

Is the Parti Québécois Bound to Disappear?

A Study of the Generational Dynamics of Electoral Behaviour in Contemporary Quebec

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WORKING PAPER

The results and conclusions of this study are the sole responsibility of the authors.

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Abstract:

Canadian politics has experienced great changes in the past two years. The drastic rise and fall of several political parties in the last federal election, as well as in several provincial elections, testifies of a desire of change among the Canadian electorate. In Quebec, the setback of the Parti Québécois (PQ) in the last 2014 provincial election testifies of a more progressive and continuous decline of the party since the 1995 referendum defeat. With now only 25% of vote shares, the question arises: is the PQ bound to disappear? If the Parti Québécois is to disappear, it would announce an important transformation in the structure of Quebec politics, and thereby in Canadian politics. The argument developed in this paper is that the analysis of today's youth support for the Parti Québécois can inform us on the future of the party. Given the importance of the national question as a basis of electoral behaviour in Quebec, we focus on the salience of this issue among youth. How much importance do youth give to the national question, compared to older generations? And, are youth more focused on the national question, or on social and economic issues when they vote? To investigate the generational dynamics of the support for the Parti Québécois, we use data from an opinion survey conducted immediately after Quebec's 2014 provincial election. First, we examine how much importance the younger generations give to the national question relative to other social and economic issues, and compared to other generations. Secondly, we investigate how these differences in issue outlooks play out on patterns of vote choice in the 2014 election. The results show that the profile of Gen Y is particularly distinct from the Boomers on several dimensions, and that Gen X stands as a transitory generation, one that is not so different attitudinally from the Boomers. Furthermore, we demonstrate that the decline of the PQ in 2014 was mostly concentrated in the Generation Y, who was less inclined to see the project of sovereignty as a priority and less likely to support the incumbent PQ government's controversial proposal to adopt a Charter of Quebec Values.

Introduction

With the rise and fall of several third parties since the mid-1990s, the party system in Quebec has become increasingly fractionalized and support for the two dominant parties has been oscillating (Godbout 2013). While the Parti Libéral du Québec (PLQ) has been able to maintain relatively stable vote shares among the electorate, the Parti Québécois (PQ) has experienced a continuous decline since the 1995 referendum defeat. The 2014 Quebec election was a particular setback for the PQ, as the support for the party hit a historical low, with only 25% of vote shares (Maioni 2014, Bélanger and Falk Pedersen 2015). As a consequence, political observers have wondered if the PQ still has a role to play in Quebec politics, or if it is ultimately bound to disappear?

In this article, we aim to investigate the factors explaining the decline of the PQ and consider what this explanation may entail for the future of party politics in Quebec. Our argument is that the process of intergenerational change explains the shift in electoral support, away from the PQ, and that the advent of a new generation with different political values and priorities may be announcing a structural change in Quebec politics.

The PQ has been described as a 'generational party' that emerged as a response to the socio-political context of the 1960s and 1970s, when dissatisfaction with regards to economic and linguistic inequalities built up and tensions with the federal government grew. The electoral successes of the party were grounded in the mobilization of the young generation of those times, the Baby-boomers (Blais and Nadeau 1984). But the lower vote shares of the PQ after the 1980s, especially among new cohorts, have led some to question whether the PQ was only the party of 'one generation'. Generations X and Y have been socialized in different socio-political contexts, with less salient economic and linguistic inequalities (Martin 1994). It is likely that they face living conditions and problems that are different from what the Baby-boomers experienced, and that they develop distinct political attitudes and priorities. In consequence, the rise of new political generations who have different political priorities, and who progressively replace the older generation, should operate a shift in how Quebec politics is conducted.

In this study, we test the generational argument developed by Lemieux (2011) that a party that is grounded in one generation inevitably declines when this generation does not constitute the majority of the electorate anymore and when new generations are not recruited in the ranks of the party. Using data from an opinion survey conducted at the time of the most recent provincial election in Quebec, we offer a snapshot of the generational dynamics currently at play in Quebec electoral politics. We first present the profiles of the three generations who were politically active in the 2014 Quebec election -the Baby-boomers, Generation X and Generation Y- and examine the socio-demographic and attitudinal differences between these three generations. Secondly, and most importantly, we test how different factors explain the electoral choice of individuals of each generation. The evidence shows that the profile of Gen Y is particularly distinct from the Boomers on several dimensions, but that Gen X is not that different from the Boomers in terms of attitudes. Furthermore, we demonstrate that the decline of the PQ in 2014 was mostly concentrated in the Generation Y, who was less inclined to see the project of Quebec sovereignty as a priority and less likely to support the incumbent PQ government's controversial proposal to adopt a Charter of Quebec Values.

Political Parties, Generations and Political Change

The Parti Québécois: a Generational Party?

Lemieux developed the argument that the Parti Québécois is a 'generational party' (2011). According to him, a generational party is anchored in one political generation. It emerges as a response to the problems of a specific generation and proposes a new conception of politics, which distinguishes it from other parties. The emergence of the PQ at the end of the 1960s was strongly supported by the youth of the 1960s and 1970s, the generation of the Baby-boomers. These youth experienced a context of socio-economic and linguistic inequalities and sought political alternatives to voice their dissatisfaction. Blais and Nadeau (1984) showed that the electoral support for the PQ in the 1970s is in fact the strongest among youth, those born between 1945 and 1959. In the 1970s, the PQ becomes a dominant political force in the Quebec party system, by offering a renewed nationalist perspective and an egalitarian political project.

