mehreen and Thompson, 2016). The student associations structure is starkly different in Quebec, as it is modelled on the structure of the unions in the province, so that the local associations represent every student, collect the money that finance the whole structure and can vote to strike (Warren, 2016).

With these resources, the student associations recognized by Bill 32 certainly wield some power inside colleges and universities, through both formal and informal channels. That said, the law does not mandate any national representation of university students. Since university funding is primarily public, however, it is essential for students to form organizations that will represent them before the government. Thus, although they are not officially recognized by the state, there are national student associations—funded by local student associations—that play this role.

This double-layered system of post-secondary student representation gives significant power to student movements, which have a strong potential for mobilization. The resilience of Quebec universities to neoliberal attacks is undoubtedly linked to the vigour of the student movements, which have insisted on the

prioritization of accessibility to higher education. In particular, the 2005 and 2012 conflicts halted reforms that would have restricted the number of scholarships offered to the neediest students (2005) and would have increased university fees (2012).

The student movement and the national question

The 1960s were marked by the creation of a student movement organized around the principle of unionism and the idea that access to higher education was good for the development of the Quebec nation. Bernard Landry created the Union générale des étudiants du Québec (UGEQ) in late 1963 to consolidate student efforts. Their main demand was fee-free education, which was also an electoral promise made by the Liberals in the 1960 election. This period was also characterized by a collaboration between student associations and the Liberal party in support of the nationalist politics of the Quiet Revolution (Theurillat-Cloutier, 2017).

The collaboration between students and the Union Nationale (UN) government elected in 1966 was productive at first. A tripartite committee (government, unions and UGEQ) was created to look into accessibility (Leduc, 2010: 122). Despite this committee, however, and despite the UN's campaign promise to establish free education, this promise was never realized. The relationship between the students and the government became more confrontational as a result (Theurillat-Cloutier, 2017), and the students became generally mistrustful of the government.

A new era began in 1968 with a student strike in many CEGEPs. The students' principal request was for an increased number of places in French universities in the province. From that point on, we saw a clear radicalization in the ideology of the student movement, as movement leaders became more staunchly in favour of Quebec independence (Gagnon, [1971] 2008). Increasingly, the student movement divided into two distinct groups: a lobbyist branch, generally aligned with the Parti Québécois (which was created in October 1968), which was willing to negotiate with the provincial government; and a combative branch, which was in an antagonistic relationship with the government.

Throughout the period under study (1960–2012), the issue of the political status of Quebec affected the trajectory of the student movement in several ways. The best-known effect is that student involvement in national associations (mainly those who become leaders) served as a launchpad for political careers with the PQ; a number of former student leaders went on to become ministers of the province (Bernard Landry, Claude Charron, Louise Harel, François Rebello, André Boisclair). But the national question, as defined more broadly above, has also had an unexpected and little-known longer-term effect linked with the adoption and implementation of Bill 32.

When Bill 32 was adopted in 1983, the student movement was divided into the Association nationale des étudiants du Québec (ANEQ) and the Regroupement des associations étudiantes universitaires (RAEU). The RAEU had initially been a university caucus within the ANEQ, but in 1981 the two had separated, and they became rival student groups. The division first appeared during the national strike of 1978 over the issues of loans and bursaries. Some members of the ANEQ believed that the PQ should be the main target of the struggle because it had

been in power since 1976 and had yet to address the problem of financial accessibility to higher education; these members tended to hold extreme-left political views and adopted more confrontational tactics. Others saw the PQ as the main driver of the national project, which meant that it could not be an enemy; for these students, consultation with the government was the best tactic. Jacques Beaudoin, a permanent employee of the ANEQ at the time, specified in his interview: "RAEU members were people who had organized a lot politically at the time of the 1980 referendum in an organization called the Student Movement for Yes (MÉOUI), which campaigned for Yes in the referendum" (personal interview, Montreal, October 2018; see Appendix). This latter group became the RAEU and supported the PQ in the referendum campaign of 1980. For the other group, which remained the ANEQ, there was less consensus on the referendum question. Like other extreme-left activists, they tended to see the project proposed by the PQ as "bourgeois."

