
FRENCH NATIONAL IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION:

Who Belongs to the National Community?

By Patrick Simon

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Executive Summary

France is in the midst of an ongoing debate over what it means to be French — a debate of crucial importance for immigrants and their descendants. The central question revolves around whether it is possible to have what some call “hyphenated identities.” Can someone belong to France and still have ties to a minority culture or a foreign country? While the concept of “dual belonging” is accepted in multiculturalist societies (such as the United States and Canada), it has been criticized in France, where many perceive identity as a zero-sum game: commitment to a minority culture or a foreign country detracts from the quality of one’s commitment to French identity.

A 2008-09 survey of 22,000 respondents, *Trajectories and Origins: The Diversity of Population in France*,¹ contradicts this “zero sum” view, showing that individuals frequently have “plural allegiances,” or closeness to more than one nation. These feelings do not appear to be in conflict for most immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Over half the immigrants surveyed and nine out of ten second-generation respondents, many with ties outside France, said they “feel French.”

While the concept of “dual belonging” is accepted in multiculturalist societies, it has been criticized in France.

The survey also reveals large differences across ethnic groups, both in rates of citizenship acquisition and in perceptions of Frenchness. For example, only 50 percent of immigrants from Turkey said they “feel French.” But many individuals who do not identify themselves as French still feel invested in the communities in which they live. Indeed, 61 percent of respondents who said they do not “feel French” also said that they feel “at home” in France. The discrepancy between those who feel at home in France and those who feel French is particularly high among immigrants from Turkey (30 points); from the European Union (EU)-27 countries (35 points); and from Morocco, Tunisia, Southeast Asia, Spain, and Italy (from 22 to 24 points).

National identity is not only a product of individual feelings of belonging and attachment; it is also affected by external perceptions of identity. Of immigrants with French citizenship, nearly half reported that they are not perceived as “being French,” as did one-quarter of descendants of immigrants. These numbers are even starker for “visible” minorities — those perceived as different due to skin color, language, accent, self-presentation, or surname — suggesting that *looking and sounding French* are important dimensions of *feeling French*.

While public debates tend to portray dual citizenship and feelings of closeness to other countries or cultures as being in competition with French national identity, this and other surveys put into question whether plural allegiances are necessarily in conflict. That ethnicity is part of one’s identity does not exclude feelings of being invested in and rooted to France. In reality, so-called hyphenated identities and plural allegiances can actually be conducive to building strong communities. Being able to navigate among plural identities offers resources in our globalized societies, whereas assimilationist requirements create more stigmatization of ethnic minorities and undermine integration prospects. The key parameter for integration is the willingness of the majority to accept “newcomers” into the fabric of society. The French anti-multiculturalism discourse creates the condition for the rejection of plural belongings by the mainstream society, and thus a marginalization of *visible minorities*.

1 Conducted by the Institut national d’études démographiques (INED) and the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE). The author was one of the principal investigators of the survey. For more, see INED, “Trajectories and Origins” Survey, http://teo_english.site.ined.fr/.



I. Introduction

How French national identity is both defined and expressed has been the subject of a long and controversial public debate in France since the mid-1980s. In May 2007 the government created the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development, which among other things was tasked with “promoting national identity.” Two years later, in November 2009, a “Great Debate on National Identity” was launched by the government with the objective of codifying “what it means to be French.” The highly controversial initiative fostered a series of 350 public meetings during its first three months and a dedicated website received 58,000 submissions as replies to the question chosen by the government: “For you, what does it mean to be French?”² Perceived more as a political ploy than as a real attempt to foster social cohesion around a unified collective identity,³ the “great debate” has indeed revealed the shadow of doubt constantly cast on the loyalty of immigrants and their descendants.

Concerns that the split allegiances of “foreigners” might weaken social cohesion in France are not a new: similar claims have been voiced since the early Third Republic (1870-1940).⁴ In autumn 2010 the radical right of the conservative party issued a parliamentary amendment to ban dual citizenship for French citizens. While the amendment was turned down, the debate resumed again in spring 2011 when high-level officials from the national soccer team criticized the choice of dual-national promising young players for electing to play with their second-nationality national team instead of the French one. In these recent debates, dual nationality was criticized for its alleged threat to national cohesion and the unfair advantage it brings to those who have choice of loyalty. Dual nationals were urged to make a choice between their citizenships and select one country in which to exercise their political rights. Beyond the practical consequences of dual nationality, the critics focused on the lack of commitment to French national identity among second-generation North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans. Ethnic minorities were accused of fostering the “balkanization” of French society with their “communitarianism”⁵ and prompting the decline of social cohesion.

The “great debate” has indeed revealed the shadow of doubt constantly cast on the loyalty of immigrants and their descendants.

This debate needs to be set against its historical background: the formation of the French nation-state. The incorporation of common norms and values is tied to the sharing of memory, history, sentiments, and attitudes that define a national body. This combination of political and cultural dimensions, outlined in Ernest Renan’s *Discours sur la Nation* (1882), was central to the French model of integration from the outset, and characterizes most national models in Europe.⁶ Seen against this background, the identity of immigrants and their descendants is subject to a range of expectations, questions, and, all too often, suspicions.⁷

2 Eric Besson, Minister of Immigration, Integration, National Identity, and Co-Development, “Conclusion of the first phase of the Great Debate on National Identity, November 2, 2009 - February 2, 2010,” (written remarks, February 5, 2010), www.immigration.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/DiscGDINat050210.pdf.

3 See Lizzy Davies, “France is Torn Asunder by Great Debate Over its National Identity,” *Guardian*, November 7, 2009, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/nov/08/france-national-identity-debate-race; and Bruce Crumley, “Berets and Baguette? France Rethinks its Identity,” *Time*, November 4, 2009, www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1934193,00.html.

