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Unacceptable Realities: Public Opinion and the Challenge of Immigration - A Franco-American Comparison

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3 Unacceptable realities: public opinion and the challenge of immigration in a Franco-American comparison

Roger Waldinger

1 Introduction

At the turn of the twenty-first century, 'globalisation' is the order of the day. With international migration bringing the alien 'other' from Third World to First, and worldwide trade and communications amplifying the feedbacks travelling in the opposite direction, the view that nation state and society normally converge has waned. Instead, social scientists are looking for new ways to think about the connections between 'here' and 'there', as evidenced by the interest in the many things called 'transnational'. Those studying international migration evince particular excitement. Observing that migration produces a plethora of connections spanning 'home' and 'host' societies, these scholars proclaim the emergence of 'transnational communities' (see Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton Blanc 1992; Smith & Guarnizo 1998; Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt 1999; Levitt, DeWind & Vertovec 2003; and accompanying articles in International Migration Review 37:3).

If some scholars look at today's immigration and see home-place connectedness as its distinguishing feature, others examine the same reality and find that old country ties inevitably give way to new, just as in the past. As Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003) have argued in their recent eloquent defence of assimilation, Remaking the American mainstream, the attenuation of home place connections derives from the dynamics of the migration process itself. Immigration is motivated by the search for the better life, a quest that usually has no inherent relationship to assimilation. Only in some instances is assimilation self-consciously embraced; often, it is precisely the end that the immigrants wish to avoid. Nonetheless, the effort to secure a better future - find a better job, a safer neighbourhood, a higher quality school - confronts immigrants with the need to choose between strategies of an 'ethnic' or 'mainstream' sort. Insofar as the better future is found in a place where out-group contacts are more plentiful than in the neighbourhoods or workplaces where the newcomers begin, the newcomers are
likely to select ‘mainstream strategies’ – and thereby progress towards assimilation, whether wanted or not.

While diverging in particulars, the professional students of immigration see a world of migration as far more open than the era of mass migration of a century ago. Standing with their back at the national frontier and looking inwards, the students of assimilation argue that prejudice no longer confines immigrants to ethnic ghettos or enclaves, giving them far more choice than their predecessors possessed. Extending their vision to encompass both receiving and sending societies, the transnationalists argue that migrants are no longer compelled to break ties with friends and family left behind, but instead enjoy the option of living lives across borders.

However, neither camp has appeared to consult the nationals of the nation state societies on which the immigrants have converged, an important omission as the views of the nationals certainly have some bearing on the possibilities awaiting the newcomers. As it happens, the national peoples of the rich, immigrant-receiving democracies all want their national communities maintained. Keeping membership restricted is of strategic value, especially when the question is whether the wealthy society that attracts the poor. Selfishness is not the only motivation at work; however, the idea of the national community, understood as a broad, family-like, group of people responsible for taking care of one another, but not everyone outside the circle, is also an ideal. Whatever the motivations propelling the public, governments do what their people want, making strenuous efforts to control movements across the border. In 2001, the United States and France were joined by nineteen out of 48 developed countries sharing policies designed to reduce immigration, as opposed to only two with policies aimed at expansion (United Nations 2002).

Though immigration restrictions would seem successful, if evaluated in light of the quantities of poor people they deter, boundaries nonetheless prove leaky. Political frontiers do not naturally divide: regional integration is the first and easiest path, which is why controlling movements across the border requires so much effort. Natural and political barriers to migration notwithstanding, the economic disparities between rich and poor places are such that the benefits of migration often outweigh the costs. Restrictions also collide with the social processes of migration, such that once implanted, the activation of migration networks makes the cross-border movements of people hard to stop (Massey, Alarcon, Durand & Gonzalez 1987). As efforts to control borders never fully succeed, the rich democracies have all created the ‘illegal’ immigrant, whose arrival produces additional efforts at policing boundaries between foreigners who do and do not belong (Ngai 2004).

