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Immigration in France: Evaluating the Myth of Equality

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As a country that has captured the imagination of many people throughout the world, France stands as a democratic country known for its colonial past. With that colonial past and a stable democracy, France attracts immigrants from all continents. Although it prides itself in *liberté, égalité et fraternité*, all may be not as it seems. Immigrants arriving in France often face hardships in a variety of different aspects of life. Education, health care, the labor market, and the overall economic situation for many new arrivals fail to treat them favorably. In this paper examines the economic situation for immigrants in France compared to the native French and provides commentary for possible reasons for disparity and the overall effect of immigration on the French economy. Immigrants, especially those of North African origin, are not treated equally in France and do not experience the same France that the native French do.

The idea of a unified France has been an important part of France's history and culture. As such, it can be hard to find data on different ethnicities. This stems from France's past during World War II, as the French have a strong desire to avoid highlighting a person's religion or ethnicity in any way, fearing a repeat of the Holocaust or other genocide (Crumley). The French want everyone to be French, not African-French or Asian-French, as one might see in America (through terms such as African-American, Asian-American, etc.) (Scott 11).

The Institut National d'études Démographiques (INED) is a French public research institution, which publishes its research in both French and English. With data available from 2009 to 2014, it can be seen that the largest share of immigrants, at roughly 57 percent each year, come to France from Africa. Following that, with about a quarter of all immigrants each year, are immigrants from Asia. Immigration from the Americas (both South and North) comes in third, averaging about 11 percent each year. Finally, immigration from Europe and Oceania round out the list, at about 6 percent and .4 percent, respectively. It should be noted, however, that the

number from Europe does not include any immigration from within any European Union countries nor Norway, the Vatican, Liechtenstein, Iceland, Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and Switzerland (INED).

Through the INED data, it is also possible to see another factor of importance, the reason behind immigrating to France. Family is by far the biggest reason for immigration, with about 55 percent of all immigrants citing that as the reason for coming to France. Second is education, and then humanitarian reasons, followed by work. As with the previous immigration statistics from the INED, these numbers do not include immigrants from within the European Union or the previously listed countries.

As the INED numbers do not include those from within the European Union, or a handful of other European nations, they are not able to paint a full picture. About half of all immigrants each year are from within the European Union, with Portugal being the most common country of origin. In 2012, 8 percent of France's population was born in Portugal, outnumbering both Morocco and Algeria as country of origin, which is where 14 percent of the population originates (7 percent from Morocco and 7 percent from Algeria) (The Local Fr). This shows how the European Union affects how people immigrate to France and the lack of data from immigration from the European Union can skew immigration statistics.

On the French government's website, there is an article meant to help foreigners understand the recent reforms passed on immigration. In 2015, France passed several bills reforming several key parts of immigration. This included a bill that "initiates a simplification of the right of residence for foreign nationals in France" and is meant to help encourage their integration into French society. The bills introduce a residence permit described as a "talent" passport that simplifies the process used by certain foreign individuals with special skills to gain

residency. In addition, these bills included measures that were meant to accelerate the asylum system. These reforms display the techniques that France is using to change their immigration system to make it simpler for newcomers and encourage the arrival of high-skilled immigrants.

In an article by Marc Hooghe and his co-authors, they discover that immigration is influenced by that country's colonial past. As France colonized many places, the French have an on-average higher rate of immigration into their country than countries that do not share the same colonial past. Their research also found that language was an influential factor, with countries with better-known languages (such as French) being the destination for immigrants. Finally, this article also shows that traditional economic motives for leaving one's country, such as high unemployment rates, are also a factor in immigration. Immigrants might be pulled towards a country with shortages in its labor force (Hooghe 501). These reasons demonstrate why France remains a popular destination for immigrants, due to its history as a colonial power and perceived shortages in France's labor force. While immigration is influenced by France's past, its present has seen changes in how immigration works.