However, since the electoral successes of the 1970s up until the 1990s, popular support for the party has declined (see Figure 1). Several explanations have been advanced to explain this downturn, related to the political context or the internal organization of the party. However, we argue that the reason for the progressive erosion of the support for the PQ is deeper than contextual factors and not only tied to short-term factors (such as interactions with Ottawa, internal party politics or leader characteristics). Lemieux (2011) argued that generational parties usually maintain themselves for a period of 30 to 40 years: they emerge with a new generation, acquire political prominence as this generation matures, and subsequently decline as the generation ages. Following Lemieux, we argue that changes in the PQ's vote shares reflect a process of intergenerational change. If the generation of Baby-boomers -who gave rise to the party- is progressively replaced in the electorate by younger generations -with different political priorities and orientations-, then the PQ is unlikely to recruit voters among these new generations, and it is thus bound to decline and disappear. We posit that the generational argument rests on two hypotheses: 1) the different generations of citizens were socialized in different socio-political environments and developed distinct political orientations and priorities, and 2) their different political outlooks impact their electoral behaviour. Thus, this empirical study addresses two research questions. Firstly, are the three generations -who are currently active in politics- distinct on political attitudes? Secondly, do these political differences reflect themselves in the electoral support received by the PQ?

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Three Generations

The literature on political socialization provides a wealth of evidence that individuals develop their political attitudes early on in life, during childhood, and that these attitudes tend to crystallize during youth and remain stable through adult life (Mannheim 1952, Jennings 2002, Jennings, et al. 2009). As individuals of a same birth cohort are socialized in a similar socio-political context and share common experiences of political events during their formative years, they tend to develop political attitudes that are distinct from other birth cohorts. In times of rapid and intense societal change, individuals are more likely to develop a common consciousness and particularly distinct political orientations, which gives rise to a political generation (Mannheim 1952).

In Quebec, three generations are currently taking part in elections: the Baby-boomers (born before 1960), Generation X (born between 1960 and 1979), and Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1994). As each generation was socialized in a different socio-political context,

we expect them to develop distinct political attitudes and electoral behaviours. Firstly, the generation of the Baby-boomers were socialized in a context of economic and linguistic inequalities, and they experienced an era of rapid social, political and economic modernization with the Quiet Revolution (Guay 1997). The economic development and growth of the 1960s led to a move away from materialist goals towards post-materialist considerations (Martin 1994, Pinard, et al. 1997, Piroth 2004, Inglehart 2008). The PQ was able to capitalize on the popular appetite for more social and political reforms as well as on the dissatisfaction with regards to the place of Quebec in the Canadian federation, and it offered the project of Quebec's sovereignty as a solution to promote Quebec's economic, political and social development (McRoberts and Posgate 1983, Lemieux 2011). Thus, with the advent of the Boomers' generation in the 1970s, the national question became a political cleavage in Quebec's electoral politics.

The generation that followed, Generation X, grew up in a different environment. The pace of reforms slowed down and inequalities between Anglophones and Francophones were progressively diminished. With regards to the support for the project of sovereignty, the 1980s and 1990s were more mixed, compared to the steady rise and support for the sovereignist movement in the 1970s. In fact, these two decades were the stage of two referendums and several constitutional crises, which alternatively led to increases in support for Quebec's sovereignty, and then to the demobilization and depoliticization of the national question (Pinard, et al. 1997, Mendelsohn, et al. 2007). Finally, Generation Y came of political age during the 1990s and 2000s. With successes in language protection and increased economic well-being, the economic, cultural and linguistic grievances became less salient (Pinard, et al. 1997). Hence, past the 1995 referendum, there was less interest in constitutional debates (McRoberts and Posgate 1983). This period reflects a return to 'normal politics', with increased salience of the left-right socioeconomic cleavage and a relative depoliticization of the national question (Mendelsohn, et al. 2007).

Based on the different processes of political development of these three generations, we hypothesize that: attachment to Quebec and the importance of the project of sovereignty are highest among the Baby-boomers, while they are lowest among Generation Y. However, given the more important fluctuations in the salience of the constitutional and nationalist debates during the 1980s and early 1990s, it is less clear where levels of attachment and the importance of sovereignty fall for Generation X. And it remains an open question whether the attitudinal profile of Gen X resemble more the profile of the Baby-boomers or that of the Gen Y.

Factors Explaining Electoral Behaviour in Quebec: the 2014 election

In Quebec, two main dimensions structure electoral politics: the left-right socioeconomic dimension and the national question (Hudon 1976, Bélanger and Nadeau 2009). Since the 1970s, positions on the sovereignty-federalism axis have been a key determining factor of electoral behaviour. But depending on the periods of time, positions on the sovereignty-federalism axis have been sometimes more or less important relative to positions on the left-right axis in explaining vote choice (Nadeau, et al. 1995). While positions on these two axes strongly impact Quebecers' electoral behaviour, contemporary issues that occupy a central place in electoral campaigns also matter in explaining vote choice, and more so when the sovereignty-federalism axis is less salient (Bélanger and Nadeau 2009, Nadeau and Bélanger 2013). In consequence, to investigate and compare the electoral behaviour of the three generations in the 2014 election, we focus on individuals' position on the issue of sovereignty, their position on the left-right axis, and positions on the Charter of Values, which was a central issue of this election (Tessier and Montigny 2016).

The national question has been the main cleavage in Quebec politics for four decades now, and the relative importance that citizens place on this dimension largely explains the successes and downfalls of Quebec's political parties. While there is still a relatively high level of support for sovereignty, among all generations (Tanguay 2007), there is a general disengagement from the national question, which is most pronounced among younger Quebecers (Guay 2004, Mendelsohn, et al. 2007). Guay (2004) explains this 'paradox' of Quebec's public opinion by the fact that people can support the 'symbolic sovereignty' (i.e. that Quebec is a distinct nation and being a member of Quebec's community is a vector of pride) at the same time that there is no (or less) support for 'real sovereignty' (i.e. that the project of founding a country is real). Guay advances that 'real sovereignty' is not a major concern, and especially for the young generation who give more priority to issues of sustainable development, the environment and cultural diversity. In that sense, the PQ's agenda may not be in tune with the priorities of Generation Y. The more recent return to 'normal politics' means that positions on the left-right socio-economic dimension gain more importance in the explanation of electoral behaviour in Quebec. While we do not expect generational differences in terms of left-right positions, we know that there are generally age-related differences in left-right positions, and that younger people are usually more left-leaning while older citizens are right-leaning. Despite the fact that the PQ emerged as a socio-democratic party promoting state intervention and egalitarian policies, the party's position on the left-right axis has been less clear in the past decades (Guay 2004), notably with its move towards the centre of the political spectrum. We thus expect the youngest citizens to turn to more left-leaning parties, rather than the PQ, compared to older citizens.

