

**BQ in the House:**  
**The Nature of Sovereigntist Representation in the Canadian Parliament**

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## **BQ in the House:**

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#### **Abstract**

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*The Bloc Québécois shook the foundation of Canadian politics when the party swept into the House of Commons in 1993 as the new Official Opposition. In subsequent years it surprised most pundits, proving to be a stable and democratic force in Canadian politics. Little has been written about the particular dynamics and behaviour of separatist parties in democratic parliaments. This study seeks to address this lacuna. The empirical analysis relies on a longitudinal dataset of oral questions asked in the Canadian House of Commons from the advent of the BQ in 1990 until 2004. We examine the BQ's attention to national unity issues in Question Period, and consider two factors that may lead to a moderation of that party's national unity agenda: fulfillment of its institutional role in Parliament, and public opinion in Quebec on sovereignty. It is shown that BQ attentiveness to issues of national unity mainly follows public support for sovereignty. It is also found that the BQ is able to marginally and momentarily affect public opinion, but the party appears on the whole limited in its ability to mobilize public support for sovereignty and pursue its separatist agenda more rigorously. Participation in the democratic parliamentary game forces the BQ to address a set of issues much broader than national unity.*

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The Bloc Québécois (BQ) shook the foundation of Canadian politics when it swept into the House of Commons in 1993 as the new Official Opposition (Erickson 1995). Separatist parties have been represented in numerous national parliaments throughout history – in Spain, Belgium and India to name but a few. However, ascendancy to the status of Official Opposition is unprecedented in democratic history (Birnie 2005). Garnering almost one fifth (18.3 percent) of seats in the House of Commons the BQ were, for four years, arguably the most empowered separatist party in a democratic government. What are the implications of having a significantly represented separatist party in a national government? To what extent has the BQ been successful in pursuing a separatist agenda in Ottawa? Does participation in Parliament lead to moderation and accommodation, or does it lead to separation? These questions have not been fully addressed in scholarship on separatism, nationalism, or even Canadian politics. While numerous studies focus on nationalist and separatist movements, there are no comparative

studies of the dynamics and behaviour of separatist parties in government and its significance for questions of national unity. Moreover, until now, empirical data on the agenda of parties in the Canadian Parliament has been lacking. This study seeks to address these lacunae by analyzing the changing agenda of the BQ in the Canadian Parliament over time, as they have evolved and grappled with the inherent ambiguities of functioning in a national government.

To the surprise of many, the BQ has proven to be a stable and democratic force in Canadian politics. Far from the predicted obstructionism, the BQ has championed a broad range of national issues, while successfully increasing the salience of issues important to Quebecers in Ottawa, and – at least throughout the 1990s – managed to keep the issue of Quebec separation on the national agenda. These dynamics are empirically examined in this paper through the analysis of a longitudinal dataset of oral questions in the Canadian House of Commons, from the advent of the BQ in 1990 until 2004. Multivariate analysis of the reciprocal effects of public opinion in Quebec on sovereignty and BQ attentiveness to national unity in the House is also carried out using these data.

The findings should help enhance our understanding of separatist parties' behaviour in national parliaments, insofar as parties' issue attentiveness at Question Period is concerned. Our study concentrates on two factors that appear particularly important in understanding separatist parties' attentiveness to issues in Parliament. These factors are: (1) the institutional constraint of working within a national government, and (2) responsiveness to the core constituency of nationalist supporters. If, like the BQ, a separatist party decides to “play the parliamentary game,” then it will inevitably have to moderate its sovereigntist agenda and pay attention to several other, non-constitutional issues. An additional constraint, or mechanism of moderation, is the level of nationalist sentiments among the population. It may very well be that separatist

parties' ability at leading public opinion is limited, and that their parliamentary behaviour has to follow the ebb and flow of nationalist sentiments in order to "keep in tune" with public opinion and to justify their own presence in Parliament.

In empirically examining these questions, we focus on *issue attentiveness* as an indicator of democratic representation. This approach differs from that followed by numerous studies whose typical focus is on the representation of public policy preferences (e.g., Althaus 2003; Erikson et al. 2002; Page and Shapiro 1992). Our study rather draws on the growing body of literature that emphasizes the importance of issue attentiveness as an integral part of the representational process (e.g., Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 2002; Soroka 2002). Paying a significant amount of attention to a set of issues is as much crucial to political parties' democratic role as parliamentary representatives of their constituents as translating policy preferences into actual public policies. One could also argue that issue attentiveness is an even more important role of separatist parties as the latter are unlikely to see the policy preference of their core supporters – separation – actually implemented by a national government. Separatist parties may just as well focus on being attentive to the issue of separation, in the hope that they can increase that issue's salience in the public mind.

### **The Parliamentary Behaviour of Separatist Parties**

We know very little about what to expect from sovereigntist parties in national governments. Indeed, relatively few sovereigntist movements achieve party status, and fewer still garner any significant representation in government. Several case studies have detailed the behaviour of separatist parties in government, such as in Gold's (2003) and Tambini's (2001) discussion of the Lega Nord. But much of the literature addresses the ideological basis of

separatist parties and the nationalist nature of their electoral support. For instance, Ross (1996) compares support for separatist parties in Catalonia and the Basque region, arguing that distinct party systems in each region account for varied electoral success. Brand et al. (1994) test a variety of indicators which influence voting patterns for the Scottish National Party (SNP), including support for independence, protest voting, perceptions of relative deprivation, and identity. Anderson and Gidengil (2002) compare the voting behaviour of the SNP and BQ electorate.

The literature on separatist parties' parliamentary behaviour largely focuses on obstructionist parties. The most famous case is that of the Sinn Féin. In 1918, that party won 73 of Ireland's 105 seats accounting for 12 percent of the British House of Commons. It promptly refused to take up its place in Westminster and proceeded to set up an Irish Assembly which adopted the Irish Declaration of Independence by the end of the month, leading to the establishment of the Irish Free State (Lloyd 1998). This extreme outcome is rare – indeed, it is the only example of participation leading to separation. Before Sinn Féin's dramatic boycott of the British Parliament, the moderate Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) had made substantial gains to increase Irish autonomy, culminating in the Home Rule Act of 1912. Another frequent example is Belgium's Vlaams Blok. In 2003, it captured 12 percent of seats in the Chamber of People's Representatives, up from 10 percent in the 1999 election (Birnie 2005). The party entered parliament with an incredibly disruptive platform, bringing a rigid and uncompromising agenda to government. In spite of an "alleged commitment to representative democracy... analysis illustrates a set of ethnocentrist, authoritarian and anti-egalitarian values underpinning an essentially non-democratic ideology" (Swyngedouw and Ivaldi 2001: 1). The unqualified refusal to moderate policies – in particular the repatriation of immigrants who do not assimilate –

led to the banning of the Vlaams Blok in 2004. The party immediately refashioned itself as the Vlaams Belang, with an ostensibly modified platform. However, the tenacity of the militant arm of the Flemish independence movement to a rigid and xenophobic ethnic nationalism belies the underlying agenda of the new party, which is likely to continue its obstruction of national politics.

