

# Strange Bedfellows? Attitudes toward Minority and Majority Religious Symbols in the Public Sphere

Antoine Bilodeau

*Concordia University*

Luc Turgeon

*University of Ottawa*

Stephen White

*Carleton University*

Ailsa Henderson

*University of Edinburgh*

**Abstract:** In this study, we contend that distinguishing individuals who support bans on *minority* religious symbols from those who want to ban *all* religious symbols improves our understanding of the roots of opposition to minority religious symbols in the public sphere. We hypothesize that both groups are likely driven by markedly different motivations and that opposition to the presence of minority religious symbols in the public sphere may be the result of an alliance between

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Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Antoine Bilodeau, Department of Political Science, Concordia University, Henry F. Hall, 1455 De Maisonneuve West, Montreal H3G 1M8, Canada. E-mail: [antoine.bilodeau@concordia.ca](mailto:antoine.bilodeau@concordia.ca); or to: Luc Turgeon, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, Social Sciences Building, 120 University, Ottawa K1N 6N5, Canada. E-mail: [lturgeon@uottawa.ca](mailto:lturgeon@uottawa.ca); or to: Stephen White, Department of Political Science, Carleton University, B640 Loeb Building, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa K1S 5B6, Canada. E-mail: [steve.white@carleton.ca](mailto:steve.white@carleton.ca); or to: Ailsa Henderson, Department of Political Science, University of Edinburgh, 3.09 Chrystal Macmillan Building, 15a George Square, Edinburgh EH 9LD, United Kingdom. E-mail: [ailsa.henderson@ed.ac.uk](mailto:ailsa.henderson@ed.ac.uk).

“strange bedfellows,” clusters of individuals whose political outlooks usually bring them to opposite sides of political debates. Drawing on a survey conducted in the province of Quebec (Canada), we find that while holding liberal values and low religiosity are key characteristics of those who would ban all religious symbols, feelings of cultural threat and generalized prejudice are central characteristics of those who would only restrict minority religious symbols. Negative attitudes specifically toward Muslims, however, also appear to motivate both groups.

## INTRODUCTION

The place of minority religious symbols in the public sphere is an increasingly contentious and politicized issue in both Europe and North America. In countries such as Canada, France, Germany, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Denmark, politicians have proposed or adopted laws to ban minority religious symbols in schools, courts, or the public service. Other laws have also been adopted to prohibit or restrict minority religious symbols in the broader public space, including restrictions on burqas or niqabs in France, Belgium, and municipalities in a number of other countries, and restrictions on the construction of new minarets in Switzerland.

These bans, as well as broader debates around the place of minority religions, have been increasingly portrayed as the product of unique alliances between progressive and conservative forces. In her analysis of debates around the place of Islam in the Netherlands, Liz Fekete (2006) argues that there is a growing trend among “enlightenment crusaders,” including feminists and gay activists, to support policy prescriptions around integration that are espoused by far right political parties and movements. In his exploration of French debates over the place of Islam in the public sphere, Olivier Roy (2007, xii) asserts that proposals to restrict all religious displays to the private sphere, rooted in what he refers to as “ideological laïcité,” have led the “majority of the secular left to strike an alliance with the Christian Right against Islam.” And according to the philosopher Jocelyn Maclure (2011), intellectual debates surrounding the institutional accommodation of minority religious practices in the province of Quebec in Canada have generated an alliance between “liberal neutralists” and “conservative nationalists.” In Maclure’s view, whereas “liberal neutralists” view the accommodation of all religions as incompatible with civic values such as gender equality and the separation of church and state, “conservative nationalists” see minority religious accommodation as a threat to the traditions and customs of the majority.

While united in their desire to restrict the visible presence of minority religions in the public sphere, these groups differ when it comes to their

broader policy objectives and motivations. Maclure refers to the possibility that groups with distinct motivations are driving opposition to the presence of minority religions in the public sphere as the “strange bedfellow hypothesis.” While “the Christian right” or “conservative nationalists” strive to curb the presence or accommodation of minority religions and to protect symbols associated with the majority, “liberal neutralists,” the “secular left,” or what we refer to in this article as “enlightenment liberals” wish to restrict the visibility of *all* religions in the public sphere. Moreover, while perceived cultural threats, in-group favoritism and prejudice are presented as driving opposition to minority symbols, secular values and a particular conception of liberalism are said to be at the root of support for blanket restrictions on the presence of religion in the public sphere.

A growing number of scholars have provided evidence of political or intellectual alliances between such strange bedfellows (see also, Lamy 2015; Scott 2007), but no study has explicitly explored whether such alliances extend to mass publics. Is mass public support for restrictions on minority religious symbols the product of an alliance between strange bedfellows — that is, one group expressing the desire to ban all religious symbols, including majority ones, and another group expressing the desire to ban only minority religious symbols? And more importantly, if such an alliance exists, do the motivations of mass publics correspond to those of political and intellectual elites? Are they the “enlightenment liberals” and “conservative-nationalists” described by political theorists? This study attempts to answer these questions.

