

Religious symbols in the workplace: opinion nuanced in and outside Quebec, driven by specific symbols

Proposed ban in Quebec appears widely supported; but crucifix, Star of David still seen as acceptable

December 4, 2018 – As various polls [show widespread support](#) in Quebec for the CAQ government's proposed ban on public employees in positions of authority wearing visible religious symbols, a new survey from the Angus Reid Institute suggests that public opinion on the issue is more nuanced than might be assumed.

While two-thirds of Quebec residents (65%) say they support the provincial government's proposal overall, the data show that both in that province and across Canada, majorities also believe public employees *should be* allowed to wear a crucifix or a Star of David on the job.

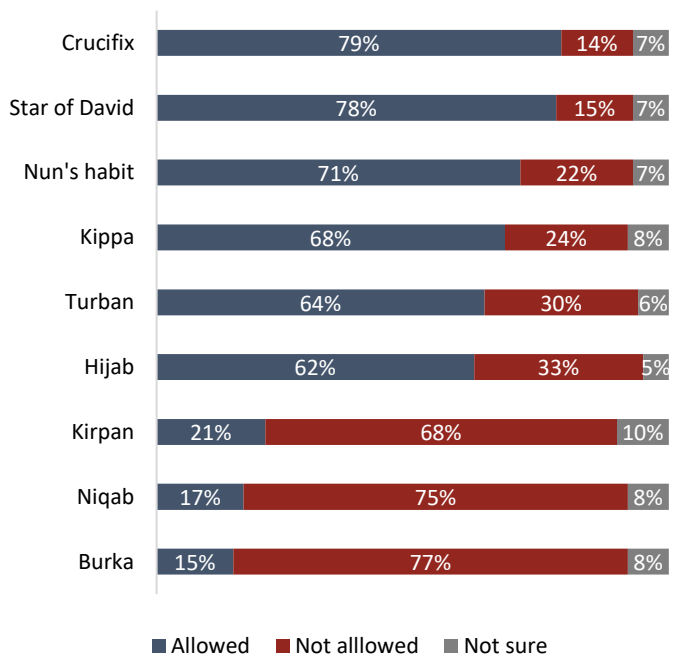
Meanwhile, residents in all provinces say public employees should be prohibited from wearing a niqab or carrying a kirpan – the ceremonial dagger worn by observant Sikhs – at work.

Quebecers take a more restrictive view than those outside the province on religious head coverings – including the Muslim hijab, the Sikh turban, the Jewish kippa, and the Christian nun's habit.

More Key Findings:

- Out of nine religious symbols asked about in this survey, only three (the aforementioned crucifix, star of David, and nun's habit) are acceptable to more than half of Quebecers. Elsewhere in Canada, majorities see six of the nine symbols as acceptable
- Both in Quebec and outside of it, young people are less supportive of a potential ban on public employees wearing religious symbols, while older respondents are more so

Please indicate whether you think public employees be allowed to wear each of these religious symbols while on the job.
(All Respondents, including Quebec residents, n=1500)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from October 11 – 17, 2018, among a representative randomized sample of 1,500 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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- Political partisanship is also a key driver of views, with past Conservative voters mostly supporting a religious symbols ban in their province, while majorities of past Liberal and New Democratic Party voters are opposed

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Which symbols would Canadians prohibit public employees from displaying?

For more than a decade, successive Quebec governments have grappled with questions of “reasonable accommodation” for religious minorities in the province. The issue has been particularly salient in Quebec, [some argue](#), because the province has long functioned as a distinct society, itself a minority within Canada.

This, coupled with the staunch secularism that has pervaded Quebec politics and society since the [Quiet Revolution](#), has led to significant debate about wearing religious garments or symbols (particularly non-Christian ones) while conducting the business of – or simply interacting with – government.

Legault is the fourth Quebec premier – and the CAQ the third different governing party – to attempt to address these issues through legislation. Like the proposals of his immediate predecessors, Legault's plan has been met with [harsh criticism](#), even as a majority of Quebecers voice support for it.

Related – Quebec Politics: Major support for Bill 62, far less approval for government's handling of border issues

Critics of the Legault government's planned legislation argue that it [amounts to discrimination](#) against non-Christians in the province – especially Muslim women.

While the CAQ bill – like legislation tabled by previous governments – may likely be written to apply to symbols from all religions, public perspectives on this issue vary significantly by the type of symbol in question.

Shown images of nine different symbols and asked whether they should be allowed in the workplace for public employees, Canadians are most amenable to the Judeo-Christian items on the list:

- Crucifixes
- Nun's habits
- Stars of David
- Kippas

Each of these three items enjoy more than two-thirds support.

Symbols from Sikhism and Islam are less favourably viewed, particularly if they cover the face (such as a niqab or burka) or – as some argue – could be considered a weapon (as in the case of the kirpan). Turbans and hijabs are OK for public employees in the eyes of six-in-ten Canadians outside Quebec, as seen in the preceding graph. Quebec residents differ significantly from the rest of Canada in their assessments of this question.

