Is nationalism left or right? Critical junctures in Québécois nationalism*

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ABSTRACT. Sub-state nationalist parties of the industrialised West occupy different positions along the left–right political spectrum. Despite the similarities of their political agendas, these parties adopt different ideological identities. This paper seeks to explain the choice of party position and the long-term consistency of these positions by employing a path-dependent perspective. The focus is first, on the critical junctures during which such choices are made; and second, on the mechanisms of continuity ensuring the persistence of the left–right identities. The argument is explored within the empirical context of Québécois nationalism.

KEY WORDS: critical juncture; minority nationalism; path dependency; Québec; sub-state nationalism.

Introduction

The examination of sub-state nationalist movements of the industrialised West has become a vibrant subfield of nationalism studies. The standard cases within this literature are Scotland, Wales, Flanders, Wallonia, the Basque country, Catalonia, and Québec. In broad brushstrokes, the focus tends to be on the historical origins of these movements, their quest for external political recognition and the parallel project of internal cultural rejuvenation (Conversi 1997; Fevre and Thompson 1999; Keating 2001; McCrone 1992; McRoberts 1999, 2001). More recently, the focus has turned to sub-state nationalist parties and electoral politics (Delwit 2005; Hough and Jefferey 2006; Swenden and Maddens 2008). What seems to be under-explored, however, is why some of these parties are on the left of the political spectrum of electoral politics while others are on the right.

Naturally, the first angle to investigate is whether there is anything intrinsically left or right about the sub-state variant of nationalism. Had this been the case, we would not have observed left–right differences between sub-state nationalist parties of course. So if there is nothing inherently left or

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right about seeking self-government for a region with a culturally distinct population, what explains the variety of positions such parties occupy on the left–right spectrum?

The second angle to investigate is role of the environment on party positions. Do sub-state nationalist parties acquire their political colours based on factors that are contingent on the political system they are situated in? For example, does their choice of left or right depend on whom they are mobilising against? The assumption here is that if the political party dominant at the centre is, say, on the left, we should expect the sub-state nationalist opposition to be on the right. This dyadic explanation based on left and right alternating between opposing sides might have had some partial merit for the founding moments of nationalist movements, but the consistency of sub-state nationalist party positions over time tends to suggest that in itself the dyadic alternation hypothesis is insufficient.

The argument this paper proposes builds on a notion similar to founding moments coupled with a path-dependent logic in order to explain consistency. During so-called critical junctures where changes in the political, social, and economic environment can no longer be managed by the existing predispositions of sub-state nationalist parties, large-scale change takes place in order to better align party positions with the changing environment. Once the party position on the left–right spectrum of electoral politics is decided, this short-term period of sudden change is followed by a period of long-term consistency. During this time of course certain changes in the political, social and economic environment happen, but until their confluence acquires the scale of a critical juncture, parties retain their ideological outlook. That being said, their left or right identity might be belied by what they do in practice; sub-state nationalist parties with avowedly socialist agendas might cut taxes and social spending, right-wing ones might support gay marriages and the decriminalisation of soft drugs; but what is important is that their ideological labelling remains constant – until the next critical juncture.

The argument is explored in the empirical context of Québécois nationalism and the critical juncture of the so-called ‘Quiet Revolution’ of 1960 during which the clerical/conservative right-wing nationalism dominant in Québec was replaced by a secular/progressive left-wing nationalism. This was a moment when changes in the political, social and economic environment mutually fed off each other, culminating in the large-scale transformation of Québec society. The clerical/conservative predisposition of Québec nationalists seemed increasingly obsolete in an environment changed by the joint effects of modernisation, urbanisation and secularisation. During this critical juncture, new parties were formed, existing parties joined forces, new political alliances were made, and a new secular/progressive nationalist position was adopted. Québec nationalism aligned its position with the changing environment. The new left identity adopted at this critical juncture set the formerly right-wing nationalist movement on a new path. The left ideological position adopted by the new sub-state nationalist party, Parti québécois, remained
constant even while the policies of the party in time moved from the left to the centre. After the disappearance of the initial terms defining the Quiet Revolution, the left alignment persisted due to mechanisms of continuity. The ideologically left outlook was reinforced through the party system and accompanying voter identification. The argument thus rests on two separate notions: (1) the critical juncture during which change occurs, and (2) mechanisms of continuity ensuring the consistency of the party position.