4 Ralph Schor, *L’opinion française et les étrangers en France : 1919-1939* (Paris: Publication de la Sorbonne, 1985); Yvon Gastaut, *L’immigration et l’opinion en France sous la Ve République* (Paris: Seuil, 2000); Gérard Noiriel, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France (XIXe – XXe siècle) : Discours publics, humiliations privées* (Paris, Fayard, 2007).

5 A French term that is not equivalent to “communitarian” in English. It refers to a propensity to favor in-group networks, interests, and values, and is defined by opposition to participation in society.

6 Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales : Europe XIIIe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

7 Patrick Weil, *Liberté, Égalité, Discriminations: “L’identité nationale” au regard de l’histoire* (Paris: Grasset, 2008).



Whereas countries that have adopted multiculturalism treat multiple national or ethnic identities as positive marks of a diverse heritage (e.g. Canada, the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom), assimilationist countries, with France in the lead, tend to insist on exclusive choices and consider the retention of an ethnic identity to be a sign of incomplete assimilation.⁸ Any public claim to an identity combining references to both France and a minority culture or a foreign country — what some might call a “hyphenated identity” — is perceived negatively.⁹ This fear reveals a conception of identity as a sort of finite stock: any sense of belonging to another country must necessarily weaken an individual’s sense of being French. This conception of belonging is challenged by the findings of the *Trajectories and Origins: Survey on Population Diversity in France (TeO)* survey outlined in this report, provided by individuals who claim multiple identities — a claim that theoretically applies as much to the general population as to immigrants and their descendants. To what extent ethnic minorities and “natives” differ in their definition of identity lies at the core of this report.

As previously noted, the public debate frames the belonging of immigrants and their descendants in France in terms of a “conflict of loyalty.” This report puts this discourse in the light of survey respondents’ own experiences. Feelings of belonging and constructions of ethnicity will be understood not only as preferences toward a minority identity but also as a consequence of the repeated experiences of discrimination and stigmatization.¹⁰ An analysis of the dialectical relationship between the mainstream society and minority groups continues in the final section. A discussion of French national feeling is framed by responses to the *TeO* survey’s open-ended question about origins. What terms (national, geographic, cultural, religious, etc.) do the respondents use to define their origins? Should the results obtained be interpreted as the emergence of a “hybrid” minority identity that does not signify a lack of integration but rather the emergence of a “symbolic ethnicity”?¹¹ Such an ethnicity is not necessarily a reproduction from one generation to the next (from immigrants to their children born in France) but involves the invention of a new identity. This creative process is also marked by the patterns of stigmatization and exclusion experienced in French society.

Methodology

Data on ethnicity are not collected in the French census or in social science surveys. The census asks questions on citizenship and place of birth, which makes it possible to describe the situation of immigrants or foreigners. A few surveys collect data on the second generation (the Labor Force Survey and Housing Survey, for example), but there is an overall lack of data on this population group.¹² Data on religion, gathered mainly in polls and opinion surveys, are even scarcer.

This report analyzes a unique data set from the largest survey ever conducted in France on ethnic minorities,¹³ one that asks questions about dual nationality, feelings of national belonging (“being

8 Irene Bloemraad, “Unity in Diversity? Bridging Models of Multiculturalism and Immigrant Integration,” *DuBois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 4, No. 2 (2007): 317–36.

9 Patrick Simon, “La République face à la diversité: comment décoloniser les imaginaires?” in *La fracture coloniale*, eds. Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Sandrine Lemaire (Paris: La Découverte, 2005).

10 See the notion of “reactive identity” developed by Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

11 This term was coined by Herbert J. Gans in 1979 to refute the idea that an “ethnic revival” was occurring in the United States. He argued that the increasing use of visible ethnic symbols did not herald a reversal of the processes of integration, but was rather the product of an increasingly upwardly mobile second and third generation choosing easy and intermittent ways of expressing their ethnic identity *precisely because* they were so well integrated. Rather than defining them, their ethnicity had become a choice or a “symbolic ethnicity.” See Herbert J. Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Culture in America,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, No. 1 (1979): 1–20.

12 Patrick Simon, “Statistics, French Social Science and Ethnic and Racial Relations,” *Revue Française de Sociologie* 51 (2010): 159–74.

13 The survey is the largest ever conducted of immigrants and the second generation; although other surveys have included immigrants in recent years, none have used such a large sample or covered so many areas of social life. See Cris Beauchemin, Christelle Hamel, and Patrick Simon, eds., *Trajectories and Origins: Survey on Population diversity in France. Initial Findings*



French”), and “feeling at home” in France. *TeO* was conducted in metropolitan France between September 2008 and February 2009 using a sample of 22,000 people. Respondents were divided into five subsamples, representing:

- Immigrants¹⁴ (8,500)
- Descendants of immigrants (8,200)
- French migrants from overseas departments (DOMs)¹⁵ (650)
- The descendants of DOM migrants, born in mainland France (750)
- Persons born in mainland France without an immigrant background, from two generations (3,600)

The census records citizenship in three categories that are mutually exclusive: French citizen at birth, French citizen by acquisition (including second generations born in France), and foreigners. Because data on multiple nationalities simply do not exist in official records, the *TeO* survey is the main source of information on dual nationality.

This report analyzes the identity patterns of immigrants and their descendants, focusing on how these relate to French national identity. We rely here on self-declaration by respondents.

II. French Citizenship Acquisition

According to the *TeO* survey, 41 percent of immigrants aged 18-60 living in metropolitan France are French citizens. Official data on citizenship acquisition state that 143,275 foreigners acquired French nationality in 2010.¹⁶ Some 94,600 were naturalized by decree, and 22,000 obtained nationality by request, following marriage to a French national.¹⁷ These are in addition to the 800,000 new citizens who have acquired nationality since the early 2000s.

The acquisition of French citizenship is directly linked to immigrants’ age at arrival and length of residence in France — those who arrived younger and who have stayed longer are more likely to be French citizens.¹⁸ Indeed, 64 percent of immigrants who arrived before the age of 10 acquired French

(Documents de Travail n°168, INED, Paris, 2010),

www.ined.fr/fichier/t_telechargement/45084/telechargement_fichier_fr_dt168.13janvier11.pdf.

