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Choices and Enrollments in French Secondary and Higher Education: Repercussions for Second-Generation Immigrants

YAËL BRINBAUM AND CHRISTINE GUÉGNARD

In France, the proportion of second-generation immigrants enrolling in tertiary education has increased as education has undergone a process of “democratization.” This article analyzes their postsecondary choices, access to tertiary programs, dropout, and transition to the labor market, compared to those of students of French origin. Youths of Portuguese origin are more likely to enter vocational higher programs concordant with their preferences and have better chances of completing a tertiary degree and finding a job. Despite their preference for selective vocational higher programs, some students of North African origin are diverted toward academic university courses, leading to higher dropout rates. This unequal access to higher education affects both degree completion and entry into the French labor market.

Introduction

The democratization of secondary education, along with the expansion of higher education, has decreased social inequalities in secondary education (Thélot and Vallet 2000). By contrast, there is increased social differentiation in access to higher education (Arum et al. 2007; Duru-Bellat and Kieffer 2008). While the increased access to university and diversification of tertiary programs have created new opportunities for young people from working-class and immigrant backgrounds, inequalities in secondary education have shifted to higher education (Selz and Vallet 2006). In the case of France, horizontal stratification and vertical stratification persist, with access to the *grandes écoles* becoming increasingly dependent on specific cultural resources (Givord and Goux 2007). This tends to ensure the reproduction of the elite (Albouy and Wanecq 2003).

In the French context, a growing number of children of immigrants enter higher education. However, their access and trajectories in tertiary education are not well known. Most recent studies have focused on school careers in secondary education. They have shown that both in Western Europe and in the United States children of ethnic minorities experience a substantial dis-

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advantage reflected in lower performance, higher dropout and class repetition rates, and concentration in the least prestigious tracks. Most of these educational inequalities are explained by social background (Heath and Brinbaum 2007). In some countries, such as Great Britain, Sweden, or France, the opposite trend obtains: controlling for social background, some second-generation immigrant groups benefit from an educational advantage.¹ Parental aspirations have a positive effect on children's educational achievement in secondary education (Kao and Tienda 1995; Vallet 1996; Brinbaum and Kieffer 2005) and may also affect their tertiary studies.

In France, the children of immigrants are more likely to be enrolled in vocational tracks than in academic ones. Second-generation immigrants more frequently obtain a technological or vocational *baccalauréat* than a general *baccalauréat* (Brinbaum and Kieffer 2009), which may also reduce their chances of completing a tertiary degree. Using the Céreq Génération 1998 survey, Alain Frickey and Jean-Luc Primon (2002) have shown that dropout rates from university are higher among second-generation immigrants, which may well have an impact on their subsequent transition to the labor market.

This article focuses on access to and completion of higher education depending on ethnic origin. At issue is whether second-generation immigrants make postsecondary study choices and obtain outcomes that differ from those of youths of French origin. Does ethnic origin have an impact on access to the different—selective or nonselective—types of tertiary institutions? What are the factors and mechanisms that account for dropout or success in completing higher education? And what impact do the latter have on labor market?

We focus on the careers of second-generation immigrants, that is, the children born in France whose parents are immigrants, compared to those of youths of French origin (whose parents are both nonimmigrants). All the second-generation immigrants included in our sample grew up and attended schools in France. We look at immigrant and social background to answer the following question: To what extent does the selectivity of higher education institutions influence educational achievements and subsequent outcomes on the labor market, broken down by gender and ethnic origin? To answer this question, we need longitudinal data. The Céreq Génération 2004 survey for the first time includes questions on postsecondary applications that can be compared to enrollment in tertiary institutions as well as to educational careers and labor market transition 3 years later. As revealed in a number of French studies, young people from immigrant families—particularly those from North African countries—face greater difficulties in the transition-to-

¹ See Vallet and Caille (1996), Felouzis et al. (2005), Rothon (2007), Brinbaum and Kieffer (2009), and Jonsson and Rudolphi (2011).

work process than do youths of French origin.² And while young people in general are particularly vulnerable in periods of economic crisis, the situation has worsened for second-generation immigrants, even though it improved for their counterparts of French origin between the 1998 and 2004 Céreq surveys (Joseph et al. 2008). So how are the transitions from higher education to work unfolding, in particular for second-generation immigrants?

In order to identify the connections between school career and access to the labor market and the effect that ethnic origin may have on them, we take into account both the choices made and the tracks and programs in secondary and higher education that individuals included in the sample went through. After presenting the data set and methodology, we describe the ethnic and class characteristics of the holders of each type of *baccalauréat*. Then, we compare applications with actual enrollments into different tertiary institutions broken down by ethnic origin and gender. Finally, we consider the consequences of these differences as far as dropout and entry into the labor market are concerned.