Nationalism, left and right

Most contemporary observers tend to see nationalism as an idea affiliated with the political right. During the nineteenth century, however, nationalism was closely associated with the political left. Instead of royal or religious legitimacy, nationalists wanted to make the ‘people’ the basis of modern political legitimacy. The revolutionary wave for representative government that swept though Europe in 1848 came to be known as the Spring of Nations. The ideal of ‘let the people decide’ naturally needed a people – a nation – that would provide the basis of popular legitimacy (for a contemporary discussion of this idea, see Yack 2001). As a product of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, nationalism was part of the modernist movement seeking progressive change, i.e. the political left.

Those who favoured the continuation of the conservative political order established with the 1815 Congress of Vienna were more likely to oppose popular legitimacy, fearing the chaos such imprudent idealism might unleash. As the voice of the ancien régime, the political right was more likely to favour the continuation of the estates system, political decentralisation, regional autonomy, the continuation of aristocratic entitlements and Church prerogatives.

From Hungary to Italy, the initial success of the popular uprisings of 1848 was followed by harsh repression. However, the ideal of popular legitimacy continued to remould the European political landscape. The Habsburgs and the Ottomans entered a process of losing territories to successive nationalist revolts, eventually culminating in the total dismembering of their multi-nation empires. For nations divided by borders like the Italians and the Germans, this was a period of national unification. During this time when nationalists – in the quest of realising popular legitimacy – succeeded in forming nation-states in many parts of the European continent, nationalism broke free from being an idea within the monopoly of the left.

While the state-centred nationalism of the late nineteenth century oscillated between the left and the right of the political spectrum, its sub-state variant became resolutely right wing.1 During this period of nation-building and centralisation, sub-state nations found a place for their concerns on the right of the political spectrum. From Brittany to Flanders, from Québec to the Basque country, it was the voice of tradition – and not modernity – that gave
minority nations a justification for resisting homogenisation. In turn, the modernist left came to view these sub-state nations as allies of the reactionary anti-revolutionary right. As a French Jacobin put it at the time, ‘reaction . . . speaks Bas-Breton’ (quoted in Weber 1976: 72).

In the early twentieth century, sub-state nationalism continued its association with the political right. But in the aftermath of World War II, a new generation sub-state nationalists in the industrialised West started to adopt the language of Third World liberation movements, injecting a heavy dose of far left ideology into their movements. At present, from Scottish nationalists on the left to Flemish nationalists on the right, sub-state nationalist parties occupy widely divergent positions on the ideological spectrum. These nationalist movements share common characteristics in terms of their demands for political recognition and autonomy together with the parallel project of internal cultural rejuvenation to undo the pervasive sense of vulnerability. But despite the almost identical issues facing them, the common discourse of past grievances and future goals finds expression in different political colours. Some sub-state nationalist parties are on the left and some are on the right.

Reinventing the sub-state nation

Québec, Catalonia, the Basque Country, Scotland, Wales, Flanders and Wallonia are all regions that – in one way or another – were able to escape the homogenising state-building processes in their respective countries. Their identities are largely based on a curious blend of a desire to preserve historical heritage, a quest to reinvent and reinforce cultural distinctiveness, and of course the instrumentalist pursuit or protection of political autonomy to these ends. They have all adopted the term ‘nation’ to refer to their sub-state ethnocultural communities. Whether or not they qualify as nations has been contested by others, so the paper will avoid trying to formulate a litmus-test for deciding who qualifies as a nation. The simple formula ‘whoever wants to be a nation is a nation’ is a pragmatic way out. And no one other than Ernest Renan better symbolises this outlook on nationalism: ‘What constitutes a national unity? Is it language? Is it geography? Is it history? Is it interest? It is all that in one way, but above all, it is the consent of the people, it is the will to live together.’

The path towards a sense of nationhood and the will to live together included a fair dose of social engineering, however. It is now of general consensus that nation-building often involves a great deal of imagination, myth-making, and manipulation of state resources (Gellner 1983). Karl Deutsch’s light-hearted reference to an old European saying epitomises this pattern: ‘A nation is a group of people united by a common error about their ancestry and a common dislike of their neighbours’ (Deutsch 1969: 3). Living through the tumultuous Third Republic France, Ernest Renan, was clearly aware of what nation-building entailed. In a lecture in 1882, Renan stated that
‘forgetfulness, and I will say even historic error, are essential factors in the creation of a nation’. Renan’s observations make particular sense in the context of the continuing nation-building project in France that started with the French Revolution of course. Abbé Grégoire’s 1790 survey shows that three-quarters of French citizens at the time knew some French but a little more than ten per cent spoke it properly. After decades of nation-building, by 1863 twenty-five per cent still spoke no French (Johnson 1993: 52). In his influential Peasants into Frenchmen, Eugene Weber argues that the real figure was probably higher since the Ministry of Public Education was likely to underestimate the numbers in order to exaggerate the success of public education’s track-record in nation-building (Weber 1976: 67).

