

Report

The 2022 provincial election in Quebec

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Abstract

The 2022 Quebec provincial election reaffirmed the Coalition Avenir Québec's (CAQ) dominance under Premier François Legault, who secured a second majority government with 90 seats and 41% of the vote. The campaign followed the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, with Legault benefiting from public approval of his pandemic management. The CAQ's platform focused on economic relief, healthcare, and nationalist policies, while opposition parties—PLQ, PQ, QS, and PCQ—struggled with fragmentation and controversies. The PLQ and PQ continued their decline, while QS seemed to reach a ceiling and the PCQ saw a significant rise in vote share without winning seats. The election highlighted distortions in Quebec's single-member plurality electoral system and renewed calls for electoral reform. New parties emerged in response to Bill 96, advocating for anglophone rights. The campaign also saw a record number of Indigenous candidates, signaling growing political inclusion.

Résumé

L'élection provinciale de 2022 au Québec a confirmé la domination de la Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) dirigée par le premier ministre François Legault, qui a obtenu un second mandat majoritaire avec 90 sièges et 41% des voix. La campagne électorale, tenue après la levée des restrictions liées à la COVID-19, a bénéficié de l'approbation populaire de la gestion de la pandémie par Legault. Le programme de la CAQ mettait l'accent sur le soutien économique, les services publics et une approche nationaliste. Les partis d'opposition—PLQ, PQ, QS et PCQ—ont souffert de divisions internes et de controverses. Le PLQ et le PQ ont poursuivi leur déclin, QS a semblé plafonner, et le PCQ a connu une hausse significative du vote populaire sans obtenir de sièges. L'élection a mis en lumière les distorsions du système électoral majoritaire uninominal et ravivé les appels à une réforme électorale, tout en signalant une inclusion politique accrue des Autochtones.

Keywords: 2022 Quebec election, Coalition Avenir Québec, François Legault

Mots-clés : Élections québécoises de 2022, Coalition Avenir Québec, François Legault

Introduction

The October 2022 provincial election in Quebec was held near the tail end of the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when most public health restrictions—such as lockdowns, curfews, needing a vaccine passport (the *VaxiCode*), and mandatory masking—had just been lifted. The coronavirus pandemic certainly marked the first mandate of the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government led by François Legault. It diverted the government from its initial course, which notably aimed to reassert Quebec's autonomy and distinctiveness within Canada. At the same time, the pandemic also provided Premier Legault with a large reservoir of support among the Quebec population, as he was seen as a reassuring presence and voice amid two years of uncertainty and sharp public policy shifts following the March 2020 virus outbreak. Broad public satisfaction with the way the Legault government had managed the pandemic played a significant role in its 2022 re-election (Bélanger et al. 2025).

The onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic can obscure how the previous 2018 election marked a historic realignment of the Quebec party system (Bélanger and Daoust 2020; Dubois et al. 2022). For the first time in half a century, a political party other than the Parti Libéral du Québec (PLQ) or the Parti Québécois (PQ) had secured victory and formed government (for a review of that election, see Bélanger and Chassé 2021). The CAQ win heralded the arrival of a “third way” in Quebec politics, that is, a strongly nationalist yet federalist option (Mailhot and Montigny 2024) —although some parallels between the CAQ and the defunct Union Nationale can certainly be drawn (see Boily and Lecours 2023). Accordingly, the 2022 Quebec election was the first held after the adoption of several nationalist CAQ policies that stirred controversy, not only within Quebec but also in the rest of Canada. The two most consequential policies were, arguably, the *Loi sur la laïcité de l’État* (also known as Bill 21), adopted in 2019, and the *Loi sur la langue officielle et commune du Québec, le français* (commonly referred to as Bill 96), enacted just a few months ahead of the electoral campaign.

While the 2022 election confirmed that the CAQ’s victory in 2018 was no fluke, the Legault government’s rapid unravelling over the course of its second mandate raises the question of whether the party can overcome the tendency of governing parties to lose support over time – and survive to the eventual departure of its founder, François Legault (Bélanger and Lalancette 2025).