14 See Appendix 1.

15 The French Overseas Departments (*départements d’outre-mer* or DOMs) consist of four non-European territories with a status of “département”: French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Réunion. Since May 2011, Mayotte has been made the fifth DOM. The DOM send representatives to the French Parliament and DOM inhabitants are full French citizens and consequently, have the right to vote in elections, including those of the European Parliament. As of January 2011, 2.9 percent of the population of the French Republic lived in the French Overseas Departments; INSEE, “Estimation de population par région, sexe et grande classe d’âge - Années 1990 à 2010,”

www.insee.fr/fr/ppp/bases-de-donnees/donnees-detaillees/estim-pop/estim-pop-reg-sca-1990-2010.xls. There are also French overseas territories, with a different status (French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Saint Barthélemy, Saint Martin, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, and Wallis and Futuna).

16 Yannick Croguennec, “Les acquisitions de la nationalité française en 2010,” (*Infos Migrations* 25, Ministère de l’intérieur, de l’outre-mer, des collectivités territoriales et de l’immigration, September 2011),

www.immigration.gouv.fr/spip.php?page=actus&id_rubrique=254&id_article=2587.

17 Ibid, 8.

18 Immigrants who arrive as children are more likely to acquire French citizenship for two reasons: the effect of the naturalization of their parent(s), and the relative similarity of their position to that of descendants of immigrants born in France, which often leads them to identify themselves as French in the same way. Length of residence is also a determining factor in the



citizenship, as did 53 percent of those who came between the ages of 10 and 16, and 32 percent of those who arrived after age 16. The assimilation criteria required for naturalization tend to favor the “established” profile: that is, older, married people who are employed and above all, who have mastered both oral and written French. As a result, in 2008 the average number of years of residence in France for new citizens was 19 years for naturalization and 9.5 years for acquisition of citizenship by marriage.¹⁹

Children born in France of foreign parents come under a deferred *jus soli* nationality law: they are considered foreigners at birth²⁰ and automatically become French when they reach 18, or earlier by request. Consequently, the vast majority of descendants of immigrants are French, with less than 3 percent, on average, reporting only a foreign nationality. There is, however, variation across nationalities: the rate increases to 5 percent for descendants of Turkish immigrants and 8 percent for descendants of Portuguese immigrants.

More than 80 percent of Southeast Asian immigrants are French citizens, which may be explained by their lack of intention to return to their country of origin when they came as refugees. Spanish and Italian immigrants also show high rates of French citizenship acquisition, largely explained by the fact that they came as children with their parents.²¹ When considering only immigrants who arrived as adults, North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans more frequently acquire French citizenship than southern European immigrants. The harmonization of status for European nationals living in another European Union country has made the acquisition of French nationality less attractive, and it is likely that EU-27 citizens refrain from opting for French citizenship for this reason.

Dual Nationality, Dual Loyalty?

French law permits dual nationality and does not require foreigners who obtain French nationality to give up their original one. It is therefore legally possible for a naturalized immigrant to be a citizen of both France and another nation. The same holds true for descendants of foreigners born in France: when they come of age, they can choose to keep their former nationality or not. One should however emphasize that the legal framework is not known by most immigrants and members of the second generation — not to mention the mainstream population.

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nationalities in recent years.*

Dual nationality is not widespread in the mainstream population (see glossary in Appendix), including among those born in foreign countries. Only 4 percent of repatriates and 16 percent of French nationals born abroad reported having dual nationality. Dual nationality is more common among immigrants (21 percent). Nearly half of the immigrants who acquired French nationality have also kept their foreign nationality. Binationals are very rare among Southeast Asians (less than 10 percent), whereas more than

decision to be naturalized, since living in a country in a more permanent way transforms people’s original purpose at the time of migration. The possibility of returning to the home country grows more distant as attachment to the country of residence increases and the obstacles related to foreign nationality become harder to tolerate.

19 A minimum of five years residence is required before applying, and the procedure takes 18 months on average (or a total of 545 days, according to 2008 figures from Ministère de l’intérieur, de l’outre-mer, des collectivités territoriales et de l’immigration, *Tableau de bord de l’intégration* (Paris: Département des statistiques, des études et de la documentation, 2010): 48, www.immigration.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/indicateurs_integregation_122010.pdf.

20 Unless one of their parents was born in France (a case of double *jus soli*, i.e two generations born in France) or is a French citizen, in which case they are French at birth.

21 Seventy percent of Italian and Spanish immigrants in the survey (aged 18 to 60 years old) entered France before the age of 16.

two-thirds of North African immigrants, 55 percent of Turkish immigrants, and 43 percent of Portuguese immigrants combine French nationality with that of their countries of origin. Excluding Spanish and Italian immigrants, most immigrants from the EU-27 countries do not apply to naturalize after they have moved to France.

Increasing numbers of naturalized immigrants have been choosing to keep their former nationalities in recent years. The proportion of binationals recorded in the TeO survey in 2008 was far higher than in the 1992 *Geographic Mobility and Social Insertion Survey* (MGIS).²² For Algerian immigrants, the number of binationals rose from 7 percent in 1992 to 67 percent in 2008; for Portuguese immigrants, from 18 percent to 43 percent. While there have been no notable changes to the law since 1992, immigrant practice with regard to dual nationality has changed considerably. The dramatic growth of binationals has to be understood as a new framing of multiple allegiances. For ethnic minorities, having multiple nationalities is seen as compatible with a full commitment to their Frenchness, indeed even as an enhancement to their Frenchness. They clearly do not see any contradiction in terms of loyalty.

For ethnic minorities, having multiple nationalities is seen as compatible with a full commitment to their Frenchness.

