France and Its Muslims
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Abstract (Summary)
Over the past few years, terrorist bombings of the public transport systems of Madrid and London have sparked fears that Europe may be breeding its own crop of indigenous jihadists. What to do about homegrown Muslim terrorism is a serious question, of course, but it is not the only one worth asking. And too often it obscures a critical fact: that the vast majority of Europe's 15-20 million Muslims have nothing to do with radical Islamism and are struggling hard to fit in, not opt out. The problem of jihadism is largely distinct from the issue of Muslims' integration into the European mainstream. The status of Muslims in France is at once much healthier and more problematic than most recent commentary lets on. France's experience with integration has been shaped by a unique combination of history, philosophy, and contemporary concerns, which together have produced a stop-and-start immigration policy and a wariness about Islam. Still, French sociologists agree that the integration of Muslims into French society has proceeded fairly well.

THE POLITICS OF ASSIMILATION

Over the past few years, terrorist bombings of the public transport systems of Madrid and London have sparked fears that Europe may be breeding its own crop of indigenous jihadists. Less understandably, those events have also sometimes been conflated with events such as the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a deranged fanatic, last fall's riots in the French banlieues, and recent protests over disparaging cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. Together, these events have been taken as evidence that the immigration and integration policies of several European countries have all failed. This diagnosis is glib and alarmist, and it overlooks more nuanced and encouraging sociological realities. What to do about homegrown Muslim terrorism is a serious question, of course, but it is not the only one worth asking. And too often it obscures a critical fact: that the vast majority of Europe's 15-20 million Muslims have nothing to do with radical Islamism and are struggling hard to fit in, not opt out. The problem of jihadism is largely distinct from the issue of Muslims' integration into the European mainstream.

The complexities of integration are on dramatic display in France, now home to 4-5 million Muslims, the largest Muslim population on the continent. A nation that prides itself on its egalitarianism and universal democratic culture, France is struggling to live up to its principles and fully integrate its Muslims into all sectors of national life. Some French and foreign observers have interpreted last November's riots in poor, largely Muslim neighborhoods throughout the country as a skirmish in a broader clash of civilizations. Yet the strife had little to do with yearnings for a worldwide caliphate and much to do with domestic socioeconomic problems. Grasping what has sometimes gone wrong -- and what has mostly gone right -- with the integration of Muslims in France can thus offer clues to the challenges faced by Europe as a whole.

The status of Muslims in France is at once much healthier and more problematic than most recent commentary lets on. France's experience with integration has been shaped by a unique combination of history, philosophy, and contemporary concerns, which together have produced a stop-and-start immigration policy and a wariness about Islam. Still, French sociologists agree that the integration of Muslims into French society has proceeded fairly well. Most Muslims in France -- half to three-fifths of whom are believed to be French citizens -- have adopted French cultural norms; they enthusiastically endorse republican values, including laïcité (the French state's aggressive official secularism). They tend to vote somewhat less often and somewhat more to the left than most of the French population, but socioeconomic variables, not religion, account for the differences. Their desire to assimilate has sometimes been met with a form of discrimination fueled by nativism and a deep distrust of Islam that has made it harder for them to find homes and jobs. But what has turned such vexing problems into crushing burdens is the economic stagnation that has afflicted the whole country and defied reform efforts for three decades.
The greater problem is that the debate over how to ease these difficulties is now ideologically polarized, having been hijacked by public intellectuals and politicians out of touch with the country's realities. The run-up to France's 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections should be an ideal time for the political class to address the concerns of its Muslim population. So far, however, the front-runners have seemed more interested in using the issue of Muslim integration for their own electoral ends. Even as they have made tepid attempts to increase the visibility of minorities within their ranks and address Muslim concerns in their parties' platforms, some politicians have resorted to scaremongering about security and immigration and have conflated those issues with Muslim integration — moves straight out of the playbook of the far right. Worse, perhaps, they have tended to treat Muslims as a monolithic community, giving "it" a reason to start feeling stigmatized. If the good news about France's Muslims is that they are already fairly well integrated and show every disposition to be fully so, the bad news is that French elites seem unwilling or unable to help.

