

[exhibits.library.utoronto.ca /exhibits/show/canadianlawandidentity/cdnlawreligion/cdnlawreligionquecharter](https://exhibits.library.utoronto.ca/exhibits/show/canadianlawandidentity/cdnlawreligion/cdnlawreligionquecharter)

Canadian Law and Religion: The Québec Charter of Values. (n.d.). University of Toronto Libraries.

Retrieved February 9, 2023, from <https://exhibits.library.utoronto.ca/exhibits/show/canadianlawandidentity/cdnlawreligion/cdnlawreligionquecharter>

The Québec Charter of Values · Canadian Law and Canadian Identity · Exhibits

5-6 minutes

Bill 60: The Québec Charter of Values

One of the most well-known religious policy controversies in recent Canadian history is Québec's Charter of Values. The Charter, also known as Bill 60, was proposed in September 2013, and would have banned public employees from wearing "ostentatious religious symbols" to work, or having their faces covered (CBC, Karkour). While the provincial government argued that the Charter was designed to promote secularism, opponents of the bill responded that it infringed on religious liberties guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (CBC). Moreover, they noted, the bill disproportionately affected some religions. For instance, Muslim women who choose to wear a veil or Sikhs who wear a turban would have to pick between ending an important spiritual practice, or losing their jobs, while Christians can tuck a cross underneath their shirt (Karkour). In 2014, the Parti Québécois, (who proposed the bill), lost their provincial election, and the Charter was never passed (Bakali, 412).

Regardless of the intent behind the bill, it resulted in several Muslim women living in Quebec being publically harassed (413). In response, George Karkour produced and directed a short documentary called *Québec 60* in order to help give them a voice, and to educate other Québécois about their lives (Karkour). He released it on YouTube in January 2014.

Works Cited:

Bakali, Naved. "Contextualising the Quebec Charter of Values: How the Muslim 'Other' is Conceptualised in Quebec." *Culture and Religion* 16.4 (2015): 412-29.

"Charter of Quebec values would ban religious symbols for public workers." *CBC News*. 10 Sept. 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/charter-of-quebec-values-would-ban-religious-symbols-for-public-workers-1.1699315>.

Laborde, Cécile. "Female Autonomy, Education and the Hijab." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 9.3 (2006): 351-77.

"Québec 60: un documentaire (la Charte des Valeurs Québécoises)." Uploaded by George Karkour, 12 Jan. 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQpbYWRcgsk&t=1235s>.

To better understand Bill 60, it helps to contextualize it within Québec's history. Like France, Québec was once controlled by a powerful, institutionalized Roman-Catholic church. Though the church lost its overwhelming political influence in the 1960s, it remains an important social and cultural force (Bakali, 415). Cecile Laborde argues in "Female Autonomy, Education, and the Hijab" that as a result, societies like France and Québec are deeply wary of the power of religious institutions (Laborde, 353).

This leads to the “Republican Perfectionist” perspective, which says that the role of the State is to prevent religion from exerting undue control over the individual (353-4). Laborde points out that many French policies target Muslim women on the assumption that Islam is a particularly oppressive religion, which prevents women from being autonomous members of society (a point of view which is seen as condescending by many such women) (355, 361).

According to the logic of *laïcité*, or secularism, wearing religious symbols in a public institution undermines the neutrality of the state. By demonstrating their religious affiliations to the public, government workers suggest that they are judging individuals not solely on the law, but also on their personal religious convictions – something which led to oppression in Quebec’s past (CBC).

However, scholars like Naved Bakali argue that this contextualization of the bill may be giving the Parti Québécois too much credit. According to Bakali, the Charter of Values targeted religious and ethnic minorities in order to re-assert Québécois nationalism (Bakali, 426-7). Since French-speaking people are a minority within Canada, they have what Bakali calls “fears of the impending erosion of white francophone Québécois culture and identity” (421). Politicians in Québec have manipulated this anxiety by using vulnerable minority populations as symbols of “outsiders” who threaten their community (422). In short, if Bill 60 seems Islamophobic, it’s because it is.

Works Cited:

Bakali, Naved. "Contextualising the Quebec Charter of Values: How the Muslim ‘Other’ is Conceptualised in Quebec." *Culture and Religion* 16.4 (2015): 412-29.

“Charter of Quebec values would ban religious symbols for public workers.” *CBC News*. 10 Sept. 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/charter-of-quebec-values-would-ban-religious-symbols-for-public-workers-1.1699315>.

Laborde, Cécile. "Female Autonomy, Education and the Hijab." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 9.3 (2006): 351-77.

“Québec 60: un documentaire (la Charte des Valeurs Québécoises).” Uploaded by George Karkour, 12 Jan. 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQpbYWRcgsk&t=1235s>.