With the advent of international migration, aliens move from outside the state’s boundaries, entering the territory. Consequently, international migrations also yield a new contrast, this time opposing the people in the state with the people of the state. The presence of foreigners on national soil, and the questions of whether they should belong, and if so how, inevitably provide the grounds for contention (Waldinger 2007). In the liberal democracies of France or the US – as opposed to the more despotic labor importing countries found in the Persian Gulf or East Asia – entry into the territory, whether legal or illegal means, gives migrants a capacity to claim rights not available on the other side of the border. While foreign persons on national soil may have some rights – often more than many nationals want – they usually do not enjoy the full set of rights to which citizens are entitled; nationals often want to maintain that difference, for reasons having to do with both self-interest and values, namely, preserving citizenship’s symbolic importance. In democracies with established histories of immigration; birth on the territory yields citizenship, regardless of the place of one’s parents’ birth or the citizenship that the parents hold (Hansen & Well 2001). While elites may understand that birthright citizenship is a key to effective integration, the public does not necessarily share this point of view, thinking that citizenship should result from deliberation and commitment, not just the accident of birth. Indeed, these views are perceptible to political entrepreneurs, who, on both sides of the Atlantic, have sought means to overturn birthright citizenship. While unsuccessful thus far, the campaigns against birthright citizenship do highlight the desire, at least among a part of the public, to build walls, not only around the frontier, but within the country as well.

Beyond the strictly political issues, involving rights and membership, are issues related to cultural belonging (Koopmans et al 2006). The sociological studies of assimilation, conducted on both sides of the Atlantic, show that the Western democracies remain quite capable of nationalising their foreigners. It is certainly the case that the immigrants to the US are turned into Americans (Alba & Nee 2003); survey data suggest that the same holds true in France (Brouard & Tiber 2006). Nonetheless, foreign-born and foreign-origin persons often retain at least some attachment to the place of origin and its culture and politics – and usually more than many nationals think they should (Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004). While preaching assimilation, the nationals do not always practise acceptance; in insisting on immigration control, they also tell the immigrants that they were never really wanted. Experiencing rejection, the immigrants and their descendants find reason to activate ethnic ties and identities that they might otherwise have abandoned. The end result is a reactive cycle, in which the
legitimacy of home country affections and cultural practices is a subject of ongoing conflict.

Thus, for the liberal democracies of both the old and new worlds, the advent of international migration produces an unending set of social dilemmas. But if there is a generic quality to these dilemmas, the ways in which the problems are framed, as well as the types of responses they elicit are inevitably affected by the historical specificities of the places on which the immigrants converge. Among the range of possible comparisons, the contrast between France and the US would seem ideal. On the one hand, the long-term realities in France and the US make for especially significant similarities: both countries have experienced relatively high levels of immigration for much of the past hundred years; in both countries, citizenship is relatively easy for foreigners to obtain and it is provided automatically to the children of foreign-born parents who are themselves born in the reception country (Horowitz & Noiriel 1992).

On the other hand, mythology divides the two countries – with the US, but not France, a self-proclaimed country of immigration (Green 1999). While the US is far from the communitarian model so often perceived from the European side of the Atlantic, the national mythology may make it easier for the Americans, as compared to the French, to accept ethnic attachments among the immigrants. Although the American mythology is contested, competing with a variety of ethnoregional, as well as racist, national self-images (Huntington 2004), it might lend itself to a more positive assessment of immigration’s impact than is true on this side of the Atlantic.

In this chapter, I will argue that opinion towards immigration issues divides precisely along these lines of generic vs. historical conditions. In both immigrant receiving societies, the ‘ethnic majority’ – what might be called ‘les Français de souche’ in France and ‘third-generation whites’ in the US – advocates a more tightly bounded society, involving tougher controls at the national frontier, as well as the internal boundary separating nationals from foreign-origin or resident persons living on the territory. By contrast, ethnic majorities in the two countries differ greatly, both in expectations for cultural change among the immigrants and in their assessment of immigration’s impact. As I will show, the Americans are more supportive of ethnic pluralism than are the French, though in a not fully predictable way. In both countries, ethnic majorities do not view immigration as yielding positive effects. But the average response masks great internal differences, with American views clustering towards the modestly negative and French views being highly polarised.

