

A Threat to the Nation?
Ideational Policy Stabilization and Quebec's Approach to Immigration

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to investigate how immigration discourse and policy has been contested by elites in the minority-majority region of Quebec since 1991. As a result of failures by the Canadian government to enact constitutional reform in the 1990s, Quebec was allotted significant power to decide who can immigrate into the region through the Quebec-Canada Accord. This thesis explores elites' ideational conceptualizations of immigration in the wake of this agreement through a longitudinal content analysis of the discourse and policy from committee meetings in the Quebec legislature. The analysis of this data reveals that elites' have a stable cross-party ideational disposition to frame immigration as a positive benefit to Quebec society except for facets of immigration which fall under federal jurisdiction. Consequently, these results contend that, even though there may be a stabilization of ideational conceptions of immigration broadly in Quebec, this ideational conceptualization may have its limits.

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Putting words to paper is a complicated thing. At times, they flow onto the sheet in a seemingly endless stream. At other moments, an author can stare at a blank word document and feel like they are trapped in a desert without any hope for reprieve.

At some points writing this thesis, I thought that desert would break me. But it did not—and I truly believe that I have the people around me to thank for it.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2018 election of Francois Legault's political party, the Future Quebec Coalition (CAQ), marked a monumental shift in Quebec politics. For the first time since 1970, a party other than the separatist Quebecois Party (PQ) or the federalist Quebec Liberal Party (QLP) formed government in the provincial legislature (Bélanger & Chassé, 2021). This relatively new centre-right political party defined itself as an advocate for autonomy—rather than either of the classic stances on Quebec separatism. However, during the campaign for this election, the incumbent Liberal premier identified migration strategies as being the defining ballot-box issue and much of the debate turned to focus on different approaches to the policy area (Xhardez & Paquet, 2021, p. 674). For the victorious CAQ, this meant an election campaign featuring numerous restrictive policy proposals concerning immigration into the sub-state entity. Many major news outlets at the time focused on the political controversy created by the party's calls to implement a cap on immigration and to instate both French tests and a cultural values test (Connolly, 2018; Patriquin, 2018). However, the academic literature has yet to establish whether the election of the CAQ government actually marks a departure from the historical norms in discourse and policy towards migration in the sub-state entity.

Instead, much of the research has focused on the unique relationship that the Quebec government has had with immigration since the inception of the nationalist movement. As the only majority francophone province, and the only recognized sub-state entity in Canada that has had referendums on separating from the federation, there is a well-established desire to protect the polity's distinct character that is especially elevated among French-speakers (Turgeon & Bilodeau, 2014, p. 332). Indeed, due to the historical legacy of separatism, the provincial government has gained some powers that allows it to do just that. After the failure to secure

constitutional amendments, in 1991, the federal and provincial government successfully negotiated the Quebec-Canada Accord—which allows the province to decide the requirements for all arriving economic migrants in Quebec and affirms that the *number* of immigrants that are annually accepted in Quebec is a shared responsibility between the two levels of government (Kostov, 2008). As a minority-majority region, this has given the provincial government several tools to shape the demography of Quebec in whatever means it sees fit.

So, given the unique position that Quebec occupies as a minority-majority region and the shifting focus to migration in Quebec politics, the following questions arise: **how have migration policies and discourse shifted since 1991 and what might have led to these changes, or lack thereof?** To pursue this study, I will be examining the cross-party discussions and policies attempts in Quebec’s legislative committees in order to evaluate how they have changed over time. Since political discourse over legislation can be a contested subject in the democratic marketplace (Zuber, 2022, p. 17), elite actors must make decisions based on a wide-range of factors about *why* they take the political positions that they do. While similar research has examined political party platforms in Quebec over similar timeframes leading up to the 2018 election (Xhardez & Paquet, 2021), this study will expand the timeframe to include the new CAQ government and also incorporate both an analysis of the discursive conversations concerning migration to Quebec—and the actual legislation that has been passed by the provincial legislature. By doing so, this research will further explore the role that ideational policy legacies play in minority-majority regions as elite actors approach the topic of migration.

A historical account of Quebec's recent approach to migration policy

Before providing a theoretical framework for this research, I think it is important to briefly explain how the Quebec immigration system works—and how it has developed over time. So, in this chapter, I will begin by detailing how immigration powers are divided between political elites in Quebec and Canada, before delving into how immigration selection criteria works, and the types of policies that have passed through the Quebec legislature over the last 50 years.

While the 1867 *British North America Act* established immigration as a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments of Canada, the Quebec government has avoided legislating on it for most of the federation's history. It was not until the period of radical social change in the 1960s that the province established its Ministry of Immigration and began to craft migration policies that looked to balance minority-majority identity with a more open approach to immigration (Barker, 2010, p. 19). Since then, four bilateral agreements have been negotiated between the federal and Quebec government that have increasingly given the sub-state entity more authority in this domain (Kostov, 2008, p. 91). The Quebec-Canada Accord is the most recent iteration of these agreements, giving Quebec more power than any other province in Canada to decide who gets to come and stay in its territory. As mentioned earlier, this agreement gives the Quebec government the ability to decide the admission and selection criteria for all economic migrants and gives the provincial government a say on overall immigration numbers (IRCC, 1991). However, it does not give the Quebec government power over asylum claims or family reunification initiatives. Likewise, it should be noted that the levels of immigration that Quebec recommends to the federal government are technically non-binding—which has led to calls for a renegotiation to this agreement by the current CAQ government as recently as March 2024 (Lapierre, 2024).

Nevertheless, since 2018, the Quebec government has published an annual immigration plan that shows the general number of immigrants that the province hopes to admit. As of 2024, Quebec's current selection system allocates points to potential applicants based on their skills and potential contributions to the province's labour force. From there, the top applicants are admitted, once the number of overall migrants has been decided in consultation between the two levels of government. This approach is similar to the method used by Canada to select immigrants for permanent residency; however, the weighting for their selection criteria is different—with Quebec allocating more points to its French-language requirements than the federal government (Government of Quebec, 2024b). For all economic migrants arriving into Canada through Quebec, they must first pass Quebec's immigration system before they can move on to Canada's permanent residency programs. Consequently, over the last 50 years, legislation regarding the selection process for these economic programs in Quebec has sought to balance the national vision of Quebec by the government of the day (Barker, 2010, p. 18) with cross-party fears of losing political weight as an official linguistic minority in Canada (Caldwell & Fournier, 1987, p. 34).

Similarly, legislation regarding integration requirements has tended to highlight political parties' visions for the province and have ranged from educational policies that promote the French language (Barker, 2010, p. 15) to immigration tests that prioritize specific values, like secularity and adherence to gender equality (Laxer, 2020). A table of electoral results and political party representation has been included in Appendix A and shows the composition of the legislature from 1966 to the most recent 2022 election. The two most successful political parties during this timeframe are the federalist Quebec Liberal party (PLQ) and separatist Quebecois Party (PQ)—however, there has also been a constellation of minor political parties that have

gained seats throughout this time period. During the period of time that will be analyzed for this thesis—from 1993 to 2019—there are a number of other minor political parties that have seats in the provincial legislature including the right-wing autonomist Democratic Action party (ADQ), the left-wing sovereigntist Quebec United (QS) party—and also the now-governing autonomist Future Quebec Coalition (CAQ) that absorbed members of the PQ and the totality of ADQ a year of its founding in 2011. Yet, while these political parties have all had the opportunity to shape debate and legislation regarding immigration—albeit with different levels of agency—none of them has been described as an openly anti-immigration party (Xhardez & Paquet, 2021, p. 677)

Once migrants have been admitted to Quebec, many of the integration requirements legislated by these political actors come into effect and become conditional for residents' applications to renew their stay in the province. While proposed policy changes to both these integration requirements and immigration selection criteria have been included in a wide range of laws, their primary legal framework is the *Québec Immigration Act*. The first version of this act was published in 1968 and it received numerous amendments throughout the subsequent decades before being replaced in 2016 by a second version. Consequently, this research will primarily focus on the proposed changes to this act over time as it serves as a focal point for migration policy in the province.

As a result of this system and legislation, we can see a relatively stable number of international immigrants arriving in Quebec since the agreement of the Quebec-Canada Accord, with the exception of the years between 1991-1993 (Xhardez & Paquet, 2021, p. 677)¹—which parallels Canada more broadly (Statistics Canada, 2023). While it was mentioned earlier that the Quebec government does not currently have control over all avenues of immigration, the

¹ See Appendix B for the full table.

selection criteria for economic immigrants is within the province's purview and those migrants represent a large majority of all international newcomers to the province. In fact, in recent years, economic migration has composed an average of 70% of the total number of migrants arriving in Quebec (Paquet & Xhardez, 2020, p. 1520). So, its power is not marginal. Indeed, as a result of these unique policies, Quebec has attracted a larger share of migrants coming from French-speaking countries over the last five decades, which is noticeably different from other regions of Canada (Blad & Couton, 2009, p. 657). Consequently, the immigration system created by the Quebec government—in response to the Accords—has simultaneously allowed for a similar rate of acceptance for migrants when compared with the rest of Canada, with a clear distinction in its selection criteria and integration policies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the literature

In this chapter, I will begin with a brief account of how the topic of migration has been studied and conceptualized before discussing the subfield of minority-majority societies and Quebec. While there has been a wide-breadth of study on Quebec as a nationalist project and its integration programs—less research has been dedicated to its role as a minority-majority entity and how that positionality shapes elites’ approaches to immigration. So, I will then give a brief account of how other scholars’ have approached political elites’ role in the migration process in Quebec and explain how this study will be different.