In 1981, a colloquium was organized at the University of Montreal by the RAEU (financed and attended by the education minister, Camille Laurin) that was supposed to establish the foundations of a charter that would lay out the rights and responsibilities of student associations. But the RAEU shifted gears, and the idea of a charter was put aside. Instead, they decided that the secretary-general of the RAEU, Jean Baillargeon, would take part in a committee established by the Ministry of Education in Quebec, along with the Conférence des recteurs et des principaux des universités du Québec (CREPUQ), to settle the issue of how best to recognize student associations. This committee was instrumental to the adoption of the 1983 law. Bill 32 was proposed directly by the RAEU to Camille Laurin. It was largely written by Baillargeon, who worked in an office alongside civil servants whose mandate was to draft bills (personal interview with Jean Baillargeon, Montreal, September 2018). Several other RAEU leaders were also activists within the PQ at the time, and the links between the two were generally strong.

For RAEU leaders, formalizing the recognition of student associations in a law was seen as progress to the extent that it would ensure a certain stability. They also saw the law as a way to eliminate the ANEQ and their Marxist-Leninist tendencies, because they believed that mandated recognition would favour lobbyist associations. According to Jean Baillargeon, who was still secretary-general of the RAEU in 1983, "The central idea was to dedicate self-financing to a law to avoid cuts to student association funding after a strike or a pressure tactic, for example" (personal interview, Montreal, September 2018). For the Ministry of Education, Bill 32 was seen as a good decision because it was a way of integrating students officially within university administration and thus of giving them a voice. The law also provided the government with a means of mapping students' place within the university and ensuring relative social peace on campuses. Because it formalized procedures for nominating a student association as the formal representative and formal interlocutor in each university and because it was supposed to channel student protest on campuses through political representative arrangements, the law was supposed to diminish the occasions (and possibilities) of protest. Finally, the Ministry of Education saw Bill 32 as a kind of positive offering to the RAEU that would help to maintain the strong links between the organization and the

PQ. As such, then, for both the RAEU and the government, Bill 32 was seen as an important step that would shape the future of the student movement.

For the ANEQ leaders, on the other hand, Bill 32 was seen as a way for the state to control the student movement and limit the social strength of student associations. As one of our interviewees (Jacques Beaudoin, permanent employee of the ANEQ) put it, "so we replace[d] the fight on the ground to be recognized by a law that is managed from the top." The student leaders believed that it was dangerous to be told by the state how to organize and how to act. Even if the ANEQ presented itself as a student union, it was very aware that the legislative framework of unions could be a way of removing power from unionists, especially by regulating the right to strike (personal interview Stephan Corriveau, Montreal, September 2018, and archival documents; see online Appendix). According to Jacques Beaudoin:

> Bill 32 could ensure that student associations were less militant, less likely to make wildcat strikes or uncontrolled or spontaneous actions and place their action more in the institutional representation, the representation on the board of directors of the institution through more institutionalized negotiating channels (personal interview, Montreal, October 2018; see online Appendix).

Before Bill 32, student associations were de facto recognized at the local level, and they negotiated their funding with each individual institution. The agreement was not very stable in the long term, but except in certain cases where recognition was an issue between the students and the administration or where student associations competed with each other to obtain a representational monopoly, the practice of de facto recognition worked quite well.

The law was adopted and implemented quickly, with no effective opposition from the ANEQ, which was struggling at the time with significant internal difficulties that impeded its ability to mobilize. Interestingly (and unexpectedly), Bill 32 did not lead to the disappearance of the combative branch of the student movement; in fact, it could even be said to have facilitated the reciprocal relationship between the two branches, though the balance of power has shifted back and forth between them over time. Because national associations are not formally recognized, there is still an element of struggle for existence that obliges them to maintain a link with their local counterparts. In addition, Bill 32 institutionalized, in a way, the competition among local associations for accreditation. Indeed—and this was a great fear of the ANEQ at the time (archives, ANEQ Central Council, National Congress, June 1983; see online Appendix)—the law makes it possible for a group of students who do not feel that they are represented by their (local) association to request that a new consultation be held. This could potentially create a conflictual and unstable situation, even if this mechanism has not been used frequently.