Data and Method

Our analysis is based on the longitudinal data of the Génération 2004 survey that was carried out by Céreq (the French Center for Research on Education, Training, and Employment) in 2007. This survey provides information on school careers in secondary and higher education and on the first 3 years on the job market. Céreq telephoned 65,000 individuals who left the French educational system between age 18 and 24 at various levels of education and entered the labor market the same year (2004). This is a nationally representative sample of secondary and higher education leavers in 2004. Among them, 19,000 students left higher education with or without a tertiary degree. We selected the sample of higher education leavers for our main analysis and worked on the whole Génération 2004 sample in the last part of the article, in order to estimate the effects of getting a tertiary degree on the risk of unemployment.

Second-Generation Immigrants

In order to identify second-generation immigrants and to compare them with young people of French origin, we use as indicators the country of birth for youths (France or out of France) and the nationality and country of birth for parents. The sample is divided into five groups. The first includes people born in France with parents of French origin. The second includes children born in France whose parents were both born in Portugal. The third consists of those whose parents were both born in a North African country (Algeria,

² See Brinbaum and Werquin (1998, 2004), Silberman and Fournier (1999, 2007), Frickey and Primon (2002), Frickey et al. (2006), and Meurs et al. (2006).

Morocco, or Tunisia). The fourth group gathers young people with one immigrant parent and one born in France (mixed population). The fifth group brings together the children of immigrants of other geographical origins (referred to as “others”). This last aggregate will be taken into account in logistic regression models but will not be presented in what follows, due to its heterogeneity. Since the focus of this study is on second-generation immigrants, individuals born abroad (1,513 persons) were excluded from the sample. Of the total number of higher education leavers, 12 percent were second-generation immigrants. Among them, young people whose parents came from North Africa and Portugal make up the largest subgroup (see table A1).

In order to take into account social and family background, we used as an indicator the highest occupation between those of the parents of the individual involved. We then established a hierarchy with five categories: the two parents are manual workers, one parent is a manual worker and the other one is a clerical worker or the two parents are clerks, one or both parents are in intermediate occupations (technicians or associate professionals), one or both parents are self-employed or craftsmen (independents), and one or both parents are in professional and managerial positions (see table A3). Immigrant parents belong more frequently to the working-class categories (manual workers and clerks). Among young people of North African origin, half of the parents are both manual workers, as are 24 percent of parents of young people from Portugal. In contrast, only 6 percent of the parents of youths of French origin are manual workers. Finally, lacking information on parental education, we also considered whether parents were—or had been—employed, unemployed, or retired; for mothers, we include whether they had ever been in the labor market. Among young people of North African origin, nearly 28 percent of fathers were retired and 50 percent of mothers were housewives who had never been employed. In contrast, 71 percent of mothers and 86 percent of fathers coming from Portugal are employed (only 8 percent are housewives and 6 percent are retired fathers).

***Baccalauréat*—the Key to Higher Education**

In France the *baccalauréat* is the key diploma allowing access to institutions of higher education. Tertiary education has expanded considerably as a result of the increasing number of pupils in secondary education, the rising number of *baccalauréat* holders, and the growing social demand for studies. Today nearly half of young people from immigrant families have a *baccalauréat*. What kind of educational careers can they expect in tertiary institutions? While the *baccalauréat* operates as the gateway to higher education, does the likelihood of accessing diverse institutions vary according to ethnic origin?

In line with the findings of the analyses carried out on the 1995 panel, young people leaving tertiary education in 2004 had obtained different types

of *baccalauréats*. While the number of *baccalauréat* graduates has increased, there are still considerable disparities regarding the distribution of types of *baccalauréat*. And while officially any *baccalauréat* makes one eligible for entering higher education, the type of *baccalauréat* obtained is increasingly correlated with a set of social characteristics.

In the mid-1980s, the Ministry of Education defined as a goal that 80 percent of each generation should reach the level of the *baccalauréat*, and in 2005 the objective of 50 percent of tertiary graduates was adopted. The vocational *baccalauréat* was created in 1985, especially for working-class students who used to obtain lower vocational diplomas such as the CAP or BEP.³ However, the system remained highly selective. The general *baccalauréat* retained its preeminent status (the scientific track being the more prestigious) and remained the main track leading to tertiary education. The technological *baccalauréat* is less valued but allows students to stay in the academic track and provides access to university. As a growing number of students from diverse social backgrounds complete secondary education, inequalities between groups defined on the basis of parental occupation now revolve around the type of *baccalauréat* one gets and are larger than those linked to immigrant background: 69 percent of children of professionals obtain general *baccalauréats*, as against less than 20 percent of children of working-class parents (Duru-Bellat and Kieffer 2008). There is a hierarchy of *baccalauréats* based on prestige and the specific social and professional prospects they provide (Prost 1986). The different tracks leading to this diploma do not offer the same higher education opportunities. Currently, 99 percent of general *baccalauréat* graduates, 76 percent of technological *baccalauréat* holders, and 23 percent of vocational *baccalauréat* graduates embark on higher education studies (Péan 2010), and general *baccalauréat* graduates are better equipped to take general university courses than are those who hold other *baccalauréats*.