When discussing immigration and integration, it is important to first define them as terms. The root of both analytical conceptualizations is tied to the idea of gaining membership into a society. While immigration can be interpreted as a function of states to decide whether they wish to include or exclude someone from the polity (Blake, 2013, p. 110), integration can be conceptualized as dialectical “process of *becoming* an accepted part of society” (Penninx, 2019, p. 5). Consequently, both categories of analysis have been widely studied across social science disciplines and in interdisciplinary ways (Brettell & Hollifield, 2023). For example, while process-based approaches to the study of integration might focus on bottom-up challenges in finding belonging (Jenkins, 2014; Klarenbeek, 2019), legal-political dimensions might focus on the extent to which migrants are considered as being members of a receiving society (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016, p. 14). This broadening of the study of immigration and integration is relatively new. While migration studies can be traced back to Ernst Ravenstein’s 1885 study of why migration happens—and its dynamics (Ravenstein, 1885), the field has grown considerably and to include a new record number of academic publications (Scholten et al., 2022, p. 13). So,

while my research incorporates some of the takeaways of other migration scholars, my primary focus is concerned with how political elites frame and create policies relating to these two terms in the province of Quebec.

For researchers, this study of minority-majority societies has unique dynamics relating to the substate's role as a distinct cultural group. As group threat theory explains, "... individuals fear, regardless of their own self-interests, that the presence of out-group populations may constitute a threat to the collective identity and the cultural, national, and ethnic homogeneity of the society" (Semyonov et al., 2006, p. 428). So, there is a risk that dominant members of a minority-majority region feel threatened by newcomers who they perceive as being different from them. While other authors have argued that these ethnic conceptualizations of minority nationhood have led to resentment toward increasing diversity and immigration (Franck, 1997; Hobsbawm, 1992), there are other factors that may also be at play. For instance, in Quebec, this idea that immigration presents a threat to a Quebecois society has been studied and has—indeed—shown that francophones are more resistant to migration than other linguistic groups (Turgeon & Bilodeau, 2014, p. 326). However, at the same time, there is also a fear that if the population of Quebec does not grow at a rate equal to the rest of Canada, it will lose its position of prominence as a dominant francophone minority within the federation (Turgeon & Bilodeau, 2014, p. 320)—or that the Quebec economy will fall behind the rest of Canada without adequate levels of immigration (Somers & Vaillancourt, 2014, p. 255). So, the impact of being a minority-majority entity is not self-evident on dispositions toward immigration.

Consequently, many studies on Quebec's approach to international migration have sought to deeply contextualize—both historic and recent—public opinion on the matter. For instance, researchers have used polling data to show that Quebec respondents in the noughties became

increasingly comfortable with the annual levels of immigration being accepted into the province (Turgeon & Bilodeau, 2014, p. 324). However, this data is limited to a time-period that ends in 2011—and other long-range studies have not yet presented findings up to the present day. More recently, polling data was used in a slightly different way—as researchers sought to assess whether there is a distinction between anti-immigration sentiment between Canadian provinces (Bilodeau et al., 2021). Interestingly, this study did not find a substantial discrepancy between anti-immigrant sentiment in Quebec and the rest of Canada—but did find that Quebec respondents have a different relationship to multiculturalism than other provinces (Bilodeau et al., 2021, pp. 43–44). So, as this second study was conducted more recently, it would appear that there is public ambivalence toward immigration that might persist to the present day. However, as the research design of Bilodeau et al.’s was not created for a longitudinal analysis and since neither study was designed to allow respondents to qualify their feelings toward immigrants in their own words—there are still open-ended questions concerning the *ideational framing* of the public over this period of time. Nevertheless, both studies provide useful insight on public opinion toward immigration in the province—and also highlight distinct differences in Quebec’s relationship to multiculturalist immigration policies.

One school of thought attributes much of this difference in Quebec’s approach to migration to the sovereigntist movement that began in the 1960s (Fontaine, 1995; Kostov, 2008). However, this line of thinking is not universally accepted. This approach has been criticized as it does not always consider the unique role that migration plays in the political discourse of the other provinces in Canada—which have not had similar independence movements (Paquet, 2013). So, there is a second body of literature that has—instead—tried to measure whether Quebec’s migration system is becoming increasingly civic since the establishment of the

provincial Ministry of Immigration. Proponents of this study, and advocates of Quebec's increasingly civic disposition argue that anyone can become a Quebecor if they are willing to integrate into the secular francophone society which shows an increasingly civic mindset (Barker, 2010, p. 18). Yet, this civic-ethnic dichotomy has also been criticized in nationalism studies. For Rogers Brubaker, the conceptual distinction is both analytically and normatively problematic as both terms are normatively ambiguous (Brubaker, 2004, p. 136). He particularly highlights that "from another point of view, however, linguistic nationalism is simply a particular expression of ethnic nationalism" (Brubaker, 2004, p. 140). Consequently, the premise of this field of research has also been heavily debated—as much of Quebec's "civic" approach to immigration relies on linguistic nationalism. Nevertheless, despite these academic debates, there does seem to be a growing consensus that Quebec's migration system has developed in a distinct way—for both how it functions and its role as a minority-majority entity (Beauregard et al., 2021; Hepburn, 2011; Turgeon & Bilodeau, 2014).

As was alluded to the aforementioned public opinion study concerning immigration and multiculturalism (Bilodeau et al., 2021, p. 44), one particularly unique aspect of this political development is how the Quebec government defines its approach as *intercultural* in opposition to the *multicultural* approach promoted by the Canadian government. As a category of practice, the Quebec government defines its term as:

a balance between, on the one hand, the continuity of a collective identity intrinsically linked with Quebec's history and its distinct and Francophone character and, on the other hand, openness to mutual and collective enrichment through the recognition of diversity and the promotion of intercultural dialogue and rapprochement. (Government of Quebec, 2015)

Yet, it is contested as a category of analysis. Some scholars who defend its use believe that the intercultural approach taken and defined by the Quebec government is a positive example of a post-ethnic conceptualization of the nation (Blad & Couton, 2009, p. 646). The general logic of this argument is that the idea of interculturalism is important for the protection of Quebec as a distinct nation—and it places less emphasis on the individual and avoids social fragmentation along otherwise ethnic lines which therefore helps to move society past the reification and essentialization of ethnic divisions (Brahm Levey, 2012, p. 220). However, just like the aforementioned debate over whether Quebec is developing a more civic approach to immigration, these terms lack conceptual clarity and may not actually eschew ethnic conceptualizations (Brubaker, 2004, p. 140). Nevertheless, this research will not take a stance on the normative value of terms like interculturalism or multiculturalism. Rather than debating the merits of this terminology, I will instead assess whether the use of these terms has changed over time among elites—and whether immigration policy has shifted along with it.

Examining the role of ideational policy stabilization theory in Quebec

In her book, *Ideational legacies and the politics of migration in European minority regions*, Christina Zuber develops a theory of ideational policy stabilization to explain the relative stability of migration discourse—despite changing incentives—in Catalonia and South Tyrol. Unlike economic theories or institutional theories which do not adequately explain why similar minority-majority regions have different approaches to immigration, ideational policy stabilization roots its explanations in historical legacies (Zuber, 2022, p. 2). To do so, Zuber builds on Chong’s sociological model of choice which highlights that personal rigidities formed by habits and dispositions can sometimes supersede rational choices (Chong, 2000, p. 4). Zuber sees this process as having two steps. First, “policy ideas stabilize as political elites build and

maintain discursive consensus around them” (Zuber, 2022, p. 22). Subsequently, the bureaucratic process where these policies are implemented cements these ideas as they stabilize further (Zuber, 2022, p. 22). As a result, what was once a set of malleable beliefs becomes a set of stable societal dispositions toward a given policy issue.

To test this theory, Zuber traces policy and discursive consensus over time with a particular focus on when policy leaders act in ways that are “... at odds with the expected utilities and probabilities assigned to possible outcomes” (Zuber, 2022, p. 29). Through process tracing, this ideational policy stabilization approach is meant to show how historical legacies play a larger role in policy choices and discourse, rather than contemporary factors. In the two case studies put forward by Zuber, she analyses the policies and framing of migration discourse of political elites in Catalonia and South Tyrol over time. For Catalonia, she finds an ideational conceptualization of migration as a net-benefit with integration policies that are framed as *tools* that help migrants overcome any disadvantage they may have (Zuber, 2022, p. 44). Comparatively, political elites in South-Tyrol contest migration on partisan lines and frame integration as a *duty* of migrants (Zuber, 2022, p. 48). Both sub-state entities represent minority-majority entities in Europe—yet they have very different conceptualizations of migrations, which she attributes to the historical legacies and framing of past migration (Zuber, 2022, p. 124).