Another major reform is the multi-year residency permit, which was introduced by the same set of bills that were described on the French government's website. Previously, all foreign nationals were required to get an updated residency permit each year, but this new multi-year permit will allow permanent residents to go several years without re-applying, reducing lines and paperwork for all involved (The Local FR). As red tape and bureaucracy is a stereotype of the French, this law shows how the French government is attempting to make it easier for immigrants to reside in France.

In recent years, the French government has reformed the French school system with the hope of spreading equality. However, for immigrants, this attempt at equality may fall short. One

study finds that immigrants' children face special problems in school: in collège (roughly the equivalent to middle school in the United States), 32 percent of Portuguese immigrants' children and 36 percent of North African immigrants' children are behind in school, compared to only 15 percent of native French students. Boys lag behind more than girls do throughout all groups; more boys repeat years than girls (Brinbaum 515-516). In addition, young immigrants are more likely to leave school without a diploma. Notably, in the case of students whose parents are North African immigrants, up to 42 percent of young men leave school without a diploma (the number falls to 27 percent for young women). Statistics such as these help to demonstrate the ways that immigrants' children struggle and school and the legacy that having an immigrant parent can leave on a child.

There are several explanations offered for these disparities. The authors of "Trajectories of Immigrants' Children in Secondary Education in France: Differentiation and Polarization" speculate that these differences could be due to the language barriers or parents' lack of education (Brinbaum 515-516). Domingues Dos Santos and Wolff hypothesize that differences in cultural values or preferences for education, discrimination experienced in the education system or some immigrant communities being overrepresented in lower socioeconomic groups could result in the inequalities observed (Domingues Dos Santos 1085-1086). Although immigrants coming from the Americas are more likely to be educated, they are also more likely to struggle with the French language, which could affect their ability to help their children in school. In their analysis, Domingues Dos Santos and Wolff find that struggling with the language causes parental education achievement to have less effect on their children's education than it otherwise would. The other significant variables include family level of education attainment and

the length of stay in France (Domingues Dos Santos 1096). While these explanations provide insight, it is of equal necessity to compare France's standing to other countries.

Although some of the statistics for immigrants' educational status seems remarkable, it is especially so when compared to other developed countries. For example, the achievement gap between math levels for immigrants is a difference of 71 percent for first generation immigrants and 46 percent for second-generation immigrants. France scores the best of the non-English speaking countries included in the study (Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Sweden), but lags behind the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia (Schnepf 533). A potential explanation for this could be difference in immigration policies, but regardless, it shows that improving immigrants' (and their children's) ability to finish school and receive education is necessary in France. The researcher suggests that language skills and socioeconomic status may contribute to the gap. Noting that when the distribution of the location of schools (in areas with a large immigrant population or not) is considered, the difference in achievement changes considerably, which suggests that segregation between immigrant communities and native communities may exist in France and the other continental countries examined (Schnepf 544). These statistics and explanations provide insight into France's treatment of immigrants and their life in France.

Although education serves as an aspect of life that allows for insights into a country's treatment of immigrants, there are other measures, such as health care, that reflect treatment of immigrants, as well. In France, as in the rest of Europe, health care is considered a right, not a privilege, and is guaranteed by the constitution. As such, France has a system where everyone, including illegal immigrants, is able to get health care in life or death situations. The Couverture Médicale Universelle (CMU) exists for legal residents and citizens who are without jobs to

receive medical care. In addition, the French have a program entitled “Aide Médicale d’Etat” (AME), which is directed at people who “are unable to fill the residence conditions for the CMU,” or illegal aliens and those without a stable living situation. The AME must be applied for and renewed every year, but allows for anyone to be treated with a life long condition (A Douget 30-33). These programs supported by the French government represent an attempt at a minimum standard of living and how the French value health care and a social protection by the government, as they provide health care even for people in their country illegally. Although France considers health care a right, even for illegal immigrants, that does not mean that it is evenly distributed among immigrants.