As a result of earlier tracking, second-generation immigrants are less likely to obtain the general *baccalauréat* than are youths of French descent (table 1). Young people of North African or Portuguese origins are more likely to be holders of a technological *baccalauréat*: 39 percent, as against 29 percent of those of French origin (including 36 percent of young people with a working-class background). Moreover, those of North African descent are less likely to get a general *baccalauréat* and more likely to acquire a vocational *baccalauréat*, as a result of their school performance and of the tracking that makes them deviate from their initial aspirations.

While increasing numbers gain access to higher education, it is worth

³ The CAP is the Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle (vocational training certificate), and the BEP is the Brevet d'études professionnelles (vocational studies certificate). At the end of the *collège*, pupils opt for vocational tracks to prepare a CAP or a BEP during 2 years; these two courses are listed as ISCED 3C in the international nomenclature. Until 2008, both certificates provided evidence of having reached the first level of vocational training, which allows entry into the workplace or further study toward a vocational *baccalauréat*.

TABLE 1
Baccalauréat OBTAINED IN SECONDARY EDUCATION AMONG TERTIARY LEAVERS (%)

Origin	<i>Baccalauréat</i>			Total
	General	Technological	Vocational	
Portugal	51	39	10	100
North Africa	46	39	15	100
France	66	29	5	100
Working class	56	36	8	100

SOURCE.—Céreq Génération 2004 survey, higher education leavers.

NOTE.—Working class: French parents' employed as manual workers and clerks.

underlining that the second-generation immigrants who obtain a *baccalauréat* have already been selected. In fact, many second-generation students dropout and leave secondary education without any qualification (Okba and Lainé 2005; Brinbaum and Kieffer 2009). As a general matter, the children of immigrants, who often have a working-class background, tend to undertake shorter educational careers.⁴

Among the whole sample of school leavers, nearly 16 percent of young people left the educational system in 2004 without any diploma; 39 percent of young men and 25 percent of young women of North African origin did so, as against 16 percent of young men and 5 percent of young women of Portuguese origin (fig. A1). The educational careers of these second-generation immigrants of Portuguese origin are similar to those of youths of French origin from the same social background. As for the relative failure of second-generation North African immigrants, it reflects their diversion into vocational tracks at the upper secondary level, which is at odds with their original aspirations (Brinbaum and Guégnard 2012). This discrepancy may well be one of the reasons for which many of them end up dropping out.

Postsecondary Choices

The French higher education system is multitrack (Duru-Bellat et al. 2008) with four main components: universities, elite programs at the prestigious *grandes écoles* (access to which is regulated by a competition occurring after at least 2 years spent in “preparatory classes”), short vocational higher education programs, and specialized higher schools. The starkest contrast is between the universities (which admit all *baccalauréat* holders) and the extremely selective *grandes écoles*.⁵ Other higher education programs (lasting 2 or 3 years) are not directly accessible to all *baccalauréat* holders who wish to

⁴ See Brinbaum and Guégnard (2011) for the analysis of educational careers using the Céreq Génération 2004 survey.

⁵ The CPGE preparatory classes (*classes préparatoires*) prepare students for the *grandes écoles* in engineering and business schools (Calmand et al. 2009); those are highly selective and enroll mostly general *baccalauréat* holders with an outstanding academic record.

enroll, because the number of students is limited. Application to these programs involves a selection process mostly based on previous academic performance or on a competitive entrance exam. These include short vocational higher education programs leading to the Brevet de technicien supérieur (BTS) and the Diplôme universitaire de technologie (DUT), as well as specialized schools.⁶ In the academic year 2009–10, most of the more than 2.3 million students attending higher education in France—about 85 percent of all *baccalauréat* holders—were enrolled at universities (57 percent), while 15 percent were in vocational higher education programs (BTS and DUT), and only 4 percent were enrolled in preparatory classes to the *grandes écoles* (table A2). Today, 85 percent of *baccalauréat* holders do enter higher education.

During the year of the *baccalauréat*, any student who plans to enter higher education needs to fill out one or several application forms to be submitted to different institutions. Institutions screen applications, focusing mostly on students' school performance and type of *baccalauréat*, and decide whether the student will be offered admission; in some cases, they may invite the applicant for an interview or ask him or her to take a specific exam. Access to higher education thus involves a complex process of acceptance and rejection by all institutions other than universities and a final decision by the student, who may be offered a place at several institutions or be forced to change his or her initial plans.

In such a hierarchical system, all students are not equal before this filtering process. Information as to how the system operates and resources are unevenly distributed across families, and geographic constraints also limit educational choices, particularly for students from working-class backgrounds (van Zanten 2001) and for second-generation immigrants (Brinbaum 2002) whose parents lacked higher education. In addition, study costs vary across institutions, and, as practical matter, the most prestigious and most expensive options tend to be available only for the most privileged students (Boudon 1974; Bourdieu 1977; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997).⁷ Yet while students endowed with more social capital (acquired through their parents' education level and resources based on networks and support) are more likely to choose more prestigious programs, the aspirations to the tertiary studies tend to be higher for second-generation immigrants than youth of French origin with similar social background and school careers (Brinbaum and Kieffer 2005). This could also have an impact on their postsecondary education.

