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Johanna N. Soleil
University of Washington, Seattle

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Cover Page Footnote

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9

Integrated or Excluded: The Effects of French Integration Policies on Immigrant Communities From 2000 to 2020

Johanna N. Soleil

University of Washington

ABSTRACT

Few issues are as important to European politics as integration, though research into the actual effect of integration policies on immigrant communities is sparse in Europe and especially in France. This paper examines through the data available to researchers how immigrant communities compare to native populations in terms of cultural, health, and economic characteristics. To this end the paper is organized as follows: the first section introduces the French political context and the cultural attitude towards immigrants. Next, the various methods of analysis are presented, and each of the previously mentioned attributes is analyzed in the French context as well as in comparison to immigrant communities in countries around France. The comparative analysis is completed using the same materials as those used in studying French immigrants, ensuring that the comparisons made are credible and reliable. From the above-mentioned analysis, policy recommendations are drawn for France and its European neighbors.

KEYWORDS

integration, immigrants, France, public policy

1. INTRODUCTION

April 2022's presidential election revealed where the French public stands on several political issues, with none being quite so polarizing as integration policies. The anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiments spread during this particular election cycle are, of course, nothing new in France—the very same anti-immigrant rhetoric was used by right-wing reactionary parties in the '80s (Chin, 2017). Indeed, French policy has differed radically throughout the years as new governments are formed and try to solve the "problem" of immigration from non-European neighbors (notably those coming from North Africa and the Middle East, who end up facing the most violent anti-immigrant sentiment) (Chin, 2017). Recent attacks on French soil by Islamic terrorists who originate from North African countries have done nothing to help this sense of "overwhelm" among some members of French society regarding immigrants. Many academics suggest that it has been precisely the failure of integration policies to provide adequate support to migrants which has spurred anti-West fanaticism (Wattles, 2018).

Today, the intense polarization of French politics and shift towards right-wing policies has meant stricter laws are being put in place against immigration and integration (Orberti, 2007). Much of the blame for institutional failures of the French state has thus been placed onto migrants, making the study of integration policies an extremely salient topic. It is necessary to study modern integration policies and their efficacy to have any sort of a democratic conversation surrounding immigration and integration, and the current system must first be properly understood to reform it. Thus, this paper analyzes how well integration policies from 2000 to 2020 have incorporated non-EU migrants within the French state, paying special attention to their economic, cultural, and health integration. In this way, the reality faced by immigrants from countries demonized in France can be uncovered, and policy recommendations to further improve integration can be made from an informed perspective. Indeed, this is done by examining the third and fourth generations of immigrants in France, who today represent the most politically active and vocal part of immigrant communities (El Karouni, 2012). From this perspective, it is possible to make the most accurate and realistic decisions regarding how to support existing immigrant communities instead of relying on the rhetoric pushed by out-of-touch politicians and parties.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

Social scientists and academics today define the term "integration" in a multitude of ways. This paper will rely on a loose and multi-situational definition employed in Garcés-Masareñas & Pennix (2016), which refers to integration as the "process of settlement, interaction with the host society, and social change that follows immigration." This definition appropriately points to the physical and more intangible characteristics of immigration as well as the effects it has on the host country's populace and popular culture. As for the differences between the terms "immigrant" and "migrant," the terms will be used interchangeably in this paper as the aim is to analyze the effects of French integration policy on populations of non-native residents, who are referred to as either by French governments in different contexts, but who ultimately receive the same treatment and are affected by the same policies (Escafré-Dublet, 2014). The data used for this paper comes from research conducted by various other academics, institutions, and organizations, as the goal is to aggregate all of their findings in one paper to determine the overall efficacy of French policies through cultural, economic and health lenses. Measuring the well-being and relative integration of immigrant populations is a difficult and complex task; therefore these three characteristics were chosen

to compile quality of life data into a smaller snapshot of the overall research available. Academic research and data compiled by other sources are used due to the degree of difficulty in completing the kind of original research necessary to analyze a very taboo subject in France—discussing or researching specifically racial characteristics is outlawed and even ethnic or nationality-based characterizations are still intensely taboo (Beaman, 2021).

3. FRENCH POLICIES FOR INTEGRATION IN PLACE SINCE 2000

Integration policies in France can be best understood through a clear definition of the role of citizens within the state—the Republican model of French governance holds that no entity may separate the citizen from the state and that all are equal in the eyes of the government. This relates to the Napoleonic ideal that no individual characteristics of any person could be articulated without creating an unjust society (El Karouni, 2012). Indeed, this universalist model of the citizenry has been ingrained into the political and social culture of France since at least the inception of the First Republic in 1792, meaning that it is very difficult to change the way that French people approach the question of citizenship and political/cultural identity (Beaman, 2021). “Color-blind” policies have thus also long been the norm in France, as governments have relied on the Republican model to support their practice of providing absolutely no differential treatment for minority groups and even the total ban on the use of race as a category for social science research (Schain, 2010).