There is a discrepancy between immigrants’ country of origin and how they receive health care. In “Immigrants’ Access to Ambulatory Care in France,” there are direct statistics to show how immigrants receive health care in France. Although all groups have high access to general practitioners (greater than 68 percent), immigrants from Europe, Australia and the Americas have higher rates (greater than 80 percent) than those from the Middle East, Asia, and the Indian-Subcontinent. However, it is worth noting that the divide between immigrants in general and French citizens is low: 85 percent of French citizens have seen a general practitioner in the past year, compared to 84 percent of immigrants. As for specialists, French citizens are more likely to see a specialist provider than immigrants, regardless of their origin. In this case, the gap is bigger: 63 percent of citizens as compared to 52 percent of foreigners. This study attempts to control for socioeconomic status and other factors, in order to focus solely on immigration status (Dourgon 2-3). These statistics help paint a picture of the differences that immigrants experience when consuming health care as compared to native citizens and show that, overall, the differences are small. Although the divide between immigrants’ access to health

care and French citizens' access is small, undocumented immigrants face special problems regarding health care.

While health care is considered a right, in practice, there are barriers to receiving it, especially for those without papers. Stéphanie Larchanché finds that, although undocumented immigrants may technically have access to the AME, many do not fill out the forms due to language barriers and fear of being prosecuted or brought to the police. If they did fill out the forms, the process could be timely and result in delayed times until treatment. She also found that up to 37 percent of French doctors might refuse to provide care to people with coverage through the AME (Larchanché 860-862). This article shows that, although health care is technically a human right in the French constitution of the V republic, it is not always so in practice and immigrants can find themselves without care.

Going hand in hand with education, employment dictates the quality of one's life. Education is a major deciding factor in the type of jobs a person can get, and this in turn can have a significant influence on a person's quality of life and their status in a society. While in an ideal world education would be the only deciding factor in a person's employment opportunities; that is not the case. Immigrants of all origins face discrimination in the work place. In France, the region of origin of the immigrant, the level of education, and gender are important factors influencing whether or not immigrants are in the work force (Simon 1-2). In addition, Simon and his coauthors remark "the French labor market can be especially hostile to new immigrants because of its restrictions on foreign nationals working in a number of professions," as many professions strictly require a certain education and set of skills that immigrants may not have (Simon 2). Other barriers of entry to the work place for immigrants in France include language

problems and few professional contacts (Simon 5). These barriers of entry into the labor market can result in fewer employment prospects.

One study tracked immigrants and their employment prospects over a period of nine years. For immigrants of all origins who are highly educated, the unemployment rate was 13.2 percent nine years after arrival, compared to 5.4 percent for native French. For immigrants with only a high school education, the unemployment rate was 23 percent after nine years. For the native French, the unemployment rate was 7.9 percent (Simon 8). The difference in the unemployment rates suggest that immigrants may have a difficult time finding jobs, potentially due to the barriers of entry into the labor market. These barriers can create lifelong problems for immigrants.

In addition, the country that a person arrived from also results in different employment rates. Country of origin also emerged as a significant variable when looking at immigrants' employment prospects. European immigrants were employed by far the most at 46 percent one year after arrival in France, while other groups experienced less than 30 percent employment; after nine years, 79 percent of European immigrants were employed compared to only 55 percent of non-European immigrants. North African immigrants are especially prone to unemployment due to lower education levels, on average, than other immigrants. (Simon 10). This could be due to discrimination against non-Europeans or the ease of which Europeans can work in France, due to its status as a member of the European Union.

One area in particular where the researchers saw more disparities was between men and women in the work force, particularly among North African immigrants. After nine years in France, only 35 percent of North African women were employed and 72 percent of North African men. While all groups of immigrants had gender disparities, this gap was by far the

largest. For Europeans, 74 percent of women were employed nine years after arrival and 86 percent of men. Sub-Saharan Africans saw 54 percent of women being employed compared to 72 percent of men (Simon 10). Notably, North African females were the only group who were employed at a rate of less than fifty percent. This could be due to cultural conflicts and their overall lower rate of education. The overall lower rate of employment for women could be attributed to traditional roles, such as being the person who raises children.