Bill 32 has thus shaped the Quebec student movement since its adoption in 1983 by stabilizing the conflictual dynamics between the two branches of the movement, which have remained quite constant from struggle to struggle (even as the names of the national associations have changed over time). National associations compete with each other to entice local associations to join them, since members are

required for funding. This situation has helped to perpetuate the division between the two branches of the movement, thus sustaining the dynamics of the movement and determining the potential for mobilization. For example, the balance of power between the two branches was inverted in the 2005 mobilization but not the one in 2012, explaining in large part the different outcomes of the protests in those years.[1] In 2005, the relationship between the two branches put an abrupt end to the mobilization; in 2012, the relative sharing of tasks between the two branches (protest tactics for the more combative branch and relations with the state for the lobbyist branch) allowed the mobilization to go on for months[2] (Dufour and Savoie, 2014).

At the heart of the proposal of Bill 32 and its adoption, the national question has served to build a stable, if fractured, community in the higher education sector. A similar pattern is noticeable in housing struggle dynamics.

3. The Case of Housing

Housing is a complex area of intervention in which all levels of government are involved. As Banting (1990: 131) points out, social housing has historically been used as "a weapon in the struggle for hegemony among the governments of Canada." The sharing of responsibilities among the various levels of government is therefore at the heart of the regime changes in this sector.

The housing regime

There is no explicit reference to the division of responsibilities for housing in the Canadian Constitution. Although this jurisdiction generally belongs to the provinces, the federal government has maintained a presence in this area since the Second World War. In accordance with its welfare state regime classification, the Canadian government opted for a liberal or dualist housing model, based on the development of an effective and efficient housing market and on residual support for low-income households unable to find adequate housing on the market (Divay et al., 2005; Hulchanski, 2004; Pomeroy and Falvo, 2013).

From 1967 until 1994, the nature of the Quebec government's intervention differed little from that of the other provinces and focussed mainly on cost-sharing programs with the federal government (Arsenault, 2018). The 1990s represent a critical juncture in the evolution of social housing policies in Canada (Suttor, 2016). Quebec is one of only two provinces, along with British Columbia, that quickly implemented a new funding program for social housing after the federal government withdrew from social housing in 1994. In 1997, the government of Quebec announced the implementation of AccèsLogis, a program dedicated to funding cooperatives and non-profit housing organizations, and the development of the Fonds québécois d'habitation communautaire (FQHC), administered in partnership with civil society groups (including tenant associations and housing cooperative associations) and designed to provide longer-term funding in this area. In the context of the implementation of AccèsLogis, the PQ government also announced specific funding for groups promoting social housing. Commonly referred to as the *contribution au secteur*, this measure was set at 1 per cent of

annual investments made through AccèsLogis. A complex calculation was used to allocate funding equally among the various provincial groups involved in social housing and their member groups.[3] There have been no major changes to this system since 1997, and these measures continue to be a cornerstone of the public housing intervention regime.

Given the active role played by some groups in developing and implementing these policies, several authors have interpreted the new institutional arrangements as a manifestation of the Quebec model (Vaillancourt et al., 2017; Bouchard et al., 2010)—and therefore of the national question, as indicated above. Arsenault (2018), on the other hand, attributes the adoption of these institutional arrangements to the 1994 arrival of a more interventionist PQ government and to the pressure exerted by community groups, primarily the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU) and the Association des groupes de ressources techniques du Québec (AGRTQ). These two explanations are not mutually exclusive and may very well be complementary. Nevertheless, we argue that the national question has been the glue binding political (PQ) and social actors, enabling institutional arrangements to take shape.