Very few cases offer the opportunity to explore the strange bedfellows hypothesis within a mass public in a natural setting. One recent case is the province of Quebec in Canada, where the visibility of both minority and majority religious symbols in the public sphere were debated simultaneously. In autumn 2013, the Quebec government introduced a legislative proposal known as the “Charter of Values” which would prohibit public sector employees, including doctors, nurses, teachers, and child care workers, from wearing religious symbols such as the hijab, the turban, or the kippah. While the Charter of Values also would have banned wearing “large” crosses, the debate surrounding the proposal focused almost exclusively on minority religious symbols, especially Muslim ones. However, in light of the introduction of the legislative proposal, a number of commentators then also questioned the legitimacy of preserving the large crucifix currently hanging in the National Assembly, the province’s legislative body. While many argued that, like other religious symbols, the crucifix should be removed, others contended it should be

preserved out of respect for Quebec's cultural heritage. Recognizing this was a potentially divisive issue, the government ultimately opted to delay a final decision on whether or not to remove the crucifix. The crucifix episode, while brief, revealed a division among supporters of the Charter of Values. Debates around the Charter of Values in Quebec suggest that Charter supporters did form a coalition of "strange bedfellows" like Jocelyn Maclure (2011) proposes, making it a useful and unique case to study the motivations of mass publics in support for bans on either all religious symbols or only minority religious symbols.

Our analysis explores the characteristics of two groups of supporters for a ban on minority religious symbols in Quebec using a survey administered as the debate over the Charter of Values was unfolding: those who supported both the Charter of Values *and* removing the crucifix from the National Assembly (enlightenment liberals), and those who supported the Charter of Values but opposed the eventual removal of the crucifix (conservative nationalists).

We begin by providing an overview of the context in which the debate over religious symbols unfolded in Quebec, and we briefly highlight similarities and differences with other debates around the world. We then present a discussion of the different theoretical perspectives guiding our analysis to differentiate the motivations of both groups of Charter supporters, stressing the role of liberalism, religiosity, and ethnocentrism. Our findings support the strange bedfellows hypothesis and demonstrate that both groups of Charter supporters had distinct motivations. Hence, while stronger liberal attitudes and low religiosity were key characteristics of Charter supporters who wanted to *remove* the crucifix, a perceived threat to Quebec culture and generalized prejudice were central characteristics of Charter supporters who wanted to *keep* the crucifix at the National Assembly. However, negative attitudes specifically toward Muslims also appear to have motivated both groups of Charter supporters.

## DEBATES ABOUT RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS IN QUEBEC

Before the 1960s, Catholicism was, like the French language, viewed as central to Quebec's identity. The province was often referred to as the "priest-ridden province"; the Catholic Church played a central role in the daily life of citizens, being largely responsible for education, health, and social services. The conservative Union nationale government's 1936 decision to install a crucifix above the Speaker's chair in the

National Assembly is emblematic of the power exercised by the Catholic Church during that period. However, in the 1960s, the province underwent rapid social, cultural, and political transformations — a period referred to as the *Quiet Revolution* — during which the Quebec state gradually took over many of the Church's responsibilities and the province experienced a gradual, but significant decline in church attendance (Eagle 2011; Meunier and Wilkins-Laflamme 2011).

Until the 1990s, debates over the place of religion focused mostly on the continuing presence of Catholic symbols and practices in public institutions. However, sporadic public discussions about the wearing of headscarves in schools and opening prayer spaces in universities emerged in the province in the 1990s, in part because of the growing number of North African immigrants arriving and settling in Quebec. In the mid-2000s, a series of disputes erupted over rules and policies accommodating religious minorities, including a Quebec soccer federation ban on wearing headscarves during games, requests by Hasidic Jews to have the windows of a YMCA gym tinted to hide women in gym clothes from public view, and a Supreme Court of Canada decision allowing a young Sikh to wear his ceremonial dagger at school. This led to what became known as the “reasonable accommodation crisis.”

In 2007, in order to provide guidelines on how to respond to these accommodation requests, the provincial Liberal government created the *Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences*. The Commission's 2008 report recommended a ban on religious symbols for public servants who must embody “at the highest level the necessary neutrality of the State” and for those who exercise coercive power (Bouchard and Taylor 2008, 151). It also recommended removing the crucifix from the National Assembly. Ultimately, however, very few of the Commission's main proposals were implemented (see, Rocher 2014).

The place of minority religious symbols in the public sphere has been a mainstay of public debates in Quebec ever since. During the 2012 Quebec election, the pro-independence Parti Québécois (PQ) campaigned in part on a promise to ban the wearing of religious symbols for all public employees. The party won the election, but failed to secure a majority government. In September 2013, the PQ minority government proposed the Charter of Values. However, Charter supporters were divided about what should happen to the crucifix at the National Assembly, and Bill 60, the formal legislative proposal that came before the National Assembly in November 2013, did not include any recommendations regarding the crucifix. Hoping to win a majority government, the PQ called an election in March

2014, before the bill was adopted. The election outcome sealed the fate of the Charter of Values and Bill 60: the PQ was defeated and the Liberal Party of Quebec, opposed to the bill, won a majority government.<sup>1</sup>

While public disputes about the place of religion in Quebec have largely been influenced by its history with the Catholic Church, such debates are not unique to the province. As noted in the Introduction, arguments about minority religious symbols abound throughout Europe and North America. But so do debates about majority religious symbols. In Italy, for example, controversies have erupted over the place of crucifixes in polling stations or schools (see, McGoldrick 2011), and in the United States there have been legal battles over school prayers and Ten Commandments monuments located in or near government buildings (Finkelman 2005).

Quebec is not insulated from disputes in other countries. In fact, French debates have profoundly influenced the discourse around questions of religious symbols in Quebec. According to Koussens and Amiraux (2014, 55), since the “accommodation crisis,” the idea that the French model of *laïcité* or, more accurately, a specific interpretation of that model, should be an inspiration for Quebec has spread among politicians, journalists, and intellectuals.<sup>2</sup> *Laïcité* in France has taken different meanings over the years. Koussens and Amiraux (2014, 60) argue that, prior to the 2000s, French *laïcité*, as embodied in the 1905 legislation on the separation of Church and State, had more in common with the liberalism of Locke than the anti-religiousness of the Enlightenment. However, since then, it has become much more dedicated to the emancipation of individuals from religion and “the regulation of individual expression of beliefs” (Koussens and Amiraux 2014, 67, *our translation*).