THE FRENCH EXCEPTION

France has experienced large-scale immigration for a century and a half; immigrants and their children and grandchildren now account for almost a quarter of the country's population. Yet the experience has had much less impact on France's collective identity than it has had on, say, the United States'. Thanks partly to a centralized public administration and greater trust in state institutions, French society is far more homogeneous — and homogenizing. Arguably, France is a more thorough melting pot than the United States, where many "hyphenated" citizens fiercely retain a communal identity alongside their American one. The French model distrusts ethnic or religious characteristics as divisive. In the name of egalitarianism, French law prohibits even identifying citizens on the basis of national origin, race, or religion; the last census to record religious affiliation was taken in 1872.

Political issues are invariably framed by interpretations of the country's republican traditions, and in the case of Muslim immigration and integration, the challenge has been to reckon with lacit. The separation of church and state in France came into its own at the end of the nineteenth century, when legislation stripped the Catholic clergy of its traditional influence in schools, hospitals, and courthouses. Designed by staunch republicans to curb the power of a church openly nostalgic for the prerevolutionary political order, laicit was enshrined as law in 1905. It has since come to play an especially important role in education, partly because primary and secondary schools have iconic status in France, where they serve as the factories that produce the republic's citizens. State-employed teachers may dispense only a scrupulously secular humanist morality and teach religion only as a sociological phenomenon.

Lacit is not inherently antireligious, as is sometimes assumed; one can be laque and Catholic -- or Muslim -- at the same time. Rather, the concept is fundamentally liberal: the 1905 law (which is still on the books) mandates the privatization of religion precisely in order to guarantee its free exercise. If French people are less religious than Americans, it is not because of the lacsitation of state institutions but because of the secularization of French society. The real particularity of lacit is its place in the French collective imagination. It is featured in the constitution -- an honor bestowed on state secularism by no other European state and by only a couple of other democracies. For some French citizens, it has even become a sort of civil religion.

If the Catholic Church has been considered problematic in France, Islam has been much more so. In fact, religion may be as enduring a fault line in France as race is in the United States. Islam has been distrusted in Europe since the Middle Ages, and modern French colonial authorities took care to institutionalize their suspicion in France's overseas territories. As early as the 1870s, they set up a two-tier system in Algeria under which local Catholics and Jews could become French but Muslims could not. Islam was seen as a barrier to Frenchness -- and in one way or another it still is today.

Immigration from North Africa to France proper remained modest until World War II, but it picked up during the postwar boom, when France's factory lines needed extra bodies. About a million guest workers came during the 1960s. But after the 1973 oil crisis, France shut its borders, offering those foreigners it already employed the option of staying and being joined by their families. Some immigrants were naturalized then, and many of their children were granted citizenship by virtue of having been born in France. (The term francais issus de l'immigration [FII] has recently arisen to describe this population and all other naturalized immigrants and their descendants.) With this status came thorough acculturation, thanks partly to strict linguistic requirements. But as a group of outsiders in the midst of an economic crisis, the immigrants and their offspring faced persistent unemployment.

In the early 1980s, an extreme right-wing movement called the National Front, led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, rose to prominence on a nativist platform that played on colonial stereotypes of Arabs as lazy, shift, and recalcitrant. The National Front advocated limiting when and how foreign residents could get French citizenship, and although its calls were opposed by a slew of largely secular, generally left-leaning groups, anti-immigrant sentiments took on a new respectability. In the 1960s and 1970s, immigrants had generally been thought of as workers. By the mid-1980s, they were considered Arabs. From there it was only a small step before they were seen as Muslims first and foremost.