⁶ BTS and DUT are 2-year programs. The BTS (higher vocational training certificate) is run by secondary schools (lycées); the DUT (technological university diploma) is run by universities. In the international nomenclature, these two programs are listed as ISCED 5B. Specialized schools are tertiary vocational programs that last 2 or 3 years and provide training for future nurses, occupational therapists, school social assistants, and so on. In the international nomenclature, these programs are listed as ISCED 5B.

⁷ In 2010, tuition was free for BTS and CPGE in all the public lycées; tuition fees in business *grandes écoles* ranged between €4,500 and €11,000 per year, compared to €200 for the first year at university and DUT programs.

TABLE 2
APPLICATIONS TO HIGHER EDUCATION (%)

Origin	BTS	DUT	Specialized School	CPGE
Portugal	48	20	4	11
North Africa	44	23	3	8
France	37	22	5	17
Working class	36	21	10	13
General <i>baccalauréat</i> :				
Portugal	16	13	3	14
North Africa	24	25	2	8
France	16	22	4	23
Technological <i>baccalauréat</i> :				
Portugal	71	32	5	9
North Africa	62	27	5	10
France	73	25	6	7
Vocational <i>baccalauréat</i> :				
Portugal	NS	NS	NS	NS
North Africa	51	10	...	5
France	81	6	1	5

SOURCE.—Céreq Génération 2004 survey, higher education leavers.

NOTE.—Applications are known only for selective institutions and not for university. BTS = Brevet de technicien supérieur; DUT = Diplôme universitaire de technologie; CPGE = preparatory classes to the *grandes écoles*.

Indeed, the tertiary education plans and expectations of second-generation immigrants are particularly ambitious whatever their ethnic origin and secondary education level. Second-generation youths are more likely to aim at vocational tertiary studies potentially leading to a BTS than are their peers of French origin. They are even more likely to apply to short and selective vocational programs than are young people from French working-class families (table 2).

Nearly three-quarters of second-generation youths applied for a vocational program (BTS, DUT, and specialized schools). Within this group, the children of Portuguese descent often choose BTS (48 percent of them do), which reflects a shift from short vocational studies in secondary education to vocational higher education. This is also true for North African second-generation immigrants. In North African families, high educational aspirations are carried across generations; the technological track or even the vocational one are perceived as potential ways of reaching higher education and therefore avoiding the working-class conditions and jobs of the parents. This trend is also reinforced by the discrimination that second-generation immigrants expect to face upon entering the labor market.

Application patterns depend both on the type of *baccalauréat* obtained and on the country of origin (table 2). More often than not, the holders of a technological *baccalauréat* apply for the BTS or (to a lesser extent) for the DUT, regardless of ethnic origin. Most vocational *baccalauréat* holders opt for the BTS. When they hold a general *baccalauréat*, youths of French origin generally choose the more selective DUT or the preparatory classes to the *grandes écoles*, while those of North African origin apply for a BTS or a DUT; for those of Portuguese origin, the three options (BTS, DUT, *grandes écoles*)

TABLE 3
ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (%)

Origin	University	BTS	DUT	Specialized School	CPGE	Other
Women:						
Portugal	49	32	4	7	6	2
North Africa	58	24	10	3	3	2
France	48	23	8	8	9	4
Working class	48	21	8	14	6	3
Men:						
Portugal	30	46	16	1	4	3
North Africa	54	29	11	1	3	2
France	32	34	15	1	14	4
Working class	33	36	15	2	9	5
All:						
Portugal	41	38	9	4	5	3
North Africa	57	26	10	2	3	2
France	41	28	12	5	11	3
Working class	41	27	11	10	8	3

SOURCE.—Céreq Génération 2004 survey, higher education leavers.

NOTE.—BTS = Brevet de technicien supérieur; DUT = Diplôme universitaire de technologie; CPGE = preparatory classes to the *grandes écoles*.

seem about equally attractive. However, very few children of immigrants choose the prestigious and selective programs preparing for the engineering and business *grandes écoles* (except for youths of Portuguese origin), as these programs have become increasingly selective according to social background (Givord and Goux 2007).

Discrepancies between Choices and Enrollments

Comparing students' higher education choices with their actual enrollments in the following year leads one to emphasize the weight of ethnic origin and the fact that the discrepancy between choices and enrollments is starker for second-generation immigrants of North African origin. While the *baccalauréat* gives access to higher education, young people's strategies and the likelihood of their entering the different types of institutions vary according to their origin. Portuguese children of immigrants often opt for BTS (48 percent of them do), and their application is more likely to be accepted (38 percent attend this kind of program, as against 28 percent of students of French origin; see table 3). As for youths of North African origin, while nearly 70 percent applied for a vocational program, only 38 percent actually enrolled in one the following year. To be more specific, within that group 10 percent of high school graduates enrolled in DUT, while 23 percent applied, and the gap is even higher for BTS (44 percent applied, and only one-quarter of them were admitted). As a result, eventually about half of this group goes to university. This discrepancy has been documented by qualitative research (Beaud 2002), and our own work confirms this trend on the basis of a nationally representative survey. Discrepancies between choices and enrollments are important for both men and women of North African origin

regarding access to BTS, but the figures are higher for North African men (a gap of 22 points) than for North African women (a gap of 8 points) as far as access to the more selective DUT is concerned.

