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Pourquoi les gens appuient-ils une loi controversée ? Manipuler la clarté et la cohérence d'une loi pour façonner la perception et l'approbation des individus

Why do people come to support a highly controversial law? Manipulating the clarity and coherence of a law can shape individuals' perception and approval

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Résumé

Les recherches passées ont démontré que la clarté et la cohérence des normes jouent un rôle dans la formation des attitudes des individus envers ces normes. Nous contribuons à cette littérature en étudiant le rôle que jouent la clarté et la cohérence d'une loi dans l'approbation des individus vis-à-vis de cette loi dans le contexte spécifique d'un sujet bien connu et controversé : l'interdiction du port de signes religieux dans les espaces publics. Nous faisons les hypothèses que manipuler le degré de clarté et de cohérence d'une loi influence l'approbation des individus via un changement dans leur perception vis-à-vis de cette loi. Nous avons conduit deux études expérimentales inter-sujets en France et au Québec dans lesquelles les participant·e·s devaient lire une proposition de loi fictive et dans lesquelles nous avons manipulé les degrés de clarté et de cohérence de cette loi. Nous avons également mesuré la perception et le degré d'adhésion des participant·e·s vis-à-vis de cette loi. Les résultats de ces deux études supportent nos hypothèses : les degrés de clarté et de cohérence de la proposition de loi ont significativement influencé la perception des individus, qui par la suite ont influencé leur degré d'adhésion. Les résultats suggèrent un effet de médiation total. Notre recherche contribue à la littérature en démontrant la malléabilité de la perception et du degré d'approbation des individus vis-à-vis d'une loi. Ces résultats sont d'autant plus importants que dans les deux études nous avons étudié la perception et l'approbation d'une proposition de loi sur un sujet largement discuté dans les médias, où l'on pourrait s'attendre à ce que chacun ait un avis bien déterminé sur le sujet, et donc peu flexible. D'un point de vue pratique, ces résultats ont pour but de sensibiliser les autorités sur la manière de communiquer de nouvelles réglementations afin de favoriser l'adhésion des individus.

Mots clefs : norme ; loi ; clarté ; cohérence ; perception ; adhésion.

Abstract

In our research, we investigated the role of law clarity and coherence on individuals' approval of this law in the specific context of a widely discussed and controversial topic: the ban on wearing religious signs in public spaces. We hypothesize that manipulating the clarity and coherence of a law influences individuals' approval of that law through a change of their perception. We conducted two experiments in which participants read a fictitious proposed law. We manipulated the degree of clarity and coherence of the law and measured participants' perception of and adherence to that law. The results consistently supported our hypotheses. Our research contributes to the literature by showing how individuals' perception and approval of a law are malleable, even in the specific context of a hot topic. Furthermore, these findings should sensitize policy makers on how to effectively communicate new policies.

Keywords: norm; law; clarity; coherence; perception; approval.

Why do people come to support a highly controversial law? Manipulating the clarity and coherence of a law can shape individuals' perception and approval

What constitutes an influential law? Is the content of the law crucial in shaping public approval of it? Or is the way of communicating the law more important? In our research, we intend to answer these questions by investigating factors influencing individuals' approval of a new law. Past research has suggested that a new law can foster the development of a new social norm and we know about the powerful effect of social norms on attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Guimond *et al.*, 2013). It thus seems important to have a better understanding of the factors making individuals more or less likely to approve an incoming law. We suggest that the way of presenting and framing a new law plays a crucial role in individuals' approval of this norm. In particular, research has shown that the degree of coherence of a norm plays an important role in shaping attitudes towards that norm (e.g., Smith *et al.*, 2012). Regarding the role of clarity, research has revealed mixed findings. In our work, we extend this literature by investigating the role of clarity and coherence of a law on individuals' approval in the specific context of a widely discussed and controversial topic: the ban on wearing religious signs in public spaces.

Banning religious signs from public spaces has been the topic of political debate for several decades in France. This debate recently reached the Province of Quebec. In our research, we conducted two experiments (Study 1 in France and Study 2 in Quebec) to investigate whether manipulating the degree of clarity and coherence of a proposed law influences individuals' perception of that law as well as their endorsement. Specifically, we argue that in this specific context of a widely discussed topic, individuals have preexisting attitudes on whether religious signs should be banned in public spaces. We expect that to change these preexisting attitudes, a change in their law perception should first occur. Accordingly, we expect a mediation effect such that manipulating the way of presenting and

framing a law would influence individuals' perception of that law, which would subsequently shape their level of adherence.

Our research contributes to the literature in two ways. First, we aim to contribute to the literature on the influence of norms by further investigating what constitutes an impactful law (e.g., Guimond *et al.*, 2013; Jackson *et al.*, 2012; Zitek & Hebl, 2007). Second, we aim to contribute to the literature on the French Republican model by studying how a law contradicting the principle of *laïcité* as defined in the French Constitution can gain wide support. From a practical point of view, our work aims to better understand how individuals can be led to endorse a law by manipulating the way of presenting and framing it. This understanding would better equip policy makers in communicating new policies to foster the public approval of these policies and making sure to increase intergroup tolerance and acceptance. The remainder of the manuscript unfolds as follows. First, we briefly review the research on the role of norms in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Second, we describe the context in which the present research was conducted and present our hypotheses. Next, we report the methods and results of the two studies. Finally, we conclude by discussing our findings.