In the mid-1980s, when Muslim workers staged strikes by praying in factory parking lots, many French people were shocked to find Islam alive in their midst. But it was in 1989, during the first controversy over whether to allow Muslim girls to wear the
Valid generalizations about the state of Muslim integration in France are hard to make, thanks to the diversity of the country's Muslim population and to French laws that ban the official collection of data about religion and ethnicity. Not all French Muslims come from North Africa (some come from Turkey and sub-Saharan Africa), and not all FII from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Turkey are Muslims (according to one study, about 60 percent of them are). Still, social scientists agree on the basic picture: by and large, Muslims in France have displayed a remarkable willingness and capacity to assimilate. According to a 1994 study by the historian and anthropologist Emmanuel Todd, in 1990, 20 to 30 percent of women of Algerian descent under the age of 35 living in France had married a French man -- one of the highest rates of intermarriage for Muslims anywhere in Europe. And more than 90 percent of Muslim respondents in a 2004 survey by the French polling institute CSA said that gender equality and other French republican values were important to them.

Findings on the hot-button issue of Islam are striking. Consider a 2005 study by Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj of the Centre de Recherches Politiques (CEVIPOF) at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris (known as Sciences Po), which compares the views of 1,003 FII from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Turkey with those of the French population generally. It found that the percentage of people who call themselves religious is about the same among these FII as among the French population at large. (Some young men among the FII surveyed are now becoming more devout, but such re-Islamization affects at most only ten percent of the Muslim population.) Religion does appear to inform the decision-making of Muslims more than that of other French people, but Muslims attend religious services no more frequently than do Catholics, Jews, or Protestants. According to the CSA poll, some 68 percent of Muslims in France support the separation of church and state. They have consistently treated the headscarf issue as a marginal matter, even after the 2004 ban, and one poll taken at the height of the recent controversy found that 71 percent of them thought the issue was getting too much attention. Even the radical Union des Organisations Islamiqes de France (UOIF), a group affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, boasts solid republican credentials. When it decried the headscarf ban as evidence that the French government was forgoing an "integrationist" version of laicité in favor of an "exclusionary" one, it was railing not against French values but against the government's failure to live up to them.

THE WAGES OF FEAR

FII are struggling to integrate economically but have made some major strides in this area too. Unemployment is believed to affect 30 percent of French citizens of Algerian and Moroccan descent, compared with ten percent of the population at large, and the jobs FII do get are more often temporary or beneath their qualifications. As a result, FII are conspicuously absent from high-visibility posts in, say, top corporations and the media.

The exact reasons for these disparities are not always clear, but some discrimination seems to be involved. Jean-Francois
Amadieu, a Sorbonne professor who runs the Observatoire des Discriminations, a think tank that studies discrimination in the workplace, found that of two French job applicants with identical credentials, the one whose name sounded Moroccan was six times less likely to get an interview than the one whose name sounded Franco-French. (Of six factors tested, only one -- being disabled -- was more penalizing than having North African roots.) A follow-up study confirmed that the prejudice was not about race or skin color but about national origin. In an upcoming book about FII in the French army, Christophe Bertossi, an immigration expert at the Institut Franais des Relations Internationales, and Catherine de Wendern, a political scientist at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, write that FII, especially of North African descent, who joined the army to escape discrimination, get training, and improve their lot in civilian life ran into a wall of overlapping prejudices: immigrants were assumed to be Muslims, Islam was conflated with Islamism, and delinquency was seen as a byproduct of radicalism.

Even more so, however, the economic problems of France's FII are attributable to the country's broader economic ailments. Thanks to three decades of ten percent unemployment, social mobility has stalled for everyone. For the first time since World War II, French people now say that they expect their children to fare less well than they did. Economic stagnation has hurt FII more than most, however, because it has trapped them at the bottom of the country's socioeconomic ladder, where they started as working-class immigrants. They often live in low-income neighborhoods that ring major cities, usually in projects that were designed as cheap, temporary housing for young, lower-middle-class baby boomers in the 1960s. When the original residents moved onward and upward to nicer neighborhoods, the projects' managing companies replaced those families with immigrants, subverting the government's plans to speed up assimilation by scattering the new arrivals around the country. The resulting ghettoization of the projects has only been reinforced over time, despite repeated injections of remedial funds by the government.