How can one account for this preference for vocational programs? The answer is probably that these paths are perceived as easing the transition to work, due to the link between training and occupations confirmed by the national Céreq surveys. Besides, BTS programs are located in secondary schools (lycées) and found all over the French territory, they have a structure and organization similar to the lycée that students have just left, and they are relatively inexpensive if they are located near the family home. The more selective DUT programs prefer to recruit good students from the general track, with a more prestigious *baccalauréat*.⁸ As far as BTS are concerned, the selection has a negative impact on children of North African immigrants and works to the advantage of technological or vocational *baccalauréat* holders from working-class backgrounds. Second-generation North African immigrants are less likely to access BTS, irrespective of social background and type of *baccalauréat*. This outcome may be explained by the gap between their high, possibly illusory ambitions and their actual school performance that leads institutions to reject their application. Another explanation may lie in the screening process that these selective programs use, within which the applicants' names or the reputation of their previous high school and place of residence in segregated areas may operate as stigmatizing factors leading to discrimination of some kind (Orange 2010). That discrimination may emerge within the selection process or when students have to look for an internship, which is a compulsory requirement of these programs. However, our data do not allow us to test this hypothesis.

Access to higher education is also characterized by substantial gender disparities based both on the distribution of the different types of *baccalauréats* between men and women and on the higher level of self-selection found among female students. At the end of the day, there are more young women than young men in tertiary education, but they tend to enroll in less prestigious programs. These differences are not explained by school performance; they rather reflect patterns of self-selection, gender habitus (*habitus de sexe* in Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), and a propensity to compromise (*choix de compromis* in Duru-Bellat 1990). Young women more often start long university studies than do their male counterparts (table 3). As for enrollment in short postsecondary programs, it varies according to national origin. As a general matter, girls of Portuguese origin often opt for the BTS (about one-third of them do, as against one-quarter of other female applicants), girls of North African origin often choose DUT, and girls of French origin often choose specialized schools. About half of men of North African origin enroll

⁸ We used logistic regression to account for the enrollment into selective vocational tracks (BTS and DUT in separate models). Models are not shown here.

TABLE 4
MAIN DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN APPLICATION AND ACCESS

Origin	BTS	DUT	CPGE
Women:			
Portugal	-10	-10	-8
North Africa	-17	-8	-3
France	-8	-9	-4
Working class	-9	-8	-4
Men:			
Portugal	-12	-11	-4
North Africa	-19	-22	-9
France	-9	-13	-8
Working class	-9	-12	-7

SOURCE.—Céreq Génération 2004 survey, higher education leavers.

NOTE.—BTS = Brevet de technicien supérieur; DUT = Diplôme universitaire de technologie; CPGE = preparatory classes to the *grandes écoles*.

in university, as against one-third of those of French or Portuguese origin, because their applications to BTS or DUT turned out to be unsuccessful. The descendants of Portuguese immigrants are more often enrolled in BTS (46 percent). Boys of French origin, in particular those from higher social backgrounds, are more likely to apply to and attend *grandes écoles* than are second-generation immigrants. They are also more likely to do so than girls of French origin. Finally, the gap between applications and enrollments is the largest among young men of North African origin (table 4). But to what extent does successful or unsuccessful application to a chosen course determine higher education outcomes and then subsequent professional entry?

More Dropouts for the Second Generation

On average, 20 percent of students drop out of higher education. Second-generation immigrants are more likely to do so than their counterparts of French origin. Nearly 40 percent of young people of North African origin and 26 percent of Portuguese origin dropout of higher institutions without a tertiary diploma (table 5). Thus, a substantial proportion of young people from North African families who had enrolled in general university courses despite their preference for short vocational programs eventually leave higher education without completing a degree. Is this outcome due to their class background or to their previous educational career? Is there also a specific ethnic penalty operating at that level?

In order to answer these questions and to explain higher education dropout, we used logistic regressions (table 6) to disentangle the effects of ethnic origin, class background, and type and level of secondary education degree. A dropout rate was estimated by using a range of characteristics: model 1 included only ethnic origin and gender; in model 2, we added class background and family environment; model 3 added the previous educational career and type of postsecondary institution to the variables included

TABLE 5
HIGHEST DIPLOMA ACCORDING TO GENDER AND ETHNIC ORIGIN (%)

	Dropout <i>Baccalauréat</i>	Vocational Diploma (BTS DUT Schools)	Bachelor	Master or Higher	Total
Women:					
Portugal	31	42	9	18	100
North Africa	38	32	13	17	100
France	18	38	15	29	100
Working class	22	44	15	19	100
Men:					
Portugal	20	41	12	27	100
North Africa	44	26	11	19	100
France	20	35	10	35	100
Working class	25	41	11	23	100
All:					
Portugal	26	41	11	22	100
North Africa	40	30	12	18	100
France	18	37	13	32	100
Working class	23	43	13	21	100

SOURCE.—Céreq Génération 2004 survey; higher education leavers.