The Charter of Quebec Values was a project proposed by the Parti Québécois. This policy proposal was made public a few months before the onset of the 2014 election campaign and aimed at reinforcing the secular nature of Quebec society by (among other things) imposing a ban on public employees wearing ostentatious religious symbols at work. This Bill was presented by the PQ as a way to continue the project of secularism of Quebec society, which started with the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s. However, opponents presented this project as an anti-immigration bill, which favoured the Catholic heritage of Quebec and discriminated against newcomers and especially Muslim immigrants. In this sense, the Charter presents a continuity in the discussion of the issue of diversity in the past decade. In 2006 and 2007, this discussion on diversity had revolved around the debate on reasonable accommodations. As the younger generations are more ethnically diverse and have grown up in a more diverse and globalized world, we expect that they will be more open to diversity and immigration (Mendelsohn, et al. 2007), and thus less supportive of the Charter. Alternatively, for the Baby-boomers who experienced the transition to a secular society during the period of the Quiet Revolution and who were socialized in a less ethnically diverse environment, support for the Charter should be higher.

As it is hypothesized that the youngest generation gives less importance to the national question, other issues -such as discussions about diversity- should have more impact on their electoral behaviour. Hence, Generation Y's attitudes on the national question and diversity should make them more likely to support other parties rather than the PQ, while the Baby-boomers' position on diversity and the importance of the national question would lead them to be more likely to vote for the PQ. In sum, the generational hypothesis is that the factors of the vote for the PQ will vary across generations, most notably between Generation Y and the Baby-boomers.

Data and Methods

To examine these questions, we make use of individual-level data from an online opinion survey conducted during the week that followed the most recent Quebec provincial election of 7 April 2014. The survey was designed by political scientists Éric Bélanger (McGill University) and Richard Nadeau (Université de Montréal) and was administered to 1,517 adult Quebecers by Léger Marketing through Web-based interviews between 9 April 2014 and 16 April 2014, thus immediately after the election. The survey respondents were recruited from Léger Marketing's LégerWeb online panel of Canadian households. Throughout the paper, weighting procedures are used so as to make the sample more representative of the Quebec population. The weight variable used is based on official data from the 2011 Statistics Canada census about gender, age, region of residence, and language.

Our key independent variable of interest in this paper is the generation to which these survey respondents belong. For our analyses, we distinguish between three age groups: individuals born before 1960 (who were 55 years old or more at the time of the 2014 election), those born between 1960 and 1979 inclusively (who were between 35 and 54 years old), and those born in 1980 or later (who were between 18 and 34 years old).¹ Although this division is necessarily arbitrary, we believe that these age cohorts correspond closely to the three distinct groups of Quebec voters that we introduced earlier: the "Baby-boomers" who were politically socialized during the Quiet Revolution and who saw the emergence of the modern sovereignty movement under René Lévesque's leadership; the members of the "Generation X" who were aware of at least one of the two referendums held on Quebec sovereignty and who witnessed the politically turbulent years surrounding the failure in 1990 of the Meech Lake constitutional agreement; and the members of the "Generation Y" who began to enter the electorate a few years after the 1995 referendum on sovereignty which is the most recent one to have been held on this issue. These three age groups make up 37 percent, 36 percent, and 27 percent of our survey sample, respectively.²

In addition to the nature of the political times during which they became socialized, these three age cohorts differ on another key aspect: their ethnic background. Whereas 88 percent of the Baby-boomer generation self-declare a Québécois or Canadian ethnic origin, the other two generations present a more diversified ethnic profile with close to a quarter of each group self-declaring an ethnic origin other than Québécois or Canadian (24 percent for Generation X and 25 percent for Generation Y). That said, the three age groups do not significantly differ from one another in terms of their language (Francophone, Anglophone, Allophone) or their place of birth (in Quebec or outside). These findings mirror the greater ethnic diversity found in Quebec following the rise in immigration that occurred over the past few decades: younger individuals may be born in Quebec and may speak French, but they do not descend from French-Canadian ancestry as much as individuals belonging to the Baby-boomer generation.

The next section will now closely examine the differences that may be observed between these three generations in their political outlooks and behaviour at the time of the 2014 provincial election in Quebec. We will first analyse in a descriptive and bivariate manner the

¹ We use the same years as Guay (1997) as our cut-off points for Generation X (1960-1979). Guay's study of generational differences in Quebec's political culture could not look at Generation Y since these individuals were not yet of voting age at that time. In this study, we therefore use the same Baby-boomer (Tables 3b and 5.045) and Generation Y (Tables 3c and 5.046) cut-off years; first by subtracting three years to our original cut-off points (1956 or before, 1957-1976, 1977 or later) and then by adding three years to them (1962 or before, 1963-1982, 1983 or later). These robustness checks indicate that our main findings are not sensitive to the exact years selected for dividing our sample into three generations (results available upon request).

differences among generations in terms of their various political attitudes. This overview will be followed by a multivariate analysis of these age groups' voting behaviour in the 2014 election.

Analysis

The Attitudinal Profile of Three Generations in Quebec

Table 1 presents a summary of the distribution of Quebecers' attitudes on a host of political variables, broken down by our three age groups. We may first look at general attitudes towards politics. The findings are entirely consistent with what we know of youth's views about politics: they are less interested in politics in general, they tend to identify less with a political party, and they are more cynical vis-à-vis the political system as a whole than older voters. In short, young Quebecers do not diverge much from the typical observations having been made about youth's attitudes towards politics in general.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The table also offers a breakdown of the generations' respective ideological positionings and opinions about contemporary policy issues.³ On the traditional left-right socioeconomic dimension, Generation Y in Quebec appears as the most left-leaning of the three age groups (lower values indicate a left-leaning self-placement on the ideology scale whereas higher values indicate a more right-leaning orientation). They are also the most morally liberal individuals, at least when looking at their opinions about same-sex marriage and the death penalty – although we can note that on the latter issue, the proportion of individuals against death penalty is the same for Generation Y as it is for Baby-boomers (52 percent). Again, these findings tend to go in the direction usually expected regarding intergenerational differences in ideological positionings.