Throughout this research, Zuber anchors her methodology in a counterfactual theory of causation that gives process tracing its inherent validity. Process tracing “... focuses on identifying the causal mechanisms that link causes and effects within a single case or a small number of cases” (Pickering, 2022, p. 293). However, many scholars have warned that process tracing is frequently used without proper rigor and understanding of the theory (Collier, 2011; Ricks & Liu, 2018). Of crucial importance to its use is the aforementioned counterfactual tests

that should be employed. In Zuber's approach to process tracing, this counterfactual test relates to a singular event that was so monumental that it had to impact the future (Rohlfing & Zuber, 2021, p. 1632). More specifically, she argues that "... one has to think about the values of the outcome before and after the historical event (which can be seen as the treatment) and compare them to the values in a most similar case that did not experience the treatment" (Zuber, 2022, p. 31). Subsequently, once the comparative analysis is completed, one can determine whether that event is truly noteworthy enough to impact the process. In terms of political discourse, Zuber assures readers that these events must be within the memory of decision-makers which greatly limits the scope for deciding which historical factors are most important (Zuber, 2022, p. 33).

As I intend to test the relevance of her theory of ideational policy stabilization on political elites' approach to immigration in Quebec, I will follow many of the same practices and theoretical understandings used in the analysis of Zuber's minority-majority case studies. In particular, I will also be incorporating Wodak and Dijk's theoretical understandings of how parliamentary discourses should be used in research (Wodak & van Dijk, 2000). In their book, they argue that migration discourse in parliamentary settings can be considered "... representative of the public discourse on immigration and minority issues" (Wodak & van Dijk, 2000, p. 26) due to the representative nature of the elected speakers. Notably, these legislators also wield considerable power in policy construction—so when considering policy stabilization, we can see precedents being set and whether they are adhered to. In general, this type of discourse must also consider the context of these debates and how personal ideological beliefs, party stances, or other general socio-political attitudes may influence what—and *how*—migration discourse is constructed in this setting (Wodak & van Dijk, 2000, p. 51). While I will expand on why this is the most appropriate methodology for this research in the following section—I think it is

important to note here that this provides a unique theoretical framing to understand *why* certain policies are discussed by political actors in the ways that they are. This theoretical framing is complemented by framing theory which analyzes the ways that elites portray a topic as they try to shape public opinion on an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007). While this research will not analyze the framing effects (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104) of migration discourse, the understanding that elite discourse impacts public opinion is important for any analysis that seeks to gauge why political actors create policy in the way that they do.

The closest study—in theory and content—to this research has been Xhardez and Paquet’s analysis of party manifestos in Quebec from 1991 to 2018 (Xhardez & Paquet, 2021). In their work, they analyze all political party manifestos since the Quebec-Canada Accord to see how elites have campaigned on the topic of immigration. At the end of their study, they find that migration was not greatly mentioned in manifestos and that all of the major political parties were generally liberal in their immigration stances—with the exception of the CAQ (Xhardez & Paquet, 2021, p. 686). After its creation in 2012, the CAQ campaign tended to politicize migration in greater detail than any other party—however, the researchers find that the CAQ’s political stance on migration is “ambiguous” due to the conflicting nature of their political discourse (Xhardez & Paquet, 2021, p. 686). Consequently, this raises interesting questions about whether there is a difference in political party positions once elected—and whether the CAQ government is ambiguous on their stances in the legislature as there can be differences between party platforms and parties’ discourse in legislatures. So, this study adds to the literature in assessing whether there is also some form of stabilization in settings where political elites engage with one another in the policy creation process.

METHODOLOGY

In order to study how elite actors in Quebec have approached immigration since the agreement to the Quebec-Canada Accord, I examine the committee meetings in the provincial legislature where the *Quebec Immigration Act* has been debated in detail. As mentioned earlier, the *Quebec Immigration Act* serves as the principle piece of legislation governing immigration rules in the province. So, given that I am looking to see whether there has been ideological stabilization in the way that elite actors approach immigration policy in Quebec, this legislation provides an excellent case study to analyze the political positions of representatives of different political parties and across the 26-year time frame. To examine this, I first engage in a longitudinal content analysis of political discourse and legislation. Then, I perform process tracing to ascertain whether there is a relevant historical legacy that supersedes contemporary incentives—or whether elites’ conceptualization of immigration comes from a basis of rational-choice.

While discourse and policy toward immigration is debated and contextualized in many arenas, the committees of the National Assembly of Quebec were chosen because they provide a forum for in-depth discussions over migration matters where Quebec political elites have sole legislative jurisdiction, unlike in the Parliament of Canada where their representatives are a minority. All provincial legislation must pass through a committee stage and—with the exception of in-camera meetings—have transcripts or video recordings available that capture elites’ debates. In these committee meetings, representatives from all elected political parties are given a spot on the committee, and meetings concerning the *Immigration Act* provide a unique opportunity to see where there is accord and discord over specific clauses and general sentiments toward immigration that do not always make it to the floor of the legislative body. While there are undoubtedly changes to the legislation—as is the nature of amendments and one of the

purposes of committee meetings—this research pays particular focus to *how* these policies evolve, and the nature of immigration strategies and conceptualizations that are put forward.

Data considerations and operationalization

Since 1991, there have been thirteen successful attempts to change the *Quebec Immigration Act* (Government of Quebec, 2018) before it was completely rewritten in 2016 and subsequently amended in 2019 (Government of Quebec, 2024). However, examining the meetings from every year would not be feasible for this research and should not be necessary to properly gauge whether there is a discursive or policy consensus toward immigration that persists over time. The selected meetings represent “focal moments” (Zuber, 2022, p. 34) where political elites clarify their positions on immigration at policy junctures, and the basics of framing theory (Chong & Druckman, 2007) can be applied. More specifically, the years that I have selected represent different governments, different party compositions, and are the periods where substantive changes have been made to the bill. Notably, the meetings also take place before and after the 1995 referendum on Quebec separatism so that any implications that the unsuccessful referendum may have had can be included. They are the years 1993, 2004, 2016, and 2019—and are made up of 25 committee meetings.

With this data, I perform a frame analysis of parliamentary debates in committee meetings from the four different time periods. To do this, I first assess how immigration is framed by representatives by all of the political parties and then whether it is described positively (as an opportunity), negatively (as a threat), or in neutral terms. Then, I gauge how that framing changes over the four time periods, and in what ways. In the body of this research, I have included two tables with a sample of relevant quotes that note the relevant topoi and trends that remained salient over this period of time. In doing so, my analysis follows Wodak and van Dijk

(2000) and Zuber (2022) as they use the content of debates as shortcuts for understanding how legislation topics are interpreted and understood in a given region. As Zuber explains in her analysis of Catalonia and South Tyrol, “... analysing not only the discourse of governing parties—eager to defend their own policies—but also the opposition’s concerns sheds light on the main conflicts surrounding the issue of immigration in a given society as a whole” (Zuber, 2022, p. 34).

To complement this expression of elites’ framing of migration, I also incorporate an analysis of the concrete legislative stipulations that are passed in the two iterations of the *Quebec Immigration Act* as they are the basis for how many immigration and integration procedures are carried out. To do this part of the research, I conduct a content analysis of the legislation over the same four time periods to gauge whether the immigration and integration policies have become more restrictive, liberal, or neutral. For this longitudinal study, and the analysis of the discourse, qualitative content analysis was chosen as the preferred method of study over automated text analysis—as interpretative skills were necessary to distinguish how immigration was being framed.

By approaching my analysis in this manner, I am performing a causal analysis of ideational legacies. If there is an established ideational consensus in the discourse and policies of the *Quebec Immigration Act*, elite actors’ actions will match historical antecedent rather than contemporary realities (Zuber, 2022, p. 30). So, the aforementioned longitudinal content analysis is first used to establish whether these legacies reoccur and limit the range of discourse and policies, using the steps established by Zuber (Zuber, 2022, pp. 17–32). Following this, process tracing is then used to show *how* this occurs and includes a brief comparison of ideational conceptualizations with elites in the most structurally-similar Canadian province as a

counterfactual test—which is important to identify the nature of the difference (Rohlfing & Zuber, 2021, p. 1632). Using this method, this study finds that political elites in Quebec *do* have a positive disposition toward economic immigration in their discourse and policies, which appears to be a result of legislative repetition and a discursive normalization on the topic. However—as will be discussed in detail in the following sections—these ideational norms do not seem to extend to immigration when the role of the federal government is incorporated into the discussion.

It should be noted that there are some limitations to this study. From a practical standpoint, it would be unrealistic to analyze every piece of discursive and policy material where elite actors frame immigration. As was mentioned earlier, this research looks to *focal moments* in the legislative process as a substitute for an all-encompassing study—and every effort was taken to include legislative periods where there has been significant variance in political circumstances and different partisan constellations in the legislature. Similarly, researchers sometimes engage in an infinite regress when looking for the pertinent links between the causal mechanism and outcome that explains their trends when performing process tracing (Zuber, 2022, p. 31). However, Zuber explains that “ideational legacies can only function if they are accessible in the memory and value repertoire of decision-makers” (Zuber, 2022, p. 31). So, the search for a causal mechanism that explains the ideational legacy toward immigration in Quebec was limited to relatively recent events. Ultimately, this study is useful to contextualize the uniqueness of Quebec elites’ approach to immigration and does have some interesting findings which link ideational contestation of immigration to the separatist movement in Quebec—which merits further investigation.

