

POLICY BRIEF | VISITING SCHOLAR SERIES

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE A MINORITY IN FRANCE?

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Dr. Beaman spoke at the SMU Tower Center event, “Citizen Outsider: Children of North African Immigrants in France” Sept. 24, 2018.

STATEMENT OF ISSUE

In France, all individuals are supposed to just be French. No other identities – whether they be ethnic, or racial, or religious – are supposed to matter. France does not collect statistics related to racial and ethnic origins. That’s what distinguishes France from the United States or other plural societies. Yet France is an ethnically diverse society, due to its long history of immigration and colonialism around the world. According to some estimates, about 26 percent of second-generation immigrants are of North African origin (meaning the former French colonies of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco). Amid growing anti-immigrant sentiment and Islamophobia across Europe, how do individuals whose parents migrated to France from these former French colonies feel as minorities in France?

KEY FINDINGS

- France is uncomfortable with the multicultural nature of its society. Because of this, “visible minorities” like children of North African immigrants are often treated like foreigners or second-class citizens. They are “citizen outsiders” – members of a society in a legal and formal sense yet continually kept on the margins of that society. They are denied cultural citizenship to be accepted as French by others.
- Second-generation North African immigrants who are middle-class and upwardly-mobile compared to their immigrant parents still experience marginalization and discrimination because of their ethnic origin. France has a growing group of citizens who despite doing everything “right” cannot seem to be seen as complete French citizens. While their educational and professional successes might suggest a triumph of France’s Republican ideology that downplays differences among her citizens, the continued exclusion of and discrimination towards adult children of North African immigrants belie this straightforward conclusion. This suggests the marginalization in France is not just based on socioeconomic status.
- Even though France does not acknowledge race or ethnicity, minorities feel that they are treated differently because of their race or ethnic origin. Minimizing race, and therefore racism, perpetuates the idea that race and ethnicity do not affect life chances or outcomes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Public policy should focus on marginalization and discrimination based on race and ethnic origin, not just socioeconomic status.
- France should provide a mechanism to collect statistics and data on the multicultural nature of its population.
- Increased representation of non-white individuals in government and arts and entertainment will increase visibility of non-white individuals in mainstream French society.

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