Descendants of immigrants reveal an attachment to their parents' nationality of origin. While 95 percent are French, nearly one-third of descendants with two immigrant parents report dual nationality. This drops to 13 percent for descendants of mixed parentage. Descendants of Turkish immigrants are the most attached to their parents' nationality, but one-third of descendants of Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians are also binational. This is especially significant in the case of Algerians, who, because of their dual *jus soli*,²³ hold French citizenship at birth. However, very few descendants of Southeast Asian immigrants have dual nationality, and it is also quite rare among individuals whose parents originally came from Italy or Spain.

Table 1. Type of Citizenship, by Population Group*

	French Only	Dual Nationality	Foreign Only	Total
Immigrants	10	18	72	100
Generation 1.5	35	24	41	100
2nd Generation	62	33	5	100
Generation 2.5	87	13	0	100
Mainstream Population	99	1	0	100
Total	88	5	7	100

Note: Population ages 18-50.

* The groups are defined as (1) immigrants: born abroad with a foreign nationality, arrived in France after 15 years of age; (2) generation 1.5: born abroad with a foreign nationality, arrived in France before 16 years of age; (3) 2nd generation: born in France from two immigrant parents; (4) generation 2.5: born in France from mixed parentage; and (5) mainstream: French, born of French parents.

Source: INED-INSEE, *Trajectories and Origins Survey (TeO)*, 2008.

22 Michèle Tribalat, Patrick Simon, and Benoît Riandey, *De l'immigration à l'assimilation: Enquête sur les populations d'origine étrangère en France* (Paris: La Découverte, 1996): 145–71.

23 Defined as being born in France to at least one parent born in France, Article 23 of the French Nationality Law, and Article 19-3 of the Civil Code.



III. Nationality and the Sense of Belonging

In addition to collecting data on citizenship, the *TeO* survey asks respondents about something harder to measure: their “national belonging,” defined as feelings of attachment to France or their country of origin (or the one of their parents for the second generation). The questions were formulated the same way for all reference territories: “I feel French, Algerian, Guadeloupian, etc.” For the descendants of immigrants, the question was duplicated for each parent and referred to the country of origin of the immigrant mother and father. That these questions are separate allows the *TeO* survey to avoid the errors of many immigrant-focused surveys, which confront one identity with another or at least place them in competition. Instead, the identification-focused questions first address France alone, and then describe various combinations with a country of origin (of self or parent). A lack of attachment to France does not necessarily mean a preference for another country: it may just as well express a lack of interest in any national feeling. Each answer was broken down in four modalities: “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree,” “strongly disagree,” and we pick the more assertive feelings (“strongly agree”) for references in Tables 2 and 3.

As expected, immigrants differ from other respondents in terms of national feeling: only 35 percent said they “strongly feel French,” as opposed to 81 percent of the mainstream population, and 77 percent of descendants of immigrants (a proportion close to that of the DOM-born and their descendants, 75 percent in both cases; see Table 2 and 3). Age upon arrival affects national feeling, as does having at least one French parent: generation 1.5 reports a strong feeling of Frenchness twice as often as immigrants who came as adults, and descendants with a mixed parentage come close to the mainstream population. There is thus a linear rise in French national feeling with each successive immigrant generation, which confirms the incorporation of a national ethos as generations go by.

Table 2. Feelings of Belonging among Immigrants

	I feel at home in France	I feel French		I feel [ethnic label]
		All	French Citizen	
Metropolitan France	75	81	85	-
Mainstream Population	78	88	88	-
Immigrants	51	25	47	62
Generation 1.5	66	50	59	46
DOM	54	75	75	77
Algeria	60	42	56	44
Morocco and Tunisia	63	41	53	55
Sub-Saharan Africa	42	33	51	60
Southeast Asia	61	40	46	59
Turkey	50	21	37	40
Portugal	69	43	79	54
Spain and Italy	61	36	72	57
EU-27	56	22	52	56
Others	54	31	49	48

Note: Population aged 18-50.

Source: INED-INSEE, *TeO*, 2008.



This national ethos does, however, vary by origin. As there is a significant impact of the acquisition of the French nationality, the percentages are given for all immigrants and only for those who are French citizens. Along the French citizens, a relative distance can be observed among immigrants from Turkey (37 percent of strong feeling of Frenchness), Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and other EU-27 countries (a bit more than 50 percent). The mainstream population is more eager to “strongly agree” (88 percent), as it is the case for descendants of parents from Spain, Italy, and other EU-27 countries (86 percent) or from the DOM (81 percent). Descendants of immigrants report rankings similar to immigrants, with those from outside Europe having lower figures than those with a European background.

If three-quarters of naturalized immigrants “feel French,” nationality is not everything.

If three-quarters of naturalized immigrants “feel French,” nationality is not everything. The adoption of a French national feeling among non-naturalized immigrants is quite noteworthy here: more than half of non-naturalized immigrants feel French, and two-thirds of those from North Africa. If a result deserves comment, it is not the lack of adoption of national identity by immigrants and their descendants but rather the strength of that adoption.

However, is feeling French the same as “feeling at home in France?” An individual may very well not share a national feeling and yet feel very close to the country where he resides.²⁴ This is verified in Table 2, which shows that some immigrants may feel at home in France although they do not “feel French.” Although there is a fairly high correlation between the two variables, building one’s life in France and feeling attached to the country do not necessarily entail a sense of national belonging. This distinction is revealed by the fact that 61 percent of respondents who do not feel French say that they feel “at home in France.”²⁵ The proportion of immigrants who feel at home in the country is systematically higher than of those who feel French, with particularly high discrepancies among immigrants from Turkey (30 points), from EU-27 countries (35), and from Morocco, Tunisia, Southeast Asia, Spain, and Italy (from 20 to 24 points). Conversely, there are very few people who define themselves as French but do not feel at home where they live. The DOM born represent an exception: 10 percent state that they “feel French” but do not feel at home in metropolitan France. “Feeling at home” encompasses symbolic, affective, and material dimensions of personal investment in one’s place of residence.²⁶ Whatever their legal citizenship, most immigrants and members of the second generation consider themselves as “locals.”

