RECENT POLICY CHANGES IN FRANCE

Immigrant Integration and Citizenship: Ambiguities and Resistance*

ABSTRACT

This article explores recent policy developments in France regarding immigrant integration and citizenship. It argues that despite some changes, the French traditional approach to the issue, favouring an undifferentiated individual civic integration of immigrants but neglecting cultural diversity, has been maintained. It also points to the more exigent demands for immigrants' cultural integration, which have been institutionalized.

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France is no longer the "land of immigration" it was during the 1920s-1930s and the 1950s-1970s, since the decision was made in 1974 to put an end to labour immigration programs, in a context of economic crisis and growing unemployment. According to INSEE, the French public statistics institute, the immigrant population living in France has been quite stable for several decades (4.5 million people in 2004). Family migration is the major source of long-term immigration today (70% in 2006). Immigration flows come predominantly from African, especially North-African, countries (43%) (DREES and Bèque 2007). With respect to existing immigrants, the INSEE 1999 Census shows that 45% are of European origin and 30% are of North-African origin.

In the last few decades, France has promoted an individualistic conception of immigrant integration into French society, rejecting any institutional recognition of cultural and group differences in the public sphere. It has also made the acquisition of French nationality an obligatory preliminary step on the road to political participation. Recent policy changes show some movement in other directions, but its impact has been limited.

Integration that refuses to recognize ethnocultural differences

One of the most significant policy changes regarding the integration of immigrants and their descendants has been the development of a comprehensive framework to fight ethnic discrimination since the late 1990s. The European Union provided the impetus to develop these programmes, but they also came about in response to national actors that were particularly inspired by the British anti-discrimination arrangement (Hargreaves 2000, Garbaye 2007). Beyond this, public discourses on the promotion of "visible minorities" have been gaining legitimacy in France in the last few years and have been especially spurred on by former Minister of the Interior and current President Nicolas Sarkozy's rhetoric. However, while leading to an increased awareness of ethnic differences, these developments have not affected the essential underlying principles of the French approach to the integration of immigrants and their descendants. The solutions that would have led to the official recognition of the existence of ethnic groups, such as forms of affirmative action explicitly taking into account ethnic criteria or the possibility of collecting statistics on ethnic origin,[1] have been rejected.

Of symbolic importance was the creation in 2004 of the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration,[2] designed to reflect the contribution of immigrants to France. As a project of recent right-wing governments, however, its primary goal has been to portray the successful integration of immigrants into the national community rather than really promoting cultural diversity.

New cultural requirements for access to the community

Despite some adaptations, the traditional integrationist line thus remains the reference for government policy and of many actors in French civil society. In terms of government action, the increased attention paid to cultural diversity by right-wing governments since 2004 is also ambiguous since it coexists with measures such as the creation of the *Contrat d'accueil et d'intégration*. Testing of this contract began in 2003; it was made compulsory in 2006. Respecting this contract is necessary for the acquisition of residence permits and French citizenship. It requires the migrant, who has to follow a one-day civic training session, to respect the laws and values of the French Republic and to speak French. The migrant is entitled to benefit from free services, mainly French language courses and information

sessions about "life in France" and about access to public services. A subsequent 2007 law goes further in requiring families of migrants in France and foreign spouses of French nationals to pass language and culture tests before they are granted permission to migrate.

Citizenship status

In terms of access to citizenship, the French framework is a mix of open measures and cultural requirements. Access to French citizenship is automatic for youth born in France to foreign parents, provided they have lived in France – continuously or not – for five years since the age of 11. Spouses of nationals can acquire citizenship after four years of marriage.[3] Other first generation immigrants can obtain French nationality through a "naturalization" procedure if they have maintained "habitual residence"[4] in France for five years.

While access to residence permits did not include any cultural requirements before 2003, access of immigrants[5] to French citizenship has long been based on assimilation. "Assimilation into the French community" is still inscribed in the law, despite the negative connotations associated with the idea of "assimilation" since the 1970s and its official rejection by the High Council for Integration,[6] which was created in 1989. The legislation goes much further than the basic requirement of French language proficiency: the applicant must adhere to the essential values of French society, must not live cut off from society, and since 2003, must demonstrate knowledge of the "rights and duties conferred by French nationality." All of this is evaluated through investigation and individual interviews with the applicant. The absence of specific criteria to assess applicants' cultural integration gives state services significant interpretation and makes local variations probable.