2 Data, variables, analysis

This chapter seeks to develop this comparison through the analysis of public opinion, using data collected by the 2003 International Social Survey Program module on National Identity. The ISSP surveyed 37,102 individuals in 31 countries, including France, the US and all of the major immigrant-receiving countries of the developed world. The sample included 1,669 respondents in France and 1,216 in the US. The survey asked questions about respondents’ citizenship as well as the citizenship of their parents at the time when the respondents were born. I have used this information to distinguish three generational categories:

- first generation: respondents who are not citizens of the country of residence
- second generation: respondents who are citizens of the country of residence, but with at least one parent who was not a citizen of the country of residence at the time of the respondents’ birth
- ‘third generation or more’: respondents who are citizens of the country of residence, both of whose parents were citizens of the country of residence at the time of the respondents’ birth.

Respondents falling into the categories of the first and second generations are used for the purpose of providing statistical controls only; sample sizes, especially for the first generation, tend to be small, making results unreliable; furthermore, the samples are probably biased against respondents unable to answer in either French or English. For practical reasons, therefore, I focus on respondents falling into the third generation or more category. Substantive considerations point in the same direction. For better or worse, it is this part of the public whose opinions exercise the greatest influence in the political arena; their views are equally crucial in determining the social and cultural environment that foreign-born or foreign-origin persons are likely to encounter.

Unfortunately, the ‘third generation or more’ category is a statistical construct, at some distance from the sociologically relevant category of ‘ethnic majority’, linking ancestry (real or putative) to social and political domination. Given the histories of immigration on both sides of the Atlantic, it seems clear that, in both countries, respondents falling into the third generation do not all or evenly belong to a sociological ethnic majority. While the ethnic majority has often proven to be expansible – extending its boundaries to encompass persons of foreign-origin – not all boundaries have proven equally flexible. In particular, the ethnic majority of the US has not yet sufficiently expanded to include African-Americans. For the purposes of this chapter, I
consequently compare third generation or more respondents in the US who categorise themselves as 'white' with third generation or more respondents in France (for whom the survey provides no racial or ethnic self-categorisation). I concede that this particular choice of categorisation is open to dispute. Further, categorisations of this sort can be essentialising, imposing a rigidity that everyday social life does not provide. On the other hand, the same could be equally said about all of the categories that we habitually use, without ever giving them a second thought.

Comparing French and American views towards a broad range of immigration issues, I ask two sets of questions. First, do French and American views differ, both before and after applying controls for background characteristics and views towards flows of foreign goods and foreign ideas? When seeking to answer this question, I pool the responses from all the French and American respondents. Second, are the factors that affect the opinion towards immigration similar or different in the two countries? When seeking to answer this question, I analyse French and American respondents separately.

For the most part, I work with a standard model, taking into account the age, sex, marital status, place of residence, education, religion, and political orientation of respondents. I distinguish urban residents as those living in a large city, as contrasted to others. I similarly distinguish respondents reporting no religious affiliation from all those respondents who report a religious affiliation of all types. Political orientation corresponds to political party preference, whether left, right, or centre, as coded by the survey. As the dependent variables are all dichotomies, I use logistic regression.

While demographic and socio-economic characteristics are likely to be influential, views towards immigration may be related to attitudes towards other types of global flows, whether of goods or ideas. As the economists note, free flows of people should yield the same positive impacts as free flows of goods or ideas; on the other hand, if it is globalisation that nationals find disturbing, negative attitudes towards trade or foreign ideas or cultural influences should be correlated with negative attitudes towards immigration, independent of any xenophobic effects. French respondents are a good deal more supportive of trade than are their American counterparts: 62 per cent of Americans favour limiting the import of foreign products, as opposed to 54 per cent of the French (a difference which is statistically significant). By contrast, 44 per cent of French respondents as opposed to 14 per cent of American respondents think that increased exposure to foreign films, music, and books is damaging to the national culture. Responses to these two questions are added to all of the statistical models on which I report in this chapter.