The picture was not very different in other parts of Europe. Tullio De Mauro’s research shows that before the Tuscan dialect was chosen as the language to unite Italy, only 2.5 per cent of the population spoke Italian (De Mauro 1963: 41). An oft-cited statement of one of the Italian nationalist politicians epitomises the activism inherent in nineteenth-century nationalism: ‘fatta l’italia, bisogna fare gli italiani’ (having created Italy, now we have to create the Italians).

In states with heterogeneous populations, nationalism followed the path of linguistic and cultural standardisation. In others united by language but divided by borders, nationalism brought formerly separate entities together. Prime examples of this are of course the German and Italian unification processes. A point that sometimes gets less attention than it deserves is that the nineteenth century was also a time-period when ‘citizenship’ was finally expanded to the lower classes and borders were consolidated. This brought an end to Europe’s transient population. According to some historians, the size of Europe’s transients – seasonal workers, paupers, beggars, artisans, musicians, thieves, mercenaries – constituted around ten per cent of the European population. For example, twenty-two per cent of Berlin’s population in 1857 was made up of transients without permanent residence (Kocka 1986: 293). In sum, nationalism came of age during a time when internal cultural homogenisation was accompanied by external boundary building.

Québec, Catalonia, the Basque Country, Scotland, Wales, Flanders and Wallonia in many ways can be seen as residual by-products of state-building. As Geert van Istendael put it: ‘Nothing is as Belgian as Flemish nationalism. Had Belgium not existed, Flemish nationalism would have no reason for existence.’ These are all regions that begat minority nationalist movements challenging state-wide cultural/linguistic uniformity. Sub-state nationalism was thus about reviving and protecting heritage. Comments of another Belgian observer invoke the romantic idealism of rescuing old nations from obscurity: ‘Geography has its laws. There are old cultural imprints which are slowly wiped out by the stormy winds of history and remain invisible for centuries. Remove the sand and the underlying pattern reappears.’

While sub-state nationalism was promoted as the historical struggle of distinct communities against state-wide uniformity, similar processes of
reinvention, myth-making and manipulation were at play (Hobsbawm 1983). As a result, they were very much evolving ‘imagined communities’ – in Benedict Anderson’s memorable phrase (Anderson 1991) – as their state-centred nationalist counterparts: For example, ‘Canadian’ was initially a term reserved for French-speaking Catholics while their English-speaking Protestant compatriots were simply labelled ‘British’. The term was then qualified into ‘English-Canadians’ and ‘French-Canadians’. More recently, the term ‘Québécois’ came to represent the national identity of Canada’s French-speakers while ‘Canadian’ has increasingly come to be the term used for the English-speaking but multicultural rest of the country.

The historic region of Flanders was made up of only the two western provinces of contemporary Flanders. In the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Flemish movement revived and reinvented the Flemish nation. The term ‘Fleming’ was no longer reserved for Dutch-speakers living in the provinces of West and East Flanders, but became the collective name for the speakers of various Dutch dialects inhabiting the northern flatlands of Belgium. The reinvention of ‘Wallonia’ is even more recent. The French-speaking southern half of Belgium in fact acquired its official name only with the constitutional reform of 1971. Walloon nationalism had in fact consolidated only in the 1960s as a defensive reaction to the onslaught of Flemish nationalism. Furthermore, the hotbed of Walloon nationalism, Liège, historically had not even been part of the region that came to be known as Wallonia.

The nineteenth-century romantic reinvention of tartan Scotland based on Highland imagery is well documented (Brown 1992: 415–25). During the same time-period, a somewhat weaker yet similar process took place in Wales as well (Morgan 1986: 19–41). While this was happening in the United Kingdom, a young Spanish-speaking Basque intellectual, Sabino Arana, was promoting a language he himself did not speak as the basis of a new Basque national identity. As one might expect, in the meantime Catalan nationalists were doing their share of reinventing tradition (Payne 1971: 15–51). In sum, despite the prevailing self-image of historical minorities resisting modern state-building, minority nationalism followed a parallel process in forging identity. What is interesting is that some minority nationalists placed themselves on the political right in doing this, others on the political left.