Such obstructionist parties tend to fall into the body of work addressing populist or far-right parties, characterized as anti-establishment, anti-elite, ideologically opposed to the status quo (Swyngedouw and Ivaldi 2001) and in many cases undemocratic (Bull and Gilbert 2001). The BQ has been included in some studies. For example, Mayer et al. (2000) characterize the party as neo-populist for its ability to “embody the unarticulated feelings and values of the masses” and anti-system for the “fundamental challenge” it poses to the government. By definition, separatist parties do seek to change the power relations governing society.

Yet, conceptualizing separatism as necessarily undemocratic – and therefore separatist parties as disruptive – overlooks the particularities of distinct subnational movements.

Obstructionist parties tend to be those beholden to an ethnic, rather than civic nationalism, and a far-right ideology. The SNP is a counter example of a moderate party devoted to independence for Scotland through the achievement of “Home Rule” by democratic and peaceful means (MacCormick 2000). The SNP achieved its highest proportion of seats in the British Parliament in 1977, with 11 MPs (Birnie 2005). They succeeded in lobbying for a referendum on devolution in 1979. The Scotland Act was endorsed by a narrow majority, only to be repealed by the Thatcher government. The SNP continued to campaign for a Scottish Parliament, but with little success until the late 1990s.

The BQ, being far from obstructionist, stands out as one of the few ideologically left-wing parties, and as a party fostering civic nationalism. The BQ has taken great efforts to adhere to democratic norms to legitimize itself in the House. When it emerged in the weeks following the failed Meech Lake Accord, formed by several MPs who had defected from other parties, it was denied official party status (Noël 1994). Most pundits did not expect the party to do well in the upcoming election. However, support for the BQ flourished amidst the rising nationalist sentiment of the early 1990s, which had been welling-up since the 1982 patriation of the constitution without Quebec, and exploded in the aftermath of failed Charlottetown referendum in 1992. The sweeping victory of the BQ in 1993 reaffirmed that, for Quebecers, “the constitutional issue was not settled” (Noël 1994: 26).

Some predicted that the BQ would be obstructionist in Parliament, taking every opportunity to “embarrass” the national government and to use all means possible to push forward its objective of sovereignty (e.g., MacDonald 1994). Others questioned the legitimacy and legality of a party based in a single province and dedicated to separation (Noël 1994: 24). Indeed, the BQ scarcely had a political platform short of independence for Quebec. Its leader Lucien Bouchard’s Speech from the Throne in 1994 was fairly startling to federalists – it was clear he had interpreted his electoral victory as a mandate for independence: “No one can trivialize the shift represented by the decision some 2 million voters have made to send 54 members here to pave the way for Quebec’s sovereignty” (Hansard 1994: 33). Emphasizing the binational nature of Canada and the distinctiveness of Quebec, he continued: “If one accepts the obvious, one must surely accept the consequences. Every nation has the right to self-government” (Hansard 1994: 34). Bouchard presented a vision of government similar to the confederation of the European Community and emphasized the importance of economic

integration with Canada in an independent Quebec, eschewing the possibility of a renewed federal system. “[T]he pre-referendum campaign has begun” he proclaimed, and “Quebec’s future as a sovereign country is just one step ahead, a sovereign country that is Canada’s neighbour and friend” (Hansard 1994: 32-39).

Despite the inflammatory rhetoric, *Bloquistes* would not go to Parliament and be obstructionist. Bouchard committed to working within the system to pursue his mission – to manage the economic crisis facing the national government and the political crisis with respect to national unity – guided by the principles of “equity and responsibility,” pledging to fulfill the traditional role of the Official Opposition, criticizing the government, and putting forth constructive ideas for both Quebec and Canada. The BQ quickly heeded this pledge. After only six months, they had earned respect as a credible and efficacious Opposition: “[f]or the Bloc Québécois, success and legitimacy as official opposition are important not so much because they may disturb the... government but rather because they give credibility to the sovereigntist project” (Noël 1994: 29).

Yet, what sorts of dynamics can we expect from a separatist party’s attentiveness to national unity issues while it is sitting in a national Parliament? Are there reasons to believe that such attentiveness may be constant over time or, rather, that some specific factors may affect that party’s level of attention to issues of national unity, potentially leading to a moderation of the party’s separatist agenda in Parliament? Below, we theoretically explore two such factors, and offer hypotheses to be tested in the remainder of this paper.



## **Theoretical Expectations**

### *The Paradox of Participation*

Once in government, parties face several dynamics which pressure them to moderate their agenda. If they maintain a militant stance on separation or fail to cooperate and work democratically within the government, they risk alienation and expulsion as obstructionists. If however, they decide to work democratically, within the system, to pursue their agenda, they will be required to moderate by opening their agenda to national issues and the business of government to take up their institutional role in earnest. Parties are astutely aware that for any gains for the sovereignty movement, earning the respect of the government is critical, both in terms of avoiding legal restrictions to limit participation, and to legitimize the sovereignty project. At the same time, they may succeed in undermining the sovereignty agenda by legitimizing the government itself. Several authors have noted that once in government, the platform of separatist parties often shifts from the objective of full independence to increasing autonomy within the government (Ross 1996; Mayer et al 2000). Pointing to political pragmatism, Mayer et al. (2000: 88-89) argue that there is an “inevitable change in the political orientation of non-mainstream populist parties [as defined above] once they achieve significant political success and a realistic chance of acquiring real political power”.

The quintessential example of the political pragmatism of separatist parties is the Lega Nord in Italy, which won 18.6 percent of seats in Italy’s Chamber of Deputies in 1994. Bull and Gilbert (2001) identify three phases of the Lega Nord, characterized by dramatic – and pragmatic – shifts in agenda (Mayer et al. 2000). The Lega Nord first emerged as a populist, ethno-regionalist party with a radical right-wing ideology rooted in ethnic nationalism. Its platform of anti-immigration and independence for Padania drew accusations of racism and xenophobia. In

the second phase, the Lega Nord moved to the forefront of the autonomy movement, elected on a platform to establish a federal system in Italy (Gold 2003). Due to its anti-government stance, its electoral success in 1994 was highly contentious. Facing a backlash from militant supporters for perceived ‘collaboration,’ and ‘co-option,’ party leader Umberto Bossi struggled to maintain the image of a revolutionary party and to balance the identity of the movement against the need to be viewed as legitimate by the government. Under increased pressure to merge with other coalition partners, he abruptly ended his foray with federalism and tabled one of three no confidence motions in 1995 – to the dismay of the pro-government faction – in order to maintain his leadership and the very identity of the movement.

The third phase, characterized by low electoral support and a declining role in government, is marked by a shift back to radicalism, ethno-regionalism and a populist, anti-government stance (Bull and Gilbert 2001: 59-61). The party’s strategy was to renew nationalism in order to mobilize support. It increased its identity discourse, returned to independence-oriented speeches, proclaimed the futility of federalism, and produced a declaration of independence. While it was able to trigger some upward shifts in support, it was never able to fully recover support. By 2000, it joined Berlusconi’s centre-right coalition. In its greatest feat of electoral pragmatism, it aligned with long-time rival, the Italian nationalist party Forza Italia, to lobby together for devolution. “For both coalition partners it was a clear case of ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’” (Tambini 2001: 131-141).