Integration into French society today rests on the shoulders of the Office for Integration, Reception and Citizenship (DAIC) of the Interior Ministry along with the Agency for Social Cohesion and Equal Opportunity (Acsé) (a lesser aid for local governments and municipalities whose goal is to decrease inequality across populations in France) (Escafré-Dublet, 2014). The major issue with this approach is the lack of flexibility that these agencies are provided with to implement specific policies to advance their missions. Two-thirds of the DAIC’s budget goes to French language instruction and up to ninety percent of the Acsé’s budget can be spent on local-level programs, which are not implemented uniformly for immigrants across France (Escafré-Dublet, 2014). As Angéline Escafré-Dublet pointed out in her 2014 critique of French integration institutions:

French integration policy relies on private initiatives, such as organisations involved in humanitarian relief... and those focused on immigrants... However, the French institutional structure greatly influences the work of associations and the ability of immigrant-based organisations to defend their interests. The extensive welfare state (which provides housing in particular) leads citizens to expect public intervention. Meanwhile, immigrant efforts to self-organize are often met with official suspicion. Even as private and nongovernmental organizations participate in immigrant integration, the state is predominant.

This passage reflects both the large capacity of the French state to intervene on behalf of immigrants to aid their integration into French society, as well as its perceived disinterest in doing so. While linguistic integration remains a top priority for government institutions, the rest of the process falls to non-state actors or even immigrants themselves to sort out, without the aid of a centralized system or network to facilitate this kind of aid. Studies have also pointed to the fact that cities within France vary widely in the integration and diversity policies that they adopt according to what political parties are in power. This in turn means that the destination of immigrants within the *same* country affects the level of parity which they will receive (left to center-left municipalities offer far more support than those of differing political alignment) (Martínez-Ariño et al., 2018). Thus, not only do the policies vary in

strength and scope within France, but they are also susceptible to the kind of rapid political change that many democracies fall victim to.

4. ANALYSIS OF POPULATION INTEGRATION

4.1. CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Linguistic assimilation is the integration project with the greatest amount of funding and attention from the national government and correspondingly has an extremely high success rate. Studies measuring the effects of language classes on the integration potential of immigrants in France showed that the greater the number of hours spent in these courses, the greater the ability of immigrants to find jobs in France, become accustomed to French society, and incorporate being French into their identity (Lochmann et al., 2018). Therefore, the availability and depth of language classes offered to immigrants in France are very important to integration, as they help the state accomplish both cultural as well as economic goals. Language classes also have the side benefit of providing a safe community for immigrants whose self-organization would otherwise be seen as suspect. However, the compulsory nature of language classes also means that immigrants who do not have prior knowledge of the French language before entering France are much more likely to experience discrimination once they have immigrated, or face a more difficult process entering the country (Climent-Ferrando, 2015). This is precisely because the policy on language classes reinforces the cultural expectation that immigrants should have a strong working knowledge of French and should therefore fit into the typical view of what constitutes the French citizenry (Dennison & Talò, 2017).

Gender has also been a historically important dimension for cultural integration, as it relates directly to the rhetoric increasingly mobilized by right-wing parties to further xenophobic sentiment among the French public (Morgan, 2017). Thus, accurately measuring gender equality among immigrant and native French groups over time is a significant metric for assessing the perception of integration. The conversation surrounding gender-based protections and rights in France has been shaped by the convergent rise of the *Rassemblement National* (previously the *Front National*) and increasingly mainstream claims of sexual violence since the early 2000s. Both trends forced subsequent French administrations to take a hardline approach to integration in every sense, which led to making the previously optional language classes mandatory (Semotiuk, 2018).

One of the major issues with this dedication to a very European but ultimately uninformed view of gender relations can be seen in the 2003 report of the first convening of the HCI (*Haut Conseil à l'Intégration*—High Council for Integration). The HCI focused solely on female genital mutilation and polygamy, without mentioning the kinds of policies which would actually help women in their daily lives (such as childcare, discrimination, education, etc.) (Morgan, 2017). The argument against headscarves in France can also be seen through this gendered and Euro-centric dimension, as both right-wing and feminist organizations have been notoriously against the wearing of headscarves in public by Muslim women due to their insistence that it is a symbol of female discrimination and oppression (Chin, 2017; Kassir & Reitz, 2016). In fact, since 2000 there have been several measures instituted by the French government to limit Muslim women's right to their religious practices, including the 2004 ban on religious symbols and other subsequent bans on religious expression (Chin, 2017).