With regards to the issue of immigration, we can look at two different indicators. The first one taps into a general view about immigrant integration and is measured in the survey using the following question: "There are different views about those who come from outside Quebec, often bringing their own customs, religion and traditions with them. Do you think it is best if such newcomers try to adapt and blend into the local culture? Or is it best if they stay different and add to the variety of customs and traditions in the locality?" Although the majority opinion is in favour of the cultural adaptation and blending of immigrants, we can clearly see in Table 1 that individuals belonging to Generation Y are the most open to the cultural difference that newcomers bring to Quebec. The second indicator assesses Quebecers' opinion about the Parti Québécois government's proposal to adopt a Charter of Quebec Values. On this specific issue, we see disagreement among generations. While a majority of Baby-boomers and Generation X are in favour of the Charter, a majority of Generation Y are against this proposal. Taken together, these two indicators clearly show that the youngest generation in Quebec seems to be the most "multiculturalist" one in its views about immigrant integration.

What about feelings of national identity and attachment? Given that the three generations examined here have been socialized during very different political times as it pertains to the national question, we would expect to see notable generational differences in terms of their

³ Our discussion implicitly breaks down these political attitudes into three groups: 1) socioeconomic policy orientations; 2) feelings of national attachment; and 3) constitutional preferences. A factor analysis actually suggests that these three groups of attitudinal variables correspond quite closely to three separate factors (Eigenvalue of 2.56 for constitutional preferences, 0.27 for socioeconomic policy orientations, and 0.15 for feelings of national attachment).

nationalist feelings. That said, the past literature has tended to show that Quebec youth are generally the most nationalist in their sentiments, no matter the historical period (Pinard, et al. 1997, Mendelsohn 2002, Bélanger and Perrella 2008). The results in Table 1 provide a nuanced view on this question. On the one hand, we see that members of Generation Y are as likely as Baby-boomers to identify themselves either as a Quebecer only or as Quebecer first, Canadian second. Generation Y is also the age group that displays the lowest level of attachment to Canada. On the other hand, the table reveals that the youth are those that feel the less attached to Quebec in 2014, and by a good margin: while 70 percent of Baby-boomers feel very attached to Quebec, only 44 percent feel so among the 18-34 age group. Members of Generation X stand somewhere in between, but lean a bit closer to Generation Y than to Baby-boomers on this variable. The low level of attachment to Quebec among the younger generation constitutes one of the most surprising finding from these survey data; they go contrary to usual expectations about Quebec youth's nationalist sentiments and they offer one clear piece of evidence that Generation Y in Quebec may feel disconnected vis-à-vis the perennial national debate in their province.

Results from survey items tapping support for Quebec independence offer the same kind of nuanced conclusions. As Table 1 shows, the level of support for independence as a constitutional option in a hypothetical referendum stands at 30 percent among Generation Y, which is slightly higher than among Generation X (26 percent) but remains lower than among Baby-boomers (35 percent). While support for independence is not entirely collapsing among Quebec youth, the 18-34 age group is nonetheless the one that considers this issue as the least important to them (only 21 percent say that it is very important to them personally, compared to 30 percent among Baby-boomers). In addition, Generation Y is the age group that is the least supportive of having more powers from Ottawa (that is, more autonomy) for Quebec's National Assembly, which is a constitutional position that has deep historical roots in the province and that is currently being defended by the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ).

When asked which issue was, for them personally, the most important in the 2014 provincial election, respondents ranked the issue of Quebec sovereignty as fifth among the list of ten issues offered to them. As Table 2 indicates, there was not much variation between the three generations with regards to the salience of the sovereignty issue. Baby-boomers and members of Generation X ranked it as fifth, whereas members of Generation Y ranked it as sixth (8 percent of them mentioned sovereignty as the most important issue to them personally in that election, a proportion that is only slightly lower than for the other two age groups). Remarkably, the three generations mentioned the same two top issues, the economy and health care. Where they markedly differed in their issue priorities was with the importance given to education (third most mentioned issue for Generation Y, eighth and ninth for the other two groups), the environment (eighth for the youth, tenth for the others), and the Charter of Quebec Values (seventh for Generation Y, but mentioned more frequently among the other two age groups).

[Insert Table 2 about here]

To sum up, the three generational groups display some similarities in their attitudinal profiles. But the differences between the younger generation (18-34 years old) and older Quebecers are worth keeping in mind as we move forward in our analysis. Members of Generation Y are more disengaged from politics, as one would expect.⁴ They locate on the left of

⁴ They are also less likely to identify with a party in general, and with the PQ in particular. For instance, 78% of PQ voters from Gen Y report a party identification, as opposed to 86% of PQ voters from Gen X and 92% of Baby-boomers having voted for the PQ in 2014.

the ideological spectrum in greater proportion than older Quebecers, which is not surprising either. They are clearly more open to a multicultural approach to immigrant integration than are Baby-boomers and, to a lesser degree, members of Generation X. They are also more likely to consider issues like education and the environment to be important in an election (at least in the 2014 one). Quebec independence is less of a priority for them, and they do not seem as convinced by the idea of giving Quebec more powers within the Canadian federation. Even more surprising is the fact that they are less attached to Quebec, although they are not necessarily more attached to Canada in return.

Generations and the Vote in the 2014 Election

We will now examine the differences among generations in their voting behaviour, as well as the extent to which some of the political attitudes having just been examined have had more or less weight in determining this behaviour in the 2014 provincial election. We can first note that members of Generation Y were those that turned out the less in this election. According to answers given to the survey's self-reported electoral participation question, individuals aged between 18 and 34 years old were twice as likely to abstain than those belonging to Generation X, and were three times as likely to abstain than Baby-boomers. (Self-reported abstention is 19 percent, 10 percent, and 6 percent, respectively; note that these figures are lower than the election's actual abstention rate of 28.6 percent because of opinion surveys' well-known tendency to overestimate turnout.) This result is not unexpected given the high degree of cynicism and disinterest in politics we previously noted among the youngest generation of Quebecers in 2014.