The projects have also bred delinquency, which has fed negative public perceptions of FII. Farhad Khosrokhavar, a sociologist at the cole des Hautes tudes en Sciences Sociales, has found that Muslims, who constitute seven to eight percent of the total French population, may account for more than 50 percent of France's prisoners. He adds that this is the result of socioeconomic factors rather than religion. But such caveats often get lost while the statistics stick, reinforcing the common conflation of criminality with immigration.

The police share such attitudes, which itself breeds distrust of authority among teenagers in the projects. The riots last November flared up after two kids, who apparently had done nothing wrong, fled police officers on sight, hid next to a power transformer, and were electrocuted. Mixed groups of teenagers -- blacks, Arabs, and whites -- then torched cars and vandalized schools in the banlieues. They did not march on posh neighborhoods or make specific demands; they were not roused by a particular ringleader or organization, religious or otherwise. The rioters just exploded into violence out of despair over their meager prospects.

That the outburst has been understood as evidence of Muslims' failed integration suggests a more subtle problem: the public discourse tends to pathologize FII and blame them for standing out while overlooking promising developments that could paint a more balanced picture. Having sparked the worst of the November violence by saying that the demonstrators were "scum" that should be "hosed down," Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy then called in imams to restore quiet, apparently assuming they would have clout over the rioters. They did not, but the move helped reinforce the mistaken impression that Islam had something to do with the problem. Meanwhile, some of the media were too out of touch to set the record straight. Amriouche Ladi, a former journalist who once investigated terrorist networks in Europe and now campaigns for minority rights, says that he struggles to convince readers -- and colleagues -- that some Muslim girls don veils of their own volition, not merely to please archconservative relatives. The encouraging performance in school of many young FII and the rise of a middle class among older ones also go relatively unreported. FII students in depressed areas generally do no worse, and perhaps even better, than whites there. Halal butcher shops and Muslim-run delis and mobile-phone stores are now scattered throughout the country. According to Amadieu, some 30 percent of FII born before 1968 have become mid- or top-level managers or small-business owners. And FII in the CEVIPOF study held midlevel executive jobs in the same proportion as did the rest of the French population.

WHAT MUSLIM VOTE?

The politics of Muslim FII also point to their high degree of assimilation into French society: Muslim voters (who are said to number 1.2 million) behave like other French people with similar socioeconomic backgrounds, displaying little evidence that their religious preferences have much impact on their political positions. Analyzing regional elections in 2004, for instance, Ternisien found that there was no clear connection between Muslims' religion or ethnicity and their votes. According to a CSA poll last year, French Muslim voters opposed the proposed EU constitution in roughly the same proportion as did the country at large -- results that confirm, according to Stphane Rozs, CSA's director of political studies, that "there is no more of a Muslim vote [in France] than there is a Jewish vote or a Protestant vote." The concept of a Muslim vote "makes no sense,"
says the Islam expert Olivier Roy, because Muslims in France are too varied and too "Gallic" to form a monolithic community. In Globalized Islam, Roy explains that in France Islam has failed "to supersede other identity patterns, social strategies, economic interests, and so on."

To the extent that one can make any generalizations about Muslim voting patterns in France, it is that Muslims are more interested in municipal and national elections than in EU elections, that they tend to favor left-wing parties, and that they scorn the extreme right. But this skew to the left is driven by economic exclusion and unemployment rather than religion. (The CEVIPOF study does suggest some group solidarity, however, since it indicates that leftist sympathies persist even when Muslims move up the economic ladder.) French Muslims make no specialized sectarian demands; the four issues of greatest concern to them, as well as to the rest of the population, are unemployment, social inequality, education, and the cost of living. Muslim elites, including the UOIF, have long shunned the idea of creating an Islamic party or a Muslim lobby, and recent attempts to tailor political platforms to Muslims' putative special interests have foundered. For instance, the "Euro-Palestine" list, which campaigned in the 2004 EU parliamentary elections on a pro-Palestinian platform, got less than ten percent of the vote in France even in districts where 40 percent of the voters were Muslim.