NOTE.—BTS = Brevet de technicien supérieur; DUT = Diplôme universitaire de technologie.

in model 2. A final regression was restricted to the sample of university leavers (model 4) in order to highlight the factors accounting for dropping out of university, as most of the second-generation youths are enrolled in universities.

In order to take into account social and family background, we used as an indicator the highest occupation among those of the parents and whether both of them were employed. We added a proxy for financial constraints, using the question about the reason for dropping out, one of the potential answers being “for financial reasons.” We also used the answer “not admitted in the course of study of one’s choice” in order to test the potential impact of the discrepancy between choice and enrollment. As far as the educational career is concerned, we used several indicators: type of *baccalauréat*, which reflects the educational track followed, distinction (mention) on the *baccalauréat* as an indicator of high school performance, and type of postsecondary institution.

Youths of North African origin face considerable risks of dropping out—the likelihood of their doing so is three times higher than for the native French—while that risk is lower for youths of Portuguese origin (odds ratio of 1.7; see table 6, model 1). The relative success of female students in secondary education is also perceptible in higher education since their dropout rates are lower (0.8). The risk of dropping out decreases for ethnic minorities once we control for class background yet remains two times higher for second-generation immigrants of North African origin. Unsurprisingly, the likelihood of obtaining a tertiary diploma is lower among people from working-class families, as financial constraints increase the risk of dropping out. Students of North African origin more often mention this factor as a

TABLE 6
RISK OF DROPOUT FROM HIGHER EDUCATION (ODDS RATIO)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Ethnic origin (ref. = France):				
Portugal	1.7***	1.3*	NS	NS
North Africa	3.3***	2.4***	1.6***	1.4**
Other	1.5***	1.4***	1.3**	1.3*
Mixed	2.0***	1.9***	1.7***	1.5**
Women (ref. = men)	.8***	.8***	.8***	.8***
Parents' occupations (ref. = workers and clerks):				
Manual workers		NS	NS	NS
Technicians		.8**	NS	NS
Independents		.8***	.8***	.8**
Professionals		.6***	.8***	.7***
Unknown		NS	NS	NS
Mother activity (ref. = employed):				
Inactive (housewife)		.8**	.9*	NS
Inactive (active in the past)		NS	NS	.9**
Other		NS	NS	NS
Leaving for financial reason (ref. = no financial reason)		1.3***	1.1**	1.3***
Not admitted (ref. = admitted)			1.5***	1.6***
<i>Baccalauréat</i> (ref. = technological):				
Vocational			3.7***	6.5***
General			.3***	.2***
Other degree			.3***	.02***
<i>Baccalauréat</i> mention (ref. = no mention):				
Mention			.4***	.4***
Mention high level			.2***	.3***
Orientation in secondary education (ref. = according to first choice):				
Not according/constraint			1.4***	NS
Other			NS	
Institution (ref. = university):				
DUT + specialized schools			.2***	
BTS			.4***	
<i>Grandes écoles</i>			.3***	
Other			.7***	
Constant	-1.5346	-1.3138	.176	.413
Somers' D	.13***	.22***	.52***	.49***

SOURCE.—Céreq Génération 2004 survey, higher education leavers.

NOTE.—Model results are expressed in odds ratio. Model 1 takes into account only ethnic origin and gender. Model 2 introduces further individual variables (family environment and the financial reasons to drop out). Model 3 adds other academic performance (*baccalauréat*, with mention, higher institutions). Model 4 takes into account only students at university. $N = 18,200$ persons, except for model 4 ($N = 7,700$ university leavers). BTS = Brevet de technicien supérieur; DUT = Diplôme universitaire de technologie; NS = not significant; ref. = reference.

* Significant at 10%.

** Significant at 5%.

*** Significant at 1%.

reason for giving up on their studies, a fact that helps explain their higher dropout rate.

Previous experience in school also has an impact on subsequent paths and careers, including dropout or success in obtaining a tertiary diploma. This is especially true for tracking in upper secondary education: the type of *baccalauréat* has a strong impact on dropout (model 3). Vocational *baccalauréat* dramatically increases the risk of dropping out (odds ratio of 3.7) compared to the technological *baccalauréat*, while the general *baccalauréat*

tends to reduce it (0.3). The performance at the end of secondary education (as measured by the mention obtained on the *baccalauréat*) also influences dropout. Last but not least, unwanted tracking at the end of lower secondary school (*collège*) has a negative effect on success in higher education and a positive effect on dropout. All other things being equal, women, whose school performance is better, are more likely to complete a degree than are men. Success rates are also higher among students enrolled in selective courses such as specialized schools or vocational programs (BTS, DUT) and in *grandes écoles*, partly because those students are overselected (table 6, model 3).