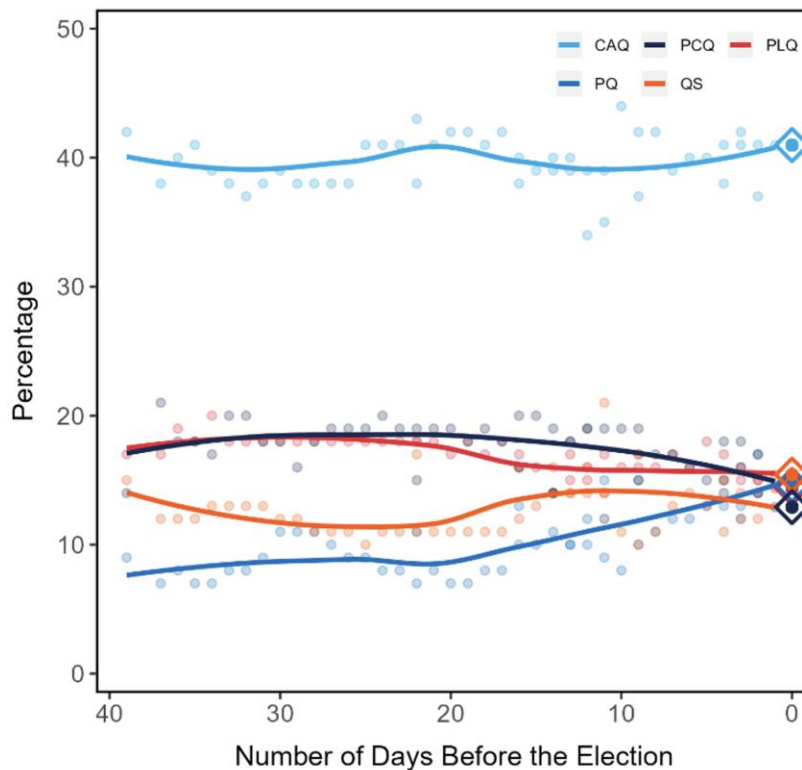
The Campaign

The election campaign in Quebec was launched by Premier François Legault on Sunday, August 28th, 2022. Figure 1 shows the evolution of voting intentions during the campaign based on major commercial polls. As the figure makes clear, the campaign offered little suspense: the incumbent Premier’s Coalition Avenir Québec entered the five-week race as the clear leader in vote intentions and remained so until the end, with minimal variation over time. What suspense there was concerned the opposition parties. As Figure 1 indicates, the Parti Libéral du Québec (PLQ) and, surprisingly, the Parti Conservateur du Québec (PCQ) were neck-and-neck for second place throughout most of the campaign, but both lost some ground during the final two weeks. The only party that managed to gain in vote intentions over the course of the campaign was the Parti Québécois (PQ), climbing from fifth to join the pack of opposition parties by the end of the campaign.

François Legault’s CAQ entered the 2022 campaign as the incumbent party, aiming to consolidate its position with promises of economic relief and improvements to public services. Early in the campaign, Legault faced criticism for referring to PLQ leader Dominique Anglade as “*cette madame*,” a comment seen as dismissive and sexist (Bélair-Cirino 2022). Despite this faux pas, the CAQ pushed forward with pledges such as tax cuts, financial aid for seniors, and a \$2 billion investment in education infrastructure. Legault also proposed limiting increases in provincial government service fees to 3% (e.g. licences, registrations, childcare services, tuition) and expanding hospital-at-home services. However, immigration became a contentious issue, with Legault linking it to violence and social cohesion—remarks he later walked back (Robillard 2022a). The party also promised environmental initiatives, including the creation of new national parks, and supported greater private-sector involvement in health care. Legault’s stance on the third link tunnel between Québec City and Lévis remained ambiguous, acknowledging the lack of studies while still defending the

project. The CAQ’s perceived lack of concern for environmental issues was exemplified by star candidate Bernard Drainville’s remark to a journalist about greenhouse gas emissions: “*Lâchez-moi avec les GES!*” (“Give me a break with greenhouse gases!”) (Pilon-Larose 2022). Although most Quebecers praised Legault’s management of the pandemic, the CAQ’s opponents criticized his government for the glaring lack of human and material resources in health care that the pandemic exposed, as well as for an insufficient response to the post-pandemic inflation that followed. Despite these controversies, Legault maintained a strong federalist stance and emphasized economic stability, presenting the CAQ as the pragmatic choice for continuity. The party’s campaign slogan effectively encapsulated this message by relying on a single word: “*Continuons*” (“Let’s continue”).