Consequently, the Quebec case can offer lessons that are relevant to other contexts. In the remainder of the article, we explore whether supporters of restrictions on minority religious symbols in Quebec constitute “strange bedfellows” with different motivations behind their desire to ban religious symbols.

## **STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: ENLIGHTENMENT LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVE NATIONALISTS**

### **Enlightenment Liberals: Liberal Attitudes, Religiosity, and Atheism**

In his study of intellectual debates around religious accommodation in Quebec, Jocelyn Maclure (2011) refers to those who view the

accommodation of all religions as incompatible with civic values — such as gender equality and the separation of church and state — as “liberal neutralists.” We prefer the term “enlightenment liberals,” which has been used in a number of studies related to debates around cultural diversity and immigration (see, Rostbøll 2009; Triadafilopoulos 2011; Gustavsson, van der Noll, and Sundberg 2016). Arguably, these liberals are not “neutral” about the role of the State with respect to the presence of religious symbols in the public sphere, since they believe that it must actively foster secular values and promote autonomous citizens. Nevertheless, Maclure’s profile of this group echoes studies on opposition to religious symbols in mass publics in a number of ways.

First and foremost, attitudes driven by a particular set of underlying values emphasizing the protection and enhancement of individual rights and freedoms, especially those related to gender and morality, are often invoked in discussions about the place of religious symbols in the public sphere (Helbling 2014; Gustavsson, van der Noll, and Sundberg 2016). We refer to this constellation of attitudes stressing individual freedom — identified as a distinctive and coherent set by a number of researchers (Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1994; Inglehart and Welzel 2005) — as liberal attitudes. From the perspective of many of those who hold such attitudes, religion is viewed as intrinsically patriarchal and conservative, and religious symbols (both minority and majority ones) seen as symbols of the oppression of women and minority groups, such as the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) community. However, not all Liberals share this perspective.

Liberals are in fact divided on the matter of religious symbols, especially in the public sphere. As argued by Helbling (2014, 244), the debate goes to the heart of whether liberalism is a substantive way of life (that must be promoted and defended), or is instead a mechanism to reconcile different ways of life. In the literature, these different perspectives are associated, respectively, with enlightenment and reformation liberalism (Galston 1995; Gustavsson 2014). These different conceptions of liberalism give significantly different roles to the state. Enlightenment liberalism sees the state as a defender of liberal values against symbols or practices that are perceived as “illiberal,” and as a promoter of autonomous citizens who are capable of rising above their particularistic identities (Gustavsson, van der Noll, and Sundberg 2016: 1725).<sup>3</sup> In contrast, reformation liberalism is associated with tolerance, diversity, and individual choices in a way that rejects state promotion of any particular definition of the “good life.” Thus, a point of contention between these two liberalisms is what, if anything, the state should do about religious symbols in



the public sphere: enlightenment liberalism is inclined to limit the visibility of symbols associated with religious beliefs and practices they see as hindering individual autonomy; reformation liberalism is wary of such restrictions. In a recent empirical test of the impact of endorsing different conceptions of liberalism, Gustavsson, van der Noll, and Sundberg (2016) find that enlightenment liberals are inclined to express negative attitudes toward the Muslim veil (while the opposite is true of reformation liberals).

Are liberal attitudes a motivation to ban religious symbols in Quebec? The answer probably depends on which perspective on liberalism is dominant in the province. While our survey does not allow us to explicitly distinguish between support for enlightenment and reformation liberalism, Charles Taylor (1994) has argued that liberalism in Quebec takes a different form (“substantive liberalism”) than in the rest of Canada (“procedural liberalism”). Like enlightenment liberalism, Taylor’s substantive liberalism is not neutral about what constitutes the good life and is willing to restrict some rights in order to promote collective goals.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps more importantly, as stated in the previous section, debates around secularism in Quebec have increasingly been influenced by a conception of *laïcité* that explicitly draw on the anti-religiousness of the Enlightenment (see also, Lamy 2015, 65–70). Accordingly, in Quebec, we expect liberal attitudes concerning individual autonomy to be associated with support for a ban on *all* religious symbols: that is, we expect those with liberal attitudes to support both the Charter and the removal of the crucifix from the National Assembly.

If enlightenment liberalism is a driving force behind support for a ban on all religious symbols, then we anticipate that ambivalence toward religion, if not an outright absence of any religious beliefs at all, is also associated with favoring such a ban. According to Gustavsson, van der Noll, and Sundberg (2016, 1725), enlightenment liberalism’s focus on fostering autonomy “leads enlightenment liberals to disrespect choices that are perceived to be made out of faith or passion, rather than reasoned reflections.” This perspective is similar to the “new atheism,” best represented intellectually by the writings of Dawkins (2006), Harris (2006), and Hitchens (2007), which opposes the display of religious symbols in public institutions in the name of rationality, science, and often explicitly, the enlightenment tradition. As such, atheism, low religiosity, or secularism might also influence public attitudes toward religious symbols. Indeed, a growing body of literature has shown that they influence a range of political attitudes and behaviors (Beard et al. 2013; Clements 2013; Ribberink, Achterberg, and Houtman 2013). Some of those studies confirm Tariq



Modood's (1994, 72) assertion that the main divide in today's world is not between majority and minority religious groups, but between "(...) those who think religion has a place in a secular public culture and those who don't." Fetzer and Soper (2003, 250–251) have dubbed this perspective the "solidarity-of-the-religious theory."<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, we expect atheists and individuals with low levels of religiosity to support both the Charter *and* the removal of the crucifix.