Building on the discussion above, the chapter draws on a variety of questions asked in the 2003 National Identity Survey to move from external to internal dimensions of the phenomenon. At the external level are issues of migration control.
- Should the number of immigrants coming to the country be increased or decreased?
- Should the country take tighter measures to control illegal immigration?
Boundaries are never watertight; hence, policies at the external level need be supplemented by internal policies distinguishing nationals from persons on the territory who are either born or originate in some other country. Internal policies involve rights and citizenship:
- Should legal immigrants in the country enjoy the same rights as citizens?
- What policies should influence access to citizenship for foreign-origin persons born or raised on the territory?
As international migration is not just a political, but also a social phenomenon, the advent of a population of alien origins, but often accepting national norms and aspiring to national membership, generates conflict over the range of acceptable, social differences. While responding to these differences is sometimes a matter of policy, it also entails a purely social component:
- Should ethnic minorities be given government assistance to preserve their traditions and cultures?
- Is it better for society if ethnic and racial minorities blend into the larger society or should they maintain their distinct customs and traditions?
- Can people who do not fully share the national culture ever fully become national?

Last, immigration produces a variety of effects, of which the most important seem to be economic and cultural. Regardless of the dimension, impacts can be seen as positive or negative:
- Immigrants are generally good for the economy.
- Immigrants take jobs away from people born in the country.
- Immigrants improve the country by bringing in new ideas and cultures.
- Immigrants increase crime rates.

For the first three sets of questions – pertaining to migration policy, citizenship policy, ethnic pluralism and assimilation – I have recoded all responses to generate a series of dichotomous variables: respondents are coded as either agreeing or disagreeing with the question (that immigration should be reduced, for example). As explained below, I have
used factor analysis to identify a common factor underlying views of immigration's impact.

3 Findings

Migration control: Employing a commonly used question, the survey asked respondents about their views regarding the desired size of the immigrant flow: should it be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same, decreased a little, or decreased a lot. As shown in Figure 3.1, French and American third generation or more respondents answered in strikingly similar terms: 67 per cent of the US respondents and 72 per cent of the French respondents thought that immigrant flows should be reduced, a difference that was not statistically significant. A regression controlling for background characteristics and views towards trade and towards foreign flows of ideas found that French respondents were significantly more likely than their US counterparts to prefer that immigrant numbers be reduced. But if the French were more restrictionist than the Americans, the difference was relatively slight: after controlling for all factors, the predicted probability that French respondents wanted flows to be reduced was three out of four, as opposed to two out of three among the Americans. In both countries, majorities of the ethnic majorities want less, not more, immigration.

Likewise, French and American respondents responded quite similarly when asked whether their country should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants. Almost three quarters of American respondents, and just over two thirds of French respondents answered affirmatively, a difference that was not statistically significant. A regression for the background factors mentioned above confirmed the convergence in opinion between these two groups. After controlling for all factors, the predicted probability that Americans would endorse stronger measures towards exclusion was 0.76; among the French the predicted probability was 0.72. Again, opinions agree in favour of more stringent efforts to keep boundaries watertight.

Focusing on the impact of ideological factors underscores the strength of the convergent factors in both countries, as can be seen from Figure 3.2. Among Americans, left-wing respondents are less likely than right-wing respondents to advocate a reduction in immigration, but they do not differ from their centrist counterparts. In France, the ideological gap is much greater, yielding significant differences between left and centre, as well as centre and right. But in both countries, there is majority support on the left for reducing immigrant numbers. By contrast, when the question turns to efforts aimed at excluding illegal immigrants, right and centrist views diverge more sharply in the US than in France. But in both countries this question too reveals a basic consensus across the ideological divides: majorities on both right and left and in both France and the US want their governments to do more to keep out the unwanted.

