



BY ROBERT LECKEY, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE    FEBRUARY 7, 2014

Samira Laouni told the committee studying Bill 60 that the employment situation for Muslims in Quebec since the values charter was proposed. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Jacques Boissinot

Photograph by: Jacques Boissinot, THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Public-opinion polls and the Marois government's spate of expensive announcements across the province indicate that we're moving toward an election. With the weak economy attracting remarkably little attention, the election promises to be a referendum on the charter of secularism. It's crucial, then, to identify this referendum election's clear question.

A number of important questions can be set aside on the basis that they don't belong at the heart of an eventual election. Should the Quebec state be secular? Should we affirm and protect the equality of men and women? Is it desirable for immigrants to integrate into society? There's already consensus on these matters.

Does Bill 60 violate the fundamental rights protected by Quebec's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms? This legal question is relevant, but an election will necessarily be fought on the basis of a robustly political question. In any case, the notwithstanding clauses leave our elected leaders room to override fundamental rights if they decide to do so.