1. Norms and Their Influence on Individuals

1.1 Brief Overview of Past Research

According to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals learn how to behave and react in a particular situation through social norms (e.g., by observing others, through the media). Norms can be defined as “arbitrary rules for behavior that are adopted because they are valued or reinforced by the culture” (Cialdini & Trost, 1998, p. 152). Past research has demonstrated that cultural and social norms play a crucial role in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Asch, 1956; Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, & Vaughn, 1994; Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Guimond *et al.*, 2013; Levin *et al.*, 2012; Meeus &

Raaijmakers, 1986; Milgram, 1974). For instance, Guimond *et al.* (2013) investigated the relationship between norms related to diversity policy and intergroup attitudes. The results revealed that, in countries characterized by norms favoring diversity, individuals displayed a lower level of anti-Muslim prejudice than in countries characterized by norms seeking to reduce diversity (i.e., multiculturalism versus assimilation diversity policies).

However, only a few studies have investigated what constitutes an impactful norm or law. For instance, Jackson *et al.* (2012) showed that the legitimacy of the institution as well as the moral purpose of the law plays an important role in predicting individuals' compliance to that law (see also Tyler & Jackson, 2014). In our research, we are interested in understanding the components of a norm that would lead to greater public approval. On one hand, research has investigated the effect of norm clarity on attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Cole, Harris, & Bernerth, 2006; Turner, 1991; Zitek & Hebl, 2007). For instance, Zitek and Hebl (2007) studied the clarity of a social norm related to the acceptability of displaying prejudice. Their results revealed that low levels of clarity of the social norm lead to greater effects of social influence compared to high levels of clarity. Cole *et al.* (2006) investigated the role of vision clarity on organizational outcome in the context of a major organizational change. They did not find any main effect of vision clarity. However, they found a three-way interaction effect revealing that, for instance, turnover intentions decreased and job satisfaction increased in the presence of a clear vision and when the change was perceived as being not so appropriate but well-executed. Furthermore, they did not find any significant effect of vision clarity when the change was perceived as appropriate and well-executed. These findings reveal the complexity of the role of clarity in predicting attitudes and behaviors and suggest that this effect might be context-dependent.

On the other hand, research has demonstrated the importance of norm coherence on attitudes and behaviors (e.g., de la Sablonnière, Debrosse, & Benoit, 2010; McAdams, 2006;

Smith & Louis, 2008; Smith *et al.*, 2012). For instance, Smith *et al.* (2012) studied the effect of coherence between an injunctive norm (i.e., what others approve/disapprove) and a descriptive norm (i.e., what others actually do) on intentions to conform to this norm. Their findings revealed that individuals had higher intentions to conform to a norm when both injunctive and descriptive norms were coherent than when they were in contradiction. In a second example, de la Sablonnière *et al.* (2010) showed the important role of culture coherence on personal outcome (e.g., well-being, life satisfaction) among bicultural individuals. Although these findings refer to different fields, they showed that the way of framing a norm — namely, through its degree of coherence — seems to play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and behaviors. In the specific context of our research, we defined coherence as the extent to which a law is judged as fitting with other related laws present in the same context. Furthermore, coherence implies not only the absence of conflict between different laws, but also that there is a link between these laws (de la Sablonnière *et al.*, 2010). We defined clarity as the extent to which a law is judged as providing enough information to understand its implications — that is, it should clearly inform about who will be affected by the law, how, and when. For example, to be clear, a law banning the wearing of religious signs in public spaces should specify whether it concerns all religious signs or only those that are highly visible (e.g., headscarf versus a religious necklace), whether the law applies to all public spaces or only to some, and to whom it applies (e.g., all citizens versus only public agents). Furthermore, it should be clearly specified when the law will be implemented.

Our research aims to further investigate the effect of clarity and coherence on attitudes in the specific context of a widely discussed and controversial topic in France and Quebec: the ban on wearing religious signs in public spaces. Before presenting our empirical work, in the next section we briefly present the two contexts in which we conducted our studies.

Introducing these contexts is crucial for understanding our hypotheses and our experimental manipulations.

1.2 Present Research

We conducted the present research in France and Quebec for two main reasons. First, both countries welcome high numbers of immigrants and refugees each year, leading to a high level of diversity among their population, including religious diversity. Despite this diversity, discrimination and negative stereotypes are very high toward people of North African origin, Arabs, or Muslims (Dambrun & Guimond, 2001; Pelletier-Dumas, de la Sablonnière, & Guimond, 2017). Second, both France and Quebec have recently observed public debates on the topic of the ban of religious signs in public spaces. Accordingly, studying how individuals react to a proposed law on the ban of religious signs in public spaces, and how different levels of clarity and the coherence of such initiatives affect public reactions is highly relevant in those contexts.