Rights and citizenship: If French and American respondents strongly support a reduction in immigration and more vigorous efforts to exclude illegal immigrants, they tend to take a somewhat different position when asked about the boundaries separating nationals from foreign-born or foreign-origin persons living on national soil. As shown in Figure 3.3, both French and American respondents prefer clear-cut
Figure 3.3 Immigrants rights and citizenship policy: predicted probabilities of agreement

- No controls US
- No controls France
- Controls US
- Controls France

Lines when asked whether legal immigrants lacking citizenship should have the same rights as citizens: just over a third of the American respondents, and just over 40 per cent of the French respondents voiced support for equality of rights. Although this difference was not significant, application of controls found that French respondents were more likely to support equality of rights, at conventional levels of statistical significance.

While voicing support, both for external barriers and for internal barriers dividing citizens from foreigners, majorities among both American and French respondents favour relatively easy access to citizenship for children, who are either born in the country or have at least one parent who is a citizen. Before controls, American respondents are significantly more likely than the French to think that children born in the country to non-citizen parents should have the right to become citizens; that difference, however, loses significance after the application of controls. Both before and after controls, Americans are significantly more likely than the French to think children born abroad to at least one parent holding French or American citizenship should have the right to become citizens. Again, however, the differences between the two groups seem far less important than the similarities.

Thus, in both France and the US, citizenship and immigration policy seem to involve quite different dimensions, with popular views endorsing barriers to foreigners, but supporting long-established practices that have historically made for minimal legal differences between persons born or raised in the country, regardless of parents’ place of birth or citizenship. Further evidence of this pattern of common divergence across policy areas can be seen by examining the responses of those persons who endorsed exclusionary immigration policies. In both France and the US, respondents endorsing restriction, whether entailing reduced immigrant numbers or stricter control of illegal immigration, opposed equality of rights between foreigners and citizens. But in both countries, a majority of those respondents endorsing exclusionary immigration policies supported inclusionary citizenship policies, with particular support for access to citizenship for those foreign-born children with at least one citizen parent. Further confirmation comes from inquiring into the effects of political orientation. While left-wing respondents are the most in favour of birthright citizenship, majority support can be found across the political spectrum, both in France and the US, with a particularly strong propensity to endorse birthright citizenship for foreign-origin children when at least one parent is a citizen.

Multiculturalism and assimilation: As shown by the travails of the second generation in both the US and France, formal citizenship hardly guarantees acceptance. Historically, acceptance in both countries has been conditioned on cultural change, with the immigrants and their descendants expected to shed foreign habits, tastes, and attachments. As characterised by Nathan Glazer, the ‘American ethnic pattern’ of the earlier twentieth century accepted ethnic difference as long as it was voluntary and confined to the private spheres of family and community, a description that could equally well apply to France.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, one can clearly observe an American pattern quite different from the one discerned by Glazer.
more than a quarter century ago. As compared to the past, the new Americans seem relatively free to retain what they wish of the old country; on the other hand, they are still expected to master and take over native ways. Similarly, there is more room than previously for pluralistic identities, though it would appear that minority or ethnic identities are acceptable only as long as they are attached to a political identity defined and understood in fundamentally American terms. But does greater acceptance of ethnic difference imply support of a hard form of multiculturalism, in which immigrants may not only preserve traditions, but are helped to do so by government? Or does it simply pertain to the sphere of civil society in which ethnic minorities can come together as interest groups, to get things done, or as cultural groups, to celebrate ethnic holidays, but only as long as the activity is voluntary, initiated by the group itself?

