

THEMATIC ARTICLES: IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION POLICIES

Policies on Immigration and Integration in France: An Analysis of Political Decision Makers Ideas and Perceptions

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Abstract. This article examines policy makers rationale for the establishment of immigration and integration policies, and their assumptions and reasoning to decide on a given policy. The article is based on in-depth interviews conducted with policy makers in Paris in the executive and legislative branches of the government (Senators and Members of the National Assembly) and leaders of the parties involved with immigration policies. The article reveals the complex, fluid, and different conceptualizations, and understandings of the political agents, as well as the commonalities and confrontations among the French political class regarding immigration and integration policies.

Keywords: *immigration, integration, public policies, policymakers, France*

Background/Conceptual Framework

Immigration and immigrants' integration have become fundamental social issues internationally and in the major debates in political campaigns in France in the 21st century. Therefore, it is necessary to examine conceptualization and understandings of the political agents who decide policies on immigration process and integration of immigrants.

Immigrants' integration implies an interrelated process at the individual and societal level. Esser (2006: 7) refers to integration as "the inclusion (or exclusion) of actors in an existing social system" as well as to the cohesion of the social system. In other words, which policies are favored to promote the co-existence of people from different background and cultures in the same territory. The vast research on integration identifies several models/patterns of integration often related to government policies: assimilation, multiculturalism, segmented assimilation, hybridization, and transnationalism in the context of transmigration (Pries 2000), and marginalization.

Since the foundation of the republic France had very much espoused the assimilationist approach, which implies the expectation that the immigrants will adapt to the dominant culture and all spheres of life of the host society, including language acquisition, civic participation, naturalization and cultural identifications with the dominant values. However, recently among several political actors there is an acceptance of a multicultural perspective, allowing for the coexistence of diversity (Amiriaux and Simon, 2006, Maisonneuve and Testé 2007). This perspective also called pluralistic, suggest that engagement in both: the heritage culture and the larger society, as well as bilingualism and ethnically mixed networks, is beneficial to the social integration of immigrants. Both perspectives do coexist within French Political actors and creates frequent confrontations within the society.

This study draws upon an array of research findings and data. The research by Citrin and Sides (2008) provide insights on the question of immigrant integration in relation to boundaries within these societies, including religion, ethnicity, and location. Another relevant framework for our study related to the work of Sam and Horenczyk (2012) on the identification with the receiving society according to the size of the immigrant population in a given city. Finally, the research by Haller, Portes, and Lynch (2011) suggests that the process of integration among immigrants suggests a pattern of segmented assimilation, and therefore this should be taken into consideration when deciding policies.

Objectives

This article examines policy makers rationale for the establishment of immigration and integration policies, and their assumptions and reasoning to decide on a given policy. By analyzing policy-makers beliefs as part of a larger political-cultural framework, it is then possible to identify and explain the adoption of a given policy.

Policies regarding issues of immigrants' integration offer an array of models and paths as several works have demonstrated (INSEE 2012, OCDE/EU 2015). Recent debates on immigration and integration in France concerns above all immigrants from the Maghreb, and from South Saharan Africa. An important part of immigrants' integration relates to the reconfiguration of national communities, including what legitimately can be considered common cultural grounds.

Methodology

Two major research techniques were employed to study policy making: semi-structured individual interviews and document analysis. (a) In-depth interviews were conducted with policy makers in Paris in the executive and legislative branches of the government (Senators and Members of the National Assembly-MNA) and leaders of the parties involved with immigration policies. The people interviewed were from the following parties: La Republique en Marche-LREM [The Republic on the Move], this party which is a composite of moderate right, center and left politicians, supports the executive branch and has the most seats in the French National Assembly; Les Republicains-LR [The Republicans], this is the moderate conservative right-win party; Rassemblement National-RN [National Rally] a far-right political party; Union des Démocrates et Independants-UDI- [Union of Democrats and Independent], a center right party; The Movement Démocrate-MoDem [Democrat Mouvement], a center right political party that tend to support the present government in most issues; Parti Socialiste-PS [Socialist Party], center left in the tradition of European social democracy; Europe Ecologie les Verts-EELV [Europe Ecology the Greens], mostly on the left of the political spectrum; La France Insoumise-FI (France unbowed), left of the political spectrum; Parti Communiste Français-PCF, [French Communist Party], this party is also on the left and in many issues agrees with France Unbowed; Lutte Ouvrière-LO [Workers' Struggle], this is a small far left party from Trotskyist inspiration. In the text I will use the French initials of the parties.

