

**If the recorded mark below is <50%, we recommend you make an appointment to see your Tutor.**  
“The contemporary framing of the ‘immigration problem’ signals a broader right-wing shift in French politics” – Discuss.

The immigration problem in France is the supposed link between the rise of immigrants and the economic and social decline of the nation (Boubtane in Migration Policy Institute, 2022, France Reckons with Immigration Amid Reality of Rising Far Right.). To some scholars this has led to the rise in power and support for the far-right. The presentation of the ‘immigration problem’ in French politics is posed as a solution to achieving French exceptionalism and aligning with the values of the republic. As a result, the ‘immigration problem’ has become racialised, used to justify and instate racism and discrimination in the eyes of the republic, positioning it as a necessity in retaining French identity and culture. Accordingly, this essay seeks to discuss the validity of this claim. To begin, I will critically discuss the position of the left wing in the political landscape through questioning its ideologies. After which, I focus on the stigmatisation of Islam, assessing how this manifests in media. Before concluding, I explore the manner in which the ‘immigration problem’ manifests in political society, and has created social and physical divisions.

Despite the French government claiming to adopt and support a ‘colour-blind’ narrative in the political framework, through the racialisation of the immigration problem, the government manifestly fails to acknowledge their own biases. Supposedly, the ‘colour-blind’ narrative is intended to ignore race, yet in contradiction, the framing of the ‘immigration problem’ fixates on race and ethnic minorities, and exacerbates the persistence of racism. This is even the case where, even if ethnic minorities acquire French nationality, be it through birth or state granted, racism persists. Indeed, these (non-immigrant) French nationals are still treated as problems to society, by society itself and by extension politics. As

**Commenté [EM1]:** Please use the following in-text referencing system: (Name, year). So in this case: (Boubtane, 2022).

**Commenté [EM2]:** What is French exceptionalism? Briefly define.

**Commenté [EM3]:** Good point.

**Commenté [EM4]:** OK. But what is your take?

**Commenté [EM5]:** Good point.

a result, prevalent political ideologies are nothing more than right-wing ideologies as these effectively dictate the French political landscape. To the far right, nationality alone does not make one French, as there *is* a focus on racial and cultural differences, and this notion is widely supported by the French media and public. This, alongside the significance of laïcité in society, validates Khemilat's view that "religiosity becomes a new criterion of social differentiation, thereby replacing race" (Khemilat, 2019 cited in Rinaldi and Pirrone, 2021: 184). Ignoring race in society through a colour-blind lens leads to using religion to conceal prejudice mechanisms of racism, targeting French Muslims and people of colour. Consequently, left-wing support of the secular approach reveals a disregard for the racism in society and therefore reinforces the idea of the 'immigration problem' being a racialised concept.

**Commenté [EM6]:** Include full name: Fatima Khemilat

Alongside this racialised nature of the 'immigration problem', the rise in French exceptionalism has consequently led to the construction and stigmatisation of Islam and French Muslims – 'immigrants' – as a global and western threat to society. Given this, integration and assimilation into French culture has become increasingly difficult for ethnic minorities in France, particularly Muslims. This stigmatisation escalated particularly following the Charlie Hebdo republishing of the cartoon depicting an image of the Prophet Mohammed. The satirical attacks on religion and branding of Muslims as terrorists thus promotes the racist notions, targeting those they view as immigrants. Consequently, the publication of misinformation targets French Muslims, subjecting them to racism and forcing them to abandon their religious identity to escape oppression. This has caused the development of liberal and illiberal islamophobia that constructs stereotypical beliefs against Islam and Islamic culture, arguing that it opposes the culturally superior west. Here, the left support the inequality that persists in society, constructing their racist ideals as a 'pseudo-progressive theory' and equally reaffirming the stereotypical and racist notions of the right-wing parties (Mandon, Winter, 2017: 31). As a result, rather than accepting new republican multiculturalism, this has manifested into the need to integrate and assimilate into French society, and is used to justify the right-wing shift in French politics.

**Commenté [EM7]:** Again, explain what you mean by "the rise of French exceptionalism".

**Commenté [EM8]:** Define liberal and illiberal islamophobia

**Commenté [EM9]:** Mondon

Whilst one could argue that there are other causes to the right-wing shift in French politics, it is evident that the ‘immigration problem’ is the core focal point for the right-wing to instate their policies. This is particularly true when the majority of French people claim that ‘there are too many immigrants’ and call for a ‘strong leader to re-establish law and order’. It is evident that the focus on immigration in politics has reinforced Eric Ciotti’s idea of “French Guantanamo” where he claims that ‘french people are being “replaced” by foreign – Arab, black, Muslim – immigrants’ (Momatz, 2021, Politico). Furthermore, left-wing candidates being unsuccessful in gaining support higher than 10%, and being replaced by right-wing politicians, imposing their values on the media and news further evidences how French media dictates the political landscape of the country. With most media outlets following the narratives of reclaiming French identity and focusing on the ‘immigration problem’, it is undeniable that French politics aligns more with the right.

Commenté [EM10]: Reference?

Commenté [EM11]: French

Additionally, whilst reclaiming French identity and exceptionalism, it is clear that the colonial history and structures are still embedded into society, and the focus on France as a supreme nation reinforces such notions and again segregates and targets people of colour. This is perhaps most prominent in the banlieues and the increase in police violence towards the banlieue youth, who are typically immigrants and people of colour. The socialist government prioritised the issue of security in taking incidents and revolts seriously. This initiation of the urban policy starkly contrasts the approach of the governments following the 2002 election. The government promoted the view that the banlieues were a ‘threat’ to French society and initiated the use of urban violence causing a surge in police brutality towards citizens in the banlieues. The banlieue has become an increasingly ethnicised word ‘closely associated with insecurity and immigration’ and this is most recognisable in the aftermath of the 2005 riots following the death of Zyed and Bouna as they were fleeing from the police (Rey, 1999 cited in Dikec, 2007: 3). The Prime Minister claiming that they were involved in criminal activity and failing to act on this event

Commenté [EM12]: Good point.

led to the greatest expression of social discontent since 1968. Again, the media played a significant role in reconstructing and reinforcing the 'stereotypical ideas of people of immigrant origin as fundamentally menacing to the established social order', therefore demonstrating the way in which French politics has shifted to the right-wing and the significant role that the media and the government has in institutionalising and asserting such notions (Hargreaves, 1996 cited in Dikec, 2007: 3).

Ultimately, the 'immigration problem' is an undeniable demonstration of the shift to right-wing politics, particularly as this is founded on racist ideals and upholding the values of the French republic. Viewing immigration as a 'problem' and as a national issue causes it to be something that should be considered from both sides of the political spectrum, thus leading to the decline in left-wing political parties having a relevant place in the political landscape, and the abandonment of social equality and progressive reform. Alongside this, with the depiction of immigration and race in the media, there is a clear continuous rise in right-wing ideologies that have a significant impact on French politics and society.

## Bibliography

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Commenté [EM13]: Mondon

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