### **Conservative Nationalists: Ethnocentrism, Feelings of Threat and Generalized Prejudice**

According to Maclure (2011, 142), conservative nationalists, rather than opposing a public place for religion per se, believe that the religion of the majority — Catholicism, in the case of Quebec — "cannot be put on par with the other religions brought to Quebec through immigration." They distinguish themselves from enlightenment liberals by viewing minority religious accommodation as a threat to the traditions and customs of the majority group. Conservative nationalists' opposition to minority religious symbols may well be rooted in ethnocentrism, which Kinder and Kam (2009, 8) — drawing on the seminal work of Sumners (1906) — define as a pre-disposition to divide the human world into in-groups and out-groups.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, "symbols and practices become objects of attachment and pride when they belong to the in-group and object of condescension, disdain, and (in extreme cases) hatred when they belong to out-groups" (Kinder and Kam 2009, 8).

In the case of public opinion toward minority religious symbols, ethnocentrism might operate in one of two ways. First, majority group members might view minority groups as jeopardizing the material well-being, status, and culture of majority group members. According to "group threat theory," ethnocentrism is the product of competition over finite resources (material and symbolic) between groups in a political community.<sup>7</sup> More relevant to our study are "symbolic" or "cultural threats" rooted in fears that out-groups are putting the majority's values and culture at risk (Velasco González et al. 2008). A number of scholars have also linked perceived threats to broader insecurities about national identity (Sides and Citrin 2007; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007), similar to Maclure's account of "conservative nationalists." The group threat perspective suggests that when individuals believe their own (national, cultural, or ethnic) group is at risk, they are more likely to reject "out-groups" and their associated

symbols, and to express a strong desire for cultural unity. Indeed, in her study on attitudes toward the veil, Van der Noll (2010) found that perceived threats are associated with support for a ban on the Muslim headscarves. As such, our expectation is that Quebecers who view minorities as constituting a threat to Quebec culture will be Charter supporters opposed to removing the crucifix from the National Assembly. The rationale is that this group of Charter supporters wants to restrict minority religious symbols exclusively in order to protect the status of their own (majority) religious traditions.

Second, majority group identity might generate antipathy toward members of minority groups. Social identity theory posits that in order to evaluate their own members positively, members of a community are prone to view members of other groups in a negative light. Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner (2009) have referred to such phenomena as a tendency to view all minorities as a “band of others.” More commonly, it is referred to as “generalized prejudice,” defined by Hagendoorn and Sniderman (2001, 21, quoted in Spruyt and van der Noll, 2016, 4), as a “*consistent* tendency to evaluate immigrant groups negatively (...).” A body of literature has found that those who hold negative attitudes toward minorities are less likely to want to extend to these minorities the same rights or privileges as the majority group, or are more likely to oppose policies perceived as benefiting minority groups (Gilens 1995; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Helbling found that xenophobia was associated with support for a ban on the Muslim Headscarf in schools (Helbling 2014). However, we might anticipate people whose negative attitudes toward “out-groups” are rooted in ethnocentrism to have fundamentally different views about the crucifix than enlightenment liberals: for the former, the crucifix is more likely to be seen as a symbol of the majority group. Consequently, if ethnocentrism is a driving force behind support for a ban on minority religious symbols, then the expectation is that those who express antipathy toward ethno-cultural minority groups will support the Charter, but will be opposed to the removal of the crucifix from the National Assembly.

### **Group-Specific Affect: A Common Bond between Enlightenment Liberals and Conservative Nationalists?**

A growing body of literature has focused on the importance of “group-specific affect” in structuring attitudes toward immigration and minority

groups (Sides and Gross 2013; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013). Those studies draw on Converse's (2006 [1964], 38) well-known claim that citizens organize their opinions on specific issues around "visible social groupings," rather than abstract ideological principles. Policy questions thus become a judgment on the groups implicated in the policies.

Since the reasonable accommodation crisis, media coverage in Quebec has overwhelmingly focused on Muslims. They have been primarily presented as the main group challenging the secular nature of Quebec, but also at times as a group who refuse to assimilate and whose culture is deemed incompatible with Quebec culture (see, Antonius 2008; Potvin 2008). In short, Muslims have been criticized either for their religious practices or, more broadly, for their culture. Together, the literature on group-specific affect and the emphasis on Muslims during the Charter of Values debate suggests that negative attitudes toward Muslims in particular could be associated with support either for restricting the wearing of all religious symbols in public institutions, *or* for restricting only minority religious symbols. Accordingly, we expect Quebecers who hold more negative attitudes toward Muslims in particular to be Charter supporters irrespective of their position on the crucifix.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

To test the strange bedfellows hypothesis, the study relies on data from an online survey conducted in January and February 2014 as the debate over the Charter of Values was unfolding. The sample is composed of 1000 respondents from Quebec.<sup>8</sup> Respondents were asked whether they supported or opposed the Charter of Values, and whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "The crucifix should be removed from the National Assembly."<sup>9</sup> The data indicate that 49% of respondents were opposed to the Charter of Values, 27% were supportive of the Charter but opposed to the removal of the crucifix, and 24% were supportive of the Charter and in favor of removing the crucifix.<sup>10</sup> For brevity, we will now refer to these two groups as "pro-Charter and pro-crucifix" and "pro-Charter but anti-crucifix," respectively.