Twenty-eight interviews were conducted in November-December 2019. The sample size of 28 persons is derived from the following methodological concerns: (1) considerations about project goals, available research time, and resources for a successful completion of this study; (2) the need to allow for sufficient respondent variation to capture diversity; (3) recommendations discussed in the ethnographic methods literature about standard validity/reliability criteria (Brady and Collier 2004; Steinmetz 2004); and (4) contemplations about the 'saturation' point of a qualitative sample (Small 2009, Russell and Ryan 2010). Anonymity was ensured from the beginning (no names would be published, only the political affiliation and the roles they played, such as Senator, Member of the French National Assembly, Leader of a party, etc.).

(b) A secondary data analysis from documents was undertaken to complement the individual interviews.

The coding process followed the procedure of the “grounded theory” suggested by Charmaz (2003). The objective was to extract "ideal typical" frames of how respondents rationalize their decisions. The task included to establish a map of patterns of commonalities and differences that define policy-makers beliefs on issues of immigration and integration policies, and to identify markers of cultural mindsets that point to different interpretations and/or the application of values concerning immigration and integration policies. The analysis was framed in terms of contextual factors, such as a country’s political culture, history, and the role it plays in immigration policies. Based on our document analysis and interviews, and following the grounded theory method, I have (1) coded observations from the interviews, (2) created categories of issues and patterns of perception, (3) looked for relationships and links, and (4) developed conceptual frameworks.

Results

The issue of immigration in France has enormous political repercussions. The predominant feeling among the French population and many of the politicians interviewed is that immigration is out of control (Observatoire 2020, Ifop 2018). A large part of the population feels that the French government does manage properly the situation of immigration, and there is a widespread belief in myths like that of the “great replacement”. As this senator from the governing coalition LREM argues:

The sentiment that immigration is out of control is felt psychologically well beyond the real phenomenon, but which is reinforced by the fact that all the governments that preceded us did not do anything about immigration. And I believe that the present government is attempting to provide the means to ensure effective control of immigration.

It has been 40 years since the most recent policies on immigration were put in place. The legislation on immigration has been modified piecemeal, tweaking some tests on existing texts, but this process did not produce a coherent policy. As this senator (LR) asserted: “We have the result of 40 years of laxity on issues of immigration and integration of immigrants.”

However, the existing legislation regarding the right of asylum seems to have been applied very strictly, because some estimates of the interviewees and documents, reveal that more than 80% of asylum request are rejected in the last 4 years. The great mass of immigration came illegally or as part of the family reunification act, because legal economic immigration is very restricted:

France, like other countries, brought in masses of people from the Maghreb with the somewhat absurd idea that they were here temporarily and that they would leave. Except that we did not realize that we people will not spend an entire professional career of 40 years without taking root and without bringing their family. (Leader the Republicans)

The Family reunification policy was put in place just after the 1973 oil crisis and the economic impact of that crisis, under the administration of Valerie Giscard D'Estaing in 1975. "At first, France accepted workers and then afterwards for the sake of humanity, they were allowed to bring their families. And consequently, we ended up with too many immigrants, and with young people who did not integrate as expected." (MNA LR)

The position on immigration is not monolithic even within the same parties. However, it is possible to identify four major tendencies among the politicians interviewed. The far-right current wants a closed society. Based on ethnic and nationalist reasons they do not think that France should allow the entry of immigrants, except in exceptional and very specific cases. For many people within the French society this is a discourse that they want to hear. It is a very effective lever given the large numbers of people opposed to immigration as the already cited surveys suggest (Observatoire 2020, Ifop 2018.) and the support for anti-immigrant parties in the 2022 presidential elections reveals. The moderate right-wing parties, and in particular The Republicans-LR are also in favor of a strong control on immigration but are willing to accept refugees. However, a minority within this party express views very similar to the extreme right: "A temptation of demagoguery does exist, including in my own political party. I see that we want to win votes in the overbidding on this subject, abandoning a certain number of humanist principles by twisting the reality of the facts." (Senator LR). Then, several small parties in the center of the political spectrum such as MoDem are calling for a more efficient and orderly control on immigration but are not opposed to all immigration.

The moderate left such as the PS, and the EELV, are also divided on this issue, even within the same party. The predominant stances include some controls of immigration, and above all to reach international agreements to transfer resources to those countries who produce emigrants. This position is also generally held by the leaders and representatives of France Unbowed-FI and the Communist Party-PCF. In fact, on this issue the center right agrees with the left, revealing some consensus among the interviewees from the center right and the left (MoDem, LREM, FI, PS, EELV, and PCF) on the need to co-develop agreements with immigration

countries: “we should have an active policy that promotes exchanges and the movement of people, but with the objective of the development of the countries from which they come.” Senator PS.

Finally, there is a small minority, in the far left that consider that there should be free movement of people in the world. The far left argue that people should be free to move without any immigration control. As this leader from LO states: “Borders exist only to protect the interests of the rich. Those who control the wealth need borders to keep their wealth. Our fight is humanity, we are internationalists.”