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Within Quebec, majorities are opposed to public employees wearing hijabs (57%) and turbans (55%), and nearly half (48%) oppose public servants wearing the Jewish kippa. Responses by region are summarized in the table that follows:

Percentage who think public employees should NOT be allowed to wear each of these religious symbols while on the job.								
	Total (1500)	BC (200)	AB (150)	SK (100)	MB (100)	ON (475)	QC (350)	ATL (125)
Burka	77%	68%	79%	85%	65%	72%	91%	79%
Niqab	75%	65%	73%	86%	69%	69%	91%	76%
Kirpan	68%	60%	69%	70%	61%	61%	84%	67%
Hijab	33%	24%	30%	25%	25%	23%	57%	32%
Turban	30%	21%	24%	28%	22%	20%	55%	29%
Kippa	24%	20%	17%	13%	16%	16%	48%	14%
Nun's habit	22%	18%	21%	15%	10%	14%	43%	17%
Star of David	15%	11%	10%	8%	7%	11%	32%	10%
Crucifix	14%	10%	12%	6%	10%	9%	27%	10%

Views on this question are also shaped by age, with respondents under age 35 more likely to say each type of symbol should be allowed and less inclined to see it banned.

This pattern holds true across nearly all symbols canvassed, though the gulf between younger and older respondents is more pronounced on symbols from religious other than Christianity and Judaism. For example, fewer than one-in-four Canadians ages 18-34 say public employees should not be allowed to wear a turban (20%) or a hijab (23%) at work. Among older respondents, this rises to more than one-in-three.

Similarly, while majorities of Canadians under age 35 agree with the overall majority view that burkas, niqabs, and kirpans should not be allowed, they are much less unanimous in this view than older age groups:

The following table shows results for all symbols by age and gender.

Percentage who think public employees should NOT be allowed to wear each of these religious symbols while on the job.						
	Total (1500)	18-34 (424)	35-54 (518)	55+ (557)	Men (730)	Women (766)
Burka	77%	60%	81%	87%	81%	74%
Niqab	75%	58%	79%	86%	80%	72%
Kirpan	68%	56%	72%	74%	70%	67%
Hijab	33%	23%	37%	37%	36%	30%
Turban	30%	20%	33%	35%	31%	29%
Kippa	24%	15%	26%	29%	26%	22%
Nun's habit	22%	22%	25%	20%	25%	20%
Star of David	15%	10%	20%	15%	19%	12%
Crucifix	14%	10%	16%	14%	16%	11%

These same patterns hold within Quebec, though at a lower baseline of approval for all symbols, as seen in the following table:

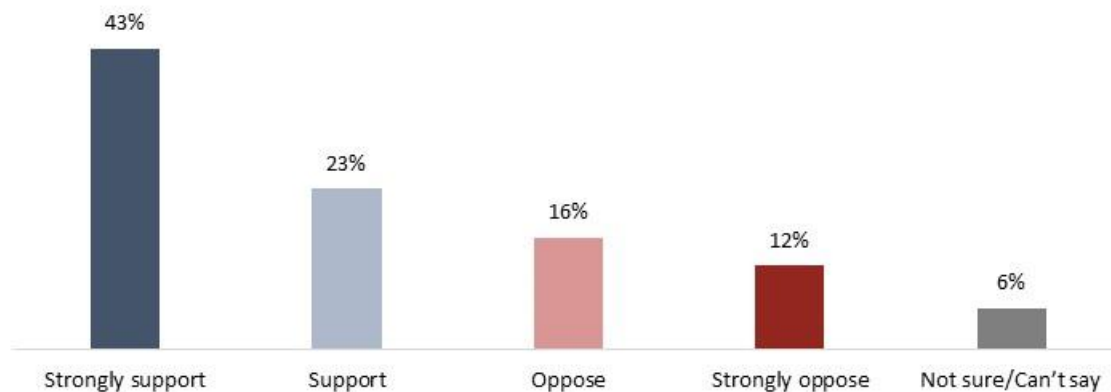
Percentage who think public employees should NOT be allowed to wear each of these religious symbols while on the job. (Responses from Quebec residents only)						
	QC Total (350)	18-34 (96*)	35-54 (123)	55+ (142)	Men (177)	Women (184)
Burka	91%	86%	93%	94%	92%	91%
Niqab	91%	86%	93%	93%	93%	90%
Kirpan	84%	76%	90%	85%	83%	86%
Hijab	57%	45%	65%	57%	56%	57%
Turban	55%	44%	64%	56%	55%	55%
Kippa	48%	39%	51%	51%	47%	49%
Nun's habit	43%	49%	43%	40%	46%	41%
Star of David	32%	25%	37%	32%	33%	31%
Crucifix	27%	21%	30%	28%	31%	23%