1.2.1 The French Republican Model

Research has identified three main intergroup ideologies that nations can adopt to deal with diversity: assimilation, multiculturalism, and colorblindness (Badea, 2012; Bleich, 2001; Guimond *et al.*, 2014; Roebroek & Guimond, 2015). The ideology of assimilation advocates the homogenization of the population by, for instance, asking immigrants to conform to the culture and language of their new country. Inversely, the ideology of multiculturalism promotes cultural diversity by acknowledging group differences and respecting minority group identities. Finally, the ideology of colorblindness advocates the ignorance of group belongingness, such that all citizens should be treated equally regardless of their race or ethnicity. The French Republican model rests on this colorblind model through its two central principles: *laïcité* and citizenship (Hollifield, 2010; Jennings, 2000; Kamiejski, Guimond, De Oliveira, Er-Rafiy, & Brauer, 2012). On one hand, *laïcité* is a principle “symbolising the non-

religious nature of the state where the state neither recognises nor subsidises a particular religion” (Idriss, 2005, p. 261; see also Milot, 2013). On the other hand, citizenship is a principle symbolizing the collective identity at the nation level meaning that (a) each individual should be considered as a member of the nation and not as a member of a particular group (e.g., Muslims) and that (b) all citizens have the same rights and duties (Jennings, 2000; Kamiejski *et al.*, 2012; Schnapper, 2004). Laïcité and citizenship are both part of the French Constitution of 1958. For instance, the first article of the French Constitution states that “France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic, and social Republic. It shall insure the equality of all citizens before the law without distinction of origin, race, or religion. It shall respect all beliefs.” These two principles aim to protect citizens by ensuring their liberty and equality, regardless of their origin or religion, as well as ensuring harmonious intergroup relationships through colorblind equality (Guimond, de la Sablonnière, & Nugier, 2014).

Since the past decades, laïcité and citizenship have been the topic of public debate in the French media, particularly among politicians (Milot, 2013). The debate has resurfaced as the frequency of terrorist attacks increased (Idriss, 2005). The debate has led to a dual conceptualization of the principle of laïcité (Baubérot, 2012; Idriss, 2005; Milot, 2013; Poulter, 1997; Roebroek & Guimond, 2016). The first interpretation of laïcité, called “historical laïcité,” represents the traditional form of laïcité as stated in the French Constitution. It refers to a form of laïcité in which the state is neutral in terms of religion and does not intervene in the private sphere. The second interpretation, called “new laïcité”, refers to a form of laïcité in which “the state will strive hard to maintain its religious neutrality by curtailing religious freedom, in the interests of public order” (Idriss, 2005, pp. 261-2). This second interpretation implies that efforts by the government to control religious expression in the public can be justifiable (Idriss, 2005; Milot, 2013). According to Baubérot (2012), this new meaning of laïcité is rather recent and can be seen as an outcome of the law voted in

2004 in France banning conspicuous religious signs for students of public schools. The development of this new *laïcité* is supported by the right-wing political parties and their supporters expressing their concerns about the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in France (Barthélemy & Michelat, 2007; Idriss, 2005; Poulter, 1997).

The practical implications of the emergence of this new *laïcité* are evident in two recently passed laws that aim to remove all religious signs from the public sphere. First, the March 15, 2004, Law 2004-228 states that in public primary and secondary schools, it is forbidden for pupils to wear any conspicuous religious signs. Following this law, the government developed two charters for public services and schools in 2007 and 2013. These charters are codes of conduct for pupils and public agents strictly forbidding all religious signs. Second, the October 11, 2010, Law 2010-1192 states that it is forbidden for an individual to wear any clothing hiding his or her face in public unless it can be justified by health or professional reasons, or when it is related to a sport practice or a particular event.

With the implementation of these laws related to new *laïcité* in 2004 and 2010, France became the first country in Europe to ban the burka and niqab in public (Hopkins, 2015). According to Baubérot (2012), these laws are in contradiction with historical *laïcité* and citizenship and, thus, with the French Republican model as defined by the French Constitution. First, they contradict historical *laïcité*; whereas the historical *laïcité* acts as a safeguard of citizens' liberty through the state's neutrality, the new *laïcité* promotes the state's neutrality regarding religion through the restriction of citizens' liberty. Second, these two laws contradict the principle of citizenship because they do not have the same consequences for all French citizens (Baubérot, 2012; Milot, 2013). Indeed, it is easier for Christians to hide a necklace with a cross under a T-shirt than for Muslim women to hide their headscarves. These laws tend to stigmatize and cause damage to particular groups of citizens over others — namely, Muslims and Sikhs. Hence, this new *laïcité* challenges the colorblind ideology

adopted in France by reducing religious diversity and thereby promoting the ideology of assimilation (Kamiejski *et al.*, 2012; May, 2015). Kamiejski *et al.* (2012) demonstrated this dissociation between the new *laïcité* and citizenship by showing that the two had an opposite relationship with a measure of prejudice against North Africans. The more participants valued citizenship, the lower their level of prejudice was, whereas the more participants valued the new *laïcité*, the higher their level of prejudice was (see also Roebroek & Guimond, 2016).

Although much debate existed before these laws were enacted, they now have widespread public support in France (Idriss, 2005). How is this possible? We suggest that the way of presenting and framing such laws played an important role in their endorsement. Existing laws banning religious signs in France apply only to public schools (primary and high schools), but not to universities. In Study 1, we thus conducted an experiment in France in which we used a fictitious proposal by the French government to develop a new law that would apply to universities in order to experimentally investigate the factors influencing individuals' perception and approval of a law related to the new *laïcité*.