The predominant political movement who controls both Executive branch and the National Assembly, LREM, which is a composite of diverse political parties from the moderate right, the center and the moderate left, is constantly in turmoil over the issue of immigration. Indeed, left-wing cultures and right-wing cultures coexist based on a vague republican base. There are many debates within this coalition regarding immigration, and the only aspect they seem to agree on is to preserve the right of asylum for individuals threatened with death or persecution and allow students to come to France. In this view students “can contribute to the cultural influence of France and also that to the development of their country when they go back.” (Senator LREM). But there is much skepticism about economic immigration coming specially from the right, creating tensions within the Presidential majority, as reflected in the following statement:

As Michel Rocard once said: France cannot receive everyone. We cannot effectively welcome all those who live badly in their country because it is insufficiently developed or badly governed. I think that we need a controlled migration. We believe that the answers must be provided in terms of development aid, and cooperation to reduce immigration. (Senator MoDem)

Interviewees from all parties (except the far-right) agree that the issue is not necessarily legal immigration (asylum). The number of legal immigrants, mostly refugees, is estimated around 200,000 per year. The main issue of contention relates to illegal immigration: “Those people who arrive by air, by road, sea. etc. in the Schengen area, which is very poorly protected at its borders,” as this MNA from the RN asserts. The estimates on the number of illegal immigrants in France varies from one party to the other. The Republicans estimate around one million, others from LREM or EELV estimate it at less than 500,000. Both the RN and LR argue that the generosity of the French state, which pays the hospitals or the costs of illness and the

welfare system in general is what attracts illegal immigrants.

Why we have more than elsewhere? Because the family allowance system. We have a social system that is extremely favorable to immigrants. I am talking to you about state medical aid, this is perhaps the biggest scandal. A foreigner who arrives in France after fifteen days is taken care of by state medical aid. They have the right to be reimbursed 100% of everything he will do in terms of health. And that' is what we call suction pumps that affect the health economy in particular, allowances that are given to foreigner who are entitled to receive help. It's not large sums, but they are also housed and fed, hosted by associations. Don't be surprised that they all want to come here." (MNA LR)

Most interviewees from all parties deplore the conditions in which the illegals are living. And one senator from the LR justify her party opposition to immigration based on that situation: "Because they arrive in large numbers, the French state cannot welcome them as it should. That is why our party wants to create legal mechanisms to control immigration" Senator LR. Indeed, many of the illegal immigrants live in slums, and they are often victims of unscrupulous people who get rich on their backs. For example, at their arrival in France (after having paid large sums of money to cross the Mediterranean), they are victims of what are called "sleep merchants." The so called "sleep merchants" rent slums to immigrants for a relatively high price. It is common that in a studio for one or two people, about twenty people will leave there with mattresses everywhere, and each would pay 100 euros to the landlord. When they work, as they are not declared, they are exploited:

I know farmers who make them work illegally, and who pay them a pittance. It is kind of modern slavery. Therefore, in the name of humanism, we must stop that, and organize things better. We must be ruthless with all those who profit: the smugglers, the sleep merchants, the employers, etc. Leader LR.

The perception that there are too many immigrants is not unique to France. It is sentiment that seems to be widespread across Europe according to media reports, but, in truth, many European countries are losing population. For instance, country members of the EU such as Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Estonia, Greece, Poland, Portugal and Italy are experiencing a decline in their population in the last 10 years, and in certain cases, if they are no losing more, it is due to immigration. Germany and Spain are barely reproducing themselves. France is still growing, although slowly, 0.33% a year. In short, Europe's problem is more a drop in population than increase of population. At some point, Europe will be in such a demographic state that they will have no other solution than to open the borders to more immigrants, and the same goes for France. The economic survival of this

space will be at stake. In the opinion of a senator from the socialist party:

I think that instead of barricading ourselves behind walls we should look for other alternatives. I am a specialist in the Roman Empire, and I know that the walls were never a solution. All governments in recent years have had an increasingly restrictive immigration policy and the current government is not an exception. Because a very tough government policy regarding all asylum applications the number of immigrants is relatively stable or even decreasing. A large part of immigration is due to family reunification. In short, there is much agitation in political debates on this issue when in truth there is nothing to be alarmed about.

In the same tone, the representative from FI explains that perhaps it would be necessary to start considering opening the doors to legal economic immigration. This point of view, defended by several interviewees from the left, argue that if there is illegal immigration and so many asylum seekers it is due to the lack of opportunities for legal economic immigration:

We wonder why there are so many asylum applications from countries that do not have a dictatorship. They come from safe countries where there is no political threat. They are economic immigrants who try to use this alternative. That is why there are so many rejections in these applications. They do not qualify as refugees. The same goes for illegal immigration. The more we close the doors, the more restrictive we are, the more there is illegal immigration by mechanical reaction.