Table 3 presents the distribution of voting preferences among those individuals who reported having cast a ballot in the election. Looking first at support for the Parti Québécois, we can see that Generation Y is the age group that voted the less for that party: 23 percent of members from that generation voted for the PQ, as compared to 28 percent among Generation X and 37 percent among Baby-boomers. Second, we can also note that Québec Solidaire received most of its support among the youngest generation (16 percent of Generation Y voted for QS, as opposed to 7 percent of Generation X and 4 percent of Baby-boomers). Small parties like the Green Party and Option Nationale also fared the best among voters of Generation Y. One final observation worth making is that the PQ was the first choice of only one generation, namely the Baby-boomers. The party came in second place among members of generations X, and in third place among Generation Y (behind the PLQ and the CAQ). Based on all the figures reported in Table 3, it is thus clear that in the 2014 election the PQ was less and less popular from one generation to the next.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Does the conclusion that Generation Y was the least supportive of the PQ in 2014 survive to multivariate analysis? The answer, reported in Table 4, is yes. The table presents results from a binomial logit regression analysis of support for the PQ. The vote model includes as predictors many of the attitudinal variables examined in the previous section, together with some usual socio-demographic and socioeconomic control variables (gender, education, income, and language). We include two dummy variables, one for Generation Y and another for Generation X, leaving out Baby-boomers as the reference age group to which the voting behaviour of other two is compared.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Looking only at the statistically significant variables, the model indicates that the PQ found its support in 2014 among those individuals scoring low on cynicism and high on moral liberalism (the latter variable is an index combining views about same-sex marriage and the death penalty), those feeling attached to Quebec and not attached to Canada, those supportive of the PQ's proposed Charter of Quebec Values, and those in favour of making Quebec an independent country. None of the other independent variables' impact on the PQ vote is significantly different from zero – except for the relationship between voting for the PQ and belonging to Generation Y. According to this result, members of Generation Y were 7 percentage points less likely to vote for the PQ than members of the Baby-boomer generation (the reference group), everything else being equal. Since the coefficient associated with the dummy variable for Generation X is not statistically significant, this indicates that the 35-54 year old and the Baby-boomer age groups did not significantly differ in their level of support for the PQ, everything else being equal. But Generation Y did significantly differ from the other two generational groups, on top of all the attitudinal differences already uncovered in the previous section and which are de facto captured in this multivariate model.⁵

Table 5 presents one last series of regression analyses. In this table we simply take the PQ vote model from Table 4 and re-estimate it separately for each of the three age groups, in order to more directly assess the extent to which the generations differ in the determinants of their voting decision. A number of interesting conclusions can be drawn from this table. First, the model performs less well in explaining the vote of Generation Y, as compared to the other two age groups. Indeed the proportion of explained variation in PQ vote choice is lower for the first model (0.37) than for the other two (above 0.50 each). This indicates that the independent variables included in our vote model do not holistically account for the vote decision of the youth as well as is the case for older Quebec voters in the 2014 election. Second, the independence issue itself operates in similar ways across the three generational groups. The salience of the issue as well as the variable capturing support for more power devolution have no significant

⁵ If members of Generation Y supported the PQ in lower numbers than other generations, then which party were they more likely to support? Table 3 indicated that they preferred the Parti Libéral and the CAQ to the PQ. But what about the voting decision to be made between a pair of parties that includes the PQ? Table A1 in the Appendix presents findings from a multinomial logit regression that allows to answer this question. When faced with a choice between supporting the PQ and another party, it appears that young Quebecers from Generation Y were more likely to choose Québec Solidaire over the PQ. The QS-PQ pair of parties is the only one for which we obtain a statistically significant coefficient associated with the two age group dummy variables; and it is significant only for the Generation Y dummy (so indicating that the latter group significantly differed in their behaviour from Baby-boomers). The regression coefficient is positive and large, indicating a clear preference for QS over the PQ. The choice between these two political parties is also influenced by attitudinal variables for which we previously observed a gap between the three generations: voters ideologically locating themselves on the left, not supporting the Charter of Values, not attached to Quebec, not supportive of independence, and not finding the independence issue to be of importance to them personally were all more likely to vote QS than PQ. This attitudinal profile corresponds closely to the one observed among members of Generation Y. In addition, the youth were also significantly more likely to vote QS over PQ despite these political attitudes being controlled for in the multinomial regression model. We can finally note in Table A1 that the choice between the PLQ and the PQ is almost entirely determined by attitudes about the national question, which was not as much a priority for the 18-34 age group than for others as seen in the previous section. The attraction of Quebec's younger generation towards Québec Solidaire is also observable when we examine the flow of the vote within Generation Y between the elections of 2012 and 2014 (using reported 2012 vote choice). We can note that the PQ's retention rate has been the lowest among Generation Y: only 53 percent of 2012 PQ voters within this generation stayed with the party in 2014 (the comparative figure for Generation X is 60 percent and it is 71 percent for Baby-boomers). Inversely, the retention rate of QS is the highest among the 18-34 age group, with 77 percent of 2012 QS voters having stayed with this party in 2014 (the comparative figures are 54 percent for Generation X and 47 percent for Baby-boomers).

influence on the vote decision for any of the three groups, and the variable measuring support for making Quebec an independent country systematically impacts vote choice in all three groups in a roughly similar way (the change in the probabilities of voting for the PQ associated with this variable is equal to 0.17 for Generation Y, 0.11 for Generation X, and 0.19 for Baby-boomers).

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Where we do find striking differences in the vote determinants across these models is with feelings of attachment and support for the Charter of Quebec Values. In the former case, we clearly see that attachment to Quebec has no significant impact on the vote decision of members of Generation Y, contrary to members of the other two generational groups for whom it increases the probability of supporting the PQ by 21 and 29 points, respectively. Combined with the fact that Generation Y is the least attached to Quebec, this result provides additional insight into the decline of the PQ in the 2014 provincial election. In the case of support for the Charter, we see that this variable had much less of an influence on the youth's decision to vote for the PQ than for the other two age groups. While being statistically significant, this variable only increases the probability of voting for the PQ by 14 points for Generation Y, compared to 28 and 33 points for Generation X and Baby-boomers, respectively. Again, viewed in tandem with the earlier finding about the youth being the least supportive of the Charter project, this provides further explanation for the lower level of PQ support observed among the youngest generation of voters in 2014.