Among the cases examined here, Scotland, Wales and Wallonia have remained on the political left. Scottish nationalism, for example, is generally seen to have a broad left-wing character (Hossay 2003: 184–9; Keating and Bleiman 1979; McCrone 1992: 211–45). In fact, overall numbers show that around eighty per cent of the Scottish vote goes to parties on the left. The same pattern characterises Welsh nationalism (Davies 1989: 18, 91–4; Fèvre and Thompson 1999: 3–24). Walloon nationalists share the political colours of the British Celtic fringe. Flemish nationalists, on the other hand, have tended to occupy positions on the right of the Belgian political landscape (Erk 2005: 551–70). Québecois nationalism used to be dominated by clerical/
conservative elements but it went through an important ideological makeover in the 1960s and reinvented itself as a left-wing secular project (McRoberts 1999: 253–8; Milner and Milner 1973). Basque nationalism was similarly led by clerical/conservative forces, but under Francoist repression the movement became radicalised and started espousing a discourse similar to Third World liberation movements (Conversi 1997: 103–4 and 152; Sullivan 1988).9 Catalan nationalism remains a Christian Democrat movement on the political centre-right (Beramendi and Máliz 2004: 130; Conversi 1997: 26–7, 119; McRoberts 2001: 68).10 At the end of the day, it seems that the political agenda of sub-state nationalism is not intrinsically at home on either end of the political spectrum. But is there any way to explain the respective positions along the left–right axis nationalist parties hold?

Critical junctures and mechanisms of continuity

As mentioned in Section 1, the argument proposed to explain the left–right position of sub-state nationalist parties rests on two separate notions: (1) the short-term critical juncture during which parties align their ideological dispositions according to the large-scale changes in the environment; and (2) the long-term mechanisms of continuity ensuring the consistency of party positions. It is the contention of this paper that the political alliances that are formed and the political identities adopted at critical junctures set sub-state nationalist parties on certain paths along the left–right spectrum. Once made, the political choices then became self-reinforcing through mechanisms of continuity. The paper proposes two such mechanisms: the party system and voter identification. After the disappearance of the initial terms, these mechanisms ensure the continuation of the left–right alignment – even if the political context that led to the initial choices during the critical junctures ceases to exist. It is through these mechanisms of continuity that parties retain the consistency of their left–right positions – until the next large-scale change in the environment, i.e. critical juncture, leads the party to reformulate its political identity. The notion of ‘critical juncture’ is explained by James Mahoney in the following terms:

Antecedent historical conditions define a range of options available to actors during a key choice point. This key actor choice point, or what can be called ‘critical juncture’, is characterized by the selection of a particular option (e.g. a specific policy, coalition, or government) from among two or more alternatives. The selection made during the critical junction is consequential because it leads to the creation of institutional or structural patterns that endure over time (Mahoney 2001: 6).

Paul Pierson employs a similar point of view in his description of path dependency:

Specific patterns of timing and sequence matter . . . Particular courses of action, once introduced, can be virtually impossible to reverse; and consequently, political development is often punctuated by critical moments or junctures that shape the basic contours of social life (Pierson 2000: 251).
Path dependency in political science was first explicitly formulated by Sidney Verba in his work on political development (Verba 1971: 308). The current use of the concept, however, follows the trail left by economists who used path dependency to explain the notion of technological lock-in that follows the choices made at critical junctures (David 1985: 332–7; Arthur 1989: 116–31). Its current use in the social sciences tends to stress the importance of the decisions made during crucial turning points and how these choices determine the direction for political processes by foreclosing alternative paths. Path dependency has increasingly become a major analytical tool in comparative historical social science (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003). Ira Katznelson defines this field as ‘the enterprise of apprehending, understanding, and accounting for tremendous change and sharp shifts in the direction of human affairs at key junctures’ (Katznelson 2003: 273).

The path dependency perspective is not without its critics, however. A common criticism contends that deterministic tendencies are inherent in the path dependency mindset (Sabetti 1996: 20). Another criticism concerns the reproduction of past choices. For example, Margaret Levi believes that ‘[these choices] must be continually reproduced to have the same effects they had in the past’ (Levi 1996: 46). For Orlando Paterson it is not necessarily the reproduction of the very same choices per se that deserves scholarly attention, but the ‘processes that constitute continuity’ (Paterson 2004: 72). A similar point is made by Kathleen Thelen, who believes that the path dependency literature tends to neglect conceptualising the mechanisms that ensure continuity: ‘Where this literature has generally been weaker is in specifying the mechanisms that translate critical junctures into lasting political legacies’ (Thelen 1999: 388).