The ambiguous and ironic position of defending Canadian values in the House is not lost on the BQ. In March of 1994, Bouchard mused: “I hope we are not working for federalism.” It was indeed,

... a strange paradox that a sovereigntist party from Quebec [was] the only party fighting to preserve the main value of Canada. The Bloc Québécois may have modified Quebecers’ perception of the House of Commons. The BQ increased considerably the use of French in the House, regularly raised questions of

interest to Quebecers, and brought the Quebec debate on sovereignty to Ottawa. In doing so, they unavoidably increased the House of Commons' relevance for those Quebecers who had paid little attention in the past (Noël 1994).

Indeed, the BQ has embraced many national issues as it has taken up its institutional role in parliament. Yet, it has not compromised on its central goal of a sovereign Quebec. In contrast to Mayer et al.'s (2000) hypothesis, with electoral success, the BQ did not nationalize, nor have they lost or modified their populist attributes. The agenda of the BQ is hardly beset by pragmatism – rather, it is largely stable over time and sensibly reflects the issue priorities of its constituency.

The unwillingness of the BQ to compromise on independence is likely related to the nature of Quebec nationalism, which is culturally defined and driven largely by identity (Anderson and Gidengil 2002). Nevertheless, the agenda for sovereignty may be subject to important constraints. One of these constraints may be linked to the very fact of sending MPs to a national parliament. Thus, our first hypothesis is that (H1) working within the parliamentary system leads to a moderation of the separatist agenda, as the party has to broaden its agenda and be attentive to issues other than national unity in order to fulfill its democratic function as an opposition party.

### *Constituencies Matter*

One clear trend which emerges from the comparative examples discussed above is the vulnerability of separatist parties to the loss of militant support due to a moderation of its agenda. The IPP made the fatal error of supporting Lloyd George's Conscription Bill for Ireland in 1918, which proved to be, to the electorate, beyond the pale. The IPP's complicity with Britain was confirmed, and it was subsequently associated with the brutal repression of participants in the Easter Rising, who, by this point, had become national martyrs. Despite significant institutional

achievements, failure to oppose the British war-effort and defend the Easter insurgents cost the IPP nearly all of its electoral support due to the perception that it had been co-opted by the government, and had compromised Irish interests. In 1918 it was reduced to only 6 seats, 4 of which Sinn Féin decided not to contest (Lloyd 1998). As we saw above, the Lega Nord suffered for its positive contributions to government. Bossi was aware that “every cooperative act, and every photographed handshake with another coalition leader, tarnished the brand image of the League” (Tambini 2001: 67, 70). Moderation eventually divided the party into factions of pro-government federalists and ‘independentists’ at which point the party was hemorrhaging support (Tambini 2001: 74-75). As a consequence, electoral support for the Lega Nord has declined precipitously since 1995, bottoming at 4 percent in the 2001 elections.

For a time, the Basque National Party (PNV) claimed to be the sole champion of the Basque nation in Spain. However, moderation of its agenda, with electoral success, cost the party its militant supporters. Since 1984, the party “reduced polarization, increased pluralism, [and] the expression of national feeling through non-nationalist vehicles..., reduced concern with long-term, symbolic goals and [took a] new interest in autonomy as a means to material ends” (Ross 1996: 500), resulting in the polarization of the party. In 1986 it split, its dissidents forming the EA, a militant faction claiming that the PNV had “betrayed both the nation and its ideological roots,” leading to an electoral disaster in the following regional elections. After losing two-fifths of its members, the diminished PNV continued to moderate. They signed the anti-violence Pact, severed association with violent groups, “publicly confessed to the party’s error in trying to deny the nation’s political plurality, effectively burying the nation-party... and [by 1990] virtually dropped references to independence, or even to possible extensions of autonomy” (Ross 1996: 500). Their platform shifted toward defending the material interests of

its constituents through the promotion of industry and provision of welfare service, in a strategy coined by the party as “welfare-nationalism.” On a platform of greater autonomy and non-violence, the PNV has failed to achieve more than 2.3 percent of seats at any given time (Birnie 2005).

Scotland’s SNP has also been subject to the loss of militant support (Anderson and Gidengil 2002: 3). It has simply “not been able to establish a reputation as a credible party of government which could take over the role of the spokesperson for the national community” (Brand et al. 1994). Although it receives a significant proportion of the popular vote, the SNP has never broken 2 percent of seats in the British House of Commons. Scottish nationalists are driven both by Scottish identity and the economic position of Scotland, in contrast to Quebec nationalists, who are driven primarily by identity. Thus, the vote for greater autonomy tends to be split between the SNP and the Labour Party, which implemented devolution when it came to power in 1997 after making it part of its platform following the 1979 referendum, and is furthermore able to attract votes based on both identity and economic considerations. Despite significant autonomist gains, the agenda of the SNP continues to focus on constitutional reform and the central policy objective of re-establishing Scotland as an independent state (MacCormick 2000). A split vote, however, prevents the party from more actively pursuing its agenda. Low support for SNP in national elections is thus due in part to its moderate position, but also a function of party competition and the nature of Scottish nationalism.

These same dynamics are not evidenced in the case of the BQ. Several studies show that the strongest determinant of support for the BQ is Québécois identity (Anderson and Gidengil 2002), which tends to be stable over time. This is distinguished from the examples above, which tend to be elite-driven and/or economically oriented, in the case of disadvantaged regions. The

SNP, for example, tends to split its vote with Labour when economic issues are more salient. In contrast to other parties, the BQ has succeeded in becoming a staple of national politics, simultaneously addressing a broad range of national issues and championing the interests of Quebec, without suffering a significant loss of electoral support or abandoning its official platform of sovereignty. The unusual success of the BQ results from its unique constituency, which distinguishes it from other parties. Whereas most nationalist parties are beholden to militant support and subject to electoral loss with moderation, support for sovereignty in Quebec has a relatively stable core. Thus, moderation does not undermine electoral support for the BQ as it does for other parties.

That being said, sovereignty support over and above the core of Quebec *indépendantistes* is subject to significant fluctuations over time. Such fluctuations may constitute an additional constraint on the BQ's separatist agenda in Parliament, in that the party may have to decrease its attention to national unity issues so as to keep as much in tune with Quebec's public opinion as possible. Thus, our second hypothesis is that (H2) public opinion in Quebec on sovereignty drives BQ attentiveness to issues of national unity. The reverse causal effect may also be considered, however: we can not rule out the possibility that the BQ itself can affect public support for sovereignty.