Details on the construction of our dependent and independent variables are reported in Appendix A, but three measures — generalized prejudice, antipathy toward people of Muslim faith, and antipathy toward people of Jewish faith, require further description. Generalized prejudice is measured by a seven-item index of feelings toward minority groups, where

a score of 10 means strong positive feelings toward all groups and a score of 0 means strong antipathy. To test for the relationship between Charter support and antipathy toward people of Muslim faith in particular, we use a variable measuring the gap between feelings toward Muslims and feelings toward all minority groups. This variable ranges from -10 to 10; it takes a positive value when feelings toward Muslims are more positive than for all minority groups, and takes a negative value when feelings toward Muslims are more negative than for all minority groups. We also examine how distinctive feelings toward Jews are related to support for the Charter of Values.<sup>11</sup> Including measures of feelings toward Muslims and Jews allows us to examine whether antipathy toward religious minorities in general (rather than Muslims specifically) motivated Charter supporters.

Table 1 reports the descriptive characteristics for all three groups of respondents. While the group “pro-Charter but anti-crucifix” appears to hold stronger liberal attitudes and to be more likely to have no religion or to be less religious, the group “pro-Charter and pro-crucifix” appears to hold stronger generalized prejudice and to be more likely to perceive immigration as a threat to Quebec culture. Also consistent with our hypothesis, the data indicate that both groups appear to hold more negative feelings toward Muslims than Charter opponents.

Because there is likely considerable overlap among some of these attitudes and characteristics, Table 2 reports correlations between our independent variables. Most significantly, it shows that those who express liberal attitudes also tend to be less religious ( $r = -0.46$ ), and perhaps not surprisingly, those who view immigration as a cultural threat exhibit more negative feelings toward minority groups ( $r = -0.43$ ). For this reason, a multivariate strategy is most appropriate for our analysis.

## TESTING THE STRANGE BEDFELLOWS HYPOTHESIS: MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

In order to confirm the characteristics of each group of Charter supporters, we performed a multinomial logit analysis, in which respondents opposed to the Charter of Values are the reference category. Table 3 reports the unstandardized B coefficients of the analysis, but in the discussion which follows we translate the log-odds derived from the multinomial logit results into predicted probabilities to facilitate the interpretation of effects. When predicted probabilities are calculated, all other independent

**Table 1.** Characteristics of charter of values supporters

	Charter opponents (49%)	Charter supporters	
		Conservative nationalists (27%)	Enlightenment liberals (24%)
<b>Liberal attitudes</b> (0–10, mean score)	6.6	6.4	7.9
<b>Religion</b>			
Catholics (%)	46	76	44
Atheists (%)	22	9	45
Religion is important in my life (% strongly agree or agree)	47	45	17
<b>Immigration is a threat to Quebec culture</b> (%)	28	64	38
<b>Feelings toward all minority groups</b> (mean, 0–10)	6.9	5.3	6.5
<b>Distinctive feelings toward Muslims</b> (mean, 0 to 10, gap with feelings toward minority groups)	5.9 (−0.9)	3.2 (−2.1)	4.8 (−1.7)
<b>Distinctive feelings toward Jews</b> (mean, 0 to 10, gap with feelings toward minority groups)	6.5 (−0.3)	4.5 (−0.8)	5.7 (−0.8)
Number of observations	299	180	163

Source: Provincial Diversity Project. Note: Entries report within-group characteristics.

variables in the model are held constant at their means. In addition to the variables discussed in the section above, the analysis also controls for a number of socio-demographic variables, including age, gender, employment, education, and language spoken at home. Since the PQ proposed the Charter of Values, we also control for PQ partisanship.

The analysis presented in Table 3 indicates that partisanship was a factor in shaping opinions about the Charter of Values, aside from any other considerations that might have influenced opinions about the Charter. PQ supporters were significantly more likely to support the Charter, but were split over the matter of the crucifix. Hence, the probability of being pro-Charter and pro-crucifix increases by 19 points (from 21% to 40%) when respondents identify with the PQ, and the probability of being pro-Charter and anti-crucifix increases by 25 points (from 14% to 39%). Moreover, Francophones were more likely to be Charter supporters even when controlling for all other variables (13 points more likely than

**Table 2.** Relationships between explanatory variables (correlation coefficients)

	Catholic	Atheist	Immigration is a threat	Liberal Attitudes	Feelings toward all minority groups	Distinctive feelings toward Muslims	Distinctive feelings toward Jews
<b>Religiosity</b>	0.32***	-0.50***	0.07	-0.46***	-0.10*	-0.03	0.05
<b>Catholic</b>			0.15***	-0.13**	-0.16***	-0.13***	0.03
<b>Atheist</b>			-0.10**	0.27***	0.15***	0.04	-0.04
<b>Immigration is a threat</b>				-0.15***	-0.43***	-0.33***	-0.18***
<b>Liberal attitudes</b>					0.26***	0.04	0.00
<b>Feelings toward all minority groups</b>						0.21***	0.14***
<b>Distinctive feelings toward Muslims</b>							0.14*

Source: Provincial Diversity Project. \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 3.** Characteristics of Charter of Values supporters (multivariate analysis)