The separation between the critical juncture and the mechanisms of continuity follows the distinction Arthur Stinchcombe made between two different sets of causal processes. According to Stinchcombe, ‘the first is the particular circumstances which caused a tradition to be started. The second is the general process by which social patterns reproduce themselves’ (Stinchcombe 1968: 103). James Mahoney makes a similar point in the context of path dependency: ‘the processes responsible for the genesis of an institution are different from the process responsible for the reproduction of the institution’ (Mahoney 2001: 512). This distinction between the critical juncture and the mechanisms of continuity lie at the core of path dependency. The processes whereby the original choices are reproduced over time are based on a set of factors that are separate from the original circumstances. That is, path dependency is not based on continuation that results from a utilitarian instrumental calculation. To quote Mahoney once again: ‘[T]he causes of institutional reproduction are distinct from the processes that bring about the institution in the first place; path-dependent institutions persist in the absence of forces responsible for their original production’ (Mahoney 2001: 515).
The party system and voter identification are the two mechanisms of continuity that this paper uses to explain the consistency of the left–right position sub-state nationalist parties take. While the party system signifies a macro-level mechanism of continuity, voter identification is by definition micro-level. Although conceptually separate, the two mechanisms have obvious connections to one another. The stability of the party system in itself is not sufficient to reproduce the path taken during the critical juncture, but such stability can help bring about stability in voter identification. On the other hand, stability of voter identification in itself would matter little if the party system did not remain constant. The macro and micro are, therefore, inextricably interlinked. According to Nathaniel Beck and John Pierce, the stability of an individual’s party identification, the continuity of this and its reflection in voting preference rely a great deal on ‘a long-term psychological commitment’ (Beck and Pierce 1977: 32). The link between the macro-level party system and the micro-level voter identification was noted by Angus Campbell and Henry Valen as well: ‘... the major cohesive force which gives party system stability and continuity is the psychological attachment of the electorate to the parties’ (Campbell and Valen 1966: 267). An additional factor favouring continuity is the way partisan stability accumulates with the passage of time (Converse 1969: 139–71). Of course, not all voters hold strong loyalties, but Keith Archer and his colleagues show how ‘party identification among durable partisans acts as a long-term stabilizing force on the electorate’ (Archer et al. 1999: 408). In sum, once party alternatives are fixed during critical junctures, the mass loyalty that develops helps consolidate party loyalties. The relative stability of the party system is thus accompanied by the relative stability of voter identification – until the next critical juncture of large-scale political, social and economic change of course.

As the overview of Québec nationalism below shows, once the formative moment gave the nationalist movement its political colours, it set out on a path that would remain even if the original set of circumstances that led to the choices disappeared. Continuity is not due to the fact that at every stage the particular left-right position of the movement was calculated and recalculated. Reproduction of the movement’s political identity was simply due to a set of different factors; in this case, voter identification and the party system.

Québec nationalism from the right to the left

The settlement of la nouvelle France in present-day Québec was the largest French colony in North America. In 1760, the colony fell to the British. The loss was formalised with the Treaty of Paris between Great Britain and France in 1763. Most officers and nobles returned to France, but the French-Canadian habitants remained in Québec. When the British took over the administration of the colony, French Canadians withdrew increasingly to the countryside and sought to maintain their way of life with a minimum of interference from their new political masters. Following the establishment of
the Canadian federation in 1867, Québec continued to be a deeply conserva-
tive inward-looking province trying to isolate itself from the mostly English-
speaking rest of the country.12

As part of their policy to ensure the continuation of the French-speaking
Catholic community, the clergy sought to keep Québec a rural and con-
servative province.13 This was part of the policy of la survivance (‘survival’).
To this end, the Church was aided by politicians who shared the conservative
Catholic brand of Québécois nationalism. One of the most influential of such
politicians was the Union nationale leader Maurice Duplessis (for more on
Duplessis, see Quinn 1979). His party had come to power in 1936 with the
slogan la foi, la langue, la race (‘faith, language, race’). Under Duplessis,
Union nationale remained in power till 1959 – save for a brief period during
World War II when the Liberals ruled (Nish 1970).

However, under Union nationale government, the socio-economic structure
of clergy-controlled conservative Québec had begun to change. Industrialisa-
tion and urbanisation started to weaken the control the Catholic Church had
Canadians who lived in small rural towns across the St Lawrence valley
started moving to Montréal in record numbers (Hughes 1943). In a couple of
decades, the city’s population tripled. In 1880, seventy-three per cent of
French-Canadians lived in the countryside; by 1951 sixty-seven per cent were
living in urban areas (Cook 2005: 18). By 1971, the number of urban-dwellers
had reached seventy-eight per cent (McRoberts and Postgate 1980: 51).