However, is feeling French the same as “feeling at home in France?”

24 Closeness refers to a concrete attachment to a style of life and social codes that do not necessarily transmute in a “national identity.” As Evelyne Ribert points out, questions about closeness to the French nation may have more than one meaning and be vague to say the least, especially in quantitative surveys. See Evelyn Ribert, *Liberté, égalité, carte d’identité : les jeunes issus de l’immigration et l’appartenance nationale* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006).

25 Fifty-five percent for foreigners and 70 percent for French citizens.

26 See Jan Willem Duyvendak *The Politics of Home: Belonging and Nostalgia in Europe and the United States* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

**Table 3. Feelings of Belonging among Second Generation**

	I feel at home in France	I feel French	I feel [ethnic label]
Metropolitan France	75	81	-
Mainstream Population	78	88	-
2 nd generation	69	63	41
Generation 2.5	83	85	15
DOM	68	75	44
Algeria	69	68	32
Morocco and Tunisia	67	64	38
Sub-Saharan Africa	56	58	34
Southeast Asia	71	66	24
Turkey	64	42	44
Portugal	81	75	37
Spain and Italy	85	85	21
EU-27	85	86	9
Others	75	73	30

Note: Population aged 18-50.

Source: INED-INSEE, TeO, 2008.

A. National Identities: A Zero-Sum Game?

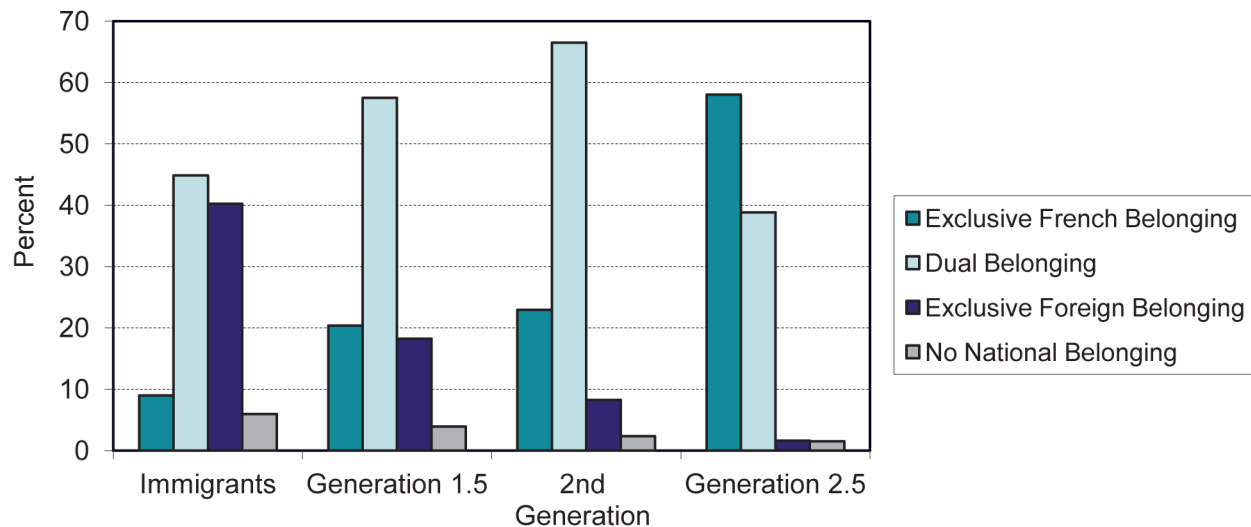
The other side of belonging is allegiance to one's country of origin. Public debate systematically portrays multiple allegiances as conflictual, but many immigrants and their descendants see them as complementary. Dual nationality enables them to legally reconcile their simultaneous real commitments, just as declaring one's attachment to the country where one lives *and* the country one comes from (and may often visit) is a type of syncretism that is likely to become more common as globalization intensifies and supranational institutions increase in number. However, the opportunity to combine allegiances and national or ethnic identities is a privilege attached to the condition of migrants. By contrast, the mainstream population has no option when it comes to hyphenate their national identity. This lack of resources may explain the highly sensitive nature of the national identity issue and the criticisms against dual nationality: apparently, choices must be made between competing references. The criticism of multiple allegiances — whether such allegiances are legally expressed in dual nationality or symbolic and affective — is based on the assumption that commitment to one country weakens commitment to another. Are the “rules” of this zero-sum game supported by evidence, or must they be abandoned in the face of a new paradigm?

The first observation is that national feeling is relatively strong towards both references: here and there. The second observation is that variation in the intensity of French national feeling is only moderately correlated with that of allegiance to one's country of origin. The relationship between the two is connected rather than competitive. Although a lower intensity of French national feeling is observed among the descendants of immigrants than within the mainstream population, it is not explained by an

increased national allegiance to their parents' country of origin. Except for the descendants of Turkish immigrants, where the two allegiances are equally strong (76 percent and 81 percent), the discrepancies in other groups are strongly in favor of France: among second-generation Algerians, for example, 68 percent said they “feel French,” and only 34 percent said they “feel Algerian;” for those of African background the figures are 58 percent and 34 percent, and for those of Asian background 66 percent and 24 percent.

A closer look at the different combinations of allegiance results in a typology with four positions: feeling exclusively French, feeling exclusively ethnic/foreign, feeling both, and feeling neither. The fourth combination corresponds to a lack of national feeling of any sort. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the four immigration-related groups across the four combinations of allegiance. For immigrants who arrived in France as children and for the descendants of immigrants, a dual allegiance is the most common situation (58 percent and 66 percent respectively). A stronger allegiance to the country of origin is found mostly among immigrants who arrived as adults (40 percent), while feeling exclusively French is found in significant numbers among descendants of mixed parentage (58 percent). Feeling neither allegiance is rare across all groups (less than 5 percent).