## **Data and Methods**

To analyze the parliamentary agenda of the BQ with an eye to the changing nature of attention to issues of national unity, we use Soroka's (2005) longitudinal database, *Oral Questions in the Canadian House of Commons*, which documents all oral questions from March 1983 to May 2004. This content analytic database is the most encompassing empirical study of

its kind, evolving out of Soroka's (2002) study of agenda-setting dynamics in Canada, which used content analysis of Question Period as the primary measure of the government's policy agenda to study shifts in attentiveness to issues over time. For our purposes, we restrict the analysis to the period starting in October 1990, the first month the BQ had representation in the House. A total of 27,519 oral questions were coded over the 1990-2004 period, spanning four Parliaments. Each oral question in the database is coded with one of 25 major topic codes, and over 200 minor topic codes, adapted from the U.S. *Policy Agendas* Project. The length of each question is measured in column centimetres or word count. To generate monthly data, daily percentages are aggregated by party and issue and calculated as a proportion of the total monthly House or party agenda, and then weighted by the number of days the House sat per month.<sup>1</sup>

The validity of Question Period as an empirical indicator of a party's issue attentiveness has now been well established in ground-breaking work on representation of the public's issue priorities in Canada (Crimmins and Nesbitt-Larking 1996; Howlett 1998; Soroka 2002; Penner et al. 2006) and in other parliamentary democracies (Diskin and Galnoor 1990; Breuning 1994). Even though oral questions by MPs cannot be considered as actual policy, they nonetheless expose a very important part of the symbolic aspect of the policymaking process (Penner et al. 2006: 1009). As such, Question Period is a valuable policy venue to consider when trying to assess the agendas of political parties in Parliament. Since the majority of questions are posed by Opposition MPs, trends in attentiveness reflect Opposition parties' issue priorities and speak to the representational behaviour of MPs. Question Period is thus one of the most visible venues in which Opposition parties' representation of their constituents' preferences can be empirically observed (Chester and Bowring 1962; Franklin and Norton 1993).

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<sup>1</sup> For a full description of the dataset design, coding methodology and general trends, see Penner et al. (2006).

The public opinion data used in this paper is a time series of voter support for Quebec sovereignty. We generate a monthly time series by averaging polls carried out during the period by Montreal-based polling firms CROP and Léger, and interpolating missing data. It should be noted that the question wordings used for measuring sovereignty support varied over that period. From 1996 on, the October 1995 referendum question on “sovereignty-partnership” is repeated, typically as follows: “If a referendum were held today on the same question that was asked in 1995, that is, sovereignty with an offer of partnership with the rest of Canada, would you vote YES or would you vote NO?” Prior to 1996, the questions referred to “sovereignty” or to a “sovereign country”, with respondents being asked whether or not they were favourable to it or would vote for sovereignty in a referendum. Nevertheless, the resulting monthly time series matches quite closely the period’s dynamics in sovereignty support in Quebec (see Pinard 1997; Gagné and Langlois 2002).

To test the hypothesis that public opinion in Quebec on sovereignty is driving BQ attentiveness to national unity in the House, multivariate regression of the reciprocal effects of sovereignty support and BQ attentiveness is employed. More specifically, vector autoregression (VAR) and Granger exogeneity tests are used to verify whether the former “Granger causes” the latter or not. The analysis also relies on graphs of the time series themselves, BQ attentiveness to national unity (versus other issues) and public opinion on Quebec sovereignty. Taken together, these various empirical methods should help enlighten the dynamics between public opinion in Quebec and the BQ’s issue attentiveness in Ottawa.



## **Findings**

### *Issue Priorities of the Bloc Québécois*

Issue attentiveness of Canadian parties is similar in the aggregate for many issue domains: party agendas tend to move together over time (Penner et al. 2006). Using a summary measure of preferences for government spending, Penner et al. (2006) illustrate that there is not as wide a range of preferences between parties as the adversarial nature of Canadian Parliamentary politics would suggest. Party agendas generally appear driven by some combination of voters' mean preference and that of their own partisans. Figure 1 illustrates with Question Period data that even in the case of national unity, issue salience tends to rise and fall similarly for all parties. This points directly to one mechanism by which partisan agendas for sovereignty are moderated at the national level. Opposition parties in Parliament have to criticize a variety of government initiatives and they need to pay at least a little attention to several issues. They are thus limited by such institutional roles, which inhibit them from responding to major changes in partisan preferences.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Despite such aggregate similarities, particular trends in oral questions nonetheless point to distinct issue priorities by party, which contribute to and shape the total Parliamentary agenda. Figure 2 graphs the proportion of questions devoted to the top five issue priorities of the BQ: labour, employment and immigration; constitutional and national unity issues; defence; government operations; and tied for fifth, transportation, and intergovernmental affairs and trade. The figure also presents the corresponding proportion of the total agenda which was devoted to BQ issue priorities over the period. Thus, while the BQ devoted 13.4 percent of all questions to issues of national unity, less than 6 percent of questions from all parties combined – including

the BQ – concerned national unity. The gap between the BQ agenda and the total agenda is a good indication of the relative salience of the issue for the BQ compared with the House as a whole. Where the gap is largest, the BQ plays the greatest role in increasing the salience of the issue in Parliament. The large gap for national unity indicates a significant role for the BQ in getting this issue onto the total agenda. Indeed, the BQ is the only party for which issues of national unity were among the top five issue priorities. The party is responsible for nearly half – 43.6 percent – of all questions concerning national unity asked in the House during this period. From Figure 2, we see that the BQ is most distinct in terms of its focus on employment, national unity and intergovernmental relations. These are sensible findings in that these three issue domains comprise the vast majority of issues traditionally considered important to Quebecers (Gagnon and Hérvault 2007).

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The BQ's top issue – employment – is a domain relevant to all parties, comprising labour-related issues and expenditures, disputes and standards, regulation such as parental leave and child care, as well as immigration and refugee issues. This issue domain is augmented for the BQ as a function of several subcategories. Throughout the 1990s, the party used oral questions to relentlessly pressure the government for jurisdictional control over manpower training and later to reform the Employment Insurance Program, which it argued was harming workers in Quebec. In the late 1990s, questions concerning parental leave and day-care also become salient. On the whole, the BQ asked the more questions about the jurisdiction of manpower training and Employment Insurance reform than any other single issue in the 1990s.

Only marginally lower were questions of national unity, which include all constitutional issues relating to Quebec, including of course, questions of sovereignty. The BQ used oral

questions to sustain the debate surrounding the possibility of granting Quebec a “distinct society” status, defend the right of the Quebec National Assembly to carry out binding referenda, challenge the Calgary Declaration and the Clarity Act, make the case for an increasing international role for Quebec, and pose hypothetical questions concerning economic, monetary and social unions in the event of separation (for a more in-depth look at these constitutional issues during that period, see Gagnon 2004).

The proportion of attention paid to defence, government operations and transportation issues by the BQ is closer to that received on the total agenda. This is the case for defence because it is driven, for all parties, by real-world events such as the disintegration of Yugoslavia and intervention in Afghanistan. In addition, the BQ also actively opposed the 1994 closure of College Militaire Royal de Saint-Jean in Quebec. Government operations is a domain also salient for all parties, as it includes issues of government accountability and efficiency. The BQ addressed the usual issues concerning ethics, with particular attention to the Liberal sponsorship scandal, as well as duplication and overlap, especially in Quebec jurisdiction. The transportation category includes airline, railway and maritime issues as well as general transportation policy. The majority of BQ questions here concern fair airline competition and regulation, which affect Montreal airports, as well as issues related to Quebec’s shipbuilding industry. The final issue priority – intergovernmental relations and trade – includes jurisdictional squabbles, disputes over transfer payments and fiscal arrangements such as the Health and Social Transfer and equalization payments, regional development, and internal trade disputes. This domain comprises most grievances voiced by moderate nationalists in Quebec, with a general focus on increasing autonomy rather than separation. The BQ focused primarily on fiscal arrangements and the fiscal imbalance, and federal spending intrusions on Quebec’s social programs.

