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Country profiles

Paris

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Publié le Saturday 8 March 2008

Modifié le Friday 11 July 2008

Fichier PDF créé le Saturday 12 July 2008

Demographics

In French administrative organization, Paris is a French department. The Ile-de-France region comprises eight departments, including Paris. The other departments in the region are Hauts-de-Seine, Seine-Saint-Denis, Val-de-Marne, Val-d'Oise Essonne, Yvelines and Seine-et-Marne (OSI 84).

The Parisian suburbs make up the areas with the highest proportion of Muslims in France. According to a 1999 census, 1,611,008 immigrants live in the Ile-de-France region. Of this figure, 466,608 are from the Maghreb, 238,984 from Sub-Saharan Africa, and 50,125 from Turkey. These three groups of immigrant populations comprise nearly 50% of the immigration population in the Ile-de-France region. Accurate data on the large numbers of immigrant descendants and children are unavailable (OSI 84).

The North-African population lives predominantly in the Seine-Saint-Denis department, Yvelines, and Val-de-Marne. Immigrants with Sub-Saharan origins mostly reside in the city center - in particular, the 18th, 19th, and 20th arrondissement and in three suburban cities: Bobigny in the Seine-Saint-Denis department, Vitry-sur-Seine in the Val de Marne department, and Cergy in the Val-d'Oise department (OSI 84-85).

The arrival of the first waves of Muslim immigrants coincided with alterations of Parisian living conditions. While many arrived to shanty-towns on the city's limits, later housing often lacked running water, and sanitary facilities. Migration of single men from Muslim countries (for example, Algeria) to the metropolis from the late 19th century to World War II, through the accumulation of short-term stays, contributed to the construction of relatively cohesive residential areas in the outlying areas of Paris, and the close suburbs of Saint-Denis and Aubervilliers (of the Saint-Denis department) and Gennevilliers (Hauts-de-Seine department) (OSI 84).

The demographics of Muslim and immigrant habitation remain today - examples include the 13th arrondissement, around the Place d'Italie, the Mosque of Paris, and the 18th arrondissement. The Strasbourg Saint-Denis area in the north central part of Paris maintains a heavily Muslim community, with a strong percentage of North-African immigrants.

Shantytowns, or bidonvilles have housed a sizable immigrant population. Locations in Paris' suburbs include Champigny, Nanterre, and Saint-Denis. By the late 1960's, shantytowns in Champigny alone housed around 14,000 people. These makeshift communities were destroyed (and relocated, rebuilt) from time to time. Renovation programs in the 1970's did not succeed in changing public perceptions about Paris' suburbs, and they are still considered to be places of crime, violence, and increasingly, places of Islamisation (Bouderon and de Perette 1988, in OSI 84).

Education

In 2001, France's first Muslim high school opened in the northeast Paris suburb of Aubervilliers, and now caters to over 100 pupils (IslamOnline 2007).

The Catholic Institute of Paris in conjunction with the Grande Mosque of Paris plans to begin a government-sponsored secularization project, expected to begin in January 2008. Thirty student imams are expected to take part in the two-semester courses to complete their religious training. The course, entitled "Religions, Secularism, Interculturality" will offer 400 hours of accredited instruction in

four subject areas - general culture, legislative matters, openness and the human sciences, and intercultural exchange (Religious Intelligence).

While disparities in educational training and experience exist for Muslims and immigrants in Paris, current city-based data is not widely available.

The French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools bans the wearing of overt religious symbols in French public primary and secondary schools (i.e. government-funded). The law is an amendment to the French Code of Education that expands principles founded in existing French law - especially the constitutional requirement of *laïcité*, the separation of state and religious activities. The bill passed through France's national legislature and was signed into law by President Jacques Chirac on March 14, 2004 and went into effect on September 2, 2004, at the beginning of the new school year (BBC UK 2004).

Further detail about the impact of this law on the French Muslim community and religious identity is available for review in the country profile for France.