While these statistics are informative, they do not necessarily mean that there is discrimination against immigrants. One controlled study aimed to examine the direct effects of discrimination on Moroccan immigrants. The authors wished to look at the effects of place of residence, nationality and origin of surname and forename on the prospects of gaining employment. In order to do this, they devised an experiment where they created nearly identical applications, changing only the applicant's place of residence, forename or surname each time to examine discrimination. The researchers used Moroccan sounding names because some studies have shown that immigrants of North African origin have the most problems finding jobs in France (E Duguet 191). This is meant to serve as a way to directly see the discrimination and problems immigrants face while attempting to find jobs. The study looked at both unskilled and skilled jobs (accounting specifically), and each applicant had the appropriate qualifications and currently held a job and lived somewhere in the Ile-de-France region (E Duguet 192-193). Overall, only 3.1 percent of the applications led to an invitation for an interview. However, there was evidence of discrimination, as 1 in 14 applications led to a job interview for French surnames and forenames, while French forename with a Moroccan surname led to an interview 1 in 35 times, a Moroccan surname and Moroccan forename led to an interview 1 in 54 times and applications where the applicant indicated that they were Moroccan resulted in job interviews in

only 1 in 274 applications (E Duget 195-196). These results suggest a bias towards French applicants and a bias against Moroccan applicants. In the conclusion, the authors noted that “applicants of Moroccan nationality and origin must, on average, send over 10 times as many resumes in order to obtain the same number of invitations to job interviews as applicants whose surnames and forenames are French” (E Duget 207). This illustrates the difficulties that Moroccan immigrants have when searching for a job. Without a job, it is much harder to make ends meet and have a high quality of life.

While having a job is important, compensation can also affect the quality of life that a person has. As with holding a job, this can be largely influenced by education; however, controlling for these differences allows one to examine only wage gaps. One survey looked at wages for native-born French, general immigrants and for those who immigrated from the French overseas departments (Départements d'outre-mer or DOM). The DOMs are similar to Hawaii or Alaska in the United States; they are fully French, comparable to any other department in France proper, but overseas. People who arrive to France from a DOM are not technically immigrants, but may face discrimination due to their accents or ethnicity. They have grown up in French institutions and under French laws but may still struggle to assimilate to mainland French culture. In general, the monthly wages for a native-born French person is 1,750 euros, 1,553 euros for those originally from a DOM, and 1,582 for other immigrants (Akgüc 8). Those from DOM make the least on average, which demonstrates that the discrimination could be based on more than just immigration status, but perhaps race as well, as many DOM residents are black.

This study also examines the wage gap for women, as gender is another variable that can influence pay. For French women, the average monthly salary is 1,457 euros but only 1,135 euros for African women (Akgüc 9). The authors also note that women from DOM, Asian

countries and European countries are likely to have the same education as men but are less likely to be in the labor force and, if they are in the labor force, they are likely to have lower wages (Akgüc 9). While this mirrors what is well known to be the case in the United States, it paints a disappointing picture of how immigrant women struggle with equality in France. It also goes against the idealistic view of France as an egalitarian society.

As a general trend, the authors found that having an education from somewhere other than France or elsewhere in Europe resulted in a wage punishment for both men and women (Akgüc 18). This implies that immigrants who were educated in some place other than Europe were subject to lower wages and perhaps that education from countries outside of Europe is not looked upon with the same regard as a European education. Finally, computing the wage gap for immigrants, the authors find that there is a wage gap for both male and female immigrants at 9.3 percent and 8.9 percent, respectively, with favor towards native French (Akgüc 21). This means that native French often earn more than their immigrant counterparts. As these numbers controlled for differences in education and other background, this suggests that the French labor market is not always fair to immigrants and immigrants may face challenges to earn the same amount as their French counterparts. As lower wages persist, there runs a risk of poverty for immigrants.