1.2.2 Province of Quebec

The Province of Quebec is a specific context because its integration policy does not refer to one of the three main intergroup ideologies described earlier. Instead, Quebec rests on the interculturalism model (Gagnon & Iacovino, 2007). This model is close to the multiculturalism model because both models recognize and value the existence of different ethnic groups. However, contrary to multiculturalism, interculturalism explicitly admits the existence of a majority culture and encourages interaction between the majority and minority groups through the use of a common language: French (Bouchard, 2011; Rocher & White, 2014).

A parallel can be drawn between the new *laïcité* debate in France and Quebec. Indeed, in 2013 the Government of Quebec proposed a law project entitled "Quebec Charter of

Values” that aimed to extend the laïcité of the state to public agents. Following its proposition, the Province of Quebec was at the epicenter of a debate around laïcité. One of the main propositions of the charter aimed to prohibit public agents from wearing ostentatious religious symbols at their workplace. According to this proposed law, a Muslim female working for the state would have to remove her headscarf if she wanted to keep her job whereas a Catholic female could keep wearing a cross around her neck as this is not considered an ostentatious religious symbol (CBC CBC-News, 2013). We used this debate around this charter as an opportunity to conduct Study 2. While Study 2 was being planned in Quebec, the Quebec Charter of Values was being thoroughly discussed and had not yet been adopted. It was thus the perfect occasion to use this context to evaluate the impact of the coherence and clarity of this proposed law on individuals’ perception and endorsement.

1.2.3 Hypotheses

Drawing on past research (e.g., de la Sablonnière *et al.*, 2010; Smith *et al.*, 2012), we expect that the degree of coherence of a law will influence individuals’ adherence to that law. We suggest that a high degree of coherence with previous laws would provide a frame of reference to individuals on how they should react to this law. Accordingly, individuals would be more likely to have positive attitudes toward a proposed law in line with other existing laws than towards a proposed law contradicting existing laws. Regarding the effect of clarity, the literature has shown mixed results (e.g., Cole *et al.*, 2006; Zitek & Hebl, 2007), suggesting that the effect of clarity might be context dependent. In our research, we expect that a higher degree of clarity will lead to greater endorsement. Indeed, we suggest that, in the context of a proposed law, individuals will need to understand the law clearly (e.g., who will be concerned by the law, how, and when it will be enforced) in order to make their own judgment about it and have positive attitudes.

However, we expect that the relationship between the way the law is presented and framed and individuals' endorsement is not as straightforward in the specific context of a proposed law related to the widely discussed and controversial topic of the ban of religious signs in public spaces. In this specific context, it seems plausible to argue that individuals have preexisting attitudes on the topic. They either agree or disagree with banning religious signs (Leduc, 2002; Wood, Rhodes, & Biek, 1995). To change these preexisting attitudes, we expect that there should first be a change in their perception. Hence, we expect a mediation effect, such that manipulating the degree of coherence and clarity of a proposed law will first have an impact on how individuals perceive that law, which will subsequently have an impact on their attitudes towards this law. Figures 1 and 2 present these mediation effects. Formally stated:

Hypothesis 1: The degree of clarity of a law influences individuals' endorsement of that law through a mediation effect, such that individuals presented with a clear law are more likely to approve that law through a greater clarity perception than individuals presented with an unclear law.

Hypothesis 2: The degree of coherence of a law influences individuals' endorsement of that law through a mediation effect, such that individuals presented with a coherent law are more likely to approve that law through a greater coherence perception than individuals presented with an incoherent law.

< Insert Figures 1 and 2 here >

2. Method

2.1 Design and Procedure

The present research consisted of two experiments conducted in France and in Quebec with a 2 by 2 factorial design in which we manipulated the degree of coherence and clarity of

a proposed law. Participants were first presented with a fictitious document describing a proposed law banning visible religious signs at the university (Study 1) or in public institutions (Study 2). Participants then completed a questionnaire designed to collect data on several measures (e.g., perceived clarity of the law), as well as on demographic data. Both studies were conducted in a paper-and-pencil format. All the materials were in French.

In both studies, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. Participants were presented with a coherent and clear proposed law, an incoherent and clear proposal, a coherent and unclear proposal, or an incoherent and unclear proposal. In Study 1 (i.e., in France), the manipulation of the coherence of the proposed law was based on the two interpretations of the principle of *laïcité* present in France. In the coherent condition, participants read that the proposed law respected the principle of *laïcité* aiming to limit religious practices to the private sphere. In the incoherent condition, participants read that the proposed law did not respect the principle of *laïcité* aiming to ensure the liberty to freely express their belongingness to a particular culture and/or religion. Regarding the clarity condition, the document described that this law would be applied to both students and the teaching staff starting from the next academic year [it was not known yet when this law would be applied and whether it would be applied only to the teaching staff or to the students as well] for participants in the clear [unclear] condition.

In Study 2 (i.e., in Quebec), the manipulation was similar to that used in Study 1. The document described that the proposed law regarding the ban of religious signs in public services respected [did not respect] Quebec's history and values for participants in the [in]coherent condition. Regarding the clarity condition, the document then described that the proposed law was [not] clearly defined such that for instance it was [not] clear who would be concerned by the law (i.e., which religious signs would be allowed and which ones would be forbidden) in the clear [unclear] condition.

