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*As French as Everyone Else? A Survey of French Citizens of  
Maghreb, African and Turkish Origin* by Sylvain Brouard,  
Vincent Tiberj (review)

Alec G. Hargreaves

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SYLVAIN BROUARD and VINCENT TIBERJ, *As French as Everyone Else? A Survey of French Citizens of Maghreb, African and Turkish Origin*, translated by Jennifer Fredette (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011). Pp. 152. \$23.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY ALEC G. HARGREAVES, Emeritus Winthrop-King Professor of Transcultural French Studies, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL; e-mail: [ahargreaves@fsu.edu](mailto:ahargreaves@fsu.edu)

In recent decades, Muslims in France have been treated with considerable and growing suspicion. Compared with other minority groups, they are widely perceived as less easy to integrate, more inclined to challenge or reject prevailing norms such as the code of *laïcité* (governing the separation of the French state from organized religions), and driven by a spirit of *communautarisme*, i.e. ethnic factionalism inimical to social cohesion and the integrity of the French nation. These perceptions of Muslims have come to the fore amid broader debates under the umbrella term of “immigration,” the loose usage of which has often engendered confusion and imprecision. In popular thinking, it has often been assumed that all persons perceived as originating in predominantly Islamic countries are Muslims and that they are by the same token in some degree aligned with headline-grabbing extremists. Assumptions of this nature were tested in 2005 by Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj in a survey of attitudes and opinions among the minority ethnic groups in which most Muslims in France have their origins, i.e. immigrant populations originating in the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa, and Turkey. Identical questions were put to both a sample of French citizens originating in those regions and a control group representing the French population as a whole, thus facilitating comparisons between norms characteristic of minority ethnic groups and those prevailing more generally in France. The minority ethnic sample was multi-generational in nature, including immigrants in the true sense—defined by Brouard and Tiberj, in line with common practice among social scientists and state-run data-gathering systems, as persons born abroad without the nationality of the country in which they now reside—and descendants of immigrants who, born in France, were natives of the country to which their forbears had migrated. All of those surveyed held French citizenship: in the case of immigrants this resulted from a naturalization procedure, which had required them to apply to become French, while their children and grandchildren were automatically citizens of France by virtue of being born there.

Comparison of the responses elicited from the minority and control group samples found that in many respects the differences between them were quite

small. In his Foreword to the French edition, Pascal Perrineau summarizes this aspect of the findings as follows:

These French citizens with immigrant backgrounds are less religious and more receptive to religious pluralism than some have thought; they are not political dissidents; they have not fallen into a “welfare culture”, having forgotten the values of hard work and ambition; their morals and their behavior suggest a degree of open-mindedness; and they are aware of the difficulties of integration even though they maintain close relations with other French people. In these respects, we can consider this population “as French as everyone else,” and we can see how this study undermines a whole series of banal commentary and stigmatizing clichés that center on these citizens with immigrant backgrounds. (p. xiv)

This is not to say that there are no differences between the minority and majority ethnic samples. The survey found lower levels of tolerance towards homosexuality, less openness to gender equality, and higher rates of anti-Semitism among the minority ethnic sample compared with the control group. Yet homophobia, sexism and anti-Semitism are by no means universally shared by minority ethnic respondents, nor are they unheard of among the majority ethnic population, as is amply attested by aspects of recent debates over *la théorie du genre* and court convictions handed out in trials such as those of former Front National leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. As Brouard and Tiberj rightly observe, minority ethnic respondents

cannot be characterized as a homogeneous group any more than the rest of the French can, contrary to what the very notion of *communautarisme* presupposes. The disputes over values (racism, authoritarianism, anti-Semitism, sexual intolerance, etc.) *that cross French society as a whole do not spare the new French among them*. From this point of view, they still seem French like the other French, like everyone else. Their diversity trumps their unity. (p. 114; emphasis in the original)

These findings are important and thoroughly deserve to be made available in translation to readers in the English-speaking world, where misperceptions of the issues at stake are at least as widespread as in France. But the English-language edition is ill-served by Paul Sniderman’s Foreword, which overstates the originality of the book and seriously misrepresents its contents. Sniderman begins by summarizing stereotypical ideas of Muslims in France as fundamentally different and determinedly distant from the rest of the population. After asking how accurate such notions might be, Sniderman writes: “Until this path-breaking book, we have not known even approximately the right answers to these questions” (p. vii). This is quite

untrue. Since the 1980s, a wealth of scholarly research and a significant body of commercially produced survey data have been published on these matters. In a number of cases, these draw on parallel samples of minority ethnic and/or Muslim respondents on the one hand and the general population on the other. Examples of parallel sampling include a major social science survey directed by Michèle Tribalat in 1992 entitled “Mobilité géographique et insertion sociale” (MGIS) and various opinion soundings conducted since 1989 by organizations such as IFOP, CSA and IPSOS. Earlier investigations of this kind are acknowledged by Brouard and Tiberj. Their 2005 survey, entitled “Rapport au politique des Français issus de l’immigration” (RAPFI), greatly extends, enriches and nuances earlier findings, offering a richer body of data than had hitherto been available concerning the attitudes of persons of Muslim heritage on a wide range of issues. But contrary to Sniderman’s suggestion, the RAPFI survey does not break fundamentally new ground. And while it is true that the results of most earlier studies have been published in full only in French, a first-rate synthesis of them has been available in English since 2006, when Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse published *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press), which includes insightful discussion of the RAPFI survey and numerous other pieces of scholarly and commercial research.