Another result from Table 5 that is worth highlighting concerns the influence of left-right ideological self-placement on support for the PQ. This variable may be revealing a rather deep (and surprising) generational gap in the PQ's 2014 support base. According to our estimates, voters positioning themselves on the right-leaning end of the scale saw their probability of voting for the PQ decrease by 24 points among Baby-boomers, but increase by 19 points among the youth. While the result for the Baby-boomer generation is not surprising, since it fits well with that party's social democratic roots, the finding for Generation Y is further evidence of the more progressively-oriented youth being more attracted to a party like Québec Solidaire than to the PQ, leaving only right-leaning young voters cohabiting with older left-leaners among the pool of PQ supporters. At the very least, it suggests that in the eyes of 18-34 year old Quebecers, the PQ of 2014 was not considered as a progressive party alternative.

Note finally that we find no evidence of a linear effect of age on PQ support. Indeed, an individual's age⁶ does not contribute significantly to the likelihood of voting for the PQ in any of the three generational groups. In other words, membership in a generational group appears to be a better predictor of PQ support than age itself. This suggests that what we are observing in these Quebec opinion data is a genuine generational phenomenon as opposed to a mere life-cycle effect.

Conclusion

The PQ has been one of the two dominant parties in Quebec since the 1970s. However, its progressive decline as well as the rise of other parties (notably the Coalition Avenir Québec and Québec Solidaire), have raised questions about its current and future centrality in Quebec's party

⁶ An independent variable for age was introduced into the models tested in Table 5.

system. This study examined whether the decline of its founding generation, the Baby-boomers, and the rise of new generations could explain the party's declining electoral force. To do so, we looked into generational differences in the factors explaining vote choice in the 2014 election. Our argument of intergenerational change posits that generations X and Y who were socialized in a different socio-political context have developed different sets of political orientations than the Baby-boomers, which leads them to be less supportive of the Parti Québécois.

This study provided evidence of clear generational differences in Quebecers' political attitudes. In fact, Generation Y appeared to be more left-leaning, more morally liberal, more open to cultural differences, more opposed to the Charter of Quebec Values, much less attached to Quebec, and less engaged with the issue of sovereignty, compared to the Baby-boomers. While Generation Y's position on the left-right axis may be due to a life-cycle effect, as young people are usually more left-leaning than older citizens, this generation's position on the issue of diversity and the national question may be reflecting more permanent societal changes. One important finding is that there are large and significant attitudinal differences between Generation Y and the Baby-boomers, whereas Generation X seems to fall somewhat in-between these two generations. These conclusions extend those of Guay (1997) presented some two decades ago. In his study of generational differences in political values and attitudes in Quebec, he showed that the greatest gap observed was between the Baby-boomers and the generation that directly preceded it. By way of contrast, on most of the opinion items that he examined, the Baby-boomers and the members of Generation X proved to be much closer in their views, although the former were clearly the most nationalists in their attitudes and preferences.

When examining the electoral behaviour of these three generations, again the contrast was most pronounced between Generation Y and the Baby-boomers. The Parti Québécois proved to be the most popular party among the Baby-boomers, while it occupied the second rank in vote choice for Generation X, and the third rank for Generation Y. Additionally, the PQ's rate of retention of voters between the elections of 2012 and 2014 was much lower among Generation Y, and somewhat lower among Generation X, compared to the Baby-boomers. This provides evidence of the inability of the PQ to gain support and develop loyalty among the younger generations, and most notably Generation Y. This tends to confirm the argument of Lemieux (2011) that the PQ is the party of the Baby-boomers' generation. The slower and more progressive than expected decline of this party's vote shares may be explained by two factors. First, the Baby-boomers' generation was one of the largest birth cohorts in recent times and it was able to maintain its weight in the electorate due to gains in life expectancy (following technological improvements in, and greater coverage of, health care among other things). Secondly, the generation that followed, Generation X, proved to be rather similar to the Baby-boomers in some significant respects. It seems that the political context of the 1980s and 1990s has allowed the PQ to mobilize Generation X and keep its place (and relevance) in the party system despite the beginning of the decline of the Baby-boomer generation⁷.

But as Generation Y occupies a larger place in the electorate, and as the weight of the Boomers continues to decline, we should see further decline in the PQ. When we look at the reasons behind the vote for the PQ we see a clear divide between Generation Y and the others, a divide that limits the possibilities for the PQ to durably maintain itself in the electorate. First, while those who support the project of Quebec's sovereignty are still more likely to vote for the PQ, regardless of the generation they are part of, members of Generation Y are much less likely to see Quebec's independence as a priority. Given that the first objective in the PQ's program is to

⁷ As Guay (1997, 87) noted, Jacques Parizeau considered that providing the PQ and its constitutional option with a new youth ("*une nouvelle jeunesse*") was the greatest accomplishment of his tenure as PQ leader (1988-1995).

achieve Quebec's sovereignty, it thus seems unlikely that the PQ could recruit a high number of supporters among Generation Y, or high enough to compensate for the ongoing decline of the Baby-boomers' generation. Second, the issue of diversity played a significant but different role in the electoral behaviour of the three generations. While support for the Charter of Quebec Values had a significant and positive impact on individuals' likelihood of voting for the PQ among all generations, it was a less important factor for Generation Y, compared to the two other generations. Also, Generation Y was more likely to oppose the project of the Charter than Generation X and the Baby-boomers. So the core policy of the PQ in the 2014 election tended to push away the younger generation. In a context of increasing rates of immigration, the issue of diversity will likely remain a central issue in Quebec politics in the years to come. The Charter was a strong signal about the turn of the PQ towards an 'identity-centred nationalism', and this project led to heated debates within Quebec society. The question is now whether the PQ has permanently alienated the youth, or if it can convincingly change its stand on diversity in order to build support among the younger generation?