By the end of the 1990s, the separatist party had developed a thorough and comprehensive agenda which included a critique of all government portfolios and public departments, with clear proposals to remedy problems: “Ironically, one could find in the BQ platform a complete government agenda” (Gagnon and Hérivault 2004: 153). The BQ stood for balanced budgets, sound fiscal management of public funds, comprehensive and progressive social policies, and multilateralism in foreign affairs. They rigorously defended the interests of Quebec, lobbying against jurisdictional intrusions, for the protection of Quebec industries, elimination of the fiscal imbalance, unconditional federal transfers for social programs, and compensation for Quebec’s universal daycare program. Addressing issues from the environment to social housing, accessible Employment Insurance, non-intervention in Iraq, continental missile defence and same-sex marriage, the BQ has proven a bona fide and efficacious party in the House, with the ability to appeal to a broad range of interests, focused on, but not limited by, issues of national unity.

To sum up, analysis of the BQ’s issue priorities highlights the distinctiveness of its attention to issues dealing with Quebec’s interests. In particular, national unity issues occupy an overly important place in the party’s oral interventions in Question Period, compared to the House’s other federal parties. Yet, aggregate similarities in parties’ issue attentiveness, as well as the breadth and diversity of issues tackled by the BQ also suggest that the fulfillment of institutional responsibilities is likely an important mechanism of moderation once parties – separatist or not – are in government. In this sense, the BQ seems somewhat distinct from other separatist parties worldwide, although comparative empirical evidence is obviously lacking. Nevertheless, the BQ first and foremost remains a separatist party, whose main *raison d’être* is

keeping the goal of sovereignty salient among Quebec's public opinion. To what extent does it fulfill this task? It is to this question that we now turn.

*Variance of BQ Attentiveness on National Unity with Public Opinion on Sovereignty*

BQ attentiveness to issues such as employment and intergovernmental affairs is fairly stable over time. However, attention to national unity – which has the highest standard deviation over the period – is characterized by marked punctuations and long lulls (see Figure 1). The salience of national unity is likely driven by some combination of real-world events, media, public opinion, and government priorities (Winter et al. 1982; Soroka 2002: 30). As we have seen, within the government, the disproportionate attentiveness given to national unity issues by the BQ suggests that it is overwhelmingly responsible for taking the issue to the House. The ebb and flow of attention to national unity is, in part, a function of the BQ's efforts to gain legitimacy in the House by fulfilling its institutional role which requires moderation of the sovereignty agenda to devote time to national issues as they emerge. It also reflects the BQ's responsiveness to, and/or mobilization of, public opinion on sovereignty in Quebec in its struggle to manage the issue of national unity to maintain the support of distinct constituencies. Figure 3 illustrates the covariation between the BQ's monthly attentiveness to national unity issues and public opinion on sovereignty over time. For comparability, the salience of national unity is a lowess-smoothed trendline (bandwidth=.1).

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

While the covariation between the two series is relatively clear, the causality is not immediately evident. To test the hypothesis that public opinion is leading attentiveness to national unity, multivariate vector autoregressions (VAR) are run, which first regress public

opinion in Quebec on sovereignty on the lag of BQ attentiveness to national unity, and then BQ attentiveness on the lag of public support for sovereignty. Two VAR models are run, specified at one and two month lags. Ideally, daily series would be employed, as the pace of Question Period is such that responsiveness to public opinion may be evident in periods shorter than one month – in a matter of weeks, or perhaps days. However, in lieu of daily data, we proceed by month – since polls on Quebec sovereignty are only conducted on a (more or less) monthly basis, even BQ MPs can only rely on monthly snapshots in order to have some idea of Quebecers’ mood toward sovereignty. The longer two month lag allows for the possibility that the BQ actually moves Quebec public opinion, which would not occur rapidly since public opinion generally tends to change relatively slowly (Page and Shapiro 1992; Bélanger and Pétry 2005). A dummy is included to control for periods when Parliament was not sitting and in which the BQ did not ask any questions in a month, i.e. the total monthly agenda of the BQ was zero. This particularly occurred prior to the October 1993 federal election, at a time when only seven BQ members were intermittently represented in Parliament. The variable thus accounts for the effect of being absent, or not having the opportunity to ask questions due to the small number of MPs. The first VAR model to be estimated at a one month lag is specified as follows:

$$BQ' = \alpha + \beta_1 PO_{t-1} + \beta_2 BQ_{t-1} + \beta_3 BQS + \varepsilon$$

$$PO' = \alpha + \beta_1 PO_{t-1} + \beta_2 BQ_{t-1} + \beta_3 BQS + \varepsilon$$

where BQ represents the monthly attentiveness to issues of national unity and PO represents the average monthly opinion in Quebec on sovereignty;  $PO_{t-1}$  is the one month lag of public opinion on sovereignty;  $BQ_{t-1}$  is the one month lag of BQ’s attentiveness to sovereignty; and BQS is the dummy for periods in which the House did not sit or the BQ’s total monthly average was zero.

Each model also includes the constant  $\alpha$  and the error term  $\varepsilon$ . The second VAR model is identical, but specified at a two month (t-2) lag.

Results from the VAR analyses with a one-month lag are presented in Table 2. Not unexpectedly, the BQ attentiveness time series has a slight first order autoregressive process, while the public opinion series has a stronger first order autoregressive process, inflated due to the interpolation. Thus, in each case, the lagged measure of the dependent variable is statistically significant, and as expected, the coefficient for the lag of public opinion at t-1 on current public opinion is highly significant and quite large, at 0.834, because the dependent variable is in part derived from the lagged measure. This collinearity is also reflected in the high R-squared value of 0.75, in contrast with the R-squared value of 0.21 in the first model. More importantly, the effect of lagged public opinion on BQ attentiveness is significant at the 0.01 level, with a positive coefficient of 0.250. Thus, for each one unit change in public opinion in the previous month, the predicted value of BQ attentiveness to national unity significantly changes in the same direction by one-fourth of a unit. As for the reciprocal effect of lagged attentiveness to national unity in the House on public opinion, it shows a small coefficient of 0.052 and fails to reach customary levels of significance. This indicates that increased attentiveness by the BQ to national unity issues at Question Period does not significantly move public opinion in Quebec over the following month.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

These results clearly illustrate a stronger effect from public opinion to the BQ than the reverse. To more conclusively determine the causal order of public opinion and BQ attentiveness, a Granger causality test is run on the VAR results. One variable is said to “Granger cause” the other if the lags of one can improve the prediction of the other. If it can, we

can reject the null hypothesis that it can not and conclude with some level of confidence that one *does* Granger cause the other, everything else being equal. Results from the Granger causality tests are presented at the bottom of Table 2. They confirm that public opinion significantly improves the prediction of BQ attentiveness. Thus, sovereignty support can be said to Granger cause BQ attentiveness to national unity issues. However, the lack of statistical significance of the second equation's Granger test indicates that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that BQ attentiveness doesn't cause public opinion. Thus, in support of our hypothesis, we can conclude that BQ attentiveness does not Granger cause public opinion with a one-month lag.