THE QUEBEC IMMIGRATION ACT

Despite dramatically shifting political circumstances between 1993 and 2019, this study finds that economic immigration is continuously framed as a benefit to Quebec society throughout the selected debates on the *Quebec Immigration Act*—among all political parties. This matches Xhardez and Paquet’s analysis of Quebec political party manifestos where they cluster all parties on the liberal side of their immigration axis during a similar period (Xhardez & Paquet, 2021, p. 685). In the discussion below, I will explain how exactly the discourse has been framed in the years 1993, 1998, 2016, and 2019. While there has been contestation over jurisdiction, specific integration policies, and the number of immigrants that Quebec welcomes—this study finds that migrants chosen by the province were constantly framed by all parties as being part of a broader narrative about Quebec as a distinct nation that has welcomed immigrants on an intercultural basis, and as being vitally important part of the Quebec economy.

Immigration and Quebec’s economy

Discussions concerning international immigrants’ impact on the Quebec economy in these committee meetings can largely be broken into two categories: those concerning migrants whose admission is decided by the *Quebec Immigration Act* and those outside the province’s jurisdiction. In all four periods, economic migrants whose admission is decided by provincial legislation are framed by elites as being beneficial to Quebec. While this was presented in multiple ways, it is best exemplified by the 2019 discussion between centre-right CAQ representative—Mr. Jolin-Barrette—and left-wing QS representative—Mr. Fontecilla. In their discussion, the QS representative questions a logistical aspect of one of the immigration policy proposals and both representatives clarify and stress their support for immigration—which can be seen at the end of Table 1. Indeed, much of the discussion in these debates concerned the best

practices for recruiting and integrating arriving migrants instead of attempts to contest the benefits of immigration. As the selected quotes in Table 1 show, there is a repeated insistence that migrants are important to boost the provincial economy, as has been argued by the elites from the federalist Quebec Liberal party in 1993 to the sovereignist QS party and autonomous CAQ party in 2019. These claims were uncontested in the committees' debates with subsequent discourse moving on to different parts of the policy process. This lack of contestation is important because it signals that either elites are not *incentivized* to change the positive conceptualization of migration as a net-benefit to the economy—or that those incentives are not motivating enough to contest the topic due to an ideational policy stabilization. In other terms, if there is not an ideational contest over the benefits of economic migrants, then elites might not see potential economic, institutional or political incentives to reframe the discourse (Zuber, 2022, p. 24) or their ideational positionality may be grounded in personal rigidities that do not reflect outside influences (Chong, 2000, p. 4). Indeed, since many of these discussions take place over a 26-year period with different political party constellations and actors, personal rigidities are less likely to play as crucial a role on an individual-level—since the elite actors in these discussions have changed repeatedly. Yet, ideational policy stabilization inherently transcends the individual since it is based on historical legacies which have established ideational norms (Zuber, 2022, p. 18).

Interestingly, this cross-party agreement was not present when political elites discussed migrants who fell outside the scope of Quebec's jurisdiction. The economic dimension of these immigration debates features disagreement over the incorporation of migrants who are not seen as contributors to the Quebec labour market, and are not under the economic residency schemes. For instance, in 1998, a representative from the governing separatist PQ party initiated a

discussion about whether the spouses and children of migrants constitute an economic liability for Quebec. As mentioned earlier, refugee admission and family reunification claims are legislated by the federal government. However, the PQ representative—Mr. Boisclair—argues that, when it comes to these migrants, “I am largely in favour of having [a qualifying test], but all of that depends on the reasonability of [this] financial solvency test” (National Assembly of Quebec, 1998; own translation). In doing so, the representative engaged in speech that delineated between migrants that are desired and chosen by the government—and those that are not—based on their financial resources. Consequently, this political discourse, which concerns family reunification, was coded as being restrictive as the political elite engaged in speech that qualified which migrants were desirable, and which were not. The ensuing discussion was contested by a Quebec Liberal member—Mr. Bergman—who argued that gauging whether migrants have the means to support unemployed family members in the province is an impossible task—and that the more important aspect is migrants’ “... desire to live in Quebec, in Canada, and the familial solidarity and their willingness to sacrifice to help one another [helps migrants to survive]” (National Assembly of Quebec, 1998; own translation). While this discussion had few policy implications—as the groups being discussed are not under provincial jurisdiction—it does showcase how migrants who are not a part of the provincial government’s selection plan are treated differently. It also showcases that there are partisan divisions that manifest when family reunification and refugees are mentioned. Indeed, this critique of migrants admitted under federal policies has political longevity—and this discourse was reformulated in a similar manner by a representative of the CAQ party in 2016 amid cross-party disagreement, as can be seen in the corresponding quote in Table 1.

Part of this contention is likely a reflection of the debates concerning the federal government's role in legislating migration. Throughout many committee meetings over the three decades, there were numerous discussions that challenged the current delineation of immigration powers between the provincial and federal government—established in the Quebec-Canada Accord. As the agreement only gives the province decision-making power over economic migration programs—which account for 70% of all migrants (Paquet & Xhardez, 2020, p. 1520)—the debate around immigration claims outside of Quebec's jurisdiction tends to follow partisan positions concerning the role of Quebec in the Canadian federation. In the aforementioned 1998 debate concerning the financial standing of migrant's families—the PQ initiated this discussion by claiming that “the position of Quebec is very-clear on the question...” (National Assembly of Quebec, 1998; own translation) and that numerous letters had been sent on behalf of the province to the federal immigration minister calling for changes to the process. Yet, subsequent debate in that committee meeting had the federalist Liberal party of Quebec (QLP) defending the status quo and their close cooperation with the federal government. Similarly, in 2016, the CAQ representative mentions that “... we have suggested to the [Liberal] minister, last year, to address the federal government to repatriate the question of family regroupment as well” (National Assembly of Quebec, 2016a; own translation)—which was ignored by Liberal representatives at the meeting. In both of these cases, traditional stances on Quebec's role in the Canadian federation are reflected in the desire for more control over deciding *who* gets to immigrate into the sub-state. Consequently, as they are repeated numerous times and in various contexts, these discussions over immigration powers remain salient over time—and can be seen as impacting a specific aspect of immigration discourse and policy.

Nevertheless, this ideational contestation over refugees and family reunification does not necessarily demonstrate ideational disagreement toward immigration more broadly in the sub-state entity. As mentioned earlier, and shown in Table 1, there is a cross-party consensus over the 26-year period that immigrants are an important part of the Quebec workforce—and are crucial to the provincial economy. It is only the two categories that fall outside the provincial jurisdiction that seem to provoke disagreement among members. In this, Barker’s claim that, when discussing immigration politics in Quebec, “party politics has played at the margins” (Barker, 2010, p. 17) is partially substantiated. While this study finds that economic migrants are framed as a positive force in the Quebec economy, debate concerning refugees and family reunification complicates this narrative. Some elite actors in the Quebec legislature have chosen to contest the notion that refugees and family reunifications are valuable to Quebec—based on an economic argument that is used as justification for more immigration powers to be devolved to the provincial government. Consequently, this contestation over a specific subset of migrants seems to reflect parties’ positionality toward Quebec’s autonomy—that seems to differ from the general ideational stances on migration more broadly.

Table 1 ²	
<u>Quote</u>	<u>Speaker / Political Party / Date</u>
“Through immigration, we can try to improve our demographic weight, our economic situation. We can also, because we also have a role to play with refugees, play our	MNA Gagnon-Tremblay, Quebec Liberal party (QLP), 1993 ¹

² All quotes are original translations of the French source material. Speakers’ excerpts have been assigned a number and relevant source references are included in Appendix C.

humanitarian role, with family reunification, but we have objectives to achieve as well.”	
“But there is no financial solvency test for minors and for spouses [of economic migrants]. Do we need to establish one? In any case, I would like to raise the question.”	MNA Boisclair, Quebecois Party (PQ), 1998 ²
“There are two important elements for our plan: the threshold and composition [of immigrants] ... How will we link the two if Ottawa tells us: No, we will take a humanitarian direction? For us, we are more economically minded, so we don’t take part? It seems like there is a conflict of orientations.”	MNA Roy, Future Quebec Coalition (CAQ), 2016 ³
“So, Quebec still has – studies show – more diversity in its source areas. We have data on that. I think we should be proud of that. This is not the result of chance, it is because we are very organized in matters of immigration, because we are responsible for the selection of qualified workers.”	MNA Weil, Quebec Liberal party (QLP), 2016 ⁴
“... particularly with a small minority nation in North America surrounded by an ocean of anglophones, which has French as its primary language. For reasons other than immigration, for lots of other reasons related to economic and cultural dynamics that are threatened in various ways, we	MNA Khadir, Quebec United (QS), 2016 ⁵

have to protect it. We have ... to make sure there is an adequate [balance] between immigration and the needs of our economic sectors and our labour market.”	
<p>“Mr. Jolin-Barrette: Well, I don't think there is anyone who considers that immigration is bad for Quebec. At the demographic level, at the economic level, at the social level, we are in a situation where the contribution of immigration is positive ...”</p> <p>“Mr. Fontecilla: I completely agree with the Minister.”</p>	<p>MNA Jolin-Barrette, Future Quebec Coalition (CAQ), 2019⁶</p> <p>MNA Fontecilla, Quebec United (QS), 2019⁶</p>

Integration as a duty and shared responsibility

As mentioned in the theoretical section of this research, the literature on integration largely conceptualizes this category of analysis as a *process* (Heckmann, 2006; Jenkins, 2014; Penninx, 2019). In doing so, researchers may view the process as a dialectic (Jenkins, 2014, p. 43) whereby all social actors play a role in forming social identity in the integration process. In this thesis, elites’ conceptualizations of this process are analyzed and their framing of immigrant integration is of the foremost concern as they have substantial power in shaping integration policies. The specific framing of immigrant integration in these committee meetings shares some similarities with the aforementioned immigration discourse as—like other studies have shown (Barker, 2010, p. 17)—there seems to be a relatively stable cross-party agreement that integration strategies are important. However, as the subsequent analysis will show, this conceptualization is unique as Quebec legislators broadly stick to a nationalistic narrative that

sees integration as both a *duty* of arriving migrants and as a *responsibility* of the sub-state to provide integration services.