	Multinomial logit regression (Base category: Charter opponents)			
	Conservative nationalists		Enlightenment liberals	
	B	SE	B	SE
Age	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Women	-0.11	0.24	-0.56	0.26*
Education	-0.09	0.13	0.01	0.14
Unemployed	0.20	0.51	-1.33	0.86
Francophones	1.18	0.43**	2.24	0.55***
Parti Québécois supporters	1.76	0.30***	2.17	0.30***
Catholics	0.80	0.32*	0.34	0.37
Atheists	-0.14	0.42	1.01	0.42*
Religiosity (0–1)	-0.47	0.45	-1.46	0.54**
Liberal attitudes (0–10)	-0.01	0.06	0.22	0.08**
Immigration is a threat to Quebec culture (0–1)	0.75	0.28**	0.03	0.30
Feelings toward all minority groups (0–10)	-0.20	0.07**	-0.10	0.07
Distinctive feelings toward Muslims (-10 to 10)	-0.16	0.06***	-0.17	0.07*
Distinctive feelings toward Jews (-10 to 10)	-0.12	0.07 <sup>c</sup>	-0.12	0.08
Constant	-1.74	0.82	-5.26	1.11***
Pseudo $R^2 = 0.30$				
$N = 642$				

Entries are multinomial logit unstandardized B coefficients.

Source: Provincial Diversity Project. \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; <sup>c</sup> $p < 0.10$ .

non-Francophones to be pro-Charter and pro-Crucifix, and 22 points more likely to be pro-Charter and anti-crucifix).

Beyond partisanship and language, the analysis lends support for the strange bedfellows hypothesis. First, the analysis indicates that those holding stronger liberal attitudes are more likely to support the Charter and the removal of the crucifix. The probability of being pro-Charter and anti-crucifix is 18 points higher among respondents with a high score (9.0) on the scale of liberal attitudes in comparison to someone with a low score (5.0) — 31% vs. 13%.<sup>12</sup> Liberal attitudes are not associated with being pro-Charter and pro-crucifix

Second, as expected, atheists and those who do not belong to any religion were more likely to support both the Charter and the removal of the crucifix. The predicted probabilities indicate that the likelihood of being



pro-Charter and anti-crucifix is 19 points higher (35% vs. 16%) among people who are atheists or without religion compared to those with a religious affiliation other than Catholicism.<sup>13</sup> It is noteworthy that the probability of being pro-Charter and pro-crucifix is 14 points higher (37% vs. 23%) among Catholic respondents than among those with other religious affiliations. Moreover, people for whom religion is of great importance, regardless of their religious denomination, are 19 points less likely to be pro-Charter and anti-crucifix than those for whom religion is not important at all in their lives (10% vs. 29%).

Third, and also consistent with our expectations, a perceived threat to Quebec culture and greater antipathy toward minority groups are associated with supporting the Charter, but only among those who are opposed to the removal of the crucifix. The predicted probability of being pro-Charter and pro-crucifix is 15 points higher (37% vs. 22%) when respondents express the view that immigration represents a threat to Quebec culture as compared to when they do not hold this opinion, and is 15 points higher (36% vs. 21%) when respondents' feelings toward minority groups are quite negative (4.1) as opposed to quite positive (8.4).<sup>14</sup>

Finally, beyond the effects of their general feelings toward all minority groups, respondents who have distinct antipathy toward Muslims are more likely to be Charter supporters of either type. The probability of being pro-Charter and anti-crucifix is six points higher when respondents express strong distinctive antipathy toward Muslims (-3.4) in comparison to when their score for Muslims is the same for other minority groups (0), and the probability of being pro-Charter and pro-crucifix is seven points higher.<sup>15</sup> Not only is greater antipathy toward Muslims a significant characteristic of both groups of Charter supporters, but it is also equally salient for both groups. However, there is no conclusive evidence of a relationship between distinct antipathy toward Jews and Charter support. Those with distinct antipathy toward Jews are not significantly more likely to be pro-Charter and anti-crucifix. They are more likely to be pro-Charter and pro-crucifix, but the relationship is modest and significant only at the 0.10-level ( $p$  value = 0.086).<sup>16</sup>

These results lend empirical support to the strange bedfellows hypothesis at the mass public level, and suggest two distinct and mutually exclusive narratives for supporting the Charter of Values. While liberal attitudes, atheism, and low religiosity distinguish Charter supporters who wanted to remove the crucifix (the group we call enlightenment liberals) from Charter opponents, a perceived threat to Quebec culture and

generalized prejudice distinguish Charter supporters against the removal of the crucifix (the group we call conservative nationalists) from Charter opponents. Moreover, the analysis indicates that both groups of Charter supporters express greater antipathy toward Muslims than Charter opponents. This result might be explained by the fact that debates around the Charter of Values were primarily focused on the Muslim veil; whether both groups of Charter supporters' greater antipathy toward Muslims has the same sources is beyond the scope of this study.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Legislative proposals to ban minority religious symbols in the public sphere have multiplied across many Western democracies. What motivates mass publics to ask for such proposals or to support them? A group of scholars looking at political and intellectual elites argues that attempts to limit the visibility of minority religious symbols in the public sphere is the product of unique alliances between conservative and progressive political forces. From their perspective, erstwhile political adversaries have joined forces to restrict the presence of minority religious symbols in the public sphere. In this study, we investigated whether this “strange bedfellows” hypothesis extends to the mass publics, and most importantly, we examined whether motivations of mass publics correspond to “enlightenment liberal” and “conservative-nationalist” ideas described by political theorists (Maclure 2011).

Our findings are consistent with such an interpretation. Supporters of the Charter of Values in Quebec appeared to form a coalition of strange bedfellows, two groups with different policy objectives and motivations matching the expected profiles of “enlightenment liberals” and “conservative nationalists.” In terms of policy objectives, the former group distinguishes itself by asking for a ban on all religious symbols, whereas the latter group wants to restrict only minority symbols. We find that prejudice and a perceived threat to Quebec culture are relevant motivations only for those who want to ban *minority* religious symbols exclusively. In sharp contrast, those who want to ban *all* religious symbols appear motivated by principles such as secularism and a particular set of liberal attitudes.