Model 4, which is restricted to the sample of university leavers, shows that the same factors are at play as far as universities are concerned. However, the type of *baccalauréat* plays an even bigger role; vocational *baccalauréat* holders face a much greater risk of dropping out (odds ratio of 6.5) than do general *baccalauréat* holders (odds ratio of 0.2). Second-generation youths more frequently obtain a vocational or technological *baccalauréat* than do youths of French origin. Among them, youths of North African origin more often enter universities than other higher education institutions. As they tend to be less well prepared for general university studies, they are more likely to drop out from higher education than are other students with a similar class background (1.4 in table 4, model 4). This is also true of youths of other origins. The failure of these groups is mainly explained by their career in secondary education, which reflects class inequalities (the odds ratio is reduced but still significant for North African or other origins). Financial reasons as well as nonadmission in vocational institutions of higher education increase the risk of dropping out of university. Therefore, the impact of the discrepancy between choices (of vocational courses) and enrollments (in universities) is perceptible in this model: all other things being equal, a student who is not admitted in the chosen tertiary course of study does have a higher probability of dropping out.

Young people of immigrant origin pursue higher education studies, as do youths of French origin from a similar class background. They obtain university diplomas, even though failure and dropout rates remain high. Yet 41 percent of young people of Portuguese origin and 30 percent of young people of North African origin obtained a vocational tertiary diploma (table 5). Nearly 22 percent of youths of Portuguese descent obtained at least a master level qualification (the same figure as for students of French origin from working-class families), compared to 18 percent of young people of North African origin. Young women from North African families differ from their male counterparts and are more likely to complete vocational higher degrees. They succeed in higher education, as they do in secondary education. However, compared to French natives, they are less likely to complete a tertiary degree, and this is also true for women of Portuguese origin.

The Impact of Higher Education on Labor Market Entry

To what extent does success or failure when applying to a chosen program determine the transition to the labor market of second-generation immigrants? In line with previous findings, we find that a higher education experience is clearly an asset in this respect, especially for youths of North African origin: in 2007, 3 years after leaving the education system, 72 percent of those who left tertiary studies were employed, as against roughly 50 percent of secondary education leavers, who are twice as likely to be unemployed (Brinbaum and Guégnard 2011). Young women of North African origin are also more likely to be inactive or in training. Among those who left tertiary education, 15 percent were unemployed, compared to 7 percent of their Portuguese- and French-origin counterparts. These observations apply to the whole sample, irrespective of qualifications and educational attainment.

Are the difficulties encountered by second-generation immigrants on the labor market explained by their ethnic origin or their educational level, or are they linked to their more chaotic previous educational career? To answer this question, we used a logistic regression model (table 7). We found that ethnic origin is a negative factor with respect to employability, especially for youths of North African or other origins, all other things being equal. The risk of unemployment 3 years after the end of training is higher for them and quite considerable regardless of their educational careers. By contrast, young people of Portuguese origin are less likely to be unemployed than are people of French origin.

Ultimately, however, the diploma remains the key variable accounting for employment status (and the field of studies also comes into play). When the level of qualification and of educational attainment increases, the probability of unemployment goes down. Graduates of BTS and DUT, specialized schools, and universities are more likely to be employed 3 years after leaving education. Technological *baccalauréat* holders face a higher risk of unemployment, whether they enter the labor market directly after high school or after failing to complete a higher education course (tertiary studies resulting in dropout are of no benefit on the labor market).

Higher education degrees are strongly correlated to labor market entry. For all ethnic groups, the higher the degree, the lower the risk of being unemployed. Yet after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics, educational careers, and professional trajectories on the labor market, the effect of ethnic origin on unemployment remains perceptible. Educational careers and diplomas being equal, the risk of unemployment is higher for young people of North African origin. As a general matter, degree completion largely depends on the previous educational career and retains a major influence on labor market outcomes. But an ethnic penalty is still noticeable, the explanation for which may well lie in discrimination at this later stage (Silberman and Fournier 1999, 2007). Furthermore, the feeling of having

TABLE 7
RISK OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN 2007 (ODDS RATIO)

	(1)	(2)
Ethnic origin (ref. = France):		
Portugal	NS	NS
North Africa	3.3***	1.8***
Other	1.6***	1.3***
Mixed	1.7***	1.4***
Women (ref. = men)		1.2***
Parents' occupations (ref. = workers and clerks):		
Manual workers		.8***
Technicians		NS
Independents		.8***
Professionals		.9**
Unknown		NS
Mother activity (ref. = employed):		
Inactive (housewife)		1.3***
Inactive (active in the past)		1.5***
Other		1.2**
Father not employed (ref. = employed)		1.2***
Fields of study (ref. = industrial):		
Services		1.3***
General		2.0***
School path (ref. = vocational <i>baccalauréat</i>):		
Without diploma <i>collège</i>		2.7***
Without diploma after vocational tracks		3.5***
CAP, BEP		1.5***
General <i>baccalauréat</i>		NS
Technological <i>baccalauréat</i>		1.3**
General <i>baccalauréat</i> + dropout		NS
Technological <i>baccalauréat</i> + dropout		1.4***
Vocational <i>baccalauréat</i> + tertiary diploma		.3***
BTS		.8**
DUT		.7**
Specialized school		.2***
Bachelor or higher		.6***
Region other (ref. = Ile-de-France)		1.3***
Orientation in secondary education (ref. = according to first choice):		
Not according/constraint		1.5***
Other		1.4***
Somers' D	.10***	.43***