Figure 1. Voting Intentions During the 2022 General Election



Source: Polling data compiled from Qc125.com website (<https://qc125.com/sondages.htm>)

Dominique Anglade led the PLQ with a campaign centred on economic revitalization and social equity. She launched her campaign by emphasizing the economy as the central ballot issue, though linguistic tensions quickly surfaced when a candidate downplayed concerns about the state of the French language in Quebec (Robillard 2022b). The PLQ proposed significant fiscal measures, including a \$1.85-billion tax break for small and midsize enterprises and a plan to recover \$3 billion from tax havens. These commitments, set out in a new financial framework that contrasted with the budgetary “rigueur” of the Couillard years (that is, the last Liberal government), signalled a more economically left-leaning PLQ than in 2018; however, the framework was corrected twice after major calculation errors came to light (Labbé 2022). Anglade also advocated for increased hospital capacity, pledging 2,000 new beds to be funded by cancelling the Québec City-Lévis third-link project. She also

repeatedly defended controversial candidates, including one who called Legault a “*pourriture antidémocratique*” (Robillard 2022c). On climate, the party proposed a “COP Québec” to align provincial climate efforts with global standards, and emphasized the idea of turning towards hydrogen as a source of green energy in the province. Towards the end of the campaign, Anglade emphasized inclusion, proposing to make September 30th a statutory holiday to honour Indigenous voices. Despite facing criticism and internal turbulence, the PLQ maintained a focus on economic reform, healthcare, and social justice, aiming to reclaim its relevance in Quebec politics.

The left-wing opposition party Québec Solidaire (QS), led by co-spokespersons Manon Massé and Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, positioned itself as the most progressive alternative with bold proposals and a broad agenda on climate, housing, and taxation. The party promised 25,000 social housing units, 10,000 affordable homes, and a 45% increase in social assistance benefits. QS also proposed a “transport revolution,” including a new metro line and extensive tramway infrastructure in Montreal. Their climate plan targeted single-occupancy vehicle use, and they proposed a \$100 perchild family allowance. QS advocated for taxing the wealthiest 5% and imposing levies on millionaires’ assets and inheritances, though they later clarified that agricultural land would be exempt. These proposed new taxes on assets and capital gains and on polluting vehicles led to strong criticism from the CAQ, which labelled them as “orange taxes” in reference to the colour of QS’s party logo (Morin-Martel 2022a). Unfortunately for QS, the label stuck with them for the remainder of the campaign. Despite these critical setbacks, the party maintained its focus on equity, proposing stronger support for caregivers. Nadeau-Dubois also emphasized youth engagement and regional immigration pathways (Porter 2022a). Overall, QS’s campaign was marked by ambitious social and environmental goals, though it somewhat struggled with messaging consistency.

Under Paul St-Pierre Plamondon (PSPP), the PQ ran a campaign focused on sovereignty and social reform. The party notably proposed removing bilingual status from municipalities where anglophones constitute less than 33 per cent of the population (Porter 2022b). The PQ advocated a \$18 per hour minimum wage, strengthened equity in salaries, alongside investments in school renovations and regional development. On the environment, proposals included carbon capture and storage while opposing a gasoline tax. The PQ also focused on elder care, proposing a dedicated seniors’ ombudsman. PSPP’s leadership was marked by efforts to balance the goal of Quebec sovereignty with practical governance, calling for a third referendum and criticizing Legault’s federalist posture. The PQ also criticized corporate profiteering and proposed taxing companies that had “taken advantage” of Quebecers (Morin-Martel 2022b). Despite limited resources, the PQ received the most donations during the campaign (Rolland 2022), and PSPP’s measured tone during the televised debates was well received, helping him stand out from his opponents. His commitment to a sovereign Quebec remained central in his discourse, though he struggled to articulate its practical contours. The PQ’s campaign blended nationalist rhetoric with progressive social policies, aiming to reassert its identity in a fragmented political landscape.