Unlike countries such as Canada or the Netherlands, France has not adopted a proactive approach to naturalization, for example through publicity campaigns. Naturalization in France is rather considered as stemming from individual voluntary action on the part of immigrants. Instead of being a right, it is granted as a favour (Weil 2005). The combination of open measures and the absence state encouragement play a part in explaining the proportion of French naturalized immigrants within the total immigrant population (41% in 2004) in France (Fougère and Safi 2005). This rate is quite high compared to countries with restrictive citizenship policies but is lower than those of countries where naturalization is proactively encouraged, such as Canada.

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The impact of Islam

The place of Islam in French society has played a significant role in shaping the debates and policies related to immigrant integration and citizenship. The evolution of criteria in accessing French nationality is clearly directed towards radical Islamic practices. Polygamy and violence against minors (aimed at combating female genital mutilation) were officially recognized in the 2006 legislation on this issue as grounds for refusing French nationality (and also for withdrawing residence permits). Symbols of radical Islam are also frowned upon for naturalization. A 2000 circular indicates that state services must mention the type of Islamic headscarf Muslim female applicants wear. On June 27, 2008, the Council of the State[7] adopted for the first time ever a ruling stating that the "radical religious practice" of a Muslim woman – who wore, at the request of her French husband, a full veil covering the face (*niqab*) and a long dark dress – was not "compatible with the essential values of the French community, notably with the principle of gender equality."

Overall, as in other European countries, recent policy changes in France reveal a specific distrust of Islam, set against a backdrop of concerns about Islamic terrorism. Fairly permissive arrangements were set up in some policy areas (such as the slaughter of animals according to Islamic rites) and a Council of Muslim Faith (a national representative body with consultative status) was established in 2003. However, the ban of the headscarf in state schools in 2004 and the definition of new naturalization criteria and of new offences aimed at radical Islam define the limits of French accommodation of Muslim religious practices.

Channels for civic participation

The acquisition of French nationality is considered a first step in the acquisition of citizenship and political rights. The link between nationality and citizenship has not been questioned, except for European Union citizens, who can vote and are eligible to run as candidates in European and local elections (but cannot become mayors or deputy mayors) since 1998. This development revived discussions and initiatives on local political rights for foreigners, which have been much debated in France since the 1970s. However, despite the mobilization of civil society actors and several bills on the issue in the early 2000s, the *status quo* has not changed.

To compensate for the absence of local political rights, some proactive municipalities have recently created consultative bodies made up of foreigners.

These arrangements exist in eight French cities today, including Paris, Lyon and Strasbourg. Instead of a form of political representation of minorities, municipalities generally conceive of these bodies as equal opportunities for immigrants to participate, even where the council's composition takes into account the population of each community in the city, as in Lyon.[8]

The freedom of association granted to foreigners by the left in 1981 favoured the development of associations in which immigrants have a significant place. The republican pattern has favoured the development of associations in France, since those that officially define themselves in ethnic terms, for example as defending the interests and the identity of a specific community, are not well-developed, especially nation-wide ones. The Conseil représentatif des associations noires,[9] created in 2005, is one of the rare exceptions. At the local level, authorities are often reluctant to support projects and organizations related to particular communities.

Immigrants' attachment and civic engagement

Turning our attention to the representation and practices of immigrants, results from two recent surveys (the first, conducted at the national level in 2005, the second at the local level – in the Lyon urban area – in 2008) show that generally speaking, the relationship to the French national community, civic attitudes and civic practices do not greatly differ between immi-grants and the general population in France[10] (LOCALMULTIDEM 2006, CEVIPOF 2005).

Regarding feelings towards the national community, a very high proportion of immigrants (at the national level and in the Lyon region) – as in the general public – declare that they are either "close" or "attached" to "French people"[11] (over 80%). The degree of attachment to the French is similar between non-naturalized immigrants (84%) and naturalized ones (86%) (LOCALMULTIDEM 2008). This result is in line with one of the conclusions of the qualitative study by Ribert (2008) of young people born in France to immigrant parents, which argues that the acquisition of French nationality upon age of majority does not necessarily go hand in hand with a more intense link with France.