2.2 Samples

2.2.1 Study 1. Participants were 283 undergraduate students enrolled in a psychology program at a French university. The majority of participants were women (85%) and the average age was 19.94 years ($SD = 2.55$). Among the participants, 19% had a mother and/or a father from another country. Participants received course credit for their voluntary participation.

2.2.2 Study 2. The sample was composed of 104 participants among whom 95% were students at a Quebec university. The majority of participants were women (69%) and the average age was 23.40 years ($SD = 5.66$). Among the participants, 46% had a mother and/or a father from another country¹. Participants were recruited via a post on the university's message board or on student Facebook groups. Participants were individually invited to the laboratory and received \$5 in compensation for their time.

2.3 Measures

After reading the proposed law, participants completed a questionnaire designed to measure the perceived coherence and clarity of the proposed law, as well as their level of adherence to the law. All measures were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

2.3.1 Study 1. We measured perceived coherence using 5 items inspired by Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) and Yampolsky, Amiot, and de la Sablonnière (2016), as well as perceived clarity using 9 items inspired by Usborne and Taylor (2010). Appendix A reports the full version of these measures. Sample items from the coherence and clarity scales, respectively, are: "To me, this law is in line with previous laws applicable in France" and "This proposition of law precisely defines its goal." We developed a 6-item scale to measure participants' level of adherence to the law. A sample item is "It is normal to forbid individuals

to wear visible religious signs in public places such as at university.” Table I shows the means, reliability coefficients, and correlation coefficients among these variables.

< Insert Table I here >

2.3.2 Study 2. We measured perceived coherence using 5 items inspired by Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) and Yampolsky *et al.* (2016) and perceived clarity using 9 items inspired by Osborne and Taylor (2010). Sample items from the coherence and clarity scales, respectively, are: “This proposition of law is in line with the government policies with regards to the integration of immigrants in Quebec society” and “This proposed law precisely describes its goal.” We measured participants’ level of adherence to the law using a self-developed 6-item scale. A sample item is “The proposed law respects my personal values.” Appendix B reports the full version of these measures. Table II shows the means, reliability coefficients, and correlation coefficients among these variables.

< Insert Table II here >

3. Results

3.1 Results of Study 1 Conducted in France

First, we tested the main effects of the manipulation of clarity and coherence on participants’ adherence by performing an OLS regression analysis (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). We regressed participant adherence to the law on the two experimental variables of clarity and coherence. Results revealed no significant effect of the manipulation of clarity ($b = .17, p = .351$) and coherence ($b = .31, p = .094$) on participants’ adherence to the law² [$F(2, 280) = 1.82, p = .164, R^2 = .01$].

Next, to test the proposed mediation effects, we used structural equation modelling (SEM). Beforehand, we performed an augmented regression as well as a Durbin-Wu-Hausman endogeneity test (Baum, Schaffer, & Stillman, 2007) to assess whether the mediator is endogenous (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010; Foster & McLanahan, 1996;

Shaver, 2005). Indeed, in each of our models the regressor of interest (e.g., perceived clarity) is measured and not manipulated, which could imply that it correlates with the disturbance of the dependent variable (Smith, 2012). In other words, the mediator and the dependent variable may share an un-modelled common cause. The only way to deal with this potential problem is to test if the mediator is endogenous. To this end, we used participants' gender as an instrumental variable.

We first tested the mediation effect of the manipulation of clarity on participants' adherence to the law via perceived clarity (H1). Results of the augmented regression and the Durbin-Wu-Hausman endogeneity test revealed that the mediator is exogenous [$F(1, 279) = 2.08, p = .15$ and $\chi^2(1) = 2.08, p = .149$, respectively] (Antonakis *et al.*, 2010; Baum *et al.*, 2007). We thus estimated a structural equation model to test our hypothesis without correcting for endogeneity problems (i.e., without correlating disturbances of the mediator and the dependent variable). The results showed a significant effect of the manipulation of clarity on perceived clarity ($b = 1.03, p < .001$) in the first stage of our model and a significant effect of perceived clarity on adherence to the law ($b = 0.45, p < .001$) in the second stage of our model [$\chi^2(1) = 3.37, p = .066$; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .09; SRMR = .04]. A test of the indirect effect using the Delta method (MacKinnon, 2008) revealed a significant indirect effect of the manipulation of clarity on adherence ($b = 0.46, p < .001$). Furthermore, the marginally significant χ^2 of our model suggested a full mediation effect. These results supported Hypothesis 1.

Second, we tested the mediation effect of the manipulation of coherence on adherence via perceived coherence (H2) using the same method as described above. The results of the augmented regression and the Durbin-Wu-Hausman endogeneity test revealed that the mediator is exogenous [$F(1, 279) = 0.28, p = .598$ and $\chi^2(1) = 0.28, p = .596$, respectively] (Antonakis *et al.*, 2010; Baum *et al.*, 2007). We thus estimated a structural equation model to

test our hypothesis without correcting for endogeneity problems. The results showed a significant effect of the manipulation of coherence on perceived coherence ($b = 0.38, p = .003$) in the first stage of our model and a significant effect of perceived coherence on adherence to the law ($b = 1.09, p < .001$) in the second stage of our model [$\chi^2(1) = 0.86, p = .353$; CFI = 1; RMSEA = 0; SRMR = .01]. A test of the indirect effect using the Delta method (MacKinnon, 2008) revealed a significant indirect effect of the manipulation of coherence on adherence ($b = 0.42, p = .004$). Furthermore, the non-significant χ^2 of our model suggested a full mediation effect. These results supported Hypothesis 2.