As for Éric Duhaime’s PCQ, it ran a populist campaign emphasizing personal freedom, fiscal conservatism, and skepticism toward government intervention. Duhaime proposed abolishing the sales tax on used goods, cutting \$13 billion in corporate subsidies, and introducing a tax credit for sports. The party faced scrutiny over Duhaime’s unpaid taxes, controversial statements, and candidates linked to the “Freedom Convoy” protest movement

of February 2022 in Ottawa against COVID-19 public health measures (Lemieux 2022). The PCQ also proposed a 120 km/h highway speed limit and expressed opposition to language policies it deemed overly restrictive. The party's stance on immigration was mixed, supporting francization efforts while opposing increased immigration thresholds. Duhaime's campaign drew large crowds in some places such as Lévis, and he positioned himself as a clear defender of individual liberties and free speech (Carabin and Morin-Martel 2022). In short, "freedom" was the key word for the PCQ, captured in its campaign slogan "*Libres chez nous*" ("Free at home") which could be seen as a deliberate echo of Jean Lesage's "*Maîtres chez nous*" from the 1962 election. Duhaime's message seemed to resonate with those citizens seeking a break from traditional politics, though it remained polarizing.

The Outcome and Its Aftermath

The 2022 provincial election saw a slight decline in voter participation compared to the 2018 election cycle, with 66.15% of the eligible electorate casting their ballots. This represents a 0.3 percentage point reduction from the previous provincial election. In the end, the result again favoured the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ). François Legault's party effortlessly secured another term as the majority government in the National Assembly. Prominent Quebec media outlets relayed the news of this victory a scant 15 minutes after the closure of the voting stations on the night of October 3rd. The magnitude of the CAQ's triumph exceeded its 2018 success, as evidenced by the proportion of seats the party managed to secure. With 41% of the popular vote, the CAQ won 90 seats, an increase of 16 from 2018 (see Table 1). This significant tally, which corresponds to 72% of the total seats, illustrates the disproportionality typical of single-member plurality ("first-past-the-post"). It constitutes the fourth-largest majority in Quebec's political history in terms of seat representation and underscores the CAQ's sweeping supremacy to the detriment of the three other major provincial parties (by votes).

Table 1. Electoral Results in Quebec Provincial Elections, 2018 and 2022

Party	2018				2022			
	Total votes	Votes (%)	Seats (#)	Seats (%)	Total votes	Votes (%)	Seats (#)	Seats (%)
CAQ	1 509 455	37.4	74	59.2	1 685 573	41.0	90	72.0
PLQ	1 001 037	24.8	31	24.8	591 077	14.4	21	16.8
PQ	687 995	17.1	10	8.0	600 708	14.6	3	2.4
QS	649 503	16.1	10	8.0	634 535	15.4	11	8.8
PCQ	59 055	1.5	0	0.0	530 786	12.9	0	0.0

Prominent newcomers, such as Bernard Drainville, a former journalist and minister in Pauline Marois' short-lived 2012-2014 minority PQ government, and Martine Biron, a major prime-time Quebec politics analyst and pundit for Radio-Canada, were effortlessly elected

amidst the CAQ's province-wide surge. However, the CAQ also suffered some disappointments; for example, in Sherbrooke, former Bloc Québécois MP and media personality Caroline St-Hilaire lost the riding to Québec Solidaire incumbent Christine Labrie.