The only distinctive political trait of French Muslims is their relative disengagement. Twenty-three percent of FII in the CEVIPOF study said they were not registered to vote, compared with only seven percent of the French population at large. French Muslims may vote less because they do not recognize themselves in the political class. Only two out of 908 members of the French Parliament are Muslim FII, and they were elected only in 2004. A 2001 survey showed that 2.4 percent of all local elected officials had North African origins – a fairly encouraging figure, except that these FII are usually expected to handle mostly issues relating to "their" community.

The political underrepresentation and disengagement of French Muslims should be a concern, a recent International Crisis Group report argued, because it has left a void that could be filled by random violence (such as the November riots) or religious radicalism (including terrorism). There is little evidence of much violent radicalization so far, but nonviolent Islamist organizations, usually Salafi groups that preach strict scriptural adherence, personal ethics, and withdrawal from Western society, have made headway in the banlieues. The reason, the International Crisis Group argued, is that the UOIF and other conservative religious groups have lost legitimacy with their bases after striking cozy arrangements with the French authorities. This development leaves the reigning political class in a curious position: having feared that the communal bond of French Muslims might somehow become a political problem, French politicians may now have reason to worry about how individualism, when taken to an extreme, might lead to anomic or radicalism.

POLE POSITIONS

There have been some signs of mobilization lately, but it remains to be seen whether they will change France's political landscape. Last year's riots have apparently driven up voter registration in the banlieues. Le Pen's strong showing in the 2002 presidential race provoked the creation of several online discussion groups about Muslim integration, and various Web sites now track all relevant news on the topic. Two largely secular protest groups have taken the lead in denouncing discrimination against FII: the Bldards (named after bled, the Arabic word for "village"), who want to reclaim the values of the old country, and the Indignes de la Republique (Natives of the Republic), who accuse France of treating FII like colonial subjects.

But these groups' emergence has only further inflamed republican purists, who see them as sectarian, divisive, and unpatriotic. The result is a polarized debate featuring abstract and sometimes misleading dichotomies: Islam versus lacit; integration versus discrimination; equal opportunity versus discrimination positive (affirmative action); republicanism versus communautarism (communalism). Talk of "integration" incriminates immigrants for failing to fit in; talk of "discrimination" blames the French for keeping them out. Some warn that communautarisme is threatening the unity of the French citizenry; others, including Laurent Lvy, a founder of the Indignes de la Republique, charge that the Franco-French are behaving like "communautaristes gaulis" (Gallic communalists) by stigmatizing Muslim FII for their religion and national origin.

Perhaps as a result, recent government initiatives designed to address the inequities suffered by Muslim FII have been limited. Azouz Begag, France's first-ever minister for equal opportunity, is strapped for resources and fears that his appointment will obscure the government's general inaction. In its first year, the Haute Autorit de Lutte contre les Discriminations et pour l'galit, a government agency set up in 2005 to punish employers who show bias in the workplace, received about 800 complaints but forwarded fewer than two dozen to the courts. And a new law requiring that job recruitment be conducted with anonymous resums is hardly revolutionary, considering that entrance exams to France's most prestigious universities already protect candidates' identities.

The farthest-reaching measures so far have been private initiatives, but even they have been modest. At the instigation of the Institut Montaigne, a small think tank to which the CEO Sabeg belongs, various companies have adopted "diversity charters" promising to promote FII among their ranks. Averros, an organization set up by the journalist Ladi to promote diversity in the media, put so much pressure on television networks that this summer a black man presented the evening news for the first time. The elite university Sciences Po has created a special admissions track for students from depressed areas designated by the government as zones d'education prioritaires (ZEPs, or priority education zones), where many FII live. And the business
school ESSEC tutors promising high school students from ZEPs to help them get into the universities of their choice. A few groups are pushing for more measures, including ones to award public contracts only to private enterprises that promote diversity and ones to redraw school districts in order to correct de facto segregation. But given the traditionally limited leverage of civil associations in France, future progress is largely dependent on the government.