3.2 Results of Study 2 Conducted in Quebec

First, we replicated Study 1's analysis by testing the main effects of the manipulation of clarity and coherence of the proposed law on participant's adherence. Similar to the findings from Study 1, the results revealed neither the manipulation of clarity ($b = 0.33, p = .283$) nor the manipulation of coherence ($b = 0.15, p = .631$) to predict participants' adherence to the law [$F(2, 101) = 0.71, p = 0.494, R^2 = .02$].

Second, we tested the mediation effect of the manipulation of clarity on participants' adherence to the law via perceived clarity (H1). Results of the augmented regression and the Durbin-Wu-Hausman endogeneity test revealed that the mediator is exogenous [$F(1, 279) = 0.55, p = .46$ and $\chi^2(1) = 0.56, p = .45$, respectively] (Antonakis *et al.*, 2010; Baum *et al.*, 2007). We thus estimated a structural equation model to test our hypothesis without correcting for endogeneity problems. The results showed a significant effect of the manipulation of clarity on perceived clarity ($b = 1.01, p < .001$) in the first stage of our model and a significant effect of perceived clarity on adherence to the law ($b = .54, p < .001$) in the second stage of our model [$\chi^2(1) = .55, p = .459$; CFI = 1; RMSEA = 0; SRMR = .02]. A test of the indirect effect using the Delta method (MacKinnon, 2008) revealed a significant indirect effect of the

manipulation of clarity on adherence ($b = .55, p = .001$). Furthermore, the non-significant χ^2 of our model suggested a full mediation effect. These results supported Hypothesis 1.

Finally, we tested the mediation effect of the manipulation of coherence on adherence via perceived coherence (H2). Results of the augmented regression and the Durbin-Wu-Hausman endogeneity test revealed that the mediator is exogenous [$F(1, 100) = 2.30, p = .13$ and $\chi^2(1) = 2.32, p = .128$, respectively] (Antonakis *et al.*, 2010; Baum *et al.*, 2007). We thus estimated a structural equation model to test our hypothesis without correcting for endogeneity problems. The results showed a significant effect of the manipulation of coherence on perceived coherence ($b = .92, p = .001$) in the first stage of our model and a significant effect of perceived coherence on adherence ($b = 0.60, p < .001$) in the second stage of our model [$\chi^2(1) = 1.90, p = .168$; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .09; SRMR = .04]. A test of the indirect effect revealed a significant indirect effect of the manipulation of coherence ($b = 0.55, p = .002$). Importantly, these results suggested a full mediation effect given the non-significant χ^2 of our model. These results supported Hypothesis 2.

4. Discussion

In our research, we investigated factors constituting an influencing law and hypothesized that the degree of clarity and coherence of a law plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' perception and adherence to this law. We conducted experiments in France and Quebec in the specific context of a widely discussed and controversial topic — namely, the ban on wearing religious signs in public spaces. We expected that the manipulation of clarity and coherence of a law would affect individuals' adherence to that law through a mediation effect, such that a high degree of clarity (Hypothesis 1) and coherence (Hypothesis 2) of the law would lead individuals to perceive this law as clear and coherent which then would result in a greater level of adherence compared to the low degree of clarity and coherence of the law, respectively. Results of both studies supported our hypotheses. Overall, these findings

replicated past research on the role of coherence by showing that, the more individuals perceived a law or a norm as coherent, the more they approved it. Regarding the role of clarity, past research showed mixed results, suggesting that the role of clarity might be context dependent. In our research, we consistently found that the more individuals perceived the law as clear, the more they approved it. These findings revealed that public perception and approval can be easily manipulated even in this specific context of a hot topic.

Importantly, we tested the main effects of our experimental manipulations of clarity and coherence on individuals' adherence. Both studies revealed that the degree of clarity and coherence of a law did not influence individuals' adherence. These results suggest that manipulating the clarity and coherence of a proposed law related to a widely discussed and controversial topic does not *directly* affect individuals' adherence to that law, which instead occurs through a change in individuals' perception, as expected. Mediation testing has undergone considerable developments and debates in recent years (Pirlott & Mackinnon, 2016; Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Yzerbyt, Muller, Batailler & Judd, 2018). One feature of these developments has been a move toward assessing indirect effects, something that did not figure prominently in initial conceptualizations of mediation (e.g., Baron & Kenny, 1986). The requirement to have an effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is not critical when thinking in terms of indirect effects. If one assumes full mediation, it is possible that the independent variable has no effect on the dependent measure because this effect is totally indirect. Furthermore, the traditional ways of testing for mediation involved measuring the mediator. As Pirlott and Mackinnon (2017) pointed out, participants were not randomly assigned to levels of the mediating variable. In such cases, « the relationship between the mediating and dependent variables is correlational » (Pirlott & Mackinnon, 2016, p. 29).