Prominent polling firms (see Tanguay 2022; Bellerose 2022) accurately forecast a decisive victory for the CAQ and further erosion of support for Quebec's two traditional parties—the Parti Libéral du Québec and the Parti Québécois, though the decline for the PQ was not as severe as anticipated. The two parties, which alternated in government from 1976 to 2018, continued their downward slide in electoral support (Bélanger et al. 2022). The PLQ secured a scant 21 seats, ten fewer than in 2018's already historic low. Concurrently, the PQ captured only three ridings, a deficit of seven compared to the prior election, with one going to the party's new leader Paul St-Pierre Plamondon. Additionally, both parties experienced a decrease in their respective vote shares: the PLQ took 14.37% of the vote, while the PQ received 14.61%, the weakest results in each party's history (Lévesque 2022; Lachance 2022). Importantly, the PLQ's collapse was much steeper than that of the PQ's: its vote share fell by more than 10 points between 2018 and 2022 (24.8 % to 14.4 %, with most of this occurring before the campaign began), compared with a 2.5-point decline for the PQ (17.1 % to 14.6 %). Although the Liberals actually finished fourth in province-wide vote share, they retained official opposition status thanks to an efficient concentration of support in their core strongholds in the western end of the Island of Montreal. The 2022 outcome thus combined a dramatic popular-vote crash for the PLQ with clear distributional advantages under Quebec's single-member plurality electoral system.

For Québec Solidaire, the worst-case scenario was avoided despite a halt to what Bélanger et al. (2022, 13) termed as the party's "slow but clear progression". For the first time in its history, the party's vote share declined, sliding from 16.1% to 15.4%. Nevertheless, QS recorded two notable successes. First, despite the party's representation largely remaining concentrated within the Montreal region, as illustrated by the loss of their seat in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, QS expanded its caucus by one (from 10 to 11). This modest expansion singled out QS as the sole opposition party to record any increase in seat share. Second, QS finished second province-wide in terms of vote share. Despite these considerable advancements, the party was unable to secure the position of official opposition, largely because its votes were less efficiently distributed than the PLQ's.

As for the Parti Conservateur du Québec, it managed to make significant progress in terms of vote share, capturing 12.9% of the popular vote, a substantial increase from the mere 1.5% recorded in the prior provincial election. This put the PCQ just 2.5 percentage points behind Québec Solidaire, the opposition party with the most votes. It also left the PCQ only 1.5 points behind the official opposition, the Parti Libéral du Québec. This remarkable upsurge, precipitated by Éric Duhaime's selection as party leader and reflected in pre-election polls (Déry et al. 2022), nonetheless failed to translate into a single seat at the National Assembly.

Apart from Éric Duhaime, all party leaders secured victory in their respective ridings. The case of Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, however, stemmed from an unexpected event, as the PQ leader benefited from the resignation of the Québec Solidaire candidate in his riding of Camille-Laurin. That candidate's decision to step down came in the wake of an incident in which she was caught on camera stealing a Parti Québécois leaflet from a constituent's mailbox, underscoring the unpredictability that often pervades political campaigns. The

withdrawal likely shifted QS votes to the PQ, allowing PSPP to edge out the CAQ incumbent, who had led in local polls and forecasts before the incident.

The electoral outcomes on October 3rd, 2022, though largely foreseen, serve as empirical validation for the culmination of major trends impacting Quebec politics, traceable to at least 2007 (Bélanger and Daoust 2020). François Legault’s renewed mandate at the helm of the province reinforced the ongoing political realignment in Quebec and disrupted once again the long-standing duopoly of the PLQ and the PQ that had persisted since 1976. These seismic shifts in Quebec’s party competition are attributed in part to the evolution and resurgence of key political cleavages among the electorate. Notably, the sovereignty issue appeared to have lost salience (Bélanger et al. 2018), supplanted by a growing “liberal-authoritarian” cultural cleavage and a reinvigorated focus on economic left-right divisions (Bélanger and Godbout 2022; Bélanger et al. 2022). Further elaborating on this general trend, specific electoral dynamics that played a role in shaping both the campaign and its outcome deserve detailed examination.