The housing movement and the national question

The organizational configurations of the right-to-housing movement in Quebec have been particularly stable since the 1970s (Dufour and Ancelovici, 2018). The movement is made up of two categories of actors: advocacy groups and community housing groups (Bergeron-Gaudin, 2017). The FRAPRU and the Regroupement des comités logement et associations de locataires du Québec (RCLALQ), both founded in 1978, belong to the first category and are the two main organizations involved in contentious politics on the issue in the province. The former has mainly fought for the protection and development of social housing, and the latter for more rent control and better access to justice for tenants. These two groups are made up of a network of approximately 50 housing committees that work at the local level, providing legal advice to tenants and conducting community organizing work (Breault, 2017). The second category of community housing actors includes housing cooperatives, non-profit housing organizations and technical resource groups, which provide support to citizens wishing to carry out new social housing projects.

The political status of Quebec has mostly been discussed during the referendum periods that have occurred over the history of the movement. The 1990s remain the most interesting period for our discussion. As mentioned, this decade is characterized by an initial sectoral process tied to the withdrawal of federal funding for social housing in 1994. Simultaneously, a second process took place during the constitutional debate created by the failure of the Meech Lake Accord and the subsequent second referendum in 1995. This pair of processes had an impact on the positioning game played by the PQ and some organizations in the movement, particularly the FRAPRU, and helped pave the way for the 1997 institutional arrangements.

At the beginning of the decade, the FRAPRU started to highlight, in its presentations to the federal government, Quebec's particular social housing needs and the imbalance in the distribution of funding among the provinces. The announcement

of the first cuts in social housing in 1991 led the organization to launch a campaign that would run until the federal government completely withdrew in 1994. In addition to this struggle against the federal government, the FRAPRU was also one of the most active community groups in the constitutional debate in Quebec, declaring itself openly in favour of independence. It was one of the only community groups that were able to participate in the Bélanger-Campeau Commission on the political future of Quebec in November 1990. It defended the notion that Quebec society was a nation that was held in a position of inferiority and oppression within Canada. In the 1992 referendum on the Charlottetown Accord, the FRAPRU also actively campaigned in a non-partisan "No" coalition, which maintained that the federal agreement merely reproduced the dynamics of oppression against Quebec and that sovereignty, combined with a progressive project, remained the best option.

In 1994, a few months before the provincial election was called in Quebec, FRAPRU changed its strategy by trying to get the PQ to make commitments in favour of social housing. On April 26, 1994, it organized a demonstration in front of the party's offices in Montreal. This strategy quickly yielded results: in the summer, in the middle of the election campaign, the PQ promised to invest $35 million in a program to buy and renovate social housing. After the PQ came to power in September, the FRAPRU continued to exert pressure, including organizing a protest camp and a demonstration in front of the National Assembly during the new government's inaugural speech on November 28, 1994. A new program, the Programme d'achat-rénovation pour coopératives et OSBL d'habitation (PARCO), was adopted at the end of the year but provided for only 1,200 housing units during the government's entire term. In response, the FRAPRU decided to form the Coalition pour le logement social in 1995 with community-housing stakeholders (AGRTQ and the Confédération québécoise des coopératives d'habitation [CQCH]) and public housing tenants to force the PQ government to invest more into the program and to do so consistently over time.

During this period, which coincided with the second referendum on Quebec independence, the FRAPRU openly reiterated its support for the sovereignty project. In its March 1995 brief submitted to the Commission sur l'avenir du Québec, it defended a progressive vision of independence and emphasized the negative effects of Canadian federalism. As it had done in the past, the group joined a popular sovereigntist coalition, independent of the official committee and of political parties. On October 24, 1995, during the referendum campaign, the FRAPRU also organized a public meeting in Montreal on social housing and sovereignty that included two PQ ministers, Louise Harel and Guy Chevrette. More than 130 housing activists attended.

The replacement of Prime Minister Jacques Parizeau by Lucien Bouchard at the head of the PQ government followed the defeat of the second referendum. This change represents a central breaking point between community groups and the PQ. The reforms and policies subsequently adopted in the housing sector in 1997 indisputably benefited from the previous existence of these privileged relationships.