In this study, we have provided evidence of generational differences in positions on a variety of issues and in the factors explaining electoral behaviour in contemporary Quebec. As the younger generations who have different political positions and preferences come to replace older generations, we should observe a change in Quebec politics. The evidence showed that the PQ was the party of the Baby-boomers, and to a certain extent of Generation X, but it is less likely to gain support among Generation Y. The long-term reasons behind the shift in electoral behaviour announce a realignment in Quebec's party system; the question is now *when* the realignment election could occur.

Political predictions are always a risky business. However, the present analysis of the generational dynamics of electoral behaviour, coupled with information on Quebec's demography (Gélineau 2015), can help us assess a range of possible outcomes for the Parti Québécois. On one hand, if Generation X continues to side with the Boomers and to offer some support to the PQ, the combined demographic weight of these two generations could help the PQ to maintain itself in the electorate until the election of 2034 - the election year when Generation Y will make up the majority of Quebec's electorate. On the other hand, if Generation X distances itself from the Boomers' preferred policies and the PQ loses some of their support, the PQ could fall even more rapidly in third or fourth rank in election results, and as soon as 2018 - when Generation X and Generation Y will make up 66% of Quebec's electorate (Gélineau 2015). That being said, several factors may condition these possible outcomes (i.e. the lower rates of electoral participation among Generations X and Y, and the ability of the PQ to renew its political project). In addition, we have witnessed in the past, moments when conflictual relationships with Ottawa and constitutional disputes revived the sovereigntist aspirations among Quebec's citizens (Yale and Durand 2011). Such moments have helped mobilize part of Generation X in favour of the PQ and its constitutional option, which explains why the PQ remains a relevant actor of the party system at the moment; and similar events in the future could help the PQ -or another actor of the sovereigntist movement- mobilize Generation Y for the first time.

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Figure 1. Vote Shares Received by the PQ between 1970 and 2014

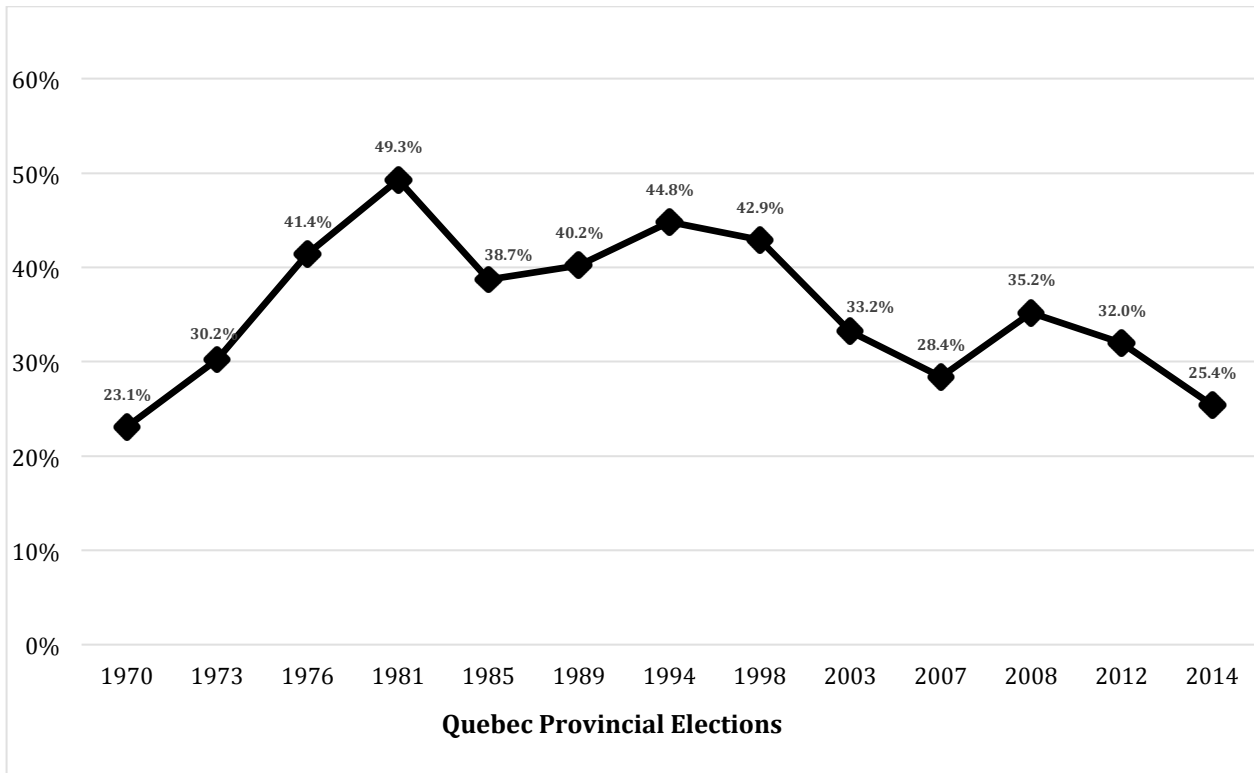


Table 1. Political Attitudes by Generations (2014)

	Gen Y	Gen X	Boomers
Interested in politics (% very or somewhat)	62.9	65.2	79.9
Party identification (% with none)	27.8	20.6	12.9
Cynicism (average score on 0-1 index)	0.52	0.51	0.50
Left-right self-placement (average score on 0-1 index)	0.49	0.54	0.55
Same-sex marriage (% in favour)	88.6	77.9	76.2
Death penalty (% against)	52.1	44.5	52.1
Immigrants (% thinking they should stay different)	20.2	17.8	6.9
Charter of Quebec Values (% in favour)	46.4	54.1	64.7
Identity (% identifying as Quebecer only or Quebecer first)	56.0	52.1	56.2
Attachment to Quebec (% very attached)	44.4	53.8	70.3
Attachment to Canada (% very attached)	31.3	34.9	38.2
Quebec independence (% in favour)	30.4	26.4	35.1
Giving Quebec more powers (% in favour)	44.5	49.1	60.1
Independence issue (% saying it is very important to them)	21.3	23.8	29.9