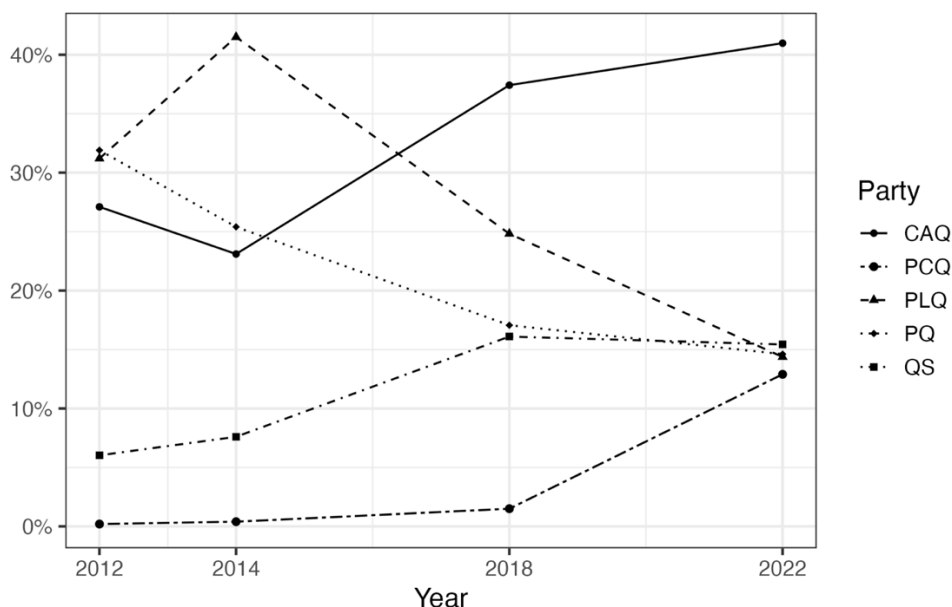
First, the CAQ’s decisive rise to power underscored a deeply divided and fractured party system. In many ways, the disunity among parties that would become the opposition once the CAQ formed government emerged as a direct byproduct of cleavage realignments within Quebec’s electoral politics (Bélanger et al. 2022). The traditional “binary” choice between federalism and sovereignty had been displaced by new issues, such as *laïcité*, immigration, and climate change, which resonate unevenly across the electorate.

Second, the Parti Conservateur du Québec’s unusual achievement of capturing 12.9% of the popular vote (11.4 percentage points more than their 2018 score) stands out as a strange occurrence in Quebec’s recent political history, less because of the absolute gain itself (cf. the CAQ in 2018) than because the PCQ progressed from a previously marginal position (1.5% and 0 seats in 2018) to double-digit support while still winning no seats in 2022. Figure 2 displays the increase in vote share received by the PCQ, and how 2022 is unique in that regard. Despite experiencing a meteoric rise in public support during the COVID-19 pandemic—a surge significant enough to warrant the inclusion of the party’s leader, Éric Duhaime, in the televised leaders’ debates—the party was ultimately unable to convert this increased visibility and support into legislative representation at the National Assembly (Bélanger et al. 2025). That said, it came frustratingly close to winning in each of the two Beauce ridings.

Amongst the electorate, this anomaly not only casts doubt on the effectiveness of the current electoral system but also brings into focus the representativeness deficiencies affecting other opposition parties, notably the Parti Québécois and Québec Solidaire. Civil society groups advocating for electoral reform, such as *Mouvement démocratie nouvelle*, argue that such electoral outcomes further underscore the urgent need for a system that better reflects Québec’s multiparty competition (Duval 2022). Ironically, the Legault government had tabled an electoral reform bill in 2019 (Bill 39) —something that Premier Legault had pledged to do in his first mandate—but in the end, decided not to put it to a vote in the National Assembly due to pandemic-related delays and limited support among the CAQ caucus (Auger 2021). Bill 39 proposed to change the current system to a mixed-member proportional electoral system, keeping 80 seats elected under the current system and adding 45 regional compensation seats elected via party lists. The outcome of the 2022 election again illustrated the very votes-to-seats discrepancies that the proposed electoral reform sought to reduce.

The 2022 election also saw the emergence of new political parties—the Parti Canadien du Québec and the Bloc Montréal—advocating for English-speaking communities, seeking to replicate the electoral appeal of the 1990s Equality Party. The introduction of Bill 96 engendered a reactive mobilization among certain segments of the population, culminating in the creation of parties committed to the defence of minority linguistic rights in Quebec. While these parties failed to capture a substantial amount of support (neither exceeded 1% of the vote), their very presence served as an indicator of specific community perceptions of policy overreach affecting the rights of English-speaking citizens (Perreault 2022).