In 1996, Lucien Bouchard's government invited the main representatives of business, labour and civil society to two socio-economic summits (in March and

October) in order to resolve the public finance crisis and gain support for the government's project. As has already been discussed in detail (see Arsenault, 2018), the creation of a funding program for social housing was one of the proposals put forward by the Groupe de travail sur l'économie sociale, a civil society body very close to the community housing stakeholders (CQCH and AGRTQ) that had a considerable influence on the decisions made at the summits. In early 1997, the FRAPRU launched a very active campaign, including the organization of several protest camps, to force the government to honour the commitment it made during the summits and implement a social housing program. This was done in the following March budget, which provided $215 million over five years for AccèsLogis. The program was entirely consistent with the previous one (PARCO) in that it relied exclusively on community housing stakeholders (cooperatives, non-profit organizations and technical resource groups) to deliver the new units, in addition to adopting an approach based on target groups.

In an interview, FRAPRU coordinator François Saillant reviewed the process that led to the adoption of the *contribution au secteur* measure—along with AccèsLogis—and noted that the previous program already included a similar form of funding:

> We succeeded in those years, which were before the referendum, it must be said, and years when the PQ was looking to consult with everyone, our brief [on sovereignty] had been well received, Guy Chevrette had reacted well, and then we started to work on it [a funding measure]. It was quite quick, because announcements were already being made about it by 1996 (personal interview, Montreal, January 2018; see online Appendix).

Although it still depended on the level of investment in social housing, the new funding measure through AccèsLogis represented a significant level of new funding for the groups. In the year of its adoption, for example, it allowed the FRAPRU and 20 of its members to receive a total grant of $462,000, resulting in the hiring of employees by tenant associations to promote social housing, in particular through protest actions.

Rémy Trudel, then minister responsible for housing, explained that adopting the *contribution au secteur* measure was mostly a pragmatic decision. He emphasized that the government through the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) did not have the expertise necessary to develop projects in the field: "I finally realized that the program would not work if there was no support. In the government . . . we did not have the experience, we did not have the field of expertise, we did not have the ability to provide support. At that moment, the decision was fairly quick." Trudel added that he was aware from the outset that the measure would not diminish the FRAPRU's contentious nature: "I told my colleagues, let's not expect that this would put an end to any kind of protest or request on the part of the FRAPRU, that is not the nature of the organization. They're going to continue because you can't solve everything all at once." During our interview, Trudel reminded us on a number of occasions that his meetings with the FRAPRU and community housing stakeholders were crucial in setting up AccèsLogis and the FQHC (personal interview, Montreal, November 2018; see online Appendix).

The convergence of the constitutional debate with the federal government's withdrawal from the housing sector during the same period had an impact on the relations between the PQ and certain organizations of the movement, mainly the FRAPRU, by promoting closer ties at the time of the referendum. This led the PQ government to adopt measures that directly served the groups leading the right-to-housing fight. Of course, this proximity between the FRAPRU and the national question was not shared by all social actors in the sector. For example, the RCLALQ stood against sovereigntist-association in 1980 and did not take any position as a group in 1995 (which was not the case for the FRAPRU, which supported Quebec independence in 1980). Some local housing committees were also against the FRAPRU position and leadership (or dominance) in the sector.

By making a part of the funding to tenant associations conditional on promoting social housing, including participating in protests on this issue, the *contribution au secteur* generated a mechanism of selection, which partly explains the great concern for, and visibility of, the issue of social housing—a concern and visibility that is largely absent in the area of rent control, evictions and housing discrimination, for example, by comparison. To receive their grant, housing committees must demonstrate to the other members of the FRAPRU that they organize a minimum number of activities annually to support the development of social housing in their territory, in order for the FRAPRU to recommend to the government that their funding be renewed. Although very few groups have lost their subsidy because of this requirement, it has at times been a source of tension within the movement, given the power that it affords the FRAPRU.