Our results do not settle current debates but provide new insights into such debates. In a sense, we have allocated our participants randomly to the mediator, perceived coherence and

clarity. And we do find significant effects of the manipulation on the mediator. Participants randomly assigned to the high clarity condition did perceive the law as being more clear than those randomly assigned to the low clarity condition. The same applies to the coherence manipulation. This manipulation with random assignment did have an effect on the perceived coherence. Thus, the fact that the perceived coherence and clarity of the law are found to account for variation in the level of support for the law is clearly consistent with our hypotheses. Still, we have no evidence that our independent variables had a direct effect on the dependent variables. From this point of view, it can be argued that our results are correlational. Furthermore, before testing our hypotheses, we checked whether our models suffered from endogeneity issues, that is whether our mediators and the dependent variable shared an un-modelled common cause, which could lead to false conclusions when testing our mediation models (Antonakis *et al.*, 2010; Pirlott & Mackinnon, 2016). Results revealed all our mediators to be exogenous, thus discarding potential confounding effects.

4.1 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Our research contributes to the literature in two ways. First, we add to the literature on the influence of norms (e.g., Guimond *et al.*, 2013; Jackson *et al.*, 2012; Zitek & Hebl, 2007). To date, only a few studies have investigated what constitutes an impactful norm or law (e.g., Cole *et al.*, 2006; Jackson *et al.*, 2012). In our work, we show that the degree of clarity and coherence of a law is of particular importance to influence individuals' perception and approval such that a proposed law explicitly presented as coherent with previous laws and clearly defined is more likely to be accepted by individuals. Second, our research contributes to the literature on the French Republican model (e.g., Idriss, 2005; Milot, 2013) by showing how a law contradicting the principle of historical *laïcité* as defined in the French Constitution can gain wide public support. Our findings demonstrate that such support can be easily influenced through simple tools, namely, by presenting the law in a clear way and by

emphasizing its coherence with the French Republican model through the new interpretation of the principle of *laïcité* (Baubérot, 2012; Idriss, 2005; Kamiejski *et al.*, 2012; Milot, 2013).

These results are of particular importance because we conducted our studies in the specific context of a widely discussed and controversial topic. In this context, we expected individuals to have preexisting attitudes on the topic at hand and, thus, not be as easily influenced. We showed that, through the simple manipulation of the way a law is presented and framed, individuals' perception and approval of that law are indeed malleable. Importantly, these results reveal how individuals can be influenced to approve a law for which they might potentially disagree if it were to be presented in the raw. Finally, from a practical point of view, our findings should sensitize policy makers on how to communicate new policies effectively. Specifically, clearly presenting an incoming law and presenting it as fitting with already existing laws would foster individuals' adherence to this law.

4.2 Limitations and Future Research

The strength of our research is that we investigated the effect of clarity and coherence of a proposed law that is the topic of current debate in the French media and in Quebec, making our research realistic. Second, we replicated our findings regarding the role of clarity and coherence in two different contexts. Finally, in our research we were interested in investigating the extent to which different degrees of clarity and coherence of a law affect individuals' approval. To do so, we manipulated both the degree of clarity and coherence of a law to assess the contribution of each factor separately on our dependent variable. Regarding the limitations of our work, we should acknowledge that we used convenient samples in both studies — that is, samples of university students. However, although a limitation, the use of this type of sample can also be a strength, particularly in Study 1, where university students were directly concerned by the proposed law, making it easier for them to understand the implications of such a law than for a non-student sample. Nonetheless, these studies should be

replicated using representative samples for generalizability purposes. Furthermore, the sample size of Study 1 ($N = 283$) and — more importantly — Study 2 ($N = 104$) raises the question of whether our studies were underpowered. Both studies yielded the same conclusion, suggesting the robustness of our results. However, we call for future research to replicate these effects and to further document the role of clarity and coherence on the public approval of laws.

Furthermore, we recommend that future researchers investigate the role of the contexts in the models we tested. In the present research, the two studies were not identical in terms of content. In France, the proposed law suggested putting a ban on wearing visible religious signs at universities. In Quebec, it suggested putting a ban on wearing visible religious signs in public institutions. Accordingly, we could not merge the two studies to test for such a contextual effect. We would expect the degree of clarity and coherence of a proposed law to play a lesser role in a context in which the law is part of the country's history as compared to a country in which this topic is relatively new. Indeed, in the present research we acknowledge that France and Quebec are not equal with regard to the topic of *laïcité* and to wearing religious signs in public spaces. *Laïcité* has only recently become a topic of political debate in Quebec (e.g., CBC-News, 2013) and, thus, is not part of the Quebec culture. Meanwhile, in France it constitutes a well-known and widely shared principle that is part of the French Constitution. Accordingly, we might expect the degree of clarity and coherence of the proposed law related to *laïcité* to play a minor role in shaping individuals' perception and adherence in the French context compared to the Quebec context.