France, in response to illegal immigration has often deported a proportion of illegal immigrants. A Member of the National Assembly from LREM estimates that in 2019 they departed around 30.000. This is a small proportion of those who stay, but according to this interviewee and two others from the FI and UDI the numbers of legal and illegal emigration are not affecting negatively the French economy:

We remain in proportions that are not unbearable for the country, quite the contrary. France has always known how to make all waves of immigration a source of wealth. I think there are quite a few jobs in France for immigrants who do not compete with the French. There are plenty of companies that cannot find workers. Especially in the hostelry. (MNA FI)

Other interviewees on the left such as the MNA of EELV consider that even though illegal immigration is a problem “it could be solved by legalizing those who work and who behave as good citizens.” These ideas reflect a sharp difference with the people I interviewed from the right-wing parties LR and RN, who are opposed to any form of legalization of immigrants or even opening the doors to legal economic migration.

In short, the solution from the right of the political spectrum is mostly closing the doors to further immigration with some exceptions. For the politicians from the

center right and left that I interviewed, given the reality of increased movement of people in the world due to poverty, climate change, wars and so on, France should adapt and facilitate the movement of people, for the mutual development of emigration countries and France. As the representative from FI said: “Given the situation of the world and the consequences of globalization, with an increased circulation of people, we also need to change our view on immigration”. However, the fear of immigration is not only tight to number on immigrants, but to how well they integrate into French society as we will examine in the following section.

INTEGRATION

Until the 1950s France was a relatively homogeneous country, predominantly white, with a large rural population strongly influenced by Catholicism, relatively integrated and accepted religious minorities of Protestants and Jews, and with a large population of atheist. There was a considerable social cohesion and very strong sense of uniqueness based on the acceptance of a secular society. From the 1950s on large numbers of immigrants from south Europe and North Africa started to come to France and brought with them different cultures and habitus. The European immigrants (Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish and other Europeans) had some major common points of integration, be it by religion, or by trade unionism or the communist party, who played an important role in the lives of the workers at that time. The immigrants who came in that period from North Africa, despite encountering more difficulties than the Europeans to adapt to a secular France, ended up integrating to a large extent.

For centuries, France has been a land of immigration, and has incorporated numerous ethnic groups into a unique blend, which was at the very core of French identity. This process of rapid assimilation was the result of a strong centralized power in order to domesticate otherness and to generate the prototype of good citizenship. The French republic since its foundation was strongly unifying, standardizing. French education was strongly oriented towards a single nation and towards uniformity. For example, at schools, children who spoke Breton or Alsatian were punished. The “French Dream” of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity for all, relied on the assumption that regardless of social class, religion, and ethnicity, all citizens were granted the same rights and duties. However, this integrative strategy no longer functions today, as the distance between “us” and “them” appears to be insurmountable for a large segment of the new immigrants, mostly from the

Maghreb and reflecting a Muslim background (Troian et al. 2018), as their numbers have increased substantially. Religion appears to be a dividing marker, which some ultranationalists quickly conveyed into a narrative involving a clash of civilizations (Safi 2006). Similarly, the socioeconomic barriers often lead to exclusion of significant parts of the population.

Then, in the sixties France experienced a general questioning of the established order, as reflected in the youth revolt of May 68. The concept of eternal France started to be questioned, and traditions were shaken up, casting doubt on the fundamentals of society.

For some of the interviewees this change was too radical: “society went to the other extreme. Everything goes.” (MNA RN). Indeed, the predominant discourse in intellectual and academic circles in the 1970s and 1980s was the apology and the exaltation of difference, perhaps in reaction to an extreme standardization from the past. For several people interviewed on the moderate right and the extreme right the exaltation of the differences tended to excuse everything and to question even basic rules of society, as exemplified in the following quote from a leader of The Republicans interviewed:

I must say on a cultural level in post-May 68 it was forbidden to forbid. It seems to me that everything was acceptable. The school deviated more and more from its original purpose of creating a republican and secular vision of the world. I would even say libertarian. When I was a kid, we were taught self-discipline. I have to say that after 68 the school was no longer the mold it had been in previous decades. Therefore, the kids of immigrants who arrived without reference, except the reference of their parents who were no longer in touch with today's society could not understand the codes of life of the society in which they lived, and even less the norms.

In this view the non-respect of the rules governing society and the dominant permissiveness was translated to the process of integrating immigrants:

In this atmosphere of contestation of the authority, there is a mass immigration of families with children who were born in France or arrived at an early age. These children were brought up, educated much less strictly than before, in a general atmosphere of contestation of authority. And on a cultural level, we move to the apology of the multicultural society, of difference, more than that of resemblance. We went from one extreme to the other. (Representative National Rally [Rassemblement national-RN])

We have cultivated the difference to the point of not integrating. And when we talk about populations from Muslim cultures, we did not want to look at the elements that could pose a problem in French society. (Senator the Republicans.)