Yet, as was argued earlier, it is possible that, while the BQ can quickly react and adjust its parliamentary behaviour to the state of opinion in Quebec, the latter can take some time to react to the BQ's increased (or decreased) attentiveness to national unity issues in Question Period in the House of Commons. To test for that possibility, we rerun the VAR estimations and Granger causality tests with a two-month lag structure, thus allowing two months for reciprocal effects to occur and be empirically observable. Results from these new estimations appear in Table 3. They continue to confirm that public opinion Granger causes BQ attentiveness. They also reveal that, with a two-month lag, BQ attention to national unity issues Granger cause public opinion. In other words, these new results indicate that causality is reciprocal, running in both directions: from sovereignty support to Question Period, and from Question Period to sovereignty support. However, the first causal pattern ( $PO_{t-2} \rightarrow BQ'$ ) clearly appears more important than the second one ( $BQ_{t-2} \rightarrow PO'$ ). This can be seen by comparing the Granger tests' Chi-squared values for the two causality scenarios (17.579, significant at the .001 level versus 11.896, significant at the .01 level) and the VAR coefficients' t ratios for the lagged values of the variables in each equation (4.19 for  $PO_{t-2}$  in the first equation and 3.45 for  $BQ_{t-2}$  in the second



one). The stronger causal effect of public opinion on BQ attentiveness is also confirmed by the non-significant Granger test results obtained for the  $BQ_{t-n} \rightarrow PO'$  causal pattern when one uses more than three months as the lag structure.<sup>2</sup>

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Table 3's results also indicate a small, but statistically significant, negative effect on sovereignty support when the BQ is not sitting in Parliament. In other words, when the BQ is not sitting, support in Quebec for sovereignty decreases. Contrary to this control variable's effect in the first equation predicting BQ attentiveness, we had no a priori theoretical expectation regarding that variable's effect in the second equation predicting public opinion. The latter result may be interpreted as yet another sign of BQ mobilization of public opinion. While this is certainly a possibility, we would nonetheless be cautious in interpreting this result, for this variable overlaps to a good extent with the summer period. Parliament is always closed in July and August, and this may merely coincide with support for sovereignty often dipping during summertime because of people being away from politics on vacation. Maltais and Lachapelle (2006) observed a similar phenomenon in recent years with Quebecers' high dissatisfaction with their provincial Liberal government, which always noticeably dipped during summertime before going up again in the fall, when Parliament resumed.

To summarize, findings from our causality tests indicate that there exists a reciprocal causal effect between public opinion and BQ attentiveness, insofar as attentiveness to national unity issues is concerned. The causal arrows run both ways: public opinion significantly drives BQ attention to these issues, and such attentiveness seems to feed back more slowly into public opinion. But sovereignty support clearly is the main factor in this causal reciprocation. BQ

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<sup>2</sup> With a three-month lag, the Granger test's Chi-squared value for  $BQ_{t-3} \rightarrow PO'$  decreases to 6.943 (significant at the 0.01 level). With lags of more than three months, public opinion continues to Granger cause BQ attentiveness, but the reverse causal effect entirely ceases to be statistically significant. Complete results available upon request.

attention to national unity only momentarily affects public opinion and to a much smaller degree, whereas the latter appears to continuously and more substantially affect the party's attentiveness to such issues.

### *Moderation of the BQ's National Unity Agenda*

So far, we have seen that the BQ has generally been more attentive to national unity issues in the House than the other parties. We have also observed that such attentiveness went through significant ups and downs over the period, as a result of the BQ's attempts at mobilizing sovereignty support in Quebec but even more so as a response to the fluctuations in this support. Despite marked punctuations and lulls in mass support for sovereignty, the overall trend has been one of decline in the years that followed the 1995 referendum's sovereigntist defeat. How has the BQ reacted to this trend? If BQ attentiveness really does follow public opinion, and if such opinion declined, how has the party adapted its parliamentary behaviour to the new opinion climate in Quebec?

Further examination of the Question Period data (see Figure 1) indicates that the months preceding the October 1995 referendum did bring national unity to the forefront. During this period, the BQ devoted a mean 20 percent of questions to issues of national unity, concerning the regulation of the referendum campaign, the issue of a binding vote, distinct society and post-referendum negotiations in the case of a vote in favour of sovereignty. Following the tumult of the narrow referendum defeat, support in Quebec for sovereignty declined and, consequently, BQ attention to sovereignty plummeted – indeed it halved – to 10 percent. During 1996, the BQ focused primarily on employment and defence, the latter due to the Somalia inquiry and

replacement of faulty Sea Kings helicopters. Transportation also emerged as an important issue with respect to airline competition and regulation as it affected Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois' loss of militant support was confirmed in the June 1997 federal election, where the party received only 37.9 percent of the vote in Quebec (compared to 49.3 percent in the previous election) and lost its Official Opposition status in the House of Commons. Despite the electoral setback, new BQ leader Gilles Duceppe began to rebuild the party, proving to be as tenacious in his defence of Quebec issues as his predecessor Lucien Bouchard (who had left the BQ leadership in January of 1996 to take up the mantle of Premier of Quebec). Duceppe maintained attention to employment and defence but joined the other parties in censuring the Liberal party for the nascent revelations concerning fundraising practices in Quebec during the referendum. The BQ vigorously defended the claim for distinct society, proposed a bilateral constitutional amendment process for sovereignty, railed against the Calgary declaration and sought to overrule section 93 of the constitution to transform Quebec denominational schools into linguistic schools. Yet, support in Quebec for sovereignty slowly continued to decline. Accordingly, in 1998, BQ attention to national unity issues lulled, receiving an average of only 8 percent of the agenda. The BQ focused instead on transportation, opposed ice-breaking fees impacting Quebec shippers, and lobbied for the Atlantic Groundfish Strategy to support fishermen.

Duceppe's Speech from the Throne in October of 1999 may have been more pragmatic and diplomatic than Bouchard's rallying call, but he maintained the focus on traditional jurisdictional concerns and emphasis on the concept of two founding peoples in Canada, accusing the government of "den[y]ing the existence of the Quebec culture and people" (Hansard 1999: 52-55). The BQ's 1999 agenda steered toward defence, as a function of the crisis in

Kosovo, and education, following the implementation of the government's Millennium Scholarship Program. The central issue however, was again national unity, which peaked at a mean 22 percent – higher than the 1995 average in the midst of the referendum. The substance of the national unity debate at the time reflected the BQ's obstinance with respect to non-constitutional autonomist proposals. They continued to flatly reject the prospect of renewed or flexible federalism, along with several pan-Canadian initiatives, including the federal government's proposed Social Union Framework, an initiative widely touted as a flexible spending agreement to accommodate the interests of Quebec (Courchene 2004). Opposition to jurisdictional intrusions focused on infringements of Bill 101 and the Quebec Civil Code. The Clarity Act, not surprisingly, caused uproar (Leslie 1999; Lajoie 2004). The BQ shot back, seeking to support and empower the Quebec National Assembly, focusing on the 50 percent plus one rule for future referenda and emphasizing the need to negotiate with Quebec in the case of a Yes vote. In addition, the BQ made the case for an increasing independent role of Quebec in foreign affairs and international relations, in particular for social and cultural forums.

Duceppe, however, may have overstepped his moderate constituents. Public support for sovereignty declined continuously in the last few years of the 1990s, reaching a low of 31 percent in 2000. As the November 2000 federal election approached, issues of national unity correspondingly declined – to a low of 6.5 percent – as the BQ turned its attention to more election-worthy topics. Despite shying away from national unity, the party elected only 38 MPs in that election. Several prominent defections from the party occurred amidst claims that sovereignty should no longer be central to the BQ's agenda. The provincial Parti Québécois (PQ) also felt the slump in support in the new millennium, receiving in the 2003 provincial election its lowest showings of support since 1976 – leading to speculation about the demise of

the sovereignty movement (Gagnon and Hérivault 2004).