Throughout the selected discussions of the *Quebec Immigration Act*, political elites across all political parties in the Quebec legislature highlight the importance of integration for the survival of Quebec as a distinct francophone society—but also frame the process as being important for the individual benefit of migrants. In a 1993 discussion that sought to put integration responsibilities in the mandate of the Quebec Ministry of Immigration, both the federalist Liberal and separatist PQ parties agreed that the metropolitan city of Montreal was where the government should focus their integration efforts—and framed the sub-state’s capacity to integrate immigrants as being limited. As PQ representative Bourdon explains in 1993:

... the capacity to integrate them through employment is something absolutely fundamental in immigration affairs. It does not just affect our precious language, it does not just affect our precious cultural security ... so are there enough jobs? How will we incorporate them? (National Assembly of Quebec, 1993; own translation)

While this discourse should be coded as restrictive as it frames integration capacity as being at a limit, it does not put forward a negative conceptualization of migrants—which is in line with the trend where elites’ avoid contesting immigration’s value. However, it also showcases the role that Quebec’s minority-majority conceptualization of society plays in integration. By conceptualizing the nation’s language and cultural security as being under threat, this speech can be seen as the epitome of group threat theory which—as mentioned in the theoretical section of this paper—can defy self-interest to pose designated out-groups as a threat to the established cultural norms (Semyonov et al., 2006, p. 428). Thus, it frames integration as being crucial to the survival of their conceptualization of Quebec. Indeed, this broader framing—of integration as

being a crucial part of the survival of Quebec as a minority-majority region—can be seen across the 26-year timespan, as shown in Table 2. In all the selected quotes, we can see a reflection of this discourse, where immigrants are *responsible* for integrating—but also where the government must provide integration services to limit the threat posed to Quebec’s status as a minority-majority society.

Yet, it should also be noted that—while integration is framed as a *duty* for newcomers by political elites in Quebec, it is also unequivocally described as a benefit for the individuals. As the Quebec Liberal member—Ms. Weil—explains without contestation in 2016:

... these measures go in the direction of better francization, better integration for Quebecers, for Quebec, for the future of Quebec, because these are the people that we have selected and that we hope that they can actively participate in Quebec society.

(National Assembly of Quebec, 2016c; own translation)

This framing—where learning French and integrating helps immigrants participate in society—is repeated throughout the decades of debate among all parties. It is an important part of the narrative established concerning migrant integration in Quebec as it lends legitimacy to the *Quebec Immigration Act* policies outside of the theme of threat. While most of the quotes selected for Table 2 demonstrate the theme of *duty* for immigrants to integrate, many also display the subtext that individual migrants benefit from integration. Notably, this ranges from comments by CAQ members in 2019 arguing that integration helps migrants with their employability (National Assembly of Quebec, 2019b)—to QLP members of the same year relinking integration to the ability to participate in Quebec society (National Assembly of Quebec, 2019b).

Table 2	
<u>Quote</u>	<u>Speaker / Political Party / Date</u>
“That’s to say that the government cannot decide the levels of immigration without knowing if we have the means to integrate them.”	MNA Gagnon-Tremblay, Quebec Liberal party (QLP), 1993 ⁷
“I think it’s this type of support that allows people, in fact, to really succeed at their integration.”	MNA Boisclair, Quebecois Party (PQ), 1998 ⁸
“I am convinced that the successful integration of immigrants requires access to quality employment and to learn French, the two cornerstones of inclusion and participation in Quebec society.”	MNA Weil, Quebec Liberal party (QLP), 2016 ⁹
“The sustainability and preservation of our French language and the responsible, effective, and sustainable integration of immigrants must involve better support in terms of Francization and the establishment of performance obligations.”	MNA Roy, Future Quebec Coalition (CAQ), 2016 ¹⁰
“We want to ensure that all immigrants who choose Quebec can benefit from all the support of the Quebec state, from when they are abroad until their full integration in Quebec, in terms of francization, in terms	MNA Jolin-Barrette, Future Quebec Coalition (CAQ), 2019 ¹¹

of integration, also in terms of employability.”	
“And I think it's important to mention it ... in the wording of the proposed text, we talk about learning French, but we don't talk about the need for there to be full participation of these people in collective life in French ... [it] is an essential element in terms of integration.”	MNA Anglade, Quebec Liberal party (QLP), 2019 ¹²

We can see a reflection of this discourse in much of the integration policy that is passed in the *Quebec Immigration Act*. While other scholars have noted there has been a discursive gap between political rhetoric and finalized policy relating to migration and multiculturalism in Europe (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013, p. 592), this was not found to be the case in Quebec’s committee discussions. While the technical language of integration policies was broad—the most explicit example of change to the legislation took place in 2016 with its rewriting. In the new draft, the *Quebec Immigration Act* repeatedly insisted that the Ministry of Immigration’s mandate includes the responsibility to make integration programs for migrants that are meant to integrate, promote francization, and establish harmonious intercultural relations (Law on the Immigration to Quebec, 2016, pp. 15–16). If there were to be a gap between policy and discourse, the finalized legislation might have omitted these sections—or used language that was different from the discourse. Yet, much of the government’s *responsibility* to integrate migrants—and the goals of francization and interculturalism—are reflected in the final version of the law. It should be noted here that the CAQ government did legislate that migrants must pass a values test in 2019 that appears to be substantially more restrictive framing to migration.

However, as will be explained further in the next section of this research—this test does not actually appear to deviate from the ideational norms furthered in these committee meetings as it reflects the national vision that has been prominent throughout all 26-years of immigration qualifications. Consequently, as much of the discourse concerning migrants does not change drastically during this period—and since the policy changes do not dramatically become more restrictive or liberal—we can see there is a general ideational consensus around migration during this period.

More specifically, it appears that the general ideational consensus across political parties during this time period reflects the minority-majority conceptualization of Quebec in a variety of unique ways. At a first glance, it might seem as if there is a broader disagreement on the normative value of immigration among political elites—as there has been an ideational contestation over Quebec’s approach to refugees, family reunification, and a simultaneous cross-party agreement that economic migrants are valuable and that migrants must be integrated into Quebec society. However, I believe that this fits a broader national narrative that Quebec’s French character must be protected while also demonstrating modern divisions within the minority-majority substate. As has been found in a recent study by Montigny, political divisions in Quebec’s electorate are increasingly polarizing political parties along debates over Quebec’s autonomy—rather than separatism or other political issues (Montigny, 2023, p. 285). Specifically, results of polling have found that voters of major political parties find sharp partisan splits on questions of whether there should be changes to federalism—while also having cross-party agreement that there should be a focus on economic success and protecting the French language (Montigny, 2023, p. 262). These findings are congruent with the discursive contestation of migration in Quebec’s legislative committees. In the discussions and policy

concerning migration—there is minimal contestation over the benefit of economic migrants or the need to integrate them into a distinctive Quebec society. Yet, debates concerning the federal government’s approach to migration tend to show division and a shift in discussions. As was mentioned earlier, having a contestation of ideas is often related to personal rigidities (Chong, 2000, p. 4), related to ideational policy stabilization, or because elites see an economic, social, or political incentive to challenge ideational conceptualizations of a topic (Zuber, 2022, p. 24). No matter which reason it is, it would appear that elites are not motivated to contest the normative benefits of immigration—yet see reasons to pursue debate that concerns Quebec’s role in the Canadian federation when it is applicable.