Neither in the US nor in France do members of the ethnic majority show any enthusiasm for multiculturalism of the hard sort, as shown in Figure 3.5. When asked whether 'ethnic minorities [should] be given government assistance to preserve their customs and traditions', less than a fifth of both the French and the American respondents answered 'yes'. For all practical purposes, the application of controls left the probabilities of support for multiculturalism unchanged. Given the widespread opposition to multiculturalism, the ideological factors that usually exercise such powerful an influence have little effect: on this question, respondents at the political centre and political right agree, both in France and in the US. Whereas left-wing respondents in both

countries are more likely to support multiculturalism than those who are further to the right, support for multiculturalism is restricted to a small minority of respondents, even on the left.

Thus, Americans and the French have convergent views when asked about the role of the state in preserving minority customs and traditions: in both countries, the ethnic majorities are strongly opposed to state assistance. Of course, there is another possibility: namely, that states actively try to weaken minorities from their cultures and traditions, as was the case during the last great era of mass migration and its aftermath, when state institutions were busily transforming immigrants into nationals. Unfortunately, the survey did not include a question corresponding to this policy option; however, it did ask whether respondents adhered to traditional expectations for assimilation — in which minorities blended and adapted into the larger society — or whether they thought it would be better that minorities preserved their traditions and customs, in effect endorsing cultural pluralism. In both countries, the majority of third-generation or more respondents endorsed the assimilation option; in the US, however, just over 50 percent preferred assimilation as opposed to three-quarters in France, a difference that was statistically significant. Controls for background and other characteristics slightly widened the gap, which remained statistically significant. Both among the French and among the US members of the ethnic majority, ideology has relatively weak effects, with no significant differences between right and centre respondents in either country. Left and right do differ in both places, although controls for ideology underline the cross-cultural divergence: support for ethnic

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**Figure 3.5** Multiculturalism, ethnic pluralism, assimilation: predicted probabilities of agreement

![Graph showing predicted probabilities of agreement for government assistance to preserve traditions, preserve traditions not blend, and cannot fully become nationals.](image)

**Figure 3.6** Effect of political orientation: multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism (predicted probabilities)

![Graph showing effect of political orientation on state support for multiculturalism, cannot become national, preserve traditions, not blend.](image)
pluralism is actually lower among left-wing French respondents than among their right-wing US counterparts.

In societies characterised by civic nationalism, cultural assimilation has historically served as the pathway to political integration: by abandoning home country attachments and cultures, immigrants and their descendants gained entry into the national community. The connection between assimilation and civic nationalism would seem to be a logical one as well: where, by contrast, the prevailing orientation takes an ethnic nationalist form, ethnic retention by minorities seems to be more acceptable as well. On the other hand, the distinctions between nationalisms of an ethnic and civic kind are often overdrawn. As Rogers Brubaker has pointed out, civic nationalism implies a strong sense of peoplehood; if nationals think that members of the community need to share common values and memories are to be shared, they may endorse assimilation all the while thinking that attachments to a foreign culture may preclude belonging (Brubaker 2004). In this light, it is not surprising to find that the survey suggests that civic nationalism takes a very different form in the two countries. In the US most third-generation whites endorse assimilation, but reject the view that ‘it is impossible for people who do not share American customs to become fully American’. By contrast, the same view, reworded appropriately for the French context, received support of well over half of the French third-generation respondents – a difference that was statistically significant, remaining so after application of controls. The impact of political ideology, however, varies between the two countries, as can be seen in Figure 3.6. In the US, ideology has only mild effects, with left-wing respondents actually more likely than their counterparts in the centre to advocate an ethnomanalist view. By contrast, right and left are sharply divided in France, though the probability that left-wing respondents would advocate an ethnomanalist position puts them well above the level observed in the US.