Both surveys also show that there is no specific tension between the feelings towards different collective groups, namely the country of origin of immigrants, the minority religion (Islam) and the French national group. Immigrants who are "very close" / " very attached' to their country of origin or to Islam are also those who declare the more intense feelings towards the French group.[12] This confirms, for some immigrants, the general hypothesis developed in the social sciences literature that identities are multiple, non-exclusive, and even cumulative.

With regard to civic engagement,[13] variations among immigrants and the general population are generally limited and are reduced or disappear if crucial sociological variables that have a positive impact on civic practices (a high level of education or belonging to the upper-class in particular), are taken into account. Brouard and Tiberj also noted this similarity between populations, but they were looking at the French population of foreign origin as a whole. It is quite remarkable that it can also be observed when we isolate immigrants from this broader group because they have had to learn about, and accommodate to, French culture and politics. For example, immigrants are a little less interested in politics than is the general population (67% compared to 74%) and they talk about it less often (63% "almost everyday" or "regularly," compared to 69%), but it is no longer the case when comparing the most educated groups of each population (more than 80% for both types of civic attitudes). The same phenomenon is observed if we look at various forms of civic activity performed over the last 12 months.[14] It is also the same for the past/present involvement in various types of associations,[15] in political parties and in trade unions. A slightly larger proportion of naturalized immigrants (16%) is not registered on electoral lists compared to the general population (11%). But once again, this is no longer true when taking into account variables such as the level of education or income.

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Non-naturalized immigrants demonstrate lower levels of civic engagement compared to naturalized immigrants.[16] This variation may be explained by a combination of different factors. First, non-naturalized immigrants have a combination of socio-demographic characteristics that make them less likely to participate. Compared to naturalized immigrants, they have a lower level of education, lower incomes and a higher unemployment rate. Amongst them, the proportion of upper-class individuals is lower and that of young people is higher. Further, more of them have been in France for less than 13 years (31%, compared to 15% of naturalized immigrants). Well, it is possible that some naturalized immigrants demonstrated a high interest in politics

before their naturalization and that the right to vote was a significant element in their request for French nationality. This hypothesis is plausible given the socio-demographic characteristics of this population. It might also be supposed that naturalization itself increases interest in politics and involvement in the public sphere. However, overall the variation between non-naturalized and naturalized immigrants is not very large (maximum of +10 points).

The French approach to the integration of immigrants leaves little space for the assertion of group-based demands in the public sphere[17] and seems to have had an impact on the way immigrants participate in the public sphere. Indeed, their preferred forms of participation are rarely group-oriented. Their involvement in organizations promoting the interests of immigrants is rare: the RAPFI survey shows that 5% of immigrants are (or were) members of these organizations and 8% have taken part in the activities of these organizations. Immigrant involvement in organizations promoting the interests of their ethnic group[18] is even rarer (respectively 2% and 3%). Overall, participation in such organizations is significantly lower than in other types of associations.[19] Moreover, individual immigrant civic activities are not mainly oriented towards people of foreign origin: only about a third of respondents say that this was the case. This proportion is higher than that observed for the general public (about +15 points), but not for all civic activities: a similar proportion among immigrants and the general population have signed a petition (respectively 39% and 36%) or have taken part in demonstrations (38% and 35%) concerning people of foreign origin. Finally, attitudes regarding the wearing of the headscarf in state schools, the development of affirmative action policies or the emphasis on "cultural differences" rather than on "what French people have in common" reveal that culture- and group-related claims are not widespread among immigrants (Brouard and Tiberj 2005: 130-134).

Conclusion

Recent policy developments in France thus reveal some ambiguity since the increased attention paid to visible minorities has been accompanied by more exigent demands regarding immigrant cultural integration, and especially regarding Islamic practices. Overall, the French traditional approach to immigrant integration and citizenship, which regards particularistic collective identities with suspicion, has been maintained. The acquisition of French nationality is still seen as the crowning achievement of the integration process and a pre-requisite to political rights and participation. This persistent approach has its advantages: the insistence on common citizenship and ethnically undifferentiated forms of civic participation certainly plays a part in explaining close levels of civic engagement among immigrants and the general population. However, a better recognition of cultural diversity would not necessarily have been an obstacle to this, contrary to what many French actors believe and as the experience of other countries might suggest, where multicultural policies and high levels of immigrant political participation coexist.[20]