Introducing the democratic and Quebec values test

A more recent example of this ideational consensus can be found in the CAQ government’s introduction of the democratic and Quebec values test. The policy, which was debated in the 2019 committee meetings, requires all economic migrants to either attend a class on Quebec values or answer 75% of questions correctly on a test covering the same subject matter. In doing so, migrants are expected to be able to distinguish which values are representative of the *Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* and “... [learn] the importance of the French language, Québec culture and the vitality of the regions” (An Act to Increase Quebec’s Socio-Economic Prosperity and Adequately Meet Labour Market Needs through Successful Immigrant Integration, 2019, p. 5). While this is a new requirement for immigrants submitting their applications to the Quebec government, its stated goals are similar to past integration efforts—albeit with a greater focus on cultural values. Prior to its rewriting, the 1991 version of the *Quebec Immigration Act* specified that integration programs shall “... provide and take charge of the implementation of linguistic integration services consisting of services of

French language instruction and introduction to Québec life” (Act Respecting Immigration to Québec, 1968) whereas the 2016 version promoted “...the democratic values of Quebec, integration steps and francization as well as on Quebec culture and the dynamism of its regions” (Law on the Immigration to Quebec, 2016, p. 26). Over time, we can see that there has been a recurring insistence that arriving migrants must adopt the French-language and adapt to Quebec life—which later evolved to include specific democratic and cultural components. Consequently, this test can be seen as both a reaffirmation of Quebec’s identity—which migrants must integrate into—and a new definition of what it means to be a part of this minority-majority society.

During the 2019 debates on this legislation, contention over the proposal largely focused on how best to teach democratic and Quebec values—and not on the notion itself. In response to the CAQ government’s bill, a member of the oppositional Quebec Liberal party—Ms. Anglade—exemplified this as she gives support for the legislation and explains that “it is so important, for us, in the Liberal party, and the learning of French and the learning of values, that we [want to] try to understand the way that it will be done” (National Assembly of Quebec, 2019b; own translation). Indeed, representatives from the PQ and QS did not contest the idea’s objectives either, and that part of the bill was passed into law. Once again, this cross-party consensus demonstrates a willingness among political elites to frame Quebec’s immigration system as a protector of the province’s distinct character—and does not contest the notion that immigration is beneficial to the province. Consequently, this fits with the aforementioned trend whereby most political contestation concerning the role of migrants seems to occur over questions of jurisdiction—and not elites’ general view on migrants or immigration. Additionally, while it might seem like the inclusion of *values-based* language in the legislation in 2016 and 2019 marks an evolution in the way that elites conceive of immigration—I would argue that it

fits the broader narrative that is also present in the 1993 committees. In both periods, elites frame migration as a *duty* to integrate into their conceptualization of the Quebec nation—and their conceptualization of this society has been tied up in the language of interculturalism that is based on “... a common public culture, based upon shared values, history and respect for the contribution of both majorities and minorities” (Weinstock, 2013, p. 103). Thus, these policies and rhetoric seem to be rooted in a firm conceptualization of the minority-majority society that is open to newcomers so long as they are willing to adhere to a language, cultural norms, and conceptualization of history.

Quebec as a nation of immigrants?

While deciding the annual number of migrants admitted into Quebec is supposed to be a shared responsibility between the federal and Quebec government, its debate has also played an increasingly prominent role in provincial committee meetings over the last three decades—while immigration numbers have remained relatively consistent over that same period of time (Xhardez & Paquet, 2021, p. 677). In the 1993 meeting, discussions over the number of migrants being admitted into Quebec was not raised—and in 1998, it was only discussed once by separatist PQ member Mr. Boisclair to clarify that the record number of migrants in 1991 was a decision by the federal government (National Assembly of Quebec, 1998). However, in 2016 and 2019, it was raised more frequently as discussions focused more heavily on the publication of immigration projections and on concerns over the federal jurisdiction of refugees.

Indeed, much of this debate is a reflection of the aforementioned approaches to immigration and integration. While discourse broadly describes migrants as being beneficial to Quebec and to the economy—there was a particular focus on the number of migrants that Quebec could integrate, and debates over jurisdiction. Just as earlier trends have highlighted,

contestation during this time period is centred on the normative benefits of immigrants—as all political parties qualify that they support immigration throughout the debates. Instead, ideational contestation can be linked to concerns over Quebec’s autonomy in matters of immigration and its role as a minority-majority society. This is exemplified in the 2016 debate where members discuss the provincial government’s release of an immigration plan that details an increase to the projected number of migrants for that year. As a part of the discussion, a member of the separatist PQ questions the ability of the provincial government to decide these annual numbers. As he—Mr. Koto—explains, “when the minister decided to also, ostensibly, raise the number of refugees, I have the impression that Quebec was not first invited to discuss” (National Assembly of Quebec, 2016b; own translation). The ensuing debate was largely over whether the federal government respects the input of the provincial government in their immigration targets—with the federalist QLP stating that they do while the separatist PQ member repeated his question several times. As was mentioned in debates concerning refugees, this seems to be a reflection of a debate over jurisdiction rather than an ideational challenge to the normative benefit of welcoming a given number of migrants to Quebec.

Indeed, elites’ conceptualizations of the Quebec nation throughout these committee meetings was often reflected in their insistence that the province is a historically francophone nation that welcomes other migrants on an intercultural basis. In 1993, Liberal representative—Mr. Ciaccia—describes Quebec as “... a pluralist and open society. Here, the majority of French origins cohabit with a minority of British origins, aboriginal nations, and people of diverse cultures” (National Assembly of Quebec, 1993; own translation). As the decades passed, this narrative remains salient through the use of interculturalist language—as exemplified in policies that frame Quebec as a nation of defined people-groups which must learn to cohabit

harmoniously through the use of French (Law on the Immigration to Quebec, 2016, p. 16). As a result of this linguistic framing, political elites in these committees agreed that migrants from French-speaking places have an advantage in adapting to Quebec society—and found consensus in discussions concerning preferences for French-speaking refugees (National Assembly of Quebec, 2016b) and the establishment of a Quebec office of migration in Morocco in 2019 (National Assembly of Quebec, 2019a). As mentioned by Liberal representative Weil (National Assembly of Quebec, 2016b), the barriers for migrants from these places to integrate into Quebec society are lower since they already speak French and thus are preferable in the selection system. This reflects both the intercultural conceptualization of migration in Quebec as migrants are welcomed as distinct others—and the prioritization of integration where newcomers are expected to adopt the Quebec way of life.

IDEATIONAL POLICY STABILIZATION

As Zuber mentions in her outlining of ideational policy stabilization, there are two steps to performing a causal analysis of ideational legacies. First, researchers must identify whether discourse and policy match historical antecedent rather than contemporary realities and then researchers must use process tracing to show *how* it occurs (Zuber, 2022, p. 30). As has been mentioned in this research's analysis of the *Quebec Immigration Act*, there is a clear distinction between the frames used for economic migrants and those migrants who fall outside Quebec's jurisdiction. While economic migrants are unequivocally framed positively, there is a competitive framing contest for migrants who fall outside this category. Consequently, I think it is helpful to separate the two discursive frameworks when analyzing the reasons *why* certain dispositions were taped when framing immigration.

Tracing elites' positive disposition toward migration

As was mentioned in the frame analysis of parliamentary debates over the *Quebec Immigration Act*, elites continuously frame economic immigration as a benefit to Quebec. Notably, the patterns of interactions during these debates demonstrate that even when they disagree on legislation, representatives in opposition did not construe immigration as a negative force. This is important because—as Zuber mentions—if parties were to purely act strategically, opponents of the government would utilize the full spectrum of frames to argue against the legislation (Zuber, 2022, p. 50). Instead, these committees demonstrate traces of a depoliticization of immigration that has been found in various other studies into Quebec's immigration policies and parties' political positions (Barker, 2010; Xhardez & Paquet, 2021). Similarly, there is a recurring non-partisan evocation of Quebec as an intercultural nation that welcomes individuals from other backgrounds so long as they integrate into the distinct society.

This ideational repetition across parties and decades represents one pillar of argumentation used by elites to promote their immigration policies. While framing Quebec in this manner represents a historically grown societal disposition (Zuber, 2022, p. 46), Quebec elites have also made full use of material incentives—in the form of positive economic framing—to reinforce their arguments regarding migration plans. Consequently, it would appear that this positive association to economic migration does—at least partially—stem from a historically grown societal disposition that discourages elite actors from reframing immigration discourse in a negative light.

Competitive framing contests and the Quebec-Canada Accord

Using Zuber's theory to analyze discourse and policies which fall outside Quebec's jurisdiction in the Quebec-Canada Accord, however, demonstrates a clear difference. Unlike debates concerning economic migration, discussions about refugees and family reunification *did* see elites invoke a wider spectrum of frames to oppose and advance their positions on Quebec's jurisdictional role. It is therefore more difficult to ascertain whether this discourse is a reflection of historical antecedent—or contemporary realities and incentives. However, there are insights to be gained from the manner in which this discourse is contested. As mentioned in the earlier analysis of economic migration—elites that criticized the federal government's approach to immigration pathways largely based their arguments on economic critiques. As can be seen in Table 1, representatives of the separatist PQ in 1998 and autonomist CAQ party in 2016 made similar critiques of federal immigration policies in opposition to the federalist QLP comments, which were made as early as 1993. In doing so, these political actors shifted much of the debate to a political contestation of the powers and history of the Quebec-Canada Accord instead of debating the normative value of immigration. Notably, this trend is in line with other discourse

by separatist parties in Quebec where they are expected to take a hard line against the federal government on policy issues “... in order to be able to present [the party] as a firm defender of Québec” (Béland & Lecours, 2006, p. 89). Thus, competitive framing over the federal government’s approach to immigration does not necessarily contradict the historical antecedent that establishes migration, more generally, as a positive for Quebec. While Zuber’s theory argues that historical legacies can cement certain ideational norms into elite discourse, she does not explore the limit to these ideational boundaries. Consequently, in the case of Quebec—where there seems to be a ideational consensus that immigration is an important historical part of the minority-majority’s intercultural society—it is possible that the concept of migration regulated by the federal government is not included in this set of stable societal dispositions.