Sniderman is equally wide of the mark when, describing the parallel sets of respondents on which the RAPFI survey is based, he writes: “One drew on a sample of native French, the other of ‘Muslim immigrants,’ both as representative in the strict sense as possible” (p. viii). The terms used here and throughout the Foreword by Sniderman to distinguish between the control group and the sample of immigrant origin misrepresent in quite fundamental respects the distinction between the two samples in the RAPFI survey. Only 39 percent of the minority ethnic sample were in the strict sense immigrants; most were in fact natives of France, born there as the children or grand-children of immigrants. It is therefore erroneous to state, as does Sniderman, that the two categories may be characterized on the one hand as “native French” and on the other as “Muslim immigrants.”

Moreover, Sniderman’s terminology is doubly misleading insofar as a major argument advanced by Brouard and Tiberj for the quality of their findings lies precisely in the fact that they did not limit their minority ethnic sample to self-declared Muslims but instead used the wider frame of national origins (irrespective of religious beliefs) combined with questions concerning religious beliefs to delineate more clearly than in the past the salience—or, in a significant proportion of cases, the weakness or absence—of Islamic affiliations among the populations concerned. Previous surveys confined to self-declared Muslims may sometimes have suggested a misleading picture of attitudes among more broadly based minority ethnic populations who by

virtue of their immigrant origins have been frequently but wrongly assumed to be united by shared beliefs associated with the Islamic world. In the RAPFI survey, only 59 percent of respondents from Maghrebi, sub-Saharan African and Turkish backgrounds declared themselves to be Muslims; around 20 percent said they had no religion, and a similar proportion (rising to over 40 percent in the case of respondents originating in sub-Saharan Africa) identified themselves as Catholics or Protestants. These important distinctions are unfortunately elided in Sniderman's mis-characterization of the minority ethnic sample as "Muslim immigrants."

If previous surveys that included only self-identified Muslims may be criticized for tending to over-represent the strength of Islamic beliefs among populations of immigrant origin, it could on the other hand be argued that by including only French citizens and excluding immigrants who have remained foreign nationals, the RAPFI survey may err in the opposite direction, suggesting a greater degree of similarity between immigrants and natives than actually exists. Census data show that only a minority of immigrants from the countries targeted in the RAPFI survey take French citizenship; most remain foreigners. The decision to take French citizenship may imply a higher degree of identification with attitudinal norms prevailing among the general population than is to be found among immigrants who remain foreigners. This would appear to weaken the representativeness of first generation (i.e. immigrant) respondents in the RAPFI survey, since the exclusion of non-French citizens leaves out of account the majority of immigrants originating in the regions concerned. This issue does not arise in connection with second- and third-generation respondents (the children and grand-children of immigrants), who account for 61 percent of the minority ethnic sample as a whole, since they, like practically all descendants of immigrants, are automatically French citizens. But as immigrants who have become naturalized French citizens account for 64 percent of all respondents from sub-Saharan African backgrounds (with second- and third-generation respondents accounting for only 36 percent of those originating from this region), the exclusion of non-French citizens (who account for the majority of immigrants) appears to make this portion of the RAPFI sample distinctly skewed. It is a pity that the authors provide no commentary on their reasons for excluding from their sample immigrants who have remained foreigners, nor on the effects this may have on the representativeness of their findings.

Jennifer Fredette's English translation of the original French text is generally quite accomplished. Her invention of the term "New French," suitably glossed, is a neat way of abbreviating the more convoluted formulations used in the original edition to characterize the minority ethnic sample ("les Français d'origine africaine et turque," "les Français originaires d'Afrique et de Turquie," "les Français issus de l'immigration africaine et turque," "les Français d'origine immigrée," etc.). Fredette explains very knowledgeably

references to events, institutions and concepts that are liable to be unfamiliar to English-speaking readers. She wisely chooses to retain certain French terms (suitably glossed in English) in order to convey the specific resonance of terms such as *laïcité* and *communautarisme*, though it is a pity she does not do the same with *banlieue*, the English translation of which (“suburb”) has very different connotations from those of *banlieue* in French. Here and there, a few errors creep in. On pp. xvii and 117 the word “*inédit*” is wrongly translated as “unedited” when in the context of the French original it means “unprecedented” or “unique.” The “*démissions*” of Dounia Bouzar and Fouad Alaoui from the governing body of the Conseil français du culte musulman (CFCM) are wrongly translated as “dismissals” (p. 24) when they were in fact resignations. Some basic terms common in migration studies are also unfelicitously translated. For example, the rendering of “*issus de*” as “stemming from” results in the formal title of the RAPFI survey, “Rapport au politique des Français issus de l’immigration,” being misleadingly translated as “Attitudes towards politics of the French stemming from immigration” (p. 117), which could unfortunately be taken to mean that the study focuses on attitudes among the general population in France arising from immigration, whereas a more faithful translation would be “Political attitudes among French citizens of immigrant origin.” Throughout the methodological appendix, the translation of both “*flux*” and “*courant*” as “trend” wrongly suggests that their core meaning has to do with changes over time, whereas in the original French edition these terms serve primarily to make spatial distinctions, denoting population flows (“*flux*”) between countries of origin and places of settlement, and distinctive patterns (“*courants*”) that are characteristic of immigrant minorities originating in certain regions as compared with others.

Despite these minor blemishes, the publication of this English-language edition of the RAPFI survey is very much to be welcomed. It offers a valuable corrective to widespread misperceptions about Muslims in France and may be read with particular profit in conjunction with other works available in English such as that of Laurence and Vaisse.