Table 2. Salience of Issues in the 2014 Election by Generations (in percent)

	Gen Y	Gen X	Boomers
Economy	27.3 (1)	27.5 (1)	23.1 (1)
Health care	13.8 (2)	18.9 (2)	21.6 (2)
Education	10.9 (3)	4.3 (8)	1.3 (9)
Integrity	10.1 (4)	7.4 (6)	17.3 (3)
Taxes and public finances	9.3 (5)	12.0 (3)	15.2 (4)
Quebec sovereignty	8.0 (6)	8.6 (5)	10.0 (5)
Charter of Quebec Values	7.4 (7)	11.5 (4)	7.5 (6)
Environment	5.9 (8)	2.3 (10)	0.5 (10)
Family aid	4.2 (9)	4.6 (7)	1.7 (8)
Poverty	3.1 (10)	3.0 (9)	1.8 (7)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the issue's rank within the column (generation).

Table 3. Vote Choice in the 2014 Election by Generations (in percent)

	Gen Y	Gen X	Boomers
Parti Québécois	22.6	27.6	36.5
Parti Libéral du Québec	30.5	40.0	35.5
Coalition Avenir Québec	25.4	22.6	22.2
Québec Solidaire	16.2	7.2	4.1
Other party	5.3	2.6	1.7

Note: Columns each add up to 100 percent. Total number of observations is 1,283.

Table 4. Determinants of Voting for the Parti Québécois in the 2014 Election

	Voting PQ
Generation Y	-0.67 ** (0.33)
Generation X	-0.05 (0.27)
Female	0.14 (0.24)
Education	-0.58 (0.51)
Income	-0.69 (0.49)
Francophone	0.41 (0.66)
Left-right self-placement	0.01 (0.60)
Moral liberalism	0.77 * (0.42)
Cynicism	-0.87 ** (0.40)
Support for the Charter of Values	2.42 *** (0.31)
Attachment to Quebec	2.10 *** (0.70)
Attachment to Canada	-1.25 *** (0.48)
Support for giving Quebec more powers	0.41 (0.27)
Support for Quebec independence	1.31 *** (0.29)
Importance of independence issue	0.66 (0.44)
Constant	-4.62 *** (1.13)
Pseudo-R ²	0.47
N	1,020

Note: Entries are unstandardized logit regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.
*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$ (two-tailed test)

Table 5. Determinants of PQ Vote by Generations

	Gen Y	Gen X	Boomers
Age	-0.03 (0.05)	0.05 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)
Female	-0.11 (0.55)	0.18 (0.41)	0.31 (0.43)
Education	0.62 (0.96)	-0.39 (0.93)	-0.74 (0.92)
Income	-1.48 * (0.78)	-0.69 (0.87)	-0.50 (0.89)
Francophone	0.62 (0.62)	-0.08 (1.08)	1.00 (0.67)
Left-right self-placement	2.16 * (1.11)	1.51 (1.11)	-1.92 ** (0.89)
Moral liberalism	-0.59 (0.97)	1.15 * (0.66)	1.11 * (0.64)
Cynicism	-1.07 (0.86)	-0.53 (0.69)	-1.20 * (0.67)
Support for the Charter of Values	1.51 *** (0.51)	3.20 *** (0.53)	2.70 *** (0.63)
Attachment to Quebec	0.74 (1.45)	2.46 * (1.39)	2.41 ** (1.21)
Attachment to Canada	-1.20 (0.83)	-1.66 ** (0.84)	-1.19 (0.79)
Support for giving Quebec more powers	0.67 (0.56)	0.44 (0.47)	0.27 (0.44)
Support for Quebec independence	1.90 ** (0.74)	1.21 ** (0.56)	1.54 *** (0.46)
Importance of independence issue	0.15 (0.94)	1.17 (0.84)	0.47 (0.64)
Constant	-3.20 (2.20)	-8.93 *** (2.37)	-5.88 ** (2.74)
Pseudo-R ²	0.37	0.54	0.51
N	230	411	379

Note: Entries are unstandardized logit regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$ (two-tailed test)

Table A1. Multinomial Logit Estimates of Vote Choice in the 2014 Election

	QS over PQ	CAQ over PQ	PLQ over PQ
Generation Y	1.20 *** (0.42)	0.51 (0.37)	-0.11 (0.42)
Generation X	0.32 (0.39)	0.07 (0.31)	-0.07 (0.37)
Female	-0.08 (0.32)	-0.37 (0.27)	0.25 (0.31)
Education	1.26 * (0.68)	-0.04 (0.58)	0.89 (0.68)
Income	0.69 (0.63)	0.94 * (0.56)	0.34 (0.66)
Francophone	0.27 (0.94)	1.40 (0.92)	-0.98 (0.87)
Left-right self-placement	-2.70 ** (1.18)	0.65 (0.69)	1.22 (0.91)
Moral liberalism	0.91 (0.84)	-1.25 *** (0.45)	-1.08 ** (0.54)
Cynicism	0.78 (0.64)	1.10 ** (0.43)	0.27 (0.48)
Support for the Charter of Values	-2.53 *** (0.36)	-1.77 *** (0.33)	-2.82 *** (0.36)
Attachment to Quebec	-2.49 ** (1.00)	-2.50 *** (0.79)	-2.67 *** (0.89)
Attachment to Canada	-1.10 (0.68)	1.32 ** (0.53)	3.99 *** (0.65)
Support for giving Quebec more powers	0.29 (0.39)	-0.22 (0.30)	-0.81 ** (0.34)
Support for Quebec independence	-0.84 * (0.43)	-1.30 *** (0.34)	-1.74 *** (0.45)
Importance of independence issue	-1.10 * (0.60)	-0.54 (0.49)	-0.62 (0.54)
Constant	2.30 (1.51)	1.97 (1.22)	2.79 ** (1.38)
Pseudo-R ²	0.43		
N	1,020		

Note: Entries are unstandardized multinomial logit regression coefficients obtained with PQ set as the reference outcome category; standard errors in parentheses.
 *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$ (two-tailed test)