The legacy of separatism in Quebec politics

Instead, the contestation of the Quebec-Canada Accord might be a legacy of the ideational divisions from the separatist movements in Quebec from the 1960s to the 2000s. While research into the dominance of parties in Quebec has theorized that the Yes-No divide on separatism has evolved into a cleavage over regional autonomy (Bélanger & Mahéo, 2020; Montigny, 2023), it has also shown through polling that new sentiments of Quebec nationalism are correlated with integration efforts and a general openness to immigration (Montigny, 2023, p. 261). Consequently, research that focuses on the positions of political parties in Quebec substantiates the claim that there is a historic division among political elites over issues relating to federalism—and also confirms that this divide has not tended to divide parties over the benefits of immigration. Since this division represents contestation over the role of federalism dating to the advent of the separatist movement in the 1960s, it would seem like there has not been a stabilization of discursive and political norms that supersede rational choice decisions by

political elites. Instead, members of political parties have utilized a full spectrum of frames to contest the issue (Gagnon & May, 2009). Thus, this aspect of immigration does not seem to be affected by ideational policy stabilization—and rational choice models (Geri, 2018, p. 123) or personal rigidities relating to federalism (Chong, 2000, p. 4) might be better used to explain why this part of immigration discourse and policy is contested by elites.

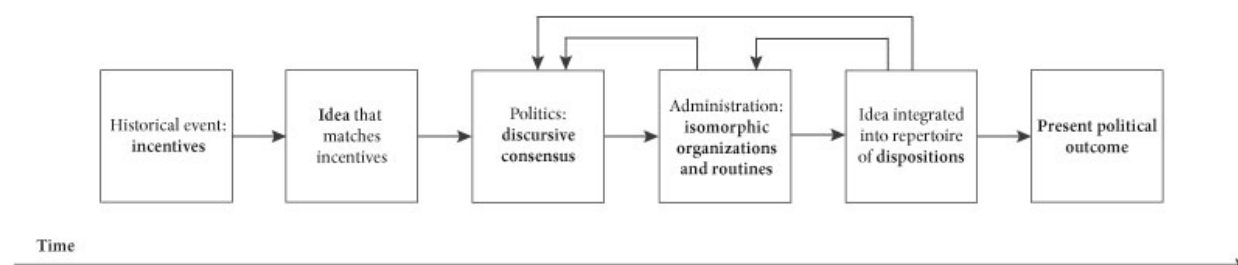
Quebec's (short) ideational history of welcoming immigrants

Nevertheless, elites' positive disposition toward economic immigration can be traced to the founding of Quebec Ministry of Immigration in 1968. Upon being established by the now defunct nationalist National Union party, the mandate of the nascent immigration office was to "... welcome immigrants and help them find a job in the province" (Symonds, 2002, p. 31). Yet, an organizational analysis of immigration debates within the Quebec government from 1968 to the 1990s shows that there was relative ambivalence to the topic of immigration and diversity during the first three decades of the ministry (Symonds, 2002, p. 43). Consequently, much of this discourse bears many similarities to the framings used by elites in this research's time period. The priorities highlighted by Symonds demonstrate that the Quebec government at this time was both open to immigrants from diverse national backgrounds—while maintaining both a policy of interculturalism and integration into a distinct francophone Quebec society (Symonds, 2002, p. 42). The aforementioned ambivalence to immigration and diversity is mostly a reflection of the depoliticized nature of immigration in the sub-state entity that postulated seemingly contradictory speech of integration and cultural preservation without "... untying the gordian knot of its relations with minority ethnic groups" (Symonds, 2002, p. 43). In essence, there was relative stability in the discourse and policy—which seemed to follow a central thread of being

open to migrants coming from different backgrounds so long as they contributed to the workforce and integrated into Quebec society.

As Christina Zuber establishes, ideational policy stabilization is when actors rely on historical legacies to make present decisions. As can be seen in her diagram, attached below as Figure 1 (Zuber, 2022, p. 26), political discourse consensus in the past leads to dispositions that are reinforced by organization and routine—which results in the present ideational outcome. So, in this context, having had a relatively stable conceptualization of immigration may have led to the present fixed dispositions that we see in immigration discourse and policy in Quebec elites' discussions today. As much of the discourse and conceptualization is similar—regarding the conceptualization of Quebec as an intercultural nation, with a focus on economic migrants, and an assimilatory integration policy that is the *duty* of migrants to take part in—this model would suggest that the routine and ambivalence of politicians has led to a cementation of ideational norms.

Figure 1



Source: Zuber, C. I. (2022). *Ideational Legacies and the Politics of Migration in European Minority Regions*. Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192847201.001.0001>

However, as was mentioned in the theoretical section, process tracing theories should have a counterfactual test that shows the inception of the process. In the case of immigration discourse and policy framings, this can be the singular event that was so important that it would have had to impact the future process (Rohlfing & Zuber, 2021, p. 1632)—which is done in a comparative manner with similar cases and different events. In this case, that moment would likely be the inception of the nationalist movement and the concurrent creation of the Ministry of Immigration in Quebec, as much of this discourse is intrinsically tied to both. This moment was crucial to the conceptual framing of immigration since so much of the discourse and policy framework is tied to a unique conceptualization of Quebec’s intercultural approach to immigration—and in opposition to the Canadian approach. As this analysis has shown, this tie to the nationalist movement is evident in elites’ conceptualization of economic migrants who are deemed crucial to the Quebec nation, in the intercultural approach more generally, in the contestation of federal immigration strategies, and the expectation to integrate into a uniquely Quebec society. In other provinces that have the same Canadian constitutional right to share migration powers—we do not see the same conceptualization of migrants. Indeed, the province of Manitoba is the closest to Quebec in terms of its power to decide policy on its immigration—yet it has a noticeably different approach to integration and framing of priorities (Paquet, 2013, p. 168). Both provinces gained their immigration powers at similar times and amid similar constitutional disagreements—yet the political discourse in Manitoba’s elite circles during this process was considerably less concerned with issues like cultural security within its integration programs and generally framed Manitoba as a welcoming place for immigrants within Canada—without an ideational contestation over the value of migrants who are chosen by the federal government’s immigration plans (Paquet, 2013, pp. 167, 129).

So, given the stability and uniqueness of elites' approach to immigration in Quebec since the establishment of the *Quebec Immigration Act* and nationalist movement, it would appear that there is ideational policy stabilization in the way that elites conceptualize economic immigration. Its benefit was linked to Quebec's established welcoming and intercultural history and was not contested by political parties in committee meetings in 1993, 1998, 2016, and 2019—unlike immigrants who fell outside the jurisdiction of the province's legislative abilities. While there would be political incentives to use a full range of frames to contest legislation (Zuber, 2022, p. 50)—economic migrants were not criticized, which signals that rational choice models are not useful analytical tools to gauge elites' motivations. Indeed, since the contestation of refugees and family reunification—which are ultimately decided by the federal government—was divided along traditional political lines relating to separatism and invoked language relating to the debate, it would appear as if this aspect of immigration was not solidified as a cross-party disposition.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The end of the 20th century has seen a rise in anti-foreigner sentiment that has shaped policy and social dispositions in Europe and still impacts the lives of immigrants today (Semyonov et al., 2006). However, the relationship between immigrants and their welcoming-societies in North America is not the same. While there have been signs of a recent up-tick in populist rhetoric and anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States of America and parts of Central America (Van Ramshorst, 2018), the dynamics and history in these regions is different. This is especially true in minority-majority regions, like Quebec. The phrase often quoted by Quebec politicians is that the province is an island of francophones surrounded by an ocean of anglophones and its distinct cultural character must be protected (Andrew-Gee, 2022). Yet this protectionist stance does not necessarily correlate to wider anti-immigrant sentiment—but instead presents itself as a unique confluence of assimilatory pressures, concerns over linguistic demographics, and a set of distinctly nationalist ideals toward newcomers.

While the election of Francois Legault’s CAQ government in 2018 was proclaimed by parts of the media as a monumental shift in this set of ideational norms in Quebec—the actual policy and discourse of this new provincial government is largely similar to past governments and shows many of the same ideational dispositions toward the policy area. The largest proposed legislative change to immigration put forward by this government was likely the democratic and Quebec values test. Yet, even though it adds an extra hurdle for immigrants looking to take up residence in Quebec, its goals are similar to those of past integration policies and the political discourse that has been present since the inception of the Quebec Ministry of Immigration. Framed by the need to keep French as proportionally relevant lingua-franca in Canada and through the discursive consensus that Quebec is a welcoming nation that practices interculturalism—these policies are meant to balance the seemingly contradictory wants of the

minority-majority nation. In fact, this research has found that there has been a positive ideational stabilization toward economic migrants that this new government has not tried to contest during the committee stage of the legislative process.