Figure 1. Feeling French and/or Foreign by Migration Background



Source: INED-INSEE, *TeO*, 2008.

What can be observed is the emergence of a dual allegiance combining identification with France with loyalty to the country of origin (whether of oneself or one's parents). This is becoming the dominant pattern for the second generation. But the opposite seems to be true for the descendants of mixed parentage (generation 2.5), marking a shift over time from one symbolic and material territory to another. The declining significance of ethnic belonging for Generation 2.5 may reflect the slow pace of the integration process. Whether this decline has to be expected for the third generation depends on the differential

B. Defining One's Origin

The *TeO* survey assessed national identity by asking respondents an open question about their family “origins” that could be very broadly interpreted. The wording was: “When you think about your family history, what would you say your origin(s) is/are? You may give more than one answer.” No examples were given. This question referred to the respondent's parents and grandparents (“family history”),



while allowing the respondent to make her own personal statement (“your origin[s]”). The reference to family history was intended to guide respondents toward influences that went beyond their own direct experience.²⁷ Would the responses to the *TeO* survey mention parents’ characteristics or would the idea of origin evoke generations further back or other dimensions of personal identity?

The first fact to be noted about the responses is their wide variety — even eliminating different spellings of the same proper names, there were 4,630 different responses. Although the question allowed more than one answer, nearly 89 percent of respondents defined their origin in one term and only 10 percent chose two.

Immigrants and descendants of immigrants, especially those of mixed parentage, were slightly more likely to cite a second reference. The dominant pattern of a single origin contradicts the idea of a plurality inherited from the historic intermixing of populations and regional histories. If assimilation means the erosion of particular regional and ethnic identities, the process seems to be on track in light of this result alone. French assimilationists’ political model is actively unfavorable to the expression of multiple identities or “hyphenation.” This context encourages respondents to make a selection among their origins: beyond the reality of plural ancestries, answers reflect exclusive choices.

Table 4. Terms Cited in Response to an Open-Ended Question about Origins (%)

	Immigrants	2 nd generation	Generation 2.5	Mainstream Population	Metropolitan France
<i>Cite at least</i>					
France	17	41	66	58	53
Single quotation	8	23	47	51	45
France + other country	8	15	17	4	6
Other combination	1	3	2	3	2
Country (other than France)	61	45	16	4	13
Region	2	2	5	17	14
Large geographical entity/ continent	5	3	4	3	3
Ethnocultural	7	5	5	2	3
Social and personality	2	2	3	11	9
Cosmopolitan and other wide identities	3	3	3	4	4
No response/Don’t know	6	4	4	7	6

Note: Population aged 18-50.

Source: INED-INSEE, *TeO*, 2008.

²⁷ It is known that responses to this sort of question are basically subjective and only imperfectly reflect the family genealogy. See Mary Waters for a detailed analysis of the ancestry question in the 1980 US census and its meanings as supplemented by qualitative interviews; Mary Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).



The terms mentioned by respondents confirm national identity as the main means of expressing origin: 66 percent cited one or more country names to define their origins; of these, 53 percent cited France. The other terms in the reclassified responses refer to areas similar to countries (regions, continents), explicit ethnocultural references (ethnic groups such as Berber, Creole, or Kurd; color [black]; or religion, social references (middle-class, modest origins, working-class, rural), family (large family, single-parent family), or personality (honest, sincere). The last group included “multicultural,” “cosmopolitan,” and “human,” together with general remarks and opinions on the question.

It is mainly among the mainstream population that the terms used cover dimensions other than country name. Regional identity is an important form of identification among the mainstream population and 17 percent used it in lieu of, rather than in addition to, the country.²⁸ Other responses from the mainstream population concern social background or personality (11 percent). Allowing for the nonspecific nature of the question, the fact that 84 percent of respondents with no migration background in two generations interpreted their origins in national or regional terms shows that this topic is strongly influenced by national debates and internalized by the respondents. This open question could also be used to identify those respondents in the mainstream population who had immigrant origins more than two generations back. Only 4 percent of the majority population cited a country other than France, which shows how the memory of immigrant origins in the third generation and later is eroded by the internalization of French national identity.

The responses of immigrants and their descendants are less varied: four-fifths of them refer to a country. Few mention social background or personality, but rather ethnocultural references or geographical regions (Maghreb, Europe, Africa, Asia, etc.). Most cited a combination of France and one or more of the family’s countries of origin. Only 8 percent of immigrants named France alone as their origin, out of 17 percent who mentioned France in one way or another. Of descendants of two immigrant parents, 23 percent declared solely French origin, which expresses quite clearly the strength of an assimilation process that tends to dissolve minority identities. Since the question concerns “origins” and not current nationality, one might expect few sole mentions of France where the family roots are in other countries. Paradoxically, the descendants of mixed parentage did not declare plural origins any more than other population groups. The choice of a solely French origin mirrors the *preferences* observed by Mary Waters in her analysis of the answers to the “ancestry question” in the 1980 US census, and meets the conclusion of Anthony Perez and Charles Hirschman that “census questions about race and ethnicity measure identity, which is theoretically distinct from ancestry.”²⁹ Consequently those who combined France and another country in their responses — the hyphenated French — are relatively few: only 15 percent of descendants of immigrants, with little variation if the parents are of mixed origin.

C. “Being” French or “Looking” French?

National feeling is constructed not only by the patterns of attachment and belonging that develop during an individual’s life, but also in relation to the perception that others have of one’s identity. This interaction is revealed particularly clearly in the dimension of national feeling — a feeling that can be denied by a restrictive definition of national identity based on, say, skin color or sociocultural norms.

We have thus far analyzed indicators of national belonging from the point of view of individuals, but the survey also recorded data about third-party perceptions of “Frenchness.” By asking the respondents to consider how they are perceived in their daily lives, this question captures the image of belonging. It

28 Brittany (18 percent of regional citations), well ahead of Alsace (7 percent), is a notable reference, claimed by 3 percent of the mainstream population.