This being said, research into the employment and education gender gaps notes a strong decrease in the imbalance between female and male immigrants born before and after

1970 in France as compared to their native-born French peers. This reflects the fact that women *have* been better integrated into the French social and economic spheres in recent decades, although it was not thanks to the national government's gender integration policies, of which there exists almost none (Algan et al., 2012). The fact that gender equality has been steadily decreasing even as many French politicians and activists claim that gender equality is incompatible with immigrants' cultures, shows that integration is incorrectly represented and is instead weaponized for political gain.

Similar to gender, religion is another facet of immigrants' identities that has been politicized by critics. France operates under a very strict system of *laïcité* which effectively limits most displays of religion in public spaces. As was previously mentioned, this system has been frequently mobilized to limit expressions of Islamic faith by Muslim women in particular (Chin, 2017). This fear of other religions is nothing new—Muslims have been criticized by French officials and society since before the beginning of the First Republic, and the recent waves of immigration into France from majority-Muslim former colonies have exacerbated the sentiment that France shouldn't receive more immigrants (Perocco, 2018). The adverse reactions to Muslims in France have also been aggravated by the rise in terrorism by jihadist groups since 2015. France has both become the number one target of terrorism in Western Europe and has the most emigrants join jihadist groups in the Middle East (Benmelech & Klor, 2016). The vast majority of those who join these groups are young people who feel that they have been slighted by Western society and have no self-confidence or sense of belonging within their communities (Algan et al., 2012). Integration efforts should thus be aimed at young second, third, or even fourth generation migrants who represent the highest-risk demographic for succumbing to religious fanaticism and cultural disintegration in France. The presence of so much religious extremism in France relative to those of other Western societies is indicative of a failure by the state to ensure enough economic and social protections and programs dedicated to young immigrants. Importantly, the negative view of all aspects of Islam in France also directly hinders hopes for the integration of younger generations into French society, as they remain ostracized and criticized for their supposedly "anti-French" religious practices (such as wearing the hijab or subscribing to a halal diet) (Perocco, 2018). Therefore, this element of cultural integration needs far more concern, since it is an integral part of the rhetoric being used against immigrants and as evidence of their failure to integrate into French society (Bisserbe, 2021).

4.2. ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

The immigrants' supposed drag on the French economy is yet another key piece of the popular anti-immigrant narrative which states that immigrants take resources away from natives and don't contribute anything in return. Thus, studying the economic well-being of immigrants is not only important as a way to understand how the population is doing for their own benefit, but also as a way to examine whether this argument actually holds up to scrutiny. From the available research into this area, the argument is revealed to be yet another falsity, as the economic assimilation of immigrants in France is well established. This includes a 2010 study published by *The Economic Journal* which concluded that the percentage of male and female immigrants with full-time employment is on average no more than 10% less of the native population (Algan et al., 2010). These conclusions were based on the metrics for first- and second-generation immigrants into France, and both men and women of the second generation have seen considerable gains in both full-time employment status and wages compared to the first generation, showing that immigrants' economic situations continue to

improve as they live in France longer (Algan et al., 2010).

This being said, there are still significant gaps in earnings between immigrants and natives which persist on from the first generation, showing that even as these groups continue to gain employment, they are not paid fairly compared to their native counterparts. In fact, the wage gap for men from the Maghreb (Northern Africa) and Turkey as compared to native French men of the same educational level actually *increases* from the first generation to the second. This implies that even as immigrants stay longer in France, they are not afforded the same economic opportunities or privileges (Algan et al., 2010).

France does not prioritize economic integration with specific programs in the same way that it does linguistic integration, making it difficult for immigrants to rely only on state aid for their well-being. External organizations (including religious and cultural groups) who fill the gaps of integration support in lieu of the state are often unable to achieve the kind of welfare protections that the state would be able to provide—including reduced housing, unemployment benefits, and job placement (Isidro & Math, 2020). Additionally, the outsized role that social networks play in job placements in France means moving to France without any personal connections can represent a real economic challenge for immigrants (Galbis et al., 2020). In the long run, systems of direct aid between immigrants provide more tangible help with the kinds of employment available to immigrants than state actors who have up to the present been using a relatively hands-off approach.