The 2000 election outcome seems to have had a lasting impact on the party's agenda. Following this setback, there appears to have been a noticeable moderation of the agenda from constitutional issues of national unity to intergovernmental relations, comprising autonomist solutions to Quebec's grievances. From 2000 onward, the salience of national unity for the BQ all but vanished. In its place, non-constitutional issues concerning increasing autonomy have been on the rise. The BQ has focused heavily on rectifying the fiscal imbalance, regional development in Quebec, increasing social transfers and equalization payments, and protecting its jurisdictional integrity. The shift is illustrated in Figure 4, marking the decline of attentiveness to issues of national unity and the concurrent increase in attentiveness to intergovernmental affairs. The 2000 period is the first in which attentiveness to the latter has clearly superseded the former, up till the end of the period examined here.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

It may be the case that over the course of these four years, the BQ has become less insistent on constitutional issues, but we should not forget that such moderation is mainly a function of the party's responsiveness to public opinion in Quebec, rather than a clear shift in the party's mandate. There is no reason to believe that national unity issues would not reemerge at Question Period if public opinion were more favourable to them. In fact, such reemergence actually occurred in 2004-05, right after the period examined here. The dramatic turnaround in the June 2004 federal election speaks volumes to the nature of support upon which the BQ depends. With the release of the Auditor General's report on the sponsorship scandal, and the subsequent nosedive in support for the incumbent Liberals, a surge in nationalist sentiment and indignance toward the Liberal Party shifted voters back to the BQ. Winning 54 seats, the BQ

was sent to Ottawa with the fourth Quebec majority in a row, and a renewed mandate to defend the interests of Quebec in the capital (Gagnon and Hérvault 2004). Support for Quebec sovereignty reached new highs during 2005, in good part due to the ongoing scandal (Bélanger and Nadeau 2006). In light of the findings presented in this section, we would expect that a longer examination of BQ attentiveness to national unity issues in Question Period would reveal that it peaked again during those two years, as a response to this new upsurge in sovereignty support.

## **Conclusion**

To what extent do separatist parties act as representational vehicles in national democratic parliaments? We do not know much about the parliamentary behaviour of separatist parties in government because of the relatively few cases that exist, but also because of the clear lack of empirical data on the nature of separatist representation in parliament. This paper sheds some light on this important research question through the use of a database of oral questions asked in the Canadian House of Commons, with an eye to the Bloc Québécois' attentiveness to issues of national unity in Question Period since 1990.

A close examination of the evolution of the BQ's agenda over time illustrates that attention to national unity is not constant, but subject to marked punctuations and lulls, a function of both real-world events and the BQ's sensitivity to public opinion. In particular, a precipitous drop in the salience of issues of national unity in the post-2000 period seems to reflect a significant shift in agenda from a focus on constitutional reform and sovereignty over to intergovernmental relations and non-constitutional autonomist solutions. This turn of events appears to be in response to the marked decline in public support for sovereignty in the few years

preceding the 2000 federal election, which resulted in a relative defeat at the polls, illustrative of the BQ's vulnerability to its moderate constituents. We have shown that this behaviour is partly due to the fact that the BQ follows public opinion in Quebec on sovereignty, more so than the BQ can actually affect sovereignty support in any lasting way. Thus, public opinion clearly constitutes one mechanism of moderation of separatist agendas in governments. We have also shown that a second constraint on the BQ's national unity agenda is the party's fulfillment of its institutional role as part of the national parliament. The BQ has decided to play the democratic game, so to speak; in order to be perceived as a serious and credible opposition party, it has had to address attention to a set of issues much broader than national unity or simply Quebec's interests.

The above analysis suggests that public opinion on national unity may in fact be more sensitive to government policy and behaviour. Although further analysis would be required, the decline in support for the BQ in the late 1990s may have been related, as Courchene (2004) argued, to the increasing success of pan-Canadian federal initiatives. We may additionally observe that failure to engage the Quebec question may drive support for the BQ by heightening nationalist sentiment, and polarizing the Quebec electorate, leaving them with only two possible options: that of the status quo or sovereignty (Simeon 2004: 117; Noël 1994). Evidence of this may be found in the marked increase in support for sovereignty right after the federal sponsorship scandal broke in 2004-05, and in the subsequent waning of BQ *and* sovereignty support following the election in January of 2006 of Stephen Harper's Conservative government, who promised to be more open to Quebec's interests (Bélanger and Nadeau 2006). Thus, it seems feasible and timely for the federal government to more seriously engage the issues important to Quebec in search of longer term resolutions to issues of national unity.

Separatist parties in government are neither necessary, nor sufficient for successful negotiation of issues of national unity. However, negotiating within the framework of government is certainly a “less destructive place for debates to take place” (Brown and Hiebert 1994: 7). The pressure to moderate agendas in government certainly paves the way for the negotiation of mutually acceptable solutions to questions of national unity. The Canadian case represents a “major achievement” in that “it has managed to conduct a fundamental debate about its very existence as a unite country openly, peacefully, and democratically... with remarkable civility” (Simeon 2004: 115). The BQ’s commitment to the national political process is substantively reflected in oral questions in the House of Commons, as illustrated by the breadth and diversity of issues the party addresses, well beyond those of national unity. Moreover, as a party which follows public opinion more so than it leads it, it ought to be conceptualized as a responsive political party, rather than a mere separatist antagonist. The dynamics of the BQ’s issue attentiveness in the Canadian Parliament point to a successful and democratic party, representing the interests of its constituents, something of which other nations – and the Canadian government in particular – ought to take note.



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**Table 1.** Reciprocal Effects of Public Opinion on Sovereignty and BQ Attention to National Unity (1990-2004, One-Month Lag)

	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
	<b>BQ Attention to National Unity</b>	<b>Public Opinion on Sovereignty</b>
Public Opinion (one-month lag)	0.250** (0.096)	0.834*** (0.041)
BQ (one-month lag)	0.198** (0.075)	0.052 (0.032)
BQ not sitting	-0.057*** (0.013)	-0.011 (0.005)
Constant	-0.059 (0.041)	0.072*** (0.017)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.21	0.75
N=163 (months)		
Granger test ( $\chi^2$ )	6.766 (0.009)	2.652 (0.103)

*Note:* Cells contain VAR coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Bottom row cells contain the Granger causality test result for each equation with p value in parentheses.