The main argument presented by these right-win politicians was that in this atmosphere of questioning the traditional French cultural makeup, the new immigrants from the Maghreb, who come with a very distinct culture, in the 1970s and later, did not feel that they needed to adapt. A situation perceived as different with previous immigration in the 1950s. A Senator from The Republicans describes it as follows:

The immigrants that arrived in France from Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria after the war, most of them integrated. That is no longer the case for their children and grandchildren, because we have allowed a rebirth and influence of the Muslim religion, which gives them a separated identity.

Indeed today, large contingents of immigrants from Africa, live, socialize, marry and some even work in ethnic communities. In other words, they reproduce their own subculture, which are viewed by many observers and scholars in France as hindering integration and as a major threat to cultural cohesion. These developments have created tensions—anti-immigrant resentment, including discrimination and hostility.

One UDI senator deplors the cuts on education in the last thirty years, undermining the role that education has been playing in social integration of the descendants of immigrants. “The key word for integration is republican education and if we do not have the means, we end up with this terrible situation of people who do not believe in the republic and are against France.”

For interviewees from the moderate and the far right the issue of immigrants’ integration has to do with a new environment of change and questioning of the traditional order in French society since the mid 1960s to the present. That is, it is due to a cultural shift and the development of a new paradigm, in which the difference is accepted and even celebrated. These views are shared by a considerable proportion of the population, resulting in a division among the French population, including a generation gap, rural/urban differences, and cultural clash between social classes. Indeed, in working class areas formerly pro-left and pro-communist party, people are starting to support the far right because of their anti-immigrant stance. At the present, France is facing a deep identity crisis, which fuels the growth of identity ideology, expressed more forcefully by extreme right of the political spectrum, but the sentiment of loss of identity is felt well beyond these circles, as reflected in recent survey already mentioned (Ifop 2018, Observatoire 2020) and media reports.

Most of the people I interviewed consider that given this environment, it is

more necessary than ever to reaffirm the basic values of the French republic and in particular secularism and the unity of France. This sentiment is reflected in the following statements: “For me it is unthinkable that any group could create a distinct community. It does not matter if it is Catholic, Muslim, or Jewish. So, I would fight this with all my strength.” Senator LREM. A senator from UDI reinforces this idea: “We shouldn't give in. It is our weakness that will make their victory. We must set the limits, and the limits are the republic and its secularism. We must at any cost apply the laws of the republic. Zero tolerance. Those who break the rules out.”

All interviewees agree on the importance of secularism as one of the fundamentals of French identity. However, on the left there is less preoccupation for people not accepting all the cultural characteristics of French society. Two of the interviewees (Member of the National Assembly FI and Leader PCF) address the question of immigrants' adaptation to French culture in terms of integration versus assimilation. In this view, integration allows the coexistence of the immigrant's original cultures along with the key elements of French culture, including secularism. It implies the acceptance of diversity. Assimilation is the expectation that immigrants will adapt to the French culture, and the obliteration and disappearance of the culture of origin:

I think what we cannot ask people to abandon everything from their own culture as the right-winners demand. However, there is a minimum requirement such as accepting the common rules, in particular the laws and regulations of France. Muslim or not Muslim must respect the rules of the country. MNA FI.

Assimilation, as the RN and some people in the LR promote is the disappearance of the culture of the country of origin in favor of the culture of the host country. It is a form of denial or amputation for the assimilated individual. I do not think it is reasonable or even realistic to require that from anyone. (Leader PCF)

The question of integration versus assimilation were already debated in France under the third republic. The debate then focused on the Jewish community, which refused the assimilation that would have made them disappear. At the end the notion of integration predominated in theory, but in practice most policies were made with the assumption of assimilation as the main guide. At least until the 1970s. Since then, there was no longer a pressure to adapt. Today, the official approach is that people are not required to deny what they are, but, on the other hand, they must respect the laws, standards, and some customs of French society:

We believe that all people, immigrant and no immigrants, should follow basic rules that allow us to live together, to have a social life, which is not only the legal rule. It

is also related to everyday interactions. For example, the dress code of Muslim women is a major point of contention right now. Representative LREM.

The dress code issue is not new to France. A major debate on the dress code took place during the adoption of the law of 1905 on secularism. The most anticlerical sector wanted to ban the habit, the outfits of nuns in the public space, and some even the cassock, but the majority had decided that everyone was free to dress in the public space as they wanted, except full nudity, which was prohibited. However, France has gone from the ban on ostentatious signs in schools for civil servants and the use of uniform until 1968, to the ban on the full veil, such as the Burqa or the niqab, in schools since 2004, and in public spaces for security reasons. And there is a considerable push to ban the veil, even light, in the public space, as it is interpreted as a promotion of Salafism, which is viewed as the most radical anti-French Muslim current.