France struggles with high unemployment rates, so much so that when President Hollande opted not to run for reelection in December of 2016, it could be partially blamed on his inability to fulfill his promise to lower unemployment rates (Nossiter). Perhaps then, it should not be a surprise that France has growing poverty rates, as well. Joshua Melvin notes “The cities with large immigrant populations, like those along the southern rim of France, recorded higher rates of poverty, than those with smaller numbers of new arrivals.” In addition, Paris and its

suburbs, a popular destination for new immigrants, have both the wealthiest areas and the poorest, showing the high amount of income inequality that Paris holds. Further, according to the OECD data, 21 percent of people who live in an immigrant household live in poverty. In France, about 8.1 percent of the population lives below the poverty line (Central Intelligence Agency). This shows that more poverty exists among immigrants than in the native French population, possibly due to the wage gap and the lower-rates of employment. Taken together, these statistics and information about where poverty lingers suggest that there is a correlation between poverty and immigration status in France.

Only furthering the problem, France has been facing rising income inequality in recent years. Income for the wealthy in France is growing, leading to higher income inequality levels than before. In recent years, income inequality has augmented in France. Average income has increased from 22,481 euros to 25,347 euros in France from 1998 to 2006. However, during this same time period, the increase for the top percentile is 26.9 percent, but the top .1 percent of income has increased by 63.7 percent (Landais 6). This representation of income inequality demonstrates how France has been struggling with rising income inequality. As seen before, immigrants in France can often have lower wages than the native French, which means that the increasing income inequality may have even more disastrous effects on immigrants.

In addition, there is evidence that allows France's level of income inequality to be examined numerically and compared to other countries. This evidence is in the form of the Gini coefficient. The Gini coefficient is "a standard measure of income inequality that ranges from 0 (when everybody has identical incomes) to 1 (when all income goes to one person)" (OECD 22). The Gini coefficient makes it easy to compare France's income inequality to other nations, especially in the OECD and gives an approximation as to what degree of income inequality

France is facing. According to the OECD, France's Gini coefficient is about .3, which is lower than many other OECD countries, which includes many developed nations and some developing nations. However, the Gini coefficient for capital income, or income earned from investments, is about .43, which is higher than many of the OECD countries. This difference in the capital earnings explains quite a bit about France's income inequality, as the income for the wealthiest French are mostly capital income earners and capital incomes have grown more quickly than wages (Landais 9). According to Camille Landais, "the surge of top incomes and of top wages has not been accompanied by a significant increase in income mobility nor by an increase in wage mobility." This implies that it is relatively hard for people to increase their earnings and move up to a better socio-economic class. As immigrants tend to be earning less overall, this would make it extremely difficult for them to move up in income levels, because mobility has not increased. Income inequality is bad for all people, but may plague immigrants especially.

While it is clear that discrimination exists, the reasons why it exists are a more complicated story. One study looked at attitudes towards immigrants in Europe as a whole. Although this does not directly pertain to France, it does offer insight to why discrimination and anti-immigrant sentiment exists in the first place. Combining eight different theories on why anti-immigrant sentiment is present in Europe, this study examined these theories to find which ones actually had an impact. In the study, which examined the different theories of reasons for anti-immigrant sentiment, they found several to be significant, including human capital theory, political affiliation theory, the neighborhood safety theory, and the foreign direct investment theory (Rustenbach 63). The human capital theory states that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to have pro-immigrant attitudes, possibly because education can provide people with skills so they are not competing with low-skilled immigrants or a higher