As another recommendation for future research, it would be interesting to further investigate person-related factors fostering individuals' adherence to a law or norm, such as participants' religion and political orientation. First, in the present research it seems plausible to argue that individuals' religious belongingness has an effect on individuals' approval, such as Muslims would be less likely to approve a law banning ostentatious religious apparel than

Christians even in the case of high perceived coherence and clarity because it would directly affect their way of living. Second, past research demonstrated the influence of political parties and integration policies on individuals' perceptions and attitudes (e.g., Guimond *et al.*, 2013; Pratto *et al.*, 1994; Portelinha & Elcheroth, 2016; Schlueter, Meuleman, & Davidov, 2013; Tankard & Paluck, 2017). It is also noteworthy that, in France, there is a notable radicalization of political parties on topics related to religion, specifically a stigmatization of Islam and an increase in adherence to those parties (Tiberj, 2014). In our research, we would expect that individuals' political orientation affects their perception and thus their approval such that left-wing individuals would be less likely to endorse such a law than right-wing individuals, regardless of the level of clarity and coherence of the law. Accordingly, future research should investigate how different political orientations might affect the relationships between the degree of clarity and coherence of a law and individuals' perception and endorsement of that law.

Finally, in our models we did not take into account participants' preexisting attitudes regarding the proposed law. We assumed that the proposed mediation effects would hold regardless of individuals' initial attitudes. We expected that regardless of whether individuals initially had a low level or a relatively high level of endorsement, presenting a coherent and clear law can only be beneficial by leading to better perception and greater endorsement as compared to presenting an incoherent and unclear law. Nonetheless, research should test for this assertion. Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate the role of clarity and coherence of a norm for which individuals do not have many prior opinions. In this case, we would expect the role of clarity and coherence to be more pronounced than in the case of a well-known topic. In addition, in the present research we tested the role of clarity and coherence of a proposed law related to the principle of new *laïcité*, for which research showed that the more individuals value the new *laïcité*, the higher their level of prejudice (Kamiejski

et al., 2012). It would be interesting to test the role of clarity and coherence on a law or norm promoting tolerance and reducing prejudice and discrimination. Is the way of presenting and framing a law a powerful tool in this case as well? Are individuals' perception and approval of a law or norm as malleable as demonstrated in the present research with regard to topics promoting tolerance? If this is the case, then policy makers would benefit from the use of this communication tool as a way to diminish tensions between the different groups in society.

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Table I

Study 1 (France): Means, Reliability Coefficients, and Correlations among Variables

Etude 1 (France): Moyennes, Coefficients de Fiabilité, et Corrélations entre les Variables.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	.85	.35							
2. Age	19.94	2.55	-.02						
3. Clarity Manipulation	.53	.50	.02	-.07					
4. Coherence Manipulation	.49	.50	.01	-.05	.03				
5. Perceived Clarity	3.89	1.01	.15 **	-.08	.51 ***	.17 **	.83		
6. Perceived Coherence	4.49	1.12	.13 *	-.08	.13 *	.17 **	.39 ***	.79	
7. Adherence to the Law	4.14	1.55	.11 †	-.09	.06	.10 †	.29 ***	.79 ***	.92

† $p \leq .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

Note. Gender is coded 0 for male participants and 1 for female participants; Cronbach's alpha bolded on diagonal.

Table II

Study 2 (Quebec): Means, Reliability Coefficients, and Correlations among Variables

Etude 2 (Quebec): Moyennes, Coefficients de Fiabilité, et Corrélations entre les Variables.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	.31	.46							
2. Age	23.40	5.66	.04						
3. Clarity Manipulation	.52	.50	-.10	.01					
4. Coherence Manipulation	.51	.50	-.13	.04	.21 *				
5. Perceived Clarity	3.77	1.13	-.02	.12	.45 ***	.15	.82		
6. Perceived Coherence	3.84	1.43	.07	-.11	.19 *	.32 ***	.32 ***	.85	
7. Adherence to the Law	4.61	1.58	.01	.03	.11	.07	.39 ***	.55 ***	.90

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

Note. Gender is coded 0 for male participants and 1 for female participants; Cronbach's alpha bolded on diagonal.

Figures' Legends:



Figure 1. The mediation effect of perception of clarity in the relationship between the degree of clarity of a proposed law and the level of adherence to this law.

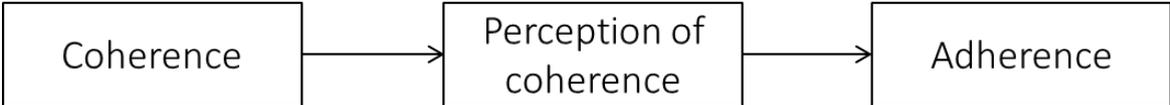


Figure 2. The mediation effect of perception of coherence in the relationship between the degree of coherence of a proposed law and the level of adherence to this law.

Footnote

¹ In Study 2, we also asked the nationality of the participants, as well as the nationality of their parents. A scrutiny of these data showed that five participants were born in a Muslim country (e.g., Morocco, Iran), six participants had a mother from a Muslim country, and seven participants had a father from a Muslim country. Using these data as a proxy for participants' religious belongingness led to the removal of seven participants from the sample. Indeed, due to the topic of the study, we expect Muslims to be less likely to approve of the proposed law than Christians (independently of the degree of clarity and coherence of the proposed law), which might have affected our results. We tested our mediation models on this reduced sample and found the same results. We then kept all participants in our analyses.

² There is also no interaction effect of the manipulations on the level of adherence. It should be noted however, that in initial analysis, we have observed an interaction between perceived clarity and perceived coherence, suggesting that together perceived clarity and perceived coherence interact in predicting individuals' approval of the law. Future studies may explore further this link as it does not represent the main goal of the present research.

Conflict of interest: none.