For most people interviewed on the left (including people from the socialist party to the far left) the economic environment is fundamental for the integration of immigrants and their descendants. After WWII France had experienced a continuous growth of the economy with full employment until mid 1970s. The Oil crisis of 1973 ended all that, and since then there have been many economic crises. For these interviewees, because France started to experience mass unemployment, it created in turn more difficulties for integration of the immigrants and above all for their sons and daughters. As a senator from the Socialist Party states, “an important part of immigrants’ integration happens through work, and this was very much the case for the first wave of North African immigration in the 1950s when we had jobs for everyone.” Furthermore, interviewees from the PCF, LO, and the EELV suggested that people from Arab origin experience some discrimination in the job market. They argue that these people who have not found their place in society “will create a parallel society with parallel political conceptions rejecting the bases of our society and finding refuge in communitarianism and religious fundamentalism.” (MNA EELV). Similar views were expressed by one MNA of FI:

If the sons and daughter of immigrants feel alienated, it is fundamentally because of their economic situation. A society that only benefits a few do not create a sense of belonging, on the contrary. If we feel bad, we try to explain things with reference to the other French people that they perceived as privileged. Or explaining their situation because of racism. Or the former colonization of their original country.

In many suburbs in France, dominated by descendants of immigrants, there is unemployment, delinquency, and a growth of communitarianism. There is a

recognition among most of the interviewees from different political parties that the French state has contributed unintentionally to create ghettos in most towns: “All these HLM [Habitations à Loyer Modéré- Low-Cost Housing], those overcrowded towers have contributed to create a concentration of people from the Maghreb, therefore creating communitarianism and delinquency” (Senator UDI). Many people from different parties on the left and the right agree with that assessment and suggest that a change in housing policies is necessary. In fact, in recent years there have been some efforts to eliminate those towers and move people away from those forest of concrete, “where Islamist radicals find their inspiration and where the Imams who influence them reside,” as one leader of the LR stated.

Because most of the young people in those high-level delinquency neighborhoods come from an old immigrant background, and are of the Muslim faith, many political leaders and some media qualify the problems of these suburbs as created by foreign emigrants, contributing thereby to feed the anti-immigrant sentiment even though these people are not immigrants. Many of the terrorist attack in French soil and other parts of Europe were perpetrated by Europeans from Muslim background, but not always recent immigrants. This is denoted by the MNA from the MoDem: “It's not the same thing these people who come to harvest or pick fruits, and these people from the ghettos who have never seen their parents work and have lived most of their lives on unemployment benefits and other help.” However, the solution to that situation for the political right is to change the law in order to curtail the people who can obtain the French nationality. A child born in France of foreign parents could obtain the nationality when it reaches the age of 18, if he asks for it. Interviewees from the LR consider that part of the issue is that France is giving too easily the French nationality, and that there should be more requirements to obtain French nationality: “I think like my group that It should not be enough to be born in France to obtain la nationality. A person to become French should above all respect the values of the republic. If a person does not love her country, she can go somewhere else.” (MNA LR).

The establishment of Islam in France is relatively recent and directly linked to successive waves of immigration from the 1950's to the present. As a result, Islam has become demographically speaking the second religion of France. As it has been said many times, Islam like all other religions, can promote the best as well as the worst depending on how people interpret the message or how the messengers, such as Imams, etc., disseminate it to

their believers. For instance, regarding Christianity, if one reads the Old Testament literally, we can justify the greatest obscurantism, dictatorship, and even genocide. On the other hand, if we take the decalogue, (in particular 2, 5, 6, 8,9 and 10) it is the revelation to the world and the sacred character of the human person. But even if the gospel seems a little more pacifist than the Old Testament, it produced the inquisition and many religious wars and violence. It is the same for the Quran. Most currents of Islam advocate contextualization, but many recent interpretations have produced more violence than any other contemporary religions, and in the case of France many currents of Islam seem to be less accommodating to the strong secularism dominating French culture. Since the terrorist attacks of September 2011 in the USA and all the attacks in France and other countries of Europe in the name of Islam, the relations between the French republic and Islam have been very difficult.

There are so call Islam fundamentalists such as the Salafists which have a considerable following in France and other countries of Europe and incite acts of terror and Jihadism. A representative of the MoDem explains it in this manner: “I think that France did not make itself loved by its children. Our major failure is that we have allowed to cultivate too much hatred of France in these young Muslims. I think that we have accepted too much without requiring a counterpart.”