Modernisation altered the existing economic, social and political landscape
in the province (Durand 1999: 100). The first product of the changes was the
emergence of a labour movement outside Church-controlled unions. Starting
with the Asbestos strike in 1949, workers started joining the new Fédération
des union industrielles du Québec (FUIQ). Asbestos was followed by strikes in
Murdochville and Louiseville. Labour found an ally in a new generation of
progressive intellectuals who had come together within the Cité Libre move-
ment formed in 1950 (Behiels 1985: 84–96). They were led by the trade unionist
Jean Marchand, the social scientist Pierre-Elliot Trudeau, and the journalist
Gérard Pelletier. Under Marchand, the Catholic labour union Confédération
des travailleurs catholiques du Canada (CTCC) changed its name to Confédéra-
tion des syndicats nationaux (CSN) and moved to the left.14

In the meantime, the La Fédération des Unions Industrielles du Québec
(FUIQ), which had retained a fairly conservative and anti-communist position,
started to move closer to the new left nationalism of its rival CTCC/CSN. The FUIQ grew with new additions. In its 1955 general congress in the
town of Joliette, CSN’s rival outlined its new social democrat and nationalist
standing. In fact, the so-called Joliette declaration adopted on 15 May 1955
was formally entitled ‘Manifeste au Peuple du Québec’, and in many ways,
symbolised the beginnings of a left current in Québec nationalism.15 Two
years later, the FUIQ renamed itself Fédération des travailleurs du Québec
(FTQ) and became the largest trade union in Québec.
The gradual process of change uprooting the established order in Québec eventually led to the demise of *Union nationale*. On 22 June 1960, Liberals under Jean Lesage were elected to power. The change of government resulted in a complete overhaul of French-Canada. This so-called Quiet Revolution (*révolution tranquille*) was a revolt against the clergy and anglophone capital as the bastions of establishment (Epinette 1998: 24). During this process Québec shed much of its ultramontane Catholic heritage and undertook a modernist redefinition of Québec society (Behiels 1987: 21–43; Cook 1995: 118–36). From 1960 to 1965 large-scale economic, cultural, political reforms were implemented. The secular left emerged much stronger from this turning point in Québec history. As a result of these changes, Québec nationalism freed itself from its clerical/conservative outlook:

Being French was clearly no longer synonymous with being Catholic. As it collapsed as a temporal power and was replaced by the state as a central institution of the Quebec collectivity, the Church’s moral influence ebbed as well, a wave of secularisation swept through Quebec’s institutions and society generally (Monière 1981: 257).

This formative moment of change for Québec also brought with it a redefinition of nationalism. Under the banner of *L’action nationale*, activists like Michel Brunet, Maurice Séguin and Guy Frégault sought to build a secular nationalist movement. Their voice was echoed by intellectuals like Fernand Dumont and Marcel Rioux who advocated leftist nationalism. Theirs was a call for a new social-democratic project instead of the rural and petty-bourgeois clerical nationalism. The editor and publisher of the big Québec newspaper *Le Devoir*, André Laurendeau and Gérard Filion, lent support to the new nationalists with their writing. They were, however, more moderate in their language than some of the more activist members of the press. During 1963–64, three journals, *Parti pris, Socialisme, Révolution québécoise*, started introducing Third World decolonisation terminology into Québec nationalism. As one of the columnists of *Parti pris* put it in 1963: ‘Revolution here [in Québec] clearly takes on national features. It is in fact a revolution of the nationalist type. It envisages the liberation of the French-Canadian nation of Québec oppressed by the English-Canadian nation represented by Ottawa.’

While nationalists were becoming left, leftists were becoming nationalist. One of the prominent voices advocating a new left nationalism was Pierre Vadeboncoeur. In an address to the Québec branch of the (left-wing) Canadian New Democratic Party in 1963, Vadeboncoeur argued that the sole reliance on the interests of the proletariat was a mistake for socialism in Canada:

This is the error of a certain narrow theoretical logic and learning. The assessment of the body of the political realities leads to another conclusion. Without denying the valid elements of the traditional theory we will certainly continue to rely on, we think that socialism must be founded here [in Québec] on the interests of patriotism.
The following years witnessed the trade union CSN moving even closer to socialism under the leadership of Marcel Pepin. This was also a time period when the Québec left started to distance itself from the English-speaking Canadian left. Activists like Michel Chartrand and André L’Heureux, who had founded the Part socialiste du Québec (PSQ) in 1963, shared the position of new nationalists in the CSN who believed that ‘the creation of a socialist Québec, therefore, necessitated the separation of Québec from Canada’ (Güntzel 1993: 152). In the meantime, the trade union FTQ remained committed to social democratic principles under the leadership of Louis Laberge, Fernand Daoust, and Jean Gérin-Lajoie. The autonomist nationalism of FTQ, however, did not go as far as calling for independence. That being said, the bond between nationalism and socialism had been consolidated. In his report on a survey of young Québécois and their ethnic and class consciousness at the time, Marcel Rioux concluded that: ‘I do not believe that I have found anyone who was a socialist without being a nationalist’.20