This is where the picture gets bleak, because the French political class seems too flummoxed, ideological, or opportunist to address these issues with the seriousness they deserve. A slice of the right together with most of the left has styled itself a proponent of equal opportunity. Perhaps because they are not expected to run next year, President Chirac and Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, both affiliated with the right-wing party Union pour un Mouveme Populaire (UMP), have made wishy-washy pronouncements about the evils of discrimination but put forward no specific proposals for ensuring equal treatment. The Parti Socialiste (PS) has been grand but vague; it boasts of promoting both "l'egalite des chances" (equal opportunity) and "le vivre-ensemble" (living together) but puts little flesh on either concept. Former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, who is vying for the PS presidential nomination in 2007, says he will represent "citizens" and not "communities," while Sgolne Royal, the current front-runner for the nomination, has said only that she would put the issue of discrimination positive to a referendum.

On these questions, as on many others, Sarkozy, France's interior minister and the UMP's president, is upstaging everyone. "I think few subjects are as important as the integration of the millions of Muslims living in France," he wrote in his 2004 manifesto, La republique, les religions, l'esprance. He was tentative about the headscarf ban and has said that he favors affirmative action. He is credited with having midwifed the Conseil Francais du Culte Musulman (even though it was the brainchild of the Socialists), which oversees mosques and imams and all matters relating to the practice of Islam in France. He promoted the abolition of la double peine, a law ordering the deportation of aliens convicted of a crime, and he has secured voting rights for foreigners in municipal elections. He recently impaneled a commission to review the 1905 law on laicit with a view to easing restrictions on state funding for mosques.

With apparently little regard for traditional republicanism, Sarkozy has also launched a charm offensive aimed at various ethnic groups. Much as he already treats factory workers, farmers, and middle managers as distinct constituencies, he has begun to approach Muslims, Jews, and Asians as possible voting blocs. He has even hired Abderrahmane Dahmane, a longtime advocate for FII, to court them on his behalf. This initiative seems to have involved mostly wining and dining in ethnic restaurants around Paris. But Dahmane told Le Monde in March that Sarkozy had secured more than 50 percent of the Muslim and Jewish vote and as much as 90 percent of the Chinese vote.

Sarkozy is inconsistent, however, and his brazeness is not guaranteed to work. Even as he supported giving legal aliens the right to vote in municipal elections, he backed reforms that are said to limit the rights of foreign entrepreneurs to be represented in local business associations. He has yet to recover from his blundering statements made during the November riots (in addition to his "hosing" comment, he blamed the disturbances on polygamy and vowed to deport the wrongdoingers, even though most were French citizens, born in France). He recently introduced a tough immigration reform bill to Parliament and ordered massive deportations of illegal aliens, prompting teachers and parents throughout the country to hide children at risk of expulsion. These moves seem to be transparent attempts to fish in Le Pen's pond, and they have reinforced Sarkozy's reputation as a politician willing to peddle something to everyone with little concern for the underlying issues.

But he is hardly alone in such maneuvering. Heading into the 2007 contest for the National Assembly's 577 seats, both the PS and the UMP have announced that they will set aside a number of districts for FII candidates in their ranks. But in many instances, these FII are expected to serve as cannon fodder in districts that the parties think they will lose anyway. (This ploy was applied shamelessly after a law was passed in 2000 requiring that 50 percent of electoral lists be reserved for women; it allowed parties to satisfy the quota without forcing incumbents to jeopardize their positions.) The more cynical white male elites will surely welcome the chance to assign female FII candidates to losing districts, which would kill two diversity birds with one stone.

The failure of the mainstream parties to treat the issue of Muslim integration seriously has left the National Front and its offshoot the Mouvement Pour la France with the most cogent platforms. This spring, Le Pen scored his strongest popularity ratings in a decade, and Philippe de Villiers, the president of the Mouvement Pour la France, has pegged his campaign on defending France against "Islamization." No matter how well it does next year, the extreme right has already succeeded in setting the tone for the entire race; its tough talk has inspired Sarkozy's twin preoccupation with security and immigration, as well as Royal's proposal to set up boot camps to restore order in the projects.