What is worrying in France at the present is the fracture of the society. There is a retreat from a search for common ground. This leads sometimes to brutal reactions and violent debate among political parties, but also within the society at large. Instead, of bringing the points of view closer together, it seems that it is the opposite that is happening. Judging by several surveys in the last ten years France has become more Islamophobic. In one opinion poll published in 2014, France was the least Islamophobic country of Europe (Pew Research Center 2014) but since then, perceptions have changed to a large part due to the numerous terrorist attacks in the name of Islam starting with the Charly Hebdo attack in January 15, where two Islamist militant gunmen shoot dead 12 people at the Charlie Hebdo's offices. Then, in November of the same year gunmen and suicide bombers launched multiple coordinated attacks on the Bataclan concert hall, in Paris, leaving 130 people dead and hundreds wounded. Eight months later in July 2016, a terrorist, tied to the Islamic State group, drove a large lorry into a crowd celebrating Bastille Day in Nice,

killing 86 people. The same month two attackers killed a priest, seriously wounded another person after storming a church in a suburb of Rouen, in Normandie. More recently, in October 2019, a radicalized police computer operator stabbed to death three officers and a civilian worker at Paris police headquarters. And in September 2020 two people were stabbed and seriously hurt in Paris, near the former offices of Charlie Hebdo. The most recent terrorist act happened in October 2020. A French teacher was beheaded outside a school in a suburb of Paris. Not to mention the multiple terrorist acts in neighboring countries such as UK, Netherlands, Spain, etc....

Most of the interviewees recognize that Muslims tend to resist the predominant secularism in French society, and many even suggest that they have difficulties to adapt to modernity and all that it implies, such as women equality for example. According to an article by Bowen (2009) based on opinion polls, 74% of Muslims in France acknowledge that there is a conflict between living in devotion to their religion and living in France.

In addition, several foreign governments dominated by religious Islamist do intervene in French internal affairs indirectly and sometimes openly, such as the president of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, calling for a boycott of French goods over France attempt to fight Islamist separatism. Indeed, these foreign countries do play a major role whether by providing ministers of religion, financing, organization of the halal sector, or the national representation of the cult. They also attempt to influence French elections. A senator from the PS interviewed suggested that unfortunately there are external agents playing a role in undermining the basis of the French republic:

I know that in the Muslim currents there are reactionary anti-secular, anti-republican forces largely financed by Turkey and the Petromonarchies, whose political objective is to undermine the foundations of the republic. I'm not blind to that. I see them, they are present in the municipal elections.

The interviewees from the right, such as the LR the RN, and even centrist parties, such as MoDem criticize the left for having ignored the problem for years and for avoiding the debate and imposing political correctness in the media:

If some of us would dare to say something negative about difficulties our society encounter with Islam, we will be accused of being xenophobes and racists. The truth is that we are experiencing an enormous growth of this rather negative religion for the well-being of the republic. (Leader LR).

The data suggest a considerable growth of Islam in France and, in particular, the more fundamentalist interpretations, such as Salafist and those who support the Islamic State. In the last ten years more women than ever are wearing the veil, including women who were born in France. This in the view of right-win politicians interviewed is a rejection of French way of life, and secularism, which they see as the foundations of French society:

I'm not saying that all Muslims are terrorists and not all Muslims are people who don't like France, but there are Salafist currents, and other Islamists who have a will to conquer, and to impose their culture on territories which are not their territory of origin. And that is what creates tension in the French society. (Leader LR)

There is not consensus on the left, but some believed that in the name of secularism the government should not be controlling religious expressions and that it should not intervene in affairs of religion, and particularly on the issue of how people dress: "In the name of the absolute principle of freedom of conscience I do not imagine myself intervening in the way believers decide what to do with their bodies" (MNA PS). Two other interviewees from left parties expressed similar views:

It's not up to me to tell young Muslim women whether they should wear the veil or not. It is certainly a tool in favor of a male patriarchy, but it is up to them to become aware of that from the inside. It is a dialogue among them. This is my position as an Atheist. Leader PCF.

The MNA from FI echoes the same approach: "I believe that we must put religion in the modest place where it is and stop considering that we have religious problems when today what we have above all are social problems. And we do not treat social problems with either secular or religious recipes."

However, most interviewees from different political ideologies including on the left suggested the need for some centralized mechanism to contextualize Islam within French society. In France there is a sharp separation between religion and state, while in Muslim countries the state contributes to the organization of Islam. However, Islam of France lacks a source of interpretation to contextualize it. This is recognized by this representative from the PCF: "When we look for rather moderate interpretations of Islam, we look for them on the other side of the Mediterranean such as in Morocco or Algeria. It is maybe better than in the Gulf countries, but it is not an Islam that interprets the context of French society." In the same tone, the representative from LR state: "Why we will not form our own imams in France. Given their discourse, you must be demanding. These people could be dangerous."

