D. Beland and A. Lecours, “Sub-state Nationalism and the Welfare State: Quebec and Canadian Federalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 12 (2006)

**Overview**

Article examines the relationship between sub-state nationalism and the welfare state through the case of Quebec. It argues that social policy presents mobilization and identity-building potential for sub-state nationalism, and that nationalist movements affect the structure of welfare state. Nationalism and the welfare state revolve around the notion of solidarity. Because they often involve transfers of money between citizens, social programmes raise the issue of the specific community whose members should exhibit social and economic solidarity. From this perspective, nationalist movements are likely to seek congruence between the ‘national community’ (as conceptualized by their leaders) and the ‘social community’ (the community where redistributive mechanisms should operate). Moreover, the political discourse of social policy lends itself well to national identity-building because it is typically underpinned by collective values and principles. Finally, pressures stemming from sub-state nationalism tend to reshape the policy agenda at both the state and sub-state level while favouring the asymmetrical decentralization of the welfare state.

**Background**

* Nationalism often described as the political expression of a special sense of solidarity among people (the sources of which are many) – commonality of language, religion, etc
* One an argue that sub-state nationalism may affect welfare state development in at least 2 ways: reshaping the policy agenda at both the state and sub-state levels, and reinforcing the push for policy decentralization as an alternative to centralist schemes.
* A likely outcome is to introduce asymmetry into the welfare state as regions with autonomous institutions where there exists a significant nationalist movement that are granted partial control over social policy (this is the case with the UK and Scotland, as well as with Quebec)
* Quebec nationalism rhetoric tied to social policy. Additionally (and somewhat counter-intuitively) – nationalism explains in large part support for free trade in Quebec, as it promised to position the province within a continental rather than a (Canadian) national economy
* 1995 referendum failure – Canada was also in the middle of undergoing a period of retrenchment featuring an unprecedented wave of neoliberal reforms. Quebec was poorly insulated from these developments
* For the PQ, a social-democratic party whose ideological discourse was closely associated with its nationalist project, this context was particularly tricky. In late 1990s, PQs responded by enacting several progressive social policies – including $5/day daycare and universal drug insurance program
* Quebecois nationalism has stimulated asymmetry in social policy in Canada – stemming from the province’s social policy innovations but also from nationalist pressures on the central administration of many social programs. Several patterns exist:
  + First – when a power historically exercised by the federal government is decentralized to Quebec, but not other provinces
  + Second – a pattern of asymmetry (or federalism with a footnote)
  + Third – agenda setting by Quebec places pressures on federal govt (i.e. in childcare)

**Conclusion**

Nationalism in Quebec has impacted the development of social programs within Canadian federalism not only by forcing asymmetry, but also by framing the terms of the political debate in the social policy domain