Attitudes towards immigrants: In addition to inquiring into views towards state policies or preference for immigrant adaptation, the survey also asked about respondents’ assessment of the effects associated with immigration. The questions fall into two categories, one having to do with explicitly economic aspects, the second having to do with social or cultural aspects. In both France and the US, only a minority of ethnic majority respondents agreed that immigrants were good for the economy; likewise, a minority in both countries disagreed with the statement that immigrants increase crime. In the US, but not in France, a majority disagreed with the statement that immigrants’ ideas and culture do not improve the country. In France, but not in the US, a majority disagreed with the statement that immigrants take jobs away from natives. On three of the four questions – having to do with crime, the economy, and ideas or culture – the Franco-American gap is relatively small, with major disagreement emerging only in response to the question regarding job competition.

Although responses differ from one question to another, previous research suggests that there is a common, underlying view. Indeed, a factor analysis of these four items found a single factor, to which I first assigned a score, and then standardised, yielding a factor with an average of 100. High scores on the factor imply negative assessments of immigration’s impact; low scores on the factor imply positive assessments.

Average scores among French and American members of the ethnic majority barely differ. The convergence in average scores, however, hides very different patterns in the distribution of scores. As can be seen in Figures 3.7-3.9, Americans tend to cluster away from the extremes and towards the centre; by contrast, the views among the French are heavily polarised, with concentrations at the positive and negative ends, and a very strong tilt towards more negative assessments. The impact of ideology also greatly differs. In France, right and left respondents take almost exactly opposing views: left-wing respondents lean heavily towards a positive assessment of immigration’s impact; right-wing respondents tilt almost symmetrically to the other direction. In the US, by contrast, diverging political commitments yield views that are barely divergent and not statistically significant.

Other foreign flows: The advent of foreign people goes hand in hand with the arrival of foreign goods and ideas. While the residents of the rich democracies have been resistant to the free movement of peoples, they have been willing to accept, if not support, increasingly unrestricted movements of goods and ideas. The arrival of foreign people is of course more visible than the movement of foreign goods, not to
speak of the movement of foreign ideas, which is why it may spark the greatest opposition.

Nonetheless, one would expect that opinions towards freedom of movement — whether of people, goods, or ideas — might take a reasonably consistent form, such that people favouring free movement of either goods or ideas would be more accepting of free movements of people. In general, French and American responses reveal just such a pattern: persons who opposed limits on trade or who disagreed with the statement that foreign cultural influences were damaging to the national culture were likely to oppose tougher migration policies, support flexible citizenship policies, and endorse ethnic pluralism. On only one issue — opinions regarding multiculturalism — did views towards either aspect of freedom of movement have no impact on the answers provided by US respondents; among the French, by contrast, assimilation was the sole issue unrelated to views towards movement of goods or ideas.

On the other hand, the closer relationship seems to involve views regarding movements of goods and of peoples, as opposed to movements of ideas and peoples. As shown in Figures 3.10-3.11, which present predicted probabilities controlling for all other factors, opinion on issues
of migration policy shifts substantially, depending on whether one approves or disapproves of free trade in foreign goods. For example, among Americans who strongly agree with the statement that ‘a country should limit the import of foreign products’, the probability of thinking that immigration should be reduced is almost four out of five. Among their counterparts who strongly disagree with the same statement, however, the probability of supporting reduced immigration is barely two out of five. By contrast, views towards foreign cultural influences have more modest effects.

4 Conclusion

The turn of the twenty-first century has brought a world of mass migration, but this is a reality that the residents of the rich democracies do not like. Often wanting foreign workers, but having much less taste for foreign people who settle down, the residents of the rich democracies want their national communities maintained. As shown in this chapter, ethnic majorities in these immigrant democracies on the two sides of the Atlantic have remarkably convergent views. Majorities in both countries want fewer immigrants, rather than more; likewise, majorities want their governments to work harder at excluding the illegal immigrants who seek to evade controls. Only a minority thinks that immigration yields positive effects.