Religious Life

There are over 75 Islamic mosques and prayer areas in Paris (IslamFrance). Among the most prominent ones in the vicinity include:

Grand Mosque of Paris (5th arrondissement) - Currently the largest mosque in Paris, it encompasses a prayer area, religious schooling, a library, conference room, restaurant and tea room. The Grand Mosque is headed by Dalil Boubakeur, an opponent of multiculturalism who works closely with the French government and national politics (Mosquee de Paris)

Adda'wa Mosque (19th arrondissement) - Led by the charismatic and widely followed Larbi Kechat, the Ad-Dawa mosque has a capacity for about 1,000 persons, but construction for a new mosque intends for it to be the largest in Europe. Regarded by many young people as a place of refuge against Islamophobia and discrimination, Kechat's following has been in large part due to the encouragement of dialogue, fostering of seminars, lectures, and discussion of contemporary issues of importance - such as literacy, HIV, women's rights, and modernity (Khedimellah).

Ar-Rahma Mosque (Saint-Denis) - The Jamaat-al-tablsh (Society for the progagation of Islam) is a pietist and prosthelyzing movement, whose religious instruction favors intensive religious practice, strict observance of rules, and non-concern with politics (Khedimellah).

The visibility of Islam in France has evolved considerably since the first waves of Muslim immigrants, and notably, the noticeable presence of religion in the public space. After World War I, in 1922, the French Government of Edouard Herriot decided to build a large mosque in Paris as a sign of gratitude for the involvement of Muslims in the war. Completed in 1926, the Muslim Institute of the Mosque of Paris, located in the 5th arrondissement, unquestionably remains the oldest organization. The Institute, supported by privileged links with the Algerian state, was intended to become a beacon and disseminator of Islamic culture, as well as a place of gathering for the community. It boasts the authority of 150 imams, and oversees the affairs of around 400 of the 1,800 mosque facilities in France. (OSI 2007; 10, 65-66).

Though the Paris mosque is the largest mosque in Paris, it is not the Islamic center most frequented by Muslims living in Paris and the surrounding suburbs. The Paris mosque is funded by the

contributions of its members and maintains close relations to the Algerian government (OSI 2002; 135-137). In 2003, the French government handpicked Dalil Boubakeur, the mosque's rector, to head the newly created Council of the Muslim Faith (MSNBC 2006).

In Paris, 68% of Muslims say that religion is an important part of their daily lives. This figure stands in stark contrast in comparison to 23% of the general population. These numbers do not reflect a correlation between religious and national identity; in polling where Parisian Muslims were not forced to choose between religious and national identity, they tended to associate themselves with both.

These results are in contrast with how the general public in France perceives Muslims' degree of loyalty; when asked directly whether they think Muslims living in France are loyal to the country, between 35% and 45% of the French responded positively. However, the overwhelming majority, 73% of Parisian Muslim residents themselves, maintained that Muslims are loyal to France (GWP 2).

On questions of morality, Parisian Muslims tend to be more socially conservative than the general public. For example, 18% of Muslims in the capital city believe that homosexuality is acceptable. Concerning abortion, 24% believe that abortion is morally acceptable (GWP 2007).

Asked whether or not violence is an acceptable moral response for a noble cause, based on a five-point scale, 77% of Muslims in Paris chose a low rating of either one or two. These numbers reveal the important step of dispelling common misconceptions on both sides in order to achieve greater understanding. Moreover, 66% of Muslims in Paris feel that fellow Muslims should be more involved in the politics of their country, compared to the actuality of involvement today (GWP 2007).

There are a number of major Muslim organizations located in Paris that operate as national umbrella organizations. Among them include:

APBIF (Association des Projets de Bienfaisance Islamiques en France) - Central focuses include intercultural charitable projects by Muslims in France, based on a Sunni model of piety.

CFCM (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman) - Politically charged, CFCM seeks to represent more than 3.5 million Muslims in France, and intervene on issues of religious life in France. Different components of the organization include the FNMF (the National Federation of Muslims in France), UOIF (Union of Islamic organizations in France), and the Grand Mosque of Paris.

UOIF (Union of Islamic Organizations) - Located under the umbrella of the CFCM, the UOIF is an Islamic federation launched in France in 1983, with reputed ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. It coordinates the actions of about 100 associations, and maintains ownership of approximately 30 mosques in major cities around France.