The application of the strange bedfellows hypothesis to the domain of public opinion sheds an important light on the structure of debates over the place of minority religious symbols in the public sphere among the mass publics. Existing research on the subject has consistently shown

that perceived threats and prejudices are key motivations for asking for bans on minority religious symbols (Saroglou et al. 2009; Van der Noll 2010); the evidence with respect to the role of principles has been far less conclusive (Helbling 2014). Our study does not dispute the significance of perceived threats and prejudices; the evidence is unequivocal that antipathy toward ethnic minority groups — even groups with no explicit link to any particular religion — and a sense that immigration represents a threat to the majority culture, are key motivators for a significant group of supporters of bans on minority religious symbols. However, our study demonstrates that in order to have a more complete understanding of the motivations of mass publics, we must also consider people's views about bans on *majority* religious symbols. By taking into account views on both minority *and* majority religious symbols, our study suggests that previous research may well have underestimated the role of principles such as secularism and liberalism in shaping opinions about religious symbols in the public sphere.

Our analysis also raises questions about the foundations of Charter supporters' attitudes toward Muslims in particular. Quite importantly, we find that both enlightenment liberals and conservative nationalists express greater antipathy toward Muslims, thus supporting the claim that aside from the effects of generalized prejudice, people's views about public policies are also partially structured by their attitudes toward Muslims. It is indeed possible that enlightenment liberals' antipathy toward Muslims has different origins than the antipathy expressed by conservative nationalists. However, an exploration of this possibility is beyond the scope of this study.

Can our Quebec findings be generalized to other national contexts? We believe they might help us to understand the dynamics of public opinion regarding the place of minority religious symbols in other contexts, especially in Europe. Although Quebec is a small sub-national political jurisdiction in North America, in many ways it has much in common with European states when it comes to issues surrounding the place of religion in the public sphere. First, church attendance levels in Quebec are among the lowest in North America and are more similar to levels found in some European countries (Bibby 2008). Second, the relatively small population of Quebec and its minority status within North America offer useful comparisons to many European countries. Cultural and linguistic anxieties play a key role in the Quebec public sphere, more so than in the rest of North America (Bouchard 2012). Indeed, our findings strongly echo those of Van der Noll and Saroglou (2015) on funding for religious education in Germany, in which the authors distinguish between those who

oppose public funding for all religious schools and those who only oppose the public financing of Muslim schools.

Beyond the question of attitudes toward minority religious symbols, our study also offers broader insights into contemporary political transformations and debates. More specifically, it helps make sense of the blurring of traditional lines of political division, as far-right political parties have increasingly co-opted themes and discourses once associated with left political parties, such as the defense of liberal values and gender equality (Akkerman and Hagelund 2007; Mayer 2013). As such, our study of the Quebec case confirms that not only has opposition to minority religious symbols and practices reshaped political coalitions at an elite level, but also that such new coalitions can reshape traditional political alliances within mass publics.

## NOTES

1. There is no evidence that the Parti Québécois' Charter proposal was the decisive factor in its election loss, nor that the Liberals' opposition to the Charter was the critical factor in its victory.

2. On the concept of laïcité, see also Laborde (2005) and Daly (2012).

3. This perspective, especially in some intellectual debates and in the French context, is often referred to as republicanism and contrasted with liberalism. In this article, we share Cécile Laborde's (2005, 315) view that (French) republicanism is a "though-minded version of egalitarian, difference-blind liberalism."

4. While Taylor wrote about these distinct models of liberalism in the context of conflicts over Quebec's language laws, it is likely that this conception of liberalism is influencing other aspects of Quebec's social and political life, including the presence of religion in the public sphere.

5. In their study, they found limited evidence of such "solidarity of the religious," although Clements (2013) did find some evidence in his study of attitudes toward integration of Muslims in Great Britain.

6. It is important to mention that ethnocentrism should not be conceived as a type, such that individuals can be described as ethnocentric or not ethnocentric. As argued by Kinder and Kam (2009, 8), people are more or less ethnocentric, and as such ethnocentrism is a quantity, not a kind.

7. For an overview of group threat theory, see Stephan and Stephan (2000) as well as Riek, Mania, and Gaertner (2006).

8. Respondents are all members of the Léger Internet panel of more than 400,000 Canadians who have been recruited randomly over the phone (61%) or through various other means. Léger's annual recruitment rate for the panel is approximately 15,000 new members per year, while about 10,000 to 12,000 panelists are removed from the panel or opt-out each year. Panelists are rewarded for their participation over time with a series of financial incentives. Respondents received an e-mail invitation to participate in the survey. Each invitation e-mail contained a unique invitation link (URL) that could only be used once; this ensured that no respondent could answer the survey on more than one occasion, nor share the link with friends. No specific response rate can be calculated for an online survey, because unlike telephone surveys it is not possible to evaluate whether people refused to participate or did not read or receive the invitation. To rectify possible imbalances and render the sample representative of the entire adult population, the data is weighted according to the actual distribution of the population based on the gender, age, mother tongue, and ethnicity (visible minorities or not) of Quebecers. Results were weighted using data from the 2011 Census from Statistics Canada.

9. We limit our investigation to respondents who expressed an opinion on both questions and to all other variables presented in Table 1. The remaining sample is composed of 642 respondents.