Preferring less immigration, rather than more, ethnic majorities in both France and the US also prefer sharp distinctions between legal immigrants and citizens. Theorists of post-nationalism may contend that citizenship does not matter, and that international human rights codes provide immigrants and their descendants with all the protections they need. While adjudicating post-national claims is a matter for a different discussion, it is worth noting that the nationals questioned for this survey strongly believe that immigrants do not deserve the full panoply of rights enjoyed by citizens – a view that, in and of itself, suggests that immigrant rights may be less inextricable than the post-nationalists think. By contrast, policies that have historically facilitated citizenship for members of the second generation were strongly affirmed by ethnic majorities in both democracies.

While ready to accept immigrants’ descendants into the political community of the nation, members of the ethnic majority are much less willing to accept an ethnic identity that is either separate from, or even an addition to, the core national identity. French and American respondents are resolutely opposed to the idea that their governments might promote multiculturalism. Opinion divides on the question of social or civic ethnic pluralism, with the French strongly opposed and

the Americans split; likewise, ethnic nationalism is more heavily endorsed among the French, though a sizeable minority of Americans take the same point of view.

Thus, established publics in the US and France have not responded to the new immigrant realities in exactly the same way. While retaining the same commitment to exclusion at the national frontier, there is a clear divergence as to the options that are acceptable for those immigrants who have settled down for good. While a study like this cannot shed light on the underlying factors that have produced this difference, variations in the long-term history of both nations would seem to be the most likely cause. In the US, immigration is part of the national mythology in a way that is not, and probably cannot be, true in France. Hence, in the US, division over immigration cross-cuts differences in political orientation and partisanship. For that reason as well, Americans are more willing to accept the possibility that immigrants will retain some degree of cultural difference, at least in the medium term.

These differences notwithstanding, it is hard not to note a fundamental, trans-Atlantic similarity, in large measure because immigration poses the same sort of social dilemma on both sides of the Atlantic. The foreigners seeking to cross national borders are just implementing the programme that assimilationists, whether folk or scholarly, clearly endorse: forsaking primordial ties to ethnic group and place in search of a better life somewhere else. But since a national community could not be maintained if foreigners were able to come and go as they pleased, nationals are ready to endorse illiberal means in order to keep out foreigners, who are only looking to better their condition, via efforts of their own. Moreover, once foreign-born numbers burgeon, a gap emerges between the people of the state and the people in the state. Believing in the idea of the national community, the nationals are also reluctant to provide membership to any and all who might happen to have crossed the border. Since immigration restriction in liberal societies inherently produces ‘illegal’ immigration, the commitment to external exclusion yields support for policies designed to exclude the least acceptable foreigners from the privileges enjoyed by the people both in and of the state. Moreover, the tension between internal inclusion and external exclusion renders the usual ideological divisions out of date. While left and right still divide on issues involving internal dimensions of inclusion, left and right fundamentally agree on the need to keep external boundaries controlled.

Immigration control, therefore, reflects popular opinion. No government, however, is ready to go as far as its people would like, which is why both French and Americans want policies that are more restrictive than those that currently exist. But the insistence that fewer immigrants would be better also sends an unwelcoming message to the
immigrants who have already arrived. Consequently, the influx of foreigners produces a dis-integrating response among nationals, who are not willing to accept the reality of immigration or the distinctive self-understanding of the foreign-origin population. Having been repeatedly told that they were never really wanted, people of foreign origin are not ready for the blending urged on them by the nationals.

Notes

1 The base N includes separate surveys conducted in the former West Germany and East Germany and among Jewish and Israeli Arabs.

2 Age is a continuous variable, marital status is a dummy variable, coded 1 if the respondent is married and 0 if other. Education is represented by the variables of less than high school, some college, college, high school completion is the omitted category. Religion is a dummy variable, coded 1 if the respondent reports no religion and 0 if other. Urban residence is a dummy variable, coded 1 if the respondent lives in a big city and 0 if other. Political orientation is represented by the dummy variables of left, coded 1 if the respondent belongs to a left party and 0 if other, and right, coded 1 if the respondent belongs to a right party and 0 if other; centre is the omitted category.

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