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Notes

* Some of the data presented here come from the research project titled *Multicultural Democracy and Immigrants' Social Capital in Europe: Participation, Organisational Networks, and Public Policies at the Local Level* (LOCALMULTIDEM 2006-2009), funded by the European Commission. This comparative research focuses on the local level (six large European cities are studied: Lyon, Budapest, Milan, Madrid, Zurich, London). A CEVIPOF team led by Manlio Cinalli and of which the author is a member is responsible for the research in France. Some results are also taken from a national research study on the political attitudes of French people of foreign origin (RAPFI) run by Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj from the CEVIPOF. See *Français comme les autres? Enquête sur les citoyens d'origine maghrébine, africaine et turque*. 2005. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

[1] This was proposed through an amendment to a 2007 law on immigration and integration and was opposed by a wide range of actors, including anti-racism organizations and some prominent Muslim religious leaders.

[2] Designed as a museum, the Cité was opened in October 2007 in Paris.

[3] The required length of marriage was extended from one to two years in 2003 and then to four years in 2006.

[4] The applicant's interests (which means his/her family members and his/her income) must be based in France. The residence must also be stable, which is assessed by taking into account various elements, notably the type of residence permits held by the applicant (short- or long-term permits) and the frequency and length of his/her return travels to the country of origin.

[5] No cultural requirements exist for young people born in France to immigrant parents.

[6] This public consultative body carries out analyses and makes proposals to the government on immigrant integration.

[7] This is the highest administrative court in France, which litigates as the last resort in cases of disputes on state decisions.

[8] In his official speech presenting the institution, the mayor of Lyon stressed that the council's members must not represent their communities or their associations, but the immigrant population as a whole.

[9] The stated aim of this organization is to fight against anti-Black discrimination and promote the African-Caribbean culture.

[10] The RAPFI survey (2005) targeted a total population of 1,000 French people of Turkish, North-African and other-African origins and a control group of 1,000 "other" French people. The LOCALMULTIDEM survey (2008) concerned a total population of 700 people of North-African origin and 400 "other" residents of the Lyon urban area. One of the specificities of this survey was to include within the minority sample immigrants who have not acquired French nationality (115 people).

[11] The RAPFI survey asked respondents if they are "close" to French people (very/rather/not very/not at all). The LOCALMULTIDEM survey was about the "attachment" to French people (0-10 point scale). We include responses between six and ten as demonstrating positive attachment.

[12] In the RAPFI survey, for example, 90% of immigrants who feel "very close" to "the people of the country of origin" also feel close to French people (compared to 76% and 74% of those who are, respectively, "not very close" or "not close at all" to the people of the country of origin); 91% of Muslim immigrants who are "very close" to "the people with the same religion" also feel close to French people (compared to 76% and 79% of those who are, respectively, "not very close" or "not close at all" to "the people with the same religion").

[13] Most results provided here come from the LOCALMULTIDEM survey because it includes non-naturalized immigrants and more indicators of civic engagement. They therefore concern the Lyon region. However, we can assume that there is no significant difference between the national and local levels since general tendencies observed in the Lyon survey can also be found in the RAPFI national survey for some indicators.

[14] Such as: signing petitions, contacting media, contacting politicians or a government/local government official, taking part in a strike or in a public demonstration, or donating money to a political group.

[15] Such as: humanitarian/aid/charity/social welfare organizations, human rights/peace organizations and residents/housing/neighbourhood organizations.

[16] For example, there is a variation of between seven and ten points regarding political interest, political discussion with family, friends or colleagues, the act of contacting politicians to improve things in society, participation in a strike, involvement in associations such as human rights organizations, etc.

[17] For a comprehensive comparative perspective on the impact of national models (including the French one) on immigrant political participation and claims making, see R. Koopmans, P. Staham, M. Giugni and F. Passy. 2005. *Contested Citizenship. Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

[18] Respondents were questioned about "organizations for the promotion of Maghrebian people."

[19] For example, 11% of immigrants are or were members of resident associations, 19% have taken part in these kind of activities; the proportions are respectively 9% and 13% for youth organizations and 17% and 26% for humanitarian/charity/social welfare organizations.

[20] For an analysis of the Canadian case in a comparative perspective, see notably Will Kymlicka, 1998. *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ethnocultural Relations in Canada*, Toronto: Oxford University Press.