proportion of unskilled immigrants pushes wages up for highly educated people (Rustenbach 56-57). In all countries, left-leaning political ideals and an interest in politics correlated to pro-immigrant ideas (Rustenbach 57). The neighborhood safety theory explores native's responses to how they felt about their neighborhood after dark (that is, whether or not it safe). Not feeling safe in a neighborhood correlated to anti-immigrant sentiments (Rustenbach 62). Finally, the foreign direct investment theory states that nations who directly invest in other countries have citizens who are more open to immigrants because the media disperses more information about the other country. This was also found to be a significant variable that positively associated with being pro-immigrant (Rustenbach 63). Both the societal immigration theory and economic competition theory were partially significant. Individuals with high levels of interpersonal trust were less likely to be anti-immigrant, which is one part of the societal integration theory; however, another part of the theory, which examines how living with family affects views on immigration, was found not to be significant. Parts of the economic competition, such as lower per capita income and lower regional GDP than average correlated with anti-immigrant sentiment, however, the researchers did not find an individual's own experience with unemployment nor national GDP to be correlated with anti-immigrant views (Rustenbach 64). Due to this, the economic competition theory was only partially supported by evidence. Cultural marginality theory (the idea that people who do not feel that they can relate to immigrants due to experiencing different struggles and so will have anti-immigrant sentiments) and contact theory (anti-immigrant sentiments stem from natives who come into contact with immigrants only on a casual basis, without forming any deeper bonds or connections) both were insignificant (Rustenbach 65). The significance of these different theories help to paint a picture on how and why there is anti-immigrant sentiment. Knowing the reasons that people dislike immigrants can help researchers and community leaders

find ways to combat this malice. These theories can also help explain why some of the disparities in health care, education and the labor market exist.

As the French government is known for being generous with social help, such as healthcare, familial allocations and more, there is a fear that immigrants take more than they give. Using a generational accounting approach, one study attempts to compare the benefits given to native French and immigrants as well as what both groups put into the system via taxes (Chojnicki 1067). Chojnicki finds that “even if, on average, immigrants seem to pay fewer taxes and receive more transfers than natives, the difference in the age distribution of the immigrant population compared with the native population leads to a higher net average contribution to the public budget of an immigrant compared with a native.” Because immigration can delay the effects of an aging population, it is important (Chojnicki 1072). As a result of on-average lower levels of education, immigrants tend to pay fewer taxes than native French, due to their lower pay. However, immigrants also tend to take less of the government transfers on average, as they have smaller pensions and use less health care (Chojnicki 1077). Overall, the net contribution for an immigrant is on average higher than that of a native, because they do not receive any benefits as a child when they arrive as an adult (Chojnicki 1087). This study exhibits how immigrants can affect the welfare system that many French have come to expect and depend on. Immigrants contribute to the social welfare system in an overall positive manner and can delay the problems associated with an aging population.

As well as the overall economy, immigration can also impact the labor market specifically. One study aimed to examine the relationship between the unemployment rate and immigration in France by using models to find the relationship between the two (Fromentin 57). Fromentin finds that, in the long run, “immigrants create more jobs than they fill” through their

demand for goods and services. In the short run, however, the story is more complicated. There is some evidence that immigrants negatively affect the unemployment rate, that is, the unemployment rises with increased immigration. However, there is also a correlation between lower unemployment rates and immigration flows, which suggests that immigrants may decide to migrate to countries with lower unemployment rates. Overall, the results in the short term are not conclusive (Fromentin 63). Despite the results being inconclusive, it can be seen that immigration can be a positive for the French labor market. This demonstrates how, despite anti-immigration attitudes being commonplace, they are perhaps misdirected.

Immigrants in France experience discrimination in many different aspects of their life. Despite a long history of immigration from a variety of countries, immigrants arriving in France often do not receive the same treatment as native French, especially immigrants from North Africa. They may struggle to find a job or receive lower wages when they do find a job. Increasing poverty and income inequality in France may also harm immigrants more than it does native French. However, despite these challenges that immigrants may face, they can also help the economies by lowering the unemployment rate and contributing to the social security expenditures via tax payments. The experience of immigrants in France does not mirror the French's egalitarian ideology and immigrants frequently experience mistreatment. More research, including using data from France that can be categorized by ethnicity and religion, is needed to examine just how deeply this discrimination runs. For now, the experience of immigrants in France is full of struggles and hardships.

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