This research finds that elites' firm disposition to economic immigration—in contrast to their contestation of family reunification and refugee policies—can be traced to a routine discursive, bureaucratic, and policy stabilization that was shaped by the beginning of the separatist movement in Quebec and the establishment of the Quebec Ministry of Immigration in 1968. During this research process, there was very little mention of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission or debates relating immigrants' religion or religiosity—which has been the focus of numerous other studies on Quebec's approach to immigration (Dufresne et al., 2019; Leroux, 2010; Sharify-Funk, 2010). Consequently, the framing of Quebec as a secular nation—and those implications in the ideational conceptualization and portrayal of immigration—were not highlighted. While this does not mean that religious dynamics are irrelevant to immigration discourse, it may mean that the case selection chosen for this study did not adequately incorporate time-periods where this discourse was most prevalent. Other scholars have found that there is a bottom-up link between cultural insecurity and a support for religious restrictions in the province of Quebec (Turgeon et al., 2019, p. 255). So, further research might benefit from an exploration of how this aspect impacts elites' ideational conceptualization of immigrations—which are both within and outside Quebec's legislative jurisdiction.

Nevertheless, this does not necessarily detract from this thesis' research goals. This project seeks to answer the questions of how international immigration discourse has shifted since 1991 and why this shift—or lack thereof—may have occurred. While religiosity did not play a central role in the policy and discursive debates in Quebec's committees that were

analyzed, there were noticeable trends in the debates on the *Quebec Immigration Act*. On a practical policy level, the immigration law has been amended over a dozen times and was completely written once in 2016. Yet, the broader trends over this time period show that immigration policies and discourse generally show that there is ideational consensus in distinct integration and immigration policy areas, among elites. During this time period, there was cross-party consensus that economic migrants were necessary and beneficial to the minority-majority society—but that there should also be integration plans provided by the sub-state and followed by immigrants. Christina Zuber’s theory on ideational policy stabilization helps explain this dispositional consensus as it theorizes that ideational legacies can lead to current dispositions through repeated routines and the establishment of norms (Zuber, 2022, p. 26). Zuber does not, however, engage in an in-depth exploration of the limits to this stabilization—and so, this study theorizes that certain aspects of immigration policy and discourse may exist outside the boundaries of discursive norms, in the case of Quebec. Specifically, due to the specific historical legacies of separatism in the province, it would seem that jurisdictional issues play a superseding role in this discourse—and shape elites’ conceptualization of immigration when they discuss immigrants that are under the responsibility of the federal government.

Finally, it should be noted that while sub-state politics might be unique, they are not created in isolation and are embedded in the state’s discourses on immigration (Zuber, 2022, p. 52). This is important because the major federal political parties in Canada have largely abstained from immigrant skepticism in their discourse and policies. Despite the success of President Donald Trump and the anti-immigration rhetoric that was prevalent in the Republican party, the United States’ northern neighbour has not had a similarly successful movement to frame immigration in this light (Adams, 2022). Consequently, it is important to remember this

fact when considering the positive conceptualization of economic immigrants in Quebec. While this research has mentioned that federal-provincial relations play an important role in contestation of policy issues—that does not mean that ideas are immune to public discourse that is spread throughout the federation. As discourse, circumstances, and political constellations change in Canada and Quebec—it will be important to revisit political debates to see how this framing of migration is conducted. The durability of elites’ conceptualization towards economic immigration seems relatively stable; however, time and analysis will be needed to see if this trend sticks.

APPENDICES

A. Quebec General Election Results (1966-2022)³

Year of Election	Party name	Vote Share	Number of seats in the Quebec legislature (108-125)
1966	National Union (UN)	40.82%	56
	Liberal (QLP)	47.29%	50
	Independent	2.77%	2
1970	Liberal	45.50%	72
	National Union	19.65%	17
	Creditist Rally (RC)	11.19%	12
	Quebecois Party (PQ)	23.06%	7
1973	Liberal	54.65%	102
	Quebecois Party	30.22%	6
	Creditist Rally	9.92%	2
1976	Quebecois Party	41.37%	71

³ For the sake of accessibility, only parties which won seats in the provincial elections were included in this table. The party receiving the most seats in each election has been bolded and acronyms are included when new political parties are first introduced to the table. A dividing line has also been included to demarcate which governments were before the committee meetings analyzed in this study—and which came after.

	Liberal	33.78%	26
	National Union	18.20%	11
	Creditist Rally	4.63%	1
	National Popular Party	0.92%	1
1981	Quebecois Party	49.26%	80
	Liberal	12.03%	42
1985	Liberal	55.99%	99
	Quebecois Party	49.26%	23
1989	Liberal	49.95%	92
	Quebecois Party	40.16%	29
	Equality	4.68%	4
1994	Quebecois Party	44.75%	77
	Liberal	44.40%	47
	Democratic Action (ADQ)	6.46%	1
1998	Quebecois Party	42.87%	76
	Liberal	43.55%	48

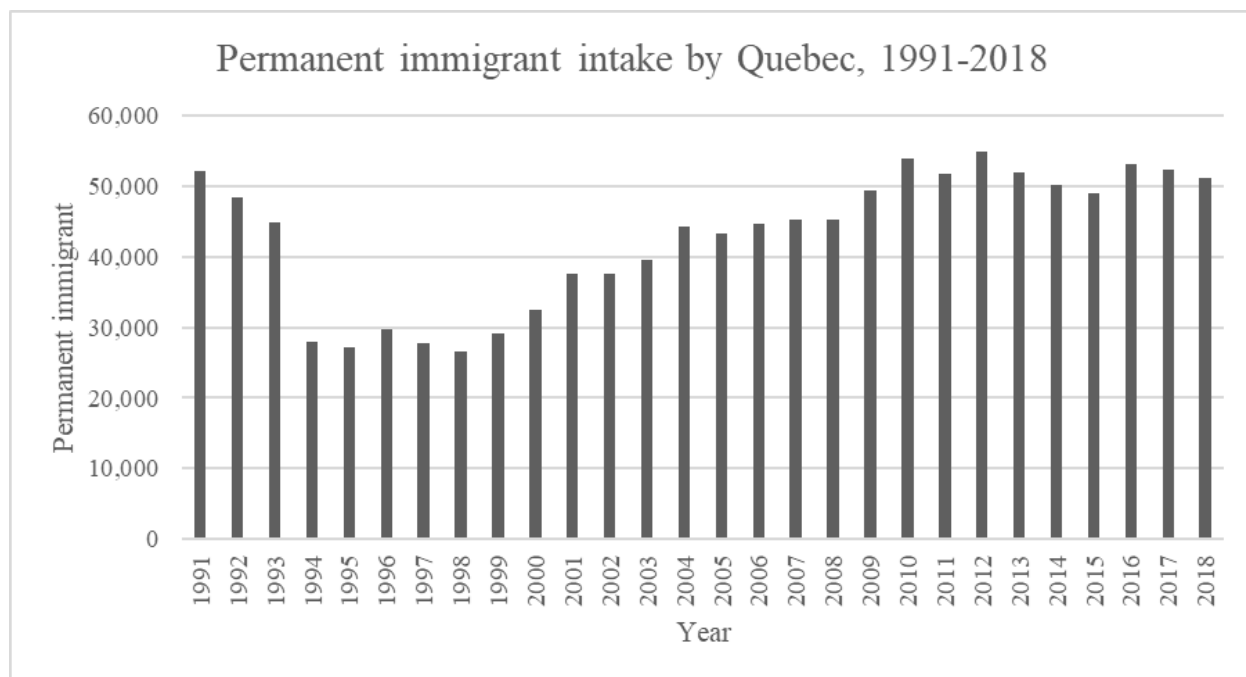
	Democratic Action	11.81%	1
2003	Liberal	45.99%	76
	Quebecois Party	33.24%	45
	Democratic Action	18.18%	4
2007	Liberal	33.08%	48
	Democratic Action	30.84%	41
	Quebecois Party	28.35%	36
2008	Liberal	42.08%	66
	Quebecois Party	35.17%	51
	Democratic Action	16.37%	7
	United Quebec (QS)	3.78%	1
2012	Quebecois Party	31.95%	54
	Liberal	31.20%	50
	Future Quebec Coalition (CAQ)	27.05%	19
	United Quebec	6.03%	2
2014	Liberal	41.52%	70

	Quebecois Party	25.38%	30
	Future Quebec Coalition	23.05%	22
	United Quebec	7.63%	3
2018	Future Quebec Coalition	37.42%	74
	Liberal	24.82%	31
	Quebecois Party	17.06%	10
	United Quebec	16.10%	10
2022	Future Quebec Coalition	40.98%	90
	Liberal	14.37%	21
	United Quebec	15.43%	11
	Quebecois Party	14.61%	3

Source: Lionel-Groulx Foundation. (2023, June 26). *Quebec Election Atlas*. Quebec Data.

<https://www.donneesquebec.ca/recherche/dataset/atlas-des-elections-au-quebec>

B. Permanent immigration levels in Quebec published by the Government of Quebec



Source: Xhardez, C., & Paquet, M. (2021). Beyond the Usual Suspects and Towards Politicisation: Immigration in Quebec’s Party Manifestos, 1991–2018. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 22(2), 673–690. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-020-00764->

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