29 In her 1990 study, Mary Waters analyzes the influences on ancestry choices, showing that for Americans who have multiple ancestries, choice of a single ethnicity is influenced by different factors, including the popularity of ethnicities in public opinion; Waters, *Ethnic Options*. See also Anthony D. Perez and Charles Hirschman, “The Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition of the US Population: Emerging American Identities,” *Population and Development Review* 35, No. 1 (2009): 1–51.



is not unusual for there to be dissonance between one's own representation of oneself ("I feel French") and others' perceptions ("but people do not see me as French"). This dissonance is undeniably a source of tension and generates feelings of rejection. While the French population is ethnically and religiously diverse, this diversity is not yet fully incorporated in the representation of "Frenchness." Therefore, visible minorities are perceived as not belonging to the French mainstream and are frequently singled out as "others." The term "othering" refers to this process of labeling members of the community on the basis of their visibility, primarily skin color, but also language, accent, self-presentation, or surname, which contribute to signaling otherness and thus lead to questions about origins. Two indicators of "othering" have been computed in the survey to measure the extent of the phenomenon (see Table 5). They are completed with two indicators of experiences of racism and discrimination.

Table 5. Indicators of Rejection and Othering, by Group

	Experience of Racism	Experience of Discrimination	Rejection of Frenchness*	Questions about Origins
Immigrants	30	27	45	32
2 nd Generation	43	31	36	27
Generation 2.5	31	17	11	20
Mainstream Population	18	11	4	6

Note: Population aged 18-50.

* This indicator is calculated only for French citizens.

Source: INED-INSEE, TeO, 2008.

The first indicator is based on the frequency of questions about one's origins. To be frequently asked about where one comes from is not in itself pejorative and does not necessarily imply a value judgment, but when it recurs, it reinforces a feeling of cultural difference. The second indicator reflects the conviction of not being seen as French ("rejection of Frenchness"). Nearly half of immigrants with French nationality consider that they are not perceived as French. This is also true for one-quarter of descendants of immigrant parents. Second generations with mixed parentage are somehow protected from othering: 11 percent feel rejected from Frenchness compared to 36 percent of descendants of two immigrant parents. The feeling of having one's Frenchness denied clearly follows a "line of visibility" affecting primarily immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa and their descendants, then immigrants and descendants from North Africa, Turkey, and Southeast Asia. The pattern is completely different for immigrants from Europe, who feel accepted in the national community. This acceptance is even more marked among their French-born descendants. Clearly, "Frenchness" is not attributed on the basis of nationality or cultural codes, such as the language spoken, but rather on a restricted vision of who "looks French."

These indicators are correlated with experiences of discrimination, more than with racism. Being perceived as an outsider reinforces the stereotypes and prejudices that foster discrimination.

Table 6. Indicators of Rejection and “Othering” by Ethnoracial Groups

	Experience of Racism	Experience of Discrimination	Rejection of Frenchness*	Questions about Origins
Europeans/Whites	23	12	10	18
Africans and Dom/Blacks	49	39	41	42
Maghrebians/Arabs	42	34	43	28
Asians	33	22	44	38
Turks	29	26	43	25
Others	33	26	24	39

Note: Population aged 18-50.

* This indicator is calculated only for French citizens.

Source: INED-INSEE, TeO, 2008.

The line of visibility which divides assimilated migrants and second generations and those who remain out the French community is materialized in the classification used in Table 6. In this table, all generations are conflated in a proxy of ethnoracial classification. If only 10 percent of the white (European) group immigrants and their descendants feel the denial of their Frenchness, all other minorities experience the same level of rejection four times more. Blacks and Arabs report significantly more discrimination and racism, meaning that their sense of belonging matches the way they are perceived. Conversely, immigrants and descendants from North Africa, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa report a substantial mismatch between their feeling French and the perception of their otherness. The dissonance is even slightly greater for descendants than for immigrants of a given origin. “Othering” is sharper for the second generation: the descendants of postcolonial migrations, who are also the most “visible” in French society, crystallize the tensions surrounding the definition of national identity.

IV. Conclusions: Compatibility and Coexistence of National and Minority Identities

Multiculturalism is overwhelmingly rejected by French political elites as a model relying on the recognition and valorization of ethnic communities and their cultural differences. It is strongly associated with foreign experiences, especially the British and US models, and perceived as the opposite of the French model of integration. It is seen to conflict with Republican values and national cohesion, and defined only in negative terms: as what the French society is *not* and should not become. It is closely associated with what is referred to as “communitarianism” (*communautarisme*): a form of cultural separatism seen as the inevitable outcome of group recognition and the promotion of cultural differences.

Yet, France is multicultural in the sense that its population is increasingly diverse: not only do immigrants and the second generation comprise 20 percent of the population in metropolitan France, but locally, these groups reach higher proportions — such as 43 percent in the Paris metropolitan area and 75 percent in the *département* of Seine Saint Denis. Diversity has fostered the expression of multiple cultural identities. But despite this “hyper diversity,” the French national identity remains more or less unchanged. In 2012 it is still expected that cultural identities will remain settled in the private sphere of life without the need for public or political recognition. The recent debate on national identity and the 2012 presidential campaign have clearly shown that the definitions of “Frenchness” that have been most heatedly promoted do not, unfortunately, offer an inclusive perspective for ethnic minorities, but instead stigmatize those



who allegedly are not “French enough” and who are threatening the national cohesion by their “broken Frenchness.”

The findings of the *TeO* survey challenge the idea that plural identities undermine national cohesion. They show that the importance of ethnicity in one’s identity does not exclude the development of a French national feeling. Most descendants of immigrants — and many immigrants — share this feeling, even when they do not possess French citizenship (47 percent of immigrant foreign nationals say they feel French). Not only can an ethnic affiliation be maintained alongside a strong French allegiance, but this allegiance does not exclude having a strong national feeling toward one’s own or one’s parents’ country of origin. A pattern of plural allegiances, not necessarily ranked, emerged from the findings of the *TeO* survey, debunking the common belief that trust and civic participation are negatively correlated with higher ethnic retention.