This particular institutional arrangement represents a significant subsidy for a number of local housing committees as well as for the FRAPRU, enabling them to pay an important percentage of community organizers' annual salaries. According to the latest data available, since 1997, the measure has allowed national associations within the sector (FRAPRU, CQCH, Réseau québécois des OSBL d'habitation [RQOH] and AGRTQ) and their members to receive more than $46 million to promote social housing (Québec, 2019: 30). No other housing issue has been supported financially to such a degree.

With this institutional arrangement, social housing became the main claim around which social protest in the sector was organized and, as a result, continues to serve as a claim (and group) mechanism of selection.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the national question has not had one single regular and constant effect on political life in Quebec but, rather, varied effects, including on patterns of protest. By tracking attitudes toward this question in two sectors of public intervention, we have been able to show that the national question has served to build common ground between the main sovereigntist party, the PQ, and certain civil society groups. Together, they have negotiated particular institutional arrangements at certain points in history that still affect social mobilizations today. In the higher education and housing sectors, we identify the gradual adoption of modes of recognition and funding that guarantee the sustainability of organizations (even if they change, as in education); the sustainability of representational organizations, either

formal or not (and even as they change, as in education); and the possibility of mobilizing resources to oppose certain state decisions and to put issues on the agenda through a bottom-up process. The fact that the institutional arrangements we have discussed in both higher education and housing are determined by funding is particularly relevant and partly explains the sustainability of protest movements within these two sectors.

As we have shown, the national question, as a range of ideas connected to social and political actors trying to make sense of their world, complicates public policy and social protest in different policy sectors. Linking to existing Canadian/Quebec research on the national question, we have shown that it has played on the three dimensions identified by previous researchers. First, it clearly has been a political cleavage around which political dynamics were organized. We can wonder if this cleavage will lose part of its influence in the next decade or not, considering the reconfiguration of political forces at the provincial level at least. Second, it has also facilitated the implementation of policies that that offer significant political influence to (certain) social forces. And, finally, as shown by the two sectors we have reviewed, the national question has an impact on the specific protest regime that deployed in the province. The question of political representation for organized civil society, the issue of distribution of resources through specific mechanisms of funding, and the nature of welfare provided in each sector are each framed in some way by the national question. In the housing and higher education sectors, it is central to these processes. In the higher education sector, a mechanism of division guaranteed a dynamic struggle between the two principal student organizations, which has resulted in a rather efficient movement. In the housing sector, a mechanism of selection directed the claims for social housing and put one main organization at the forefront of this struggle.

These institutional arrangements have also served as guardians for social movements when governments have questioned their legitimacy: no minister of education has yet attempted to revoke Bill 32 or to amend it. This is in contrast to the trade union sector, where special laws have increasingly challenged the right to strike (Petitclerc and Robert, 2018). In the area of housing, *contribution au secteur* measures are still active, such as the policy of recognition and support for autonomous community action. This second arrangement is, however, more fragile because it does not have legal status. With the recent announcement of the new, more conservative provincial government (Coalition Avenir Québec), elected in October 2018, that the financial engagements already made through AccèsLogis would be respected but without any new investments, the future of the institutional arrangement is uncertain. Protest is likely to continue to ensure the program's continuity. As the circumstances in both sectors suggest, however, the Quebec way of doing politics has a number of remarkable institutional effects and shapes a number of political dynamics, including social protest.

Notes

1 In 2005, students mobilized against budget cuts in the loan and bursary program; in 2012, student strikes were mobilized against the rise of tuition fees.

2 The lobbyist branch was mainly composed of two student federations at that time: Fédération des Étudiants Universitaires du Québec (FEUQ) and Fédération Étudiante Collégiale du Québec (FECQ). The combative branch was composed of the Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndical étudiante (CLASSE), a temporary coalition.

3 Initially, funding was distributed to FRAPRU, AGRTQ, the Confédération québécoise des coopératives d'habitation (CQCH) and their members. When the Réseau québécois des OSBL d'habitation (RQOH) was created in 2000, funding was split again. Today, the FRAPRU, the AGRTQ, the CQCH and the RQOH each receive 9 per cent of the annual funding related to the measure (White et al., 2007: 9).

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