During the course of the Quiet Revolution, a number of new nationalist organisations continued to emerge. The first one, Rassemblement pour l’indépendance nationale (RIN), was set up by Pierre Bourgault in 1960. Another such outfit was the Action Socialiste pour l’independence du Québec that came into being the same year. There were also a couple of smaller groups such as Alliance Laurentienne (1957), Parti Républicain du Québec (1962), and Ralliement Nationale (1964). However, the most influential of the new nationalist groups was the Mouvement Souveraineté-Association, established by the former Liberal cabinet minister René Lévesque in 1966.21 The new secular/progressive nationalism was decisively overpowering its clerical/conservative sibling (Dumont 1971: 15).22 The nationalist movement was now outward-looking rather than inward-looking. Instead of survivance, the battle-cry of new nationalism became rattrapage (‘catching up’). According to Michael Keating:

A liberal progressive nationalism emerged, detached itself from the Catholic tradition and drew on the advance of secular values. It challenged the Church monopoly in education and social services as well as its teachings on issues like abortion. This liberal nationalism was closely linked to the economic development of Quebec (Keating 2001: 91).

In the course of this change, ‘an église-nation [a Church nation] became an état-nation [a state nation]’ (Cook 1995: 132). An accompanying change that took place during this time-period was the (re)definition of what it was to be Québécois. The term ‘French-Canadian’ had its roots in the sixteenth century habitants; and was closely linked to the survival of the Catholic Church in British North America. Many new nationalists had been using the more inclusive ‘Québécois’, which was not only designed to include all inhabitants of Québec – including anglophones and immigrants – but was also a term devoid of Roman Catholic connotations. The term gradually eclipsed...
‘French-Canadian’ which was relegated to a term denoting ethnic origins only. According to Raphaël Canet:

The promotion of the [new] Québec identity also brought with it a progressive nationalism. A political québécois nationalism of decolonisation and progress replaced the [old] French Canadian cultural nationalism of tradition, conservativism, and survivance.24

Having changed its colours, one thing remained constant for Québec nationalism, however: the desire to guard the province’s cultural distinctiveness against the English-speaking rest of the country. By the end of the 1960s, Québec nationalism had permeated all shades of political opinion within Québec’s French-speaking population. In 1970, various nationalist groups came together to form a new political party committed to achieving Québec sovereignty. That year the new Parti québécois led by René Lévesque received twenty-four per cent of the vote the very first time it contested elections. In 1976, the party received the majority of votes and assumed power. After two sovereignty referenda in 1980 and 1995, and five Parti québécois governments, nationalism remains strongly associated with the political left in Québec. The left outlook adopted during the Quiet Revolution has somehow outlived the realities of cuts in public spending and taxes adopted by successive Parti québécois governments. While the economic policies of the nationalist party are less social-democratic than in the past, the political identity of Québec nationalism remains squarely on the left. The party system and voter identification have allowed the leftist identity of Québec nationalism to withstand the fluctuations in the political, social and economic environment.

James Bickerton and Alain-G. Gagnon emphasise the ‘strong currents of continuity in party – voter relations in Canada’ (Bickerton and Gagnon 2004: 239). The stability of Parti québécois partisanship is particularly noted by observers (Clarke 1983: 71, 82; McCormick 1996: 359). An additional factor that helps oil the mechanisms of continuity is Canada’s electoral regime. The first-past-the-post electoral system is known to favour party systems consisting of two dominant parties (Duverger 1954: 217). The fact that the party system pitted a federalist party against a nationalist one played an additional role in consolidating party identification amongst Québec voters. In first-past-the-post systems voters are less likely to move laterally between ideologically adjacent parties than they are in electoral systems based on proportional representation (Johnston 2006: 335–6).

Conclusion

This work shows that there is no automatic ideological orientation of sub-state nationalism in the West. Instead, this is set during ‘critical junctures’. Thereafter, this orientation tends to be stable, maintained through path-dependency within a given party system until the next ‘critical juncture’. Contemporary Québécois nationalism is generally considered to be on the left.

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of the political spectrum (Gagnon and Lachapelle 1996: 171–91; McRoberts 1999: 253–8; Milner and Milner 1973). However, this has not always been the case. Until the Quiet Revolution, Québec’s nationalist movement had been a clerical/conservative one, but during the massive political, social, and economic changes within the province, new political alliances were formed (Bélanger, Comeau and Métivier 2000). Literature on Québec nationalism shows how modernisation and left-wing nationalism became enmeshed in one another (Clift 1982: 18–34; Cook 1995: 118–36; Keating 1997: 94; Monière 1981: 257). But what is remarkable is that even after the special circumstances defining the Quiet Revolution disappeared, Québec nationalism represented by the Parti québécois continued its left trajectory. The party system that congealed during that ground-breaking period and the accompanying voter identification ensured that this pattern persisted.