*indicates small sample size

Support for CAQ's proposed ban in Quebec, divisions elsewhere

Despite this lack of consensus on individual symbols, almost two-thirds of Quebec residents (65%) say they support the CAQ's proposal to ban public employees in positions of authority – a group that includes police, judges, and teachers, among others – from wearing religious symbols while at work. Indeed, four-in-ten (43%) *strongly* support such a ban:

The new government of Quebec has promised to ban public employees in positions of authority from wearing religious symbols at work. Do you support or oppose this ban? (Asked of QC respondents, n=350)

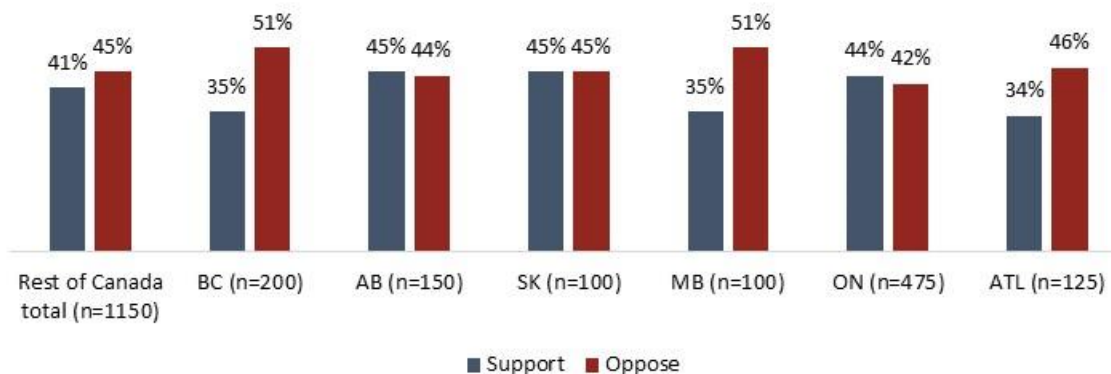


Residents of other regions are considerably more divided when asked about implementing such a ban in their province.

Overall, 41 per cent of residents of the rest of Canada would support a ban on public employees wearing religious symbols where they live, while 45 per cent are opposed. The rest (14%) are uncertain.

The biggest driver of opinion, as seen in the preceding section of this report, is the type of symbols in question. That said, there are regional differences in support for a ban like the one Legault has proposed in Quebec. Support is highest in Alberta and Saskatchewan and lowest in British Columbia, Manitoba, and Atlantic Canada, as seen in the graph that follows.

Would you support or oppose your own provincial government implementing such a ban? (Asked of those outside Quebec)

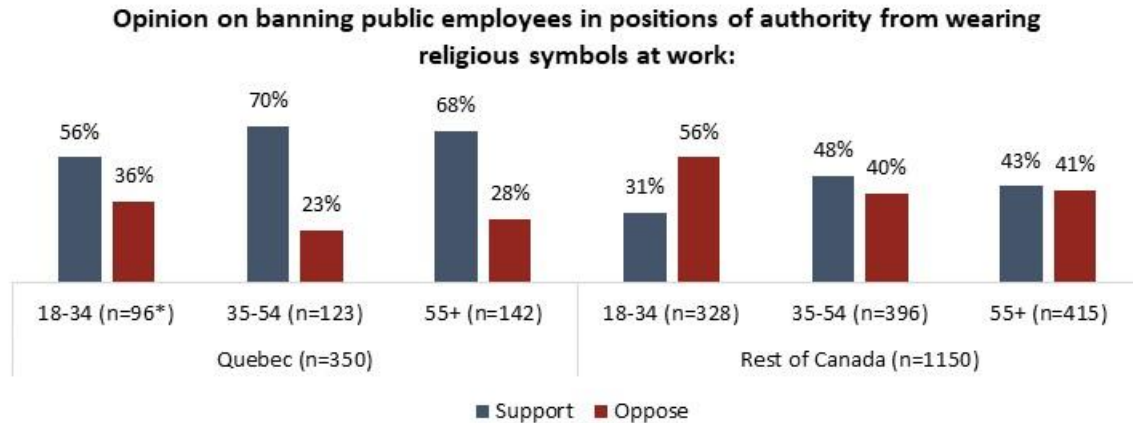


As it is on the symbol-specific question, age is an important factor in shaping opinion on this overall question both in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada. Though majorities across all age groups support the proposal in Quebec, respondents under the age of 35 do so by only a small majority (56%), while those ages 35 and older support it at a roughly seven-in-ten rate.

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In the rest of Canada, meanwhile, support for a ban on religious symbols outpaces opposition among those in the 35-plus age categories, while a majority of younger respondents (56%) are opposed:



*indicates small sample size

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

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