Figure 2. Share of Votes in Quebec by Provincial Party, 2012-2022



Source: Adapted from DGEQ (2025) official data.

Lastly, the 2022 Quebec provincial election saw a record number of Indigenous candidates, with nine individuals from diverse communities running for office (Lévesque and Chouinard 2022). Notably, this included Kateri Champagne Jourdain for the CAQ and six candidates for Quebec Solidaire, such as Cree activist Maitée Labrecque-Saganash. Alexis Wawanoloath, the first Indigenous person elected to Quebec's National Assembly back in 2007, praised the increased representation, linking it to greater awareness of Indigenous issues. With her victory in the 2022 election, Kateri Champagne Jourdain became the first Indigenous woman to serve in the Assembly and was soon appointed Minister of Employment—the first Indigenous person to serve in a Quebec cabinet (Richardson 2022). Such a rise in Indigenous candidacies may signal a shift toward inclusion and, in the long term, could influence debates on systemic racism and social equity in Quebec.

While the CAQ was re-elected in a landslide in 2022, the story thereafter was one of rapid disappointment with Legault's second mandate and a subsequent sharp drop in standing amongst Quebec voters. The CAQ government's fall began in spring 2023 when it announced it was abandoning one of its key electoral pledges made in 2018 (and repeated in 2022), to build a third highway link across the St. Lawrence River between Quebec City and Lévis. After having toyed over the years with a variety of bridge and tunnel scenarios, the CAQ finally decided to shelve the idea. Criticism and disillusionment quickly grew in the Quebec City

region. That backlash created an unexpected opening for the Parti Québécois, which managed to snatch the Jean-Talon seat in a by-election that was held on October 2nd, 2023, following the resignation of CAQ MNA Joelle Boutin (Robillard and Carabin 2023). This upset demonstrated the PQ's growing influence in the post-2022 context. In fact, the PQ went on to win two additional by-elections in 2025 (in Terrebonne and Arthabaska), thereby consolidating its newfound lead in province-wide vote intention polls.

In parallel to the PQ's rise, support for the CAQ started to erode, with the party falling to fourth place in the polls by June 2025. Other controversies that plagued the Legault government's second mandate were, amongst others, the collapse of the Northvolt project and the SAAQclic scandal. In the former case, Northvolt's bankruptcy in 2025 meant the Quebec government forfeited at least \$270 million in public funds that it had invested in the construction of this electric vehicle battery plant back in 2022 (Canadian Press 2025). In the case of SAAQclic, the Quebec auditor general reported in February 2025 that this IT modernization project was at least \$500 million over budget. This mismanagement at the *Société de l'assurance-automobile du Québec* (SAAQ) has since been examined by the Gallant Commission (Larin 2025).

Support for the CAQ fell sharply after 2022, and it has not won a single by-election since; four of the five contests held were triggered by resignations from its own caucus, and all went to opposition parties. These developments suggest that it is far from certain that the 2018 and 2022 elections may ultimately amount to the consolidation of the CAQ as a new dominant party in Quebec. The cleavage structure does appear to have shifted away from the sovereignty-federalism axis towards liberal-authoritarian and left-right divides (Bélanger and Godbout 2022). Still, the partisan translation of these newer lines of conflict remains unsettled. In particular, the PQ's recent recovery, combined with its increasing pivot towards themes of identity, *laïcité*, immigration and integration, suggests that these concerns could be at least partly channelled by a traditional pole of the party system (the PQ) rather than being monopolized by the CAQ. From this perspective, the 2022 result could also be seen as highly contextual: for many voters, it appears to have functioned, at least in part, as a referendum on the Legault government's management of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the incumbency advantage associated with that evaluation inevitably proved difficult to sustain as the salience of the health crisis faded. Thus, whether the current realignment will ultimately produce a new dominant party, restore some form of duopoly (either centred once again on the PLQ and PQ or involving a different two-party configuration), or instead consolidate a system of multiparty competition under disproportional single-member plurality rules remains an open question.

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