**TALKING ABOUT A REVOLUTION**

The question of Muslim integration in France is thus considerably more complicated than reports of its failure have suggested. Islamist terrorism remains a serious challenge, but in France -- and in much of Europe -- a gulf of belief, experience, and aspiration separates jihadists and their potential recruits from the majority of Muslims, who are toiling to fit in, not stand out. France still has a ways to go to perfect the assimilation of moderate Muslims, but it has come further along than is generally acknowledged, and recognizing that fact may be the first step toward completing the job.
Despite fears that Muslims would display less than complete loyalty to French values, Muslim FII have largely acted as independent citizens, keeping their religious beliefs in line with republicanism. To the extent that they constitute a distinct community, it is only in the eyes of politicians angling for an edge or of those who stigmatize FII for their religion or countries of origin. As the Swiss philosopher Tariq Ramadan explains, the French political class now applies a dangerous "double standard": "There's the discourse on the theoretical unity of the republic and there's the political strategy of mobilizing potential electorates." And if discrimination continues to go unaddressed, there is a real danger that French Muslims might get used to being treated as though their religious and ethnic identity was decisive and then start resorting to a kind of defensive identity politics. In the worst case, a disenfranchised group might start seeing itself as a marginalized minority, break away from mainstream republican values, and endorse a supranational Muslim community (umma) as an alternative society. Such a result would be a self-inflicted wound for France, and an unnecessary one. Studies suggest, for instance, that when it comes to correcting the damage of discrimination, Muslims, FII, and most French people alike favor the same types of pragmatic measures. Last year, a CSA poll found that more than 50 percent of all French people -- not just Muslims or immigrants -- believed that the French political class was not diverse enough and wanted more FII in Parliament. According to the CEVIPOF study, the French population at large supports, in the same measure as do the FII surveyed, programs designed to redress inequalities suffered by FII, so long as they deviate only slightly from republican egalitarianism. Such evidence suggests that France could find a way to both expect and facilitate the full incorporation of French Muslims into national life while respecting both traditional French values and a modern Muslim identity.

One serious obstacle remains the common misperception that Islam is inherently radical or resolutely incompatible with French republicanism. In the CEVIPOF study, respondents' opinions of Islam determined their opinions about the integration of FII: the warier of Islam they were, the more they held FII responsible for the problems of integration. Yet there is little reason to think that such faulty associations, and distrustful views of Islam more generally, are beyond correcting through a bit of public education. The key would be to demystify Islam without either treating it as if it were entirely irrelevant to FII or concluding that French nativism and discrimination alone fuel fundamentalism. A more nuanced approach would not necessarily involve police escorting veiled girls to school, as National Guard troops once did African American schoolkids in the American South. But it would require dropping the assumption that the only "good" Muslims are those who eat saucisson with their red wine.

Abandoning inflated republican rhetoric would help, too. The problem is not that France's values are too restrictive or outmoded or antithetical to a pluralistic society; it is that too often they become a pretext for inflexibility. The lack of official data on FII -- justified in the name of high-minded egalitarianism -- can be a convenient cover for ignoring inequalities; and the specter of communautarisme, a good excuse for not addressing them. Some (but not too many) FII are sprinkled -- like "glitter," as de Wenden puts it -- in government or on television. But throwaway measures could make matters worse by conveying a false sense of progress. Amadieu takes issue with Sciences Po's program for just this reason: adding a special admissions track for students from depressed neighborhoods, he claims, allows the university to avoid revising its main admissions procedures even though they are a significant cause of the FII's difficulties (only Parisian elites who have gone to the right prep schools have much chance of getting in). Cosmetic tweaks mean that "the big-picture problem isn't being treated," he says, "and that finding a solution is getting delayed."

The main culprit for this delay is the country's ensconced intellectual and political classes. "The problem of minorities in France is symptomatic of the broader state of French society and of its other failures," says Sabeg. "French society is stuck because an elite of 5,000 people has a lock on the system and they don't know what the general good is." Economic stagnation, the tyranny of small differences, an overly ideological public debate, cynical political maneuvering -- rather than scapegoating their Muslim fellow citizens, French elites would do well to focus on the real problems, which lie much closer to home.

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