4.3. HEALTH ANALYSIS

Arguably the most important characteristic of immigrants' lives, health is a metric not often discussed by any political party in France, except to complain about immigrants' use of the welfare system. As has already been covered, however, immigrants *do* contribute back to the state a great deal in terms of economic performance, and thus the conversations regarding their health should not be affected by complaints of their use of state resources. Research into immigrant mortality across European countries yields surprising results: France has the lowest mortality rate among comparable European states (Ikram et al., 2015). Research analyzing specifically the different health integration models of France, Denmark, and the Netherlands (“assimilationist,” “exclusionist,” and “inclusive,” respectively) concluded that the French policies were “associated with the lowest all-cause mortality in the Turkish- and Moroccan-born residents (Ikram et al., 2015). In fact, the authors of the 2015 paper pointed to the (at the time) shift to further inclusionist and multicultural attitudes of France as being a great contributor to the longevity of immigrants to France. Indeed, it appears that the universalist model of French citizenry worked in favor of immigrants in this regard, since it allows for no consideration of social differences between cases faced by healthcare providers.

This is not to imply that the French healthcare system is perfect. In fact, reports have noted that even the very limited state programs specifically designed to protect immigrants' health have been plagued by significant corruption and ineffective distribution of aid (André & Azzedine, 2016). It is therefore clear that these individual programs, which are highly controversial in France, must be radically altered to close what is still a gap between natives' and immigrants' health outcomes, especially where different cancers are concerned (André & Azzedine, 2016; Ikram et al., 2015).

5. FUTURE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Political polarization has impacted immigration discourse especially hard and integration policies have suffered as a result of the perceived threat that immigrants present to

French society and culture. Closer investigations into the realities of immigrant experiences by examining metrics of general community health reveal that much of the stigma surrounding immigrants and their supposed lack of integration is just a ploy used by the same right-wing groups that have existed in France since the 1980s. Further, it is clear that the French state has suffered several policy failures in its attempt to integrate immigrants equitably into French society, as much of the programs currently in place focus solely on linguistic assimilation. Reform could start with the existing institutions which have been seen to produce good results—most notably the DAIC and Acsé. Both of these organizations could be extremely effective in garnering the kind of economic and social networks needed for more in-depth and productive integration if they are provided with a much broader scope of responsibilities and better funding. Additionally, the institutions presenting negative outcomes (especially the superfluous health organizations) should be reduced in funding and in scope to make way for these much better suited actors.

The next priority should be long-term horizontal planning by the French state by facilitating greater transparency of organizations dealing with French immigrants. The kind of reforms necessary to eliminate corruption and illogical spending of state funds can be modeled after those which proved successful in the French healthcare system after the start of the “data-driven transparency” reported in the 2021 text *Conflict of Interest and Medicine: Knowledge, Practices and Mobilizations* (Boullier & Greffion, 2021). By exposing the metrics and data behind the actual functions of these state agencies, we can increase public awareness of what actually takes place for immigrants once they have relocated to France. An extension of this is the greater respect for the challenges faced by immigrants once they come to France, because the full extent of what support they do or do not receive from the state will be laid out very clearly, without being obstructed by xenophobic rhetoric.

It is clear from the available social science research that while the situation of immigrants in France is not entirely without its advantages (especially compared to other European countries), there is still more work to be done in terms of handling the integration of vulnerable populations into French society. This work is made especially difficult due to the rigidity of the principles of Republicanism and *laïcité*, which dictate how citizens are to be treated in public spaces and what protections are available to different social groups. Indeed, this will become an even larger issue as immigration from war- and/or climate-affected regions increases and as the generations of immigrants already living in France grow up with very little real connection to the state they reside in.

The fundamental issue with French integration policies is that the society is organized around Republicanism and is therefore currently unable to deal with the requirement of providing targeted aid to best support immigrant communities. One organization that is not forced to use this same point of view is the EU, thus making the creation of a supranational organization dedicated to integration support one of the best methods for instituting continent-wide change. This ambitious project could in theory build off of the existing *Pact on Migration and Asylum*, which seeks to provide integration support to migrants and asylum-seekers in Europe (European Commission, 2020). The main challenge for this approach to integration policy reform is that it would require a unified vision regarding integration among all member nations, something which does not exist even within countries. Thus, the outlook for supranational protections is bleak and nation-wide policies will have to suffice for the time being. This, of course, leaves immigrants to countries like France much more exposed, as the nation they are immigrating to has a system in place which is incred-

ibly resistant to change.

France is also in a unique position from which to affect change in the integration policies of its neighbor countries—France is both one of the strongest states in Europe and is currently holding the EU Presidency. Although immigration and integration have not been made a direct priority of the French Presidency (French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2022), the possibility of positive rhetoric aimed at the widening of immigrant protections across Europe still exists. This, in turn, could also help France, as its inability to provide adequate support for immigrants internally might be best addressed by advocating for EU-wide immigration policies.

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