Notes

1 The distinction between state-centred nationalism and sub-state nationalism was first made by Maurice Duverger who contrasted ‘the nationalism of the dominants’ (le nationalisme des dominantes) with the ‘nationalism of the dominated’ (le nationalisme des dominés) (Duverger 1964). For the same phenomena, Daniel Louis Seiler prefers the terms ‘centralist nationalism’ and ‘peripheral nationalism’ (Seiler 1989). In addition to sub-state nationalism, another commonly used label is ‘minority nationalism’; see Keating and McGarry (2001).

2 This is the way Friedrich Meinecke summarised the position of his contemporary Ernest Renan. Meinecke’s own views acknowledge the importance of a common ethnic heritage (Meinecke 1970: 18, 205).


5 The statement is often mistakenly attributed to Massimo d’Azeglio, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia. However, Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi show that the words belong to another Italian politician, former Minister of Education, Ferdinando Martini (Soldani and Turi 1993: 17).

6 ‘[N]iets is zo Belgisch als het Vlaamse nationalisme. Bestond België niet, dan had het Vlaamse nationalisme geen reden van bestaan’ (Van Istendael 1993: 22).

7 ‘De geographie heeft haar weten. Er zijn oude culturele afdrukken die door de stormwinden van de historie slechts traagjes worden uitgewist en na eeuwen nog zichtbaar blijven. Verwijder het zand, en de draad ligt weer bloot’ (Ruys 1973: 20).

8 Québec shares interesting parallels with both Belgian sub-state nationalist movements, particularly in terms of the influence the Catholic Church has had on Flemish nationalism. These similarities and the secular/progressive turn Québec nationalism took are explored in Erk (2002).

9 The puzzle of why Catalan nationalists employ peaceful means while Basque nationalism contains groups espousing violence has been approached from two angles. Some emphasise the macro forces of history; particularly, the differences in class structure between the two regions (Díez-Medrano 1995). Others call for an approach focusing on the micro foundations of political violence instead (Laitin 1999: 21–59).
10 That being said, there are indications of an emergent left strand within Catalan nationalism represented by the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), as well as the growing regionalist orientation of Catalan socialists (Roller 2004; Roller and Van Houten 2003). The author would like to thank Jan Sonnenschein for bringing this point to his attention.

11 Some believe the process works the other way, i.e. the stability of party systems depends on the strength of the socialisation of party identification (Converse and Dupeux 1966: 269–91).

12 For a detailed account of this time-period, see Hughes (1943); McRoberts and Postgate (1980).

13 For the role of the Catholic Church in Québec, see Eid (1978); Hamelin (1984).

14 For a detailed overview of the transformation to CSN, see Roback and Tremblay (1978: 245).

15 For more on the declaration of Jolliete, see Denis (1979: 138–9).

16 For the growth of the left in Quebec, see Linteau et al. (1991: 502–4).


19 For more on FTQ’s own evaluation of its successive stances on social issues and nationalism; see FTQ (1971).

20 ‘Je ne crois pas avoir trouvé personne qui fut socialiste sans qu’il fut nationaliste’ (Rioux 1965: 11).

21 For more on René Levesque’s leadership, see Fraser (1984) and Mintzberg (2007).


23 For a collection of views on the future of Québécois identity, see Venne (2000).

24 ‘La promotion de l’identité québécoise se double ainsi d’un nationalisme progressif. Un nationalisme politique québécois, de décolonisation et progressiste remplace le nationalisme culturel canadien-français, traditionnel, de conservation et de survivance’ (Canet 2003: 186).

25 Electoral continuity is by no means a point over which unanimity exists. Some observers have emphasised the flexibility of the Canadian electorate (Jenson 1975: 543–53; LeDuc 1984: 37–54). The opposing view seeks to show how Canadian voters in fact display consistency in voting (Sniderman, Forbes and Melzer 1974: 270–1). In their influential study, Harold Clarke and his colleagues introduce a difference between what they call ‘flexible’ and ‘durable’ partisans (Clarke et al. 1979).

26 In his original formulation Maurice Duverger called the argument that a first-past-the-post electoral regime creates a two-party system a hypothesis akin to ‘a true sociological law’ (Duverger 1954: 217). Subsequent work tends to instead highlight how the electoral system favours the emergence of two dominant parties. For more on the relationship between the electoral system and the party system in Canada, see Cairns (1968).

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