France is multicultural in the sense that its population is increasingly diverse.

The strength of national identification is confirmed by the responses to an open-ended question on defining one’s origins. Given all the possible responses, those respondents whose families have roots outside metropolitan France define themselves mainly in terms of ethnic-national origin, usually citing both France and the country of origin. We might note that these two references are not the same in nature: the country of origin is both a matter of subjective identity and objective fact, whereas for immigrants and descendants of immigrants, to cite France is the expression of an allegiance. To have been born in France shifts the center of gravity of origin but does not eliminate a continued reference to one’s parents’ country: three-quarters of descendants of immigrants state it among their origins.

Our results show the formation of what one may call a minority identity that does not contradict, but in fact complements, French national feeling. This identity does not reflect reluctance to incorporate elements from majority society into individual references, as might be predicted by a theory of integration based on a fear of “communitarianism.” It is striking to note that over 90 percent of those who mention their ethnicity as a feature of their identity also feel “at home in France.” However, the process of adopting plural identities and allegiances — normal practice among most immigrants and their descendants — is impeded by external perceptions. Other members of society can assign people an identity that may contradict or undermine their own self-definition. Immigrants’ sense of belonging is hindered less by a withdrawal into their community, not supported by our data, than by the fact that this belonging is not sufficiently recognized. The rejection of Frenchness mainly concerns immigrants but also affects those descendants whose origins are highly visible in the public space. Those from overseas France (DOM) experience a similar paradox, for all their long-standing membership in the national community. The concept of “visible minorities,” used in connection with discrimination, takes an eloquent shape along this dividing line. Here we see the attitudes of French society toward its own diversity.

Our results show the formation of what one may call a minority identity that does not contradict, but in fact complements, French national feeling.

Policy Implications: The Need to Update the National Identity Discourse

Considering the findings of the *TeO* survey, it is hard to support the mainstream discourse and widespread beliefs about the lack of allegiance to the French national identity by immigrants and their descendants. The problem lies in the restrictive definition of this national identity: it ends up excluding



visible minorities and Muslims from the national community. The French model of integration pretends to be colorblind and to ensure cohesion through a process of soft assimilation, that is, civic integration and cultural convergence to the mainstream. The counterpart to this soft assimilation is the full equality of rights and opportunities. One can call this give-and-take game a “soft assimilation contract.” This contract has in fact not been enforced by the receiving society, since full admission into the mainstream and the effective equality that should ensue from this invisibilization are not achieved for non-European ethnic minorities. The role of national identity as a framework for equality needs to be profoundly reconsidered:

- The compromise on a “soft assimilation contract” should be revised with respect to the accuracy of the cultural convergence condition. Not only is value of a convergence toward a mainstream culture (itself impossible to define) in question, but the resources for this convergence are hard to identify. More coercive requirements, such as linguistic and civic tests that a significant share of native citizens would not be able to fulfill, are strengthening the boundary between “us” and “them.” ***Rather than insisting on what immigrants and their descendants should achieve to be part of the national community, an update of the French conception of integration is necessary to make it more efficient.***
- The debate over national identity is divisive rather than inclusive. It does not help to incorporate outsiders into the national community, but increases their exclusion by defining national identity negatively, that is, by stating what it should *not* be. ***Maintaining an open national identity that is more flexible and adaptive to the new realities of French diversity is the key objective for cohesion policies. Even if multiculturalism as a policy is not an objective in the French context, ethnic and cultural diversity should be acknowledged in a symbolic and practical dimension.***
- The real threat against national cohesion is the persistence of ethnic and racial discrimination, which targets Muslims more than ever. This discrimination is challenging the French model of integration and the Republic’s promises of equality. Beyond the loss of opportunities in the labor market and social life, experiences of discrimination are associated with a higher feeling of rejection from Frenchness and a sense of isolation. Ethnic and racial discrimination discredits the value and significance of common values and norms. Instead, it leads to the emergence of a double standard in citizenship. ***Positive action against discrimination should be implemented in a more effective way. For a decade now, antidiscrimination policies have lacked coherence and failed to improve equality. The inability of these policies to change the nature and the extent of discrimination reinforces the feeling among ethnic minorities that they do not deserve the same attention from public authorities.***
- Relations between police forces and minority youths have fueled tensions, sparking sporadic riots — the 2005 riots being an extreme example. Being stopped for identity checks is a common experience for young people from ethnic minorities, as proved by the study done by the Open Society Foundations.³⁰ The conviction of being substandard citizens under constant suspicion and harassment by the police is now shared by a large number of these young members of ethnic minorities. Ethnic and racial tensions are partly produced by these relations. ***To stop the dreadful dynamic of confrontations and violence, a high-level national symposium with representatives of police forces, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from youth in suburbs, key political actors, and academics should be organized to build a shared diagnosis of the situation and revise the practices of stop-and-search.***

30 Open Society Foundations (OSF), *Profiling Minorities: A Study of Stop-And-Search Practices in Paris*, 2009, www.soros.org/initiatives/justice/articles_publications/publications/search_20090630.



Appendix: Glossary of Terms

Immigrants: Persons born abroad with a foreign nationality at birth. This definition excludes French citizens born abroad (children of expatriates, former colonizers).

Descendants of immigrants: Persons born in metropolitan France with at least one immigrant parent.

DOM native born: Persons born in one of the French overseas departments.

Descendants of DOM native born: Persons born in metropolitan France with at least one parent born in a DOM.

Mainstream population: Persons who are not immigrants or descendants of one or more immigrant(s) or who are not DOM native born or descendants of one or more DOM native born. Most of the mainstream population is born in metropolitan France with two parents born in metropolitan France, but the group also includes French citizens born abroad (repatriates from the former French colonies or children of expatriates).

Foreigners: Persons without French citizenship.



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