10. Of the 49% who opposed the Charter, 18% favored the removal of the crucifix and 31% opposed its removal. Because our focus is on identifying the motivations of Charter *supporters*, we do not distinguish charter *opponents* who favored removing the crucifix from those who wanted to keep it; indeed, the positions of Charter opponents regarding the crucifix were not featured in the public debate over the Charter.

11. Factor analysis presented in Appendix B indicates that respondents have distinctive feelings not only toward Muslims, but also toward people of the Jewish faith, another religious minority in Quebec. Although they co-vary significantly with feelings toward other minority groups, feelings toward Muslims and Jews load together on a separate factor.

12. We calculated the probability when the variable takes a value that is one standard deviation above and below the mean.

13. The category of reference (non-Catholics, non-atheists/no religion) represents about 21% of our sample. There is no difference between people who answered “no religion” and those who answered “atheist”; they are equally likely to be pro-charter and anti-crucifix (not presented).

14. These scores correspond to one standard deviation above and below the mean.

15. The  $-3.4$  corresponds to one standard deviation below the mean.

16. Additional analyses indicate that if we created variable measuring distinctive feelings toward Muslims and Jews combined, this variable would be associated with being both conservative nationalists and enlightenment liberals (results not presented). We prefer to report the results for the two religious minorities separately because it allows us to observe that feelings toward one religious minority (Muslims) were more distinctively associated with support for the Charter of Values.

17. Additional analyses were conducted in which we distinguish the two groups of Charter supporters and the two groups of Charter opponents. When the group of reference for the analysis are Charter opponents also opposed to removing the crucifix (31% of our entire sample), both groups of Charter supporters stand out with broadly the same profile of characteristics as in the analysis presented in Table 3. Charter supporters opposed to removing the crucifix stand out as being PQ supporters, French speaking, with negative feelings toward ethnic minorities, and especially toward Muslims. Charter supporters in favour of removing the crucifix stand out as being PQ supporters, French-speaking, atheists, people with low religiosity, and people who hold stronger liberal attitudes. As for Charter opponents in favour of removing the crucifix, they stand out as being non-Christian that do not perceive immigration as a cultural threat; in short, this last group of people is composed in large proportion of minority respondents. Results not presented.

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## APPENDIX A: CONSTRUCTION OF VARIABLES

Support for the Charter of Values and crucifix	<p>Constructed using the following two questions:</p> <p>The Quebec government has recently proposed a bill called "La Charte affirmant les valeurs de laïcité et de neutralité religieuse de l'État." The Bill provides guidelines for reasonable accommodation of religious practices and bans the wearing of religious symbols among Quebec public servants. Do you support this bill or not?</p> <p>Do you strongly, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements: The crucifix should be removed from the National Assembly of Quebec.</p> <p>Three-category variables:</p> <p>0 = Charter opponent (does not support Charter of Values)</p> <p>1 = Enlightenment liberal (supports Charter and agrees or strongly agrees with crucifix removal)</p> <p>2 = Conservative nationalist (supports Charter and disagrees or strongly disagrees with crucifix removal)</p>
Age	Age in years
Female	1 = female, 0 = male
Education	0 = completed high school; 1 = completed CEGEP (college); 2 = completed undergraduate degree; 3 = completed post-graduate degree

Unemployed Francophones	1 = unemployed; 0 = other employment status 1 = main language spoken at home is French; 0 = other languages
Catholics	1 = Catholic; 0 = other religions
Atheists	1 = Atheist or no religion; 0 = other religions
Religion is important in my life	1 = strongly agree; 0.67 = agree; 0.33 = disagree; 0 = strongly disagree
Immigration is a threat to Quebec Culture	1 = Immigration is a threat to Quebec culture 0 = Immigration enriches Quebec culture or has no impact on Quebec culture
Feelings toward minority groups (Generalized prejudice)	Feelings toward seven minority groups (Blacks, Chinese, Indians, Latinos, Filipinos, Muslims, and Jews) on 0 to 10 scale where 0 means "dislike a lot" and 10 means "like a lot" The question was asked for each of the seven groups separately and then responses were combined to form a single 0 to 10 scale (Cronbach alpha = 0.92)
Distinctive feelings toward Muslims	-10 to 10 scale where a positive score means more positive feelings toward Muslims than all minority groups and where a negative score means greater antipathy toward Muslims than all minority groups
Distinctive feelings toward Jews	-10 to 10 scale where a positive score means more positive feelings toward Jews than all minority groups and where a negative score means greater antipathy toward Jews than all minority groups
Liberal attitudes	0 to 10 scale made-up of five indicators where 10 means very liberal attitudes and 0 means very weak liberal attitudes: Do you strongly, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements: 1. Society would be better off if more women stayed home with their children. (reverse coding) 2. It is too easy to get an abortion nowadays. (reverse coding) 3. Gays and lesbians should NOT be allowed to marry in Canada. (reverse coding) 4. Euthanasia (or assisted suicide) is never ethically justified. (reverse coding) 5. Canada should decriminalize prostitution (Cronbach alpha = 0.59)

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**APPENDIX B: FACTOR ANALYSIS (INDEX OF GENERALIZED PREJUDICE)**

	Rotated Factor Loading	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
Feelings toward Blacks	0.73	0.41
Feelings toward Chinese	0.77	0.35
Feelings toward Filipinos	0.84	0.36
Feelings toward Indians	0.69	0.54
Feelings toward Latinos	0.69	0.46
Feelings toward Muslims	0.39	0.67
Feelings toward Jews	0.48	0.67
Eigenvalue	3.15	1.83

Method: Principal factors with varimax rotation.