A report by two senators from the center right (Goulet and Richard 2016)

identifies the existing links with foreign Islamist countries and suggest paths for transition towards an Islam of France, adapted to the French context, “compatible with the values of the French Republic and supported by the community itself: renewal of representation, training in France of Imams, compulsory secular training of Imams and Chaplains, and increased transparency of funding, especially foreign funding.” Indeed, many Mosques and their Imams are financed by South Arabia, Turkey and other countries. According to them these measures would facilitate decision making on concrete aspects that have created confrontations and misunderstandings, such as “should women be allowed to wear the veil in school and other official places,” how she should behave. “Can a Muslim women see a male doctor?” “What should we recommend to her children? Is it normal to make them practice Ramadan and fasting in Ramadan before they finish growing?” “Should prayers be allowed when they are not compatible with the professional framework?” They suggest that these situations were not thought out, and the answers came from elsewhere, “from sources not anchored in our society and with rather malicious interpretations vis-à-vis our republic.”

However, this proposal would require a reinterpretation of the law of 1905, which established a clear separation of church and State, and this included no financial support for worship, and no interference of the state in the cults as Goulet and Richard (2016) reproduce in their report:

The State is the guardian of the principle of secularism to which Article 1 of the Constitution confers constitutional value. The law of December 9, 1905, sets out the terms: freedom of religious expression and freedom of organization for religions, neutrality regarding the latter for the State. Guarantor of the freedom to be able to practice - or not - the religion of one's choice, the State is also the guarantor of the maintenance of public order. In other words, the State is not called upon to intervene in the settlement of religious affairs, except when there is a threat to public order.

Conclusion

There is a consensus among all interviewees from any political party on a rejection of communitarianism and the support for a strong secular state. The key framework is that the French republic does not recognize communities. In their view no religious group constitutes a community that could be the intermediary between the citizen and the State. They all affirm intransigence in the defense of the republic and secularism, and that is it is up to religions to apply the well-established law on secularism, and not the law to adapt to religions.

However, there are major differences on how to approach both immigration policy and integration policies. Most people interviewed from the left and the center of the political spectrum acknowledge the emergence of a new hybridity in the context of globalization and see the spread of multiculturalism and diversity in all areas of life as unavoidable. On the other hand, most right-wing and some center right politicians as well as large proportions of the French population are attached to the traditional assimilation concept according to which immigrants should adopt the culture of the majority. This division exists even between the liberals and the more conservative wing of the political party who controls the government, LREM.

Two major narratives influence the debate on immigration and integration. For the left the cultural aspect itself is not enough to explain the issues of integration and Islamic terrorism. Although most recognize that there is a religious problem, the fundamental argument is that there is a social problem because the vast majority of Muslims belong to the most disadvantaged social classes and live in deprived neighborhoods. For several interviewees from left parties, socio-economic reasons marginalize these people and consequently they find refuge in a radicalized Islamism and commit terrorist acts. This might be true only to a certain extent, because many of the people who embrace a fundamentalist Islam and several of those who have committed acts of terrorism in France and other countries of Europe were not economically marginalized.

Much of the French population tend to support the argument that immigration should be limited, and that Islam poses a threat to the French way of life, as reflected in recent polls cited in previous pages and opinion polls for the 2022 presidential election. Indeed, in these polls the most anti-immigrant right-wing candidates together obtain close to 50% of the vote's intentions and all the left together reach less than 25% (not considering the moderate left people who are part of the LREM).

The propositions about immigration and integration policies were expressed more forcefully by the interviewees from the right. The interviewees from the right parties such as LR and RN only accept at the most some refugees, and their views on integration is that immigrants should assimilate to the French way of life. The interviewees from the left were vaguer. They were not opposed to economic immigration and considered important to establish agreements with the emigration countries. Regarding integration, they were more tolerant in accepting some cultural differences of descendants of immigrants (but not separatism or

communitarianism). But above all, the interviewees from the left parties emphasized the need to address barriers to social progress among immigrants and their descendants to create more cohesion and reduce the potential for extremism, as well as to strengthen anti-discrimination laws to ensure that the immigrants and their descendants are treated fairly.

Over the past ten years instead of making progress in understanding each other, there has been a greatest divide. The polls show that non-Muslim French people who were not racist, intolerant or anti-Muslims became intolerant, and now believe that Muslims pose a problem of public security and that most Muslims do not want to integrate. On the other hand, even non-radical Muslims now consider themselves misunderstood and mistreated by the rest of the French population.

Given this situation several interviewees from the right and the left suggested that the state should fully exercise its prerogatives of public power in the areas linked to integration. However, the extent that state integration policies could substantially influence immigrant's integration is an open question. Neither assimilationist nor pluralist perspectives seem to have been effective in reducing tensions within the society.

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