EMF (Etudiants Musulmans en France) - Created in 1989, the EMF prides itself on being an 'association made by students for students.' Objectives include inter-faith and inter-cultural approaches to challenges experienced by students, making an effort to fight for comprehensive advancement of students - academic, social, and personal, and encouraging the university setting as hospitable grounds for open dialogue and discussion.

Civic Life

Social exclusion and Islamic affiliation do not seem to be significant factors in the rise of radical Islamism in Paris. Evidence suggests that resentment of foreign policy is the most significant factor in

the increase of radical ideology, but governments are less comfortable with this conclusion, instead responding by putting additional pressures on communities that already feel under considerable pressure to change and conform. (NYIRI 2007; in Muslim Integration 39)

Data from a 2007 Gallup World Poll shows divide between the French secular mindset and Parisian Muslim opinion on the display of religious symbols. Veiling of the face is a divisive subject; 64% of the overall French population felt that removing the face veil is necessary to integrate members into society, compared to 18% of Muslims residing in the capitol. However, 54% of the same overall population felt similarly about the wearing of large, prominent Christian crosses.

With regard to whether or not Parisian Muslims have a favorable opinion of the French government, 40% of Muslims responded affirmatively - slightly more than the overall public. (GWP 2007)

Public Perception and Community Projects

In 2004, the Monitoring Centre on Discrimination from the University of Paris conducted an employment experiment. The University sent out different standard curricula vitae in response to 258 job advertisements for a sales person. The results found that the chances of getting a positive reply from employer, were five times less for a person from the Maghreb (EUMC 44-45).

The Institut du Monde Arabe (IMI) is an important institute in Paris focused on the Arab world. The IMI was established in 1980, when 18 Arab countries affirmed an agreement with France to establish an institute address cultural exchange. The IMI's aim, while not religiously focused, aims to promote cooperation and cultural exchanges between France and the Arab world. Programs and activities include Arabic classes, cultural events, and scientific and cultural information.

Incidents in Recent Years

(Unless otherwise noted, all of the below are sourced from BBC UK, 2007)

April 2005: More than 20 people of African origin die in blaze in a dilapidated Paris hostel.

August 2005: Two dozen immigrants die in fires in run-down Paris apartment blocks. The incident simultaneously highlighted the inadequate housing conditions and squalor experienced by minorities in crowded Parisian neighborhoods, and drew attention to the growing number of undocumented immigrants in the city. (BBC UK, 2005)

October-November 2005: Beginning on October 25th, largely immigrant communities in north-east Paris are hit by riots after two male youths of North African origin were electrocuted in an electricity substation in the Parisian suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. Witnesses state that the two boys were being chased by police, however, authorities deny that they were being chased by police at the time. Civil unrest unfolds in Paris' urban suburbs after this incident; thousands of cars set on fire in riots across the country, and hundreds were arrested for their participation in the riots; curfews were imposed to quell the urban unrest. The riots escalated and spread to other cities, prompting the government to implement emergency measures to try to restore order. On November 14th, then President Jacques Chirac pledged to create employment and other opportunities for young people in an effort to prevent resurgence of urban violence.

March-April 2006: New youth employment laws sparked mass demonstrations in Paris and other cities across France. The law would have allowed employers to allow their employees under the age

of 26 a two-year trial period, but grant employers the right to end a contract without explanation during this period. Opponents of the law said it greatly disenfranchised youth seeking economic stability. As the protests gained support, the legislation was scrapped.

November 2007: Following the deaths of two teenagers whose motorcycles collided with police in the Paris suburb of Villiers-le-Bel, a second bout of civil rest enflamed many Muslim and immigrant Parisian youth. The families of the two youths killed in the encounter on November 26, 2007 say that the police intentionally rammed their motorcycle, fatally killing the two boys. Police however, deny this, saying that the vehicle was stolen, being driven at high speeds, and that the two teenagers were not equipped with protective headgear. Immediately after the incident, violent riots and clashes took place in and around Villiers-le-Bel; over 70 cars were burned, in addition to several shops, a library, two schools, and a police station (International Herald Tribune 2007).

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Acronyms

OSI - Open Society Institute

EUMC - European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia

INSEE - Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies)

GWP - Gallup World Poll