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001 (two-tailed test)

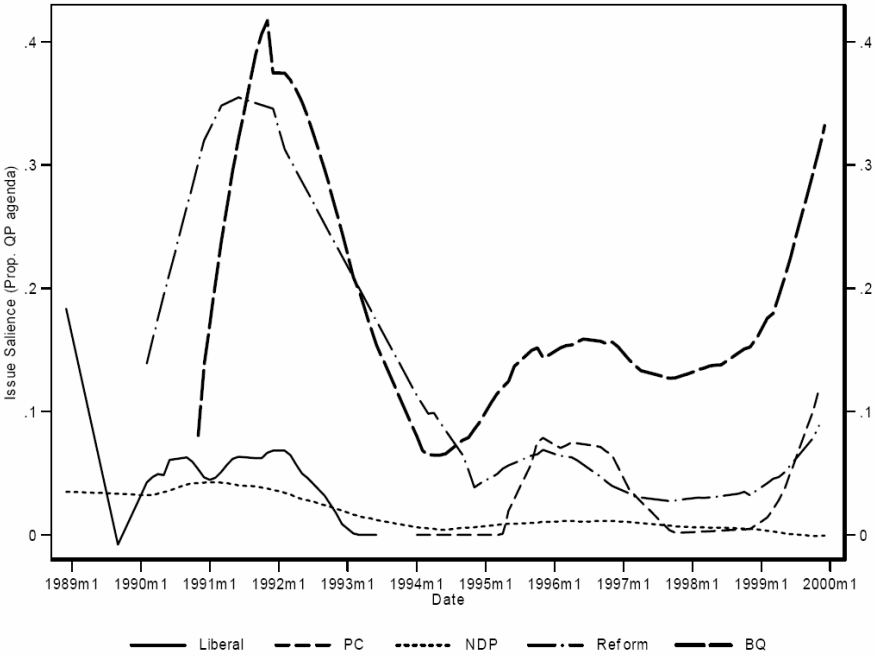
**Table 2.** Reciprocal Effects of Public Opinion on Sovereignty and BQ Attention to National Unity (1990-2004, Two-Month Lag)

	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
	<b>BQ Attention to National Unity</b>	<b>Public Opinion on Sovereignty</b>
Public Opinion (two-month lag)	0.397*** (0.095)	0.713*** (0.049)
BQ (two-month lag)	0.108 (0.073)	0.131** (0.038)
BQ not sitting	-0.069*** (0.013)	-0.016* (0.007)
Constant	-0.115** (0.040)	0.122*** (0.021)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.23	0.64
N=162 (months)		
Granger test ( $\chi^2$ )	17.579 (0.000)	11.896 (0.001)

*Note:* Cells contain VAR coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Bottom row cells contain the Granger causality test result for each equation with p value in parentheses.

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001 (two-tailed test)

**Figure 1.** Attentiveness to National Unity in the Canadian House of Commons by All Federal Parties



Reproduced from Penner et al. (2005)

**Figure 2.** Issue Priorities of the Bloc Québécois

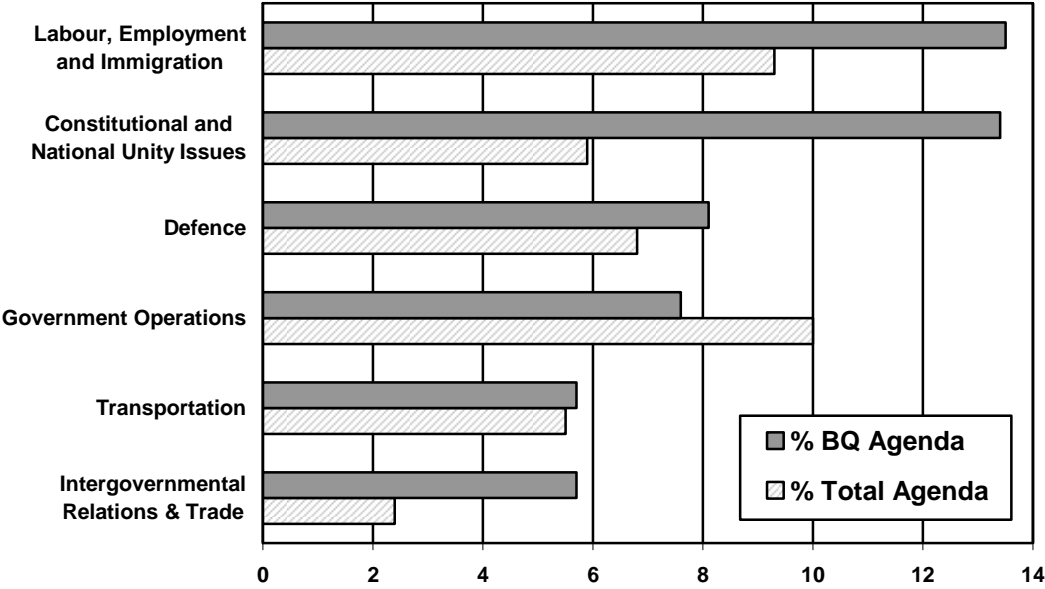




Figure 3. Saliency of National Unity (BQ Agenda) and Public Support for Sovereignty in Québec

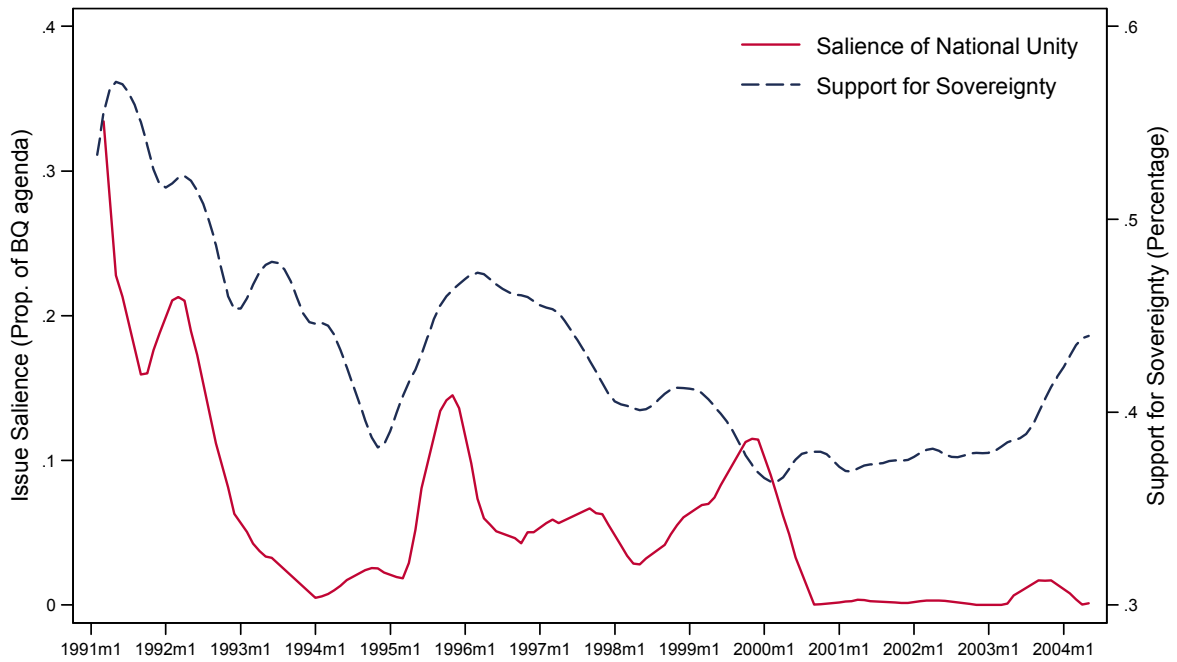


Figure 4. Saliency of National Unity and Intergovernmental Relations (BQ Agenda)