SOURCE.—Céreq Génération 2004 survey, all secondary and higher education leavers on the labor market.

NOTE.—CAP = Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle; BEP = Brevet d'études professionnelles; BTS = Brevet de technicien supérieur; DUT = Diplôme universitaire de technologie; NS = not significant; ref. = reference.

** Significant at 5%.

*** Significant at 1%.

been discriminated against during a job search is also higher for members of this group (Brinbaum and Guégnard 2011).

Conclusion

Second-generation immigrants have benefited from the democratization of secondary education and the expansion of higher education. Increasing numbers of young people of immigrant background leave the education

system with a *baccalauréat* and a tertiary diploma. Among all school leavers in 2004, 22 percent of youths of North African origin and 41 percent of youths of Portuguese origin do obtain the latter. However, their previous career in secondary education and the type of *baccalauréat* that they get make it less likely that they will succeed in higher education. Despite their preference for short vocational tertiary programs, many youths of North African origin are enrolled in general university courses. Since their vocational or technological *baccalauréat* did not prepare them adequately to undertake university studies, they are more likely to drop out. In contrast, young people of Portuguese origin, who are more likely to enter higher vocational programs congruent with their preferences, have better chances of finding a job.

For second-generation immigrants, there remains a strong correlation between class background and ethnic origin and the type of studies chosen, on the one hand, and educational attainment, on the other hand. While access to higher education has been expanded quantitatively, both a horizontal and a vertical stratification persist. Only a minority of second-generation immigrants is in a position to enter the most selective courses, which is also true of youths of working-class background generally. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977) warned against the tendency to infer that increasing numbers of students in higher education would necessarily reduce the inequality inherent to the French higher education system, a warning confirmed by a number of other studies as well as this one.⁹ As of today, that system remains highly “segregative” (Merle 2000).

This article has highlighted the discrepancies between aspirations and enrollments in upper secondary education, on the one hand, and between applications and access to higher education programs, on the other hand, as well as the impact of both on dropout and on labor market outcomes. The higher aspirations of the second-generation immigrants, which had long been perceptible as far as secondary studies were concerned, have now shifted to tertiary studies, although they tend to concentrate on vocational programs. However, there is a gap between application and access to these selective vocational programs. This gap is particularly wide for North African second-generation immigrants, a large number of whom therefore end up undertaking general studies at universities. The admission process, which is still a black box, selects applicants in a way that prevents many from attending the courses they favored. This is partly explained by the limited offerings of such programs in the segregated areas where the children of immigrants live and by their lower level of education. Yet some hidden discrimination within the selection process at institutions may also come into play. This is a topic that future qualitative studies should explore. North African second-generation immigrants are less prepared for these general studies, and they fail and

⁹ See Prost (1986), Merle (2002), Beaud (2008), and Duru-Bellat et al. (2008).

dropout from university in large numbers, while Portuguese second-generation immigrants' careers are similar to those of students of French origin. Whereas success in higher education is real for a fraction of these young people and leads to upward social mobility—as a comparison of their educational attainment with that of their parents demonstrates—difficulties and barriers reinforced by unwanted tracking in secondary and in tertiary education often induce a feeling of unfairness and discrimination, which is then further amplified by their difficult entry into the labor market.

Appendix

TABLE A1
POPULATION INTERVIEWED BY THE CÉREQ

Origin	Young Men	Young Women	Total %	Frequency (Not Weighted)
Portugal	1,968	2,592	1	210
North Africa	4,935	8,190	3	569
Other	8,146	9,049	5	780
Mixed	4,820	5,494	3	443
France	145,008	176,902	88	16,217
Total	164,877	202,227	100	18,219

SOURCE.—Céreq Génération 2004 survey, higher education leavers.

TABLE A2
NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

	2000	2005	2010	2010 (%)
BTS	238,894	230,275	240,322	10
DUT	119,244	112,395	118,139	5
University	1,277,516	1,312,141	1,326,444	57
CPGE	70,263	73,147	81,135	4
<i>Grandes écoles</i> engineering	89,313	107,219	117,271	5
<i>Grandes écoles</i> business	63,905	83,176	116,303	5
Specialized school	93,386	124,201	137,164	6
Other	207,732	227,243	178,254	8
Total	2,160,253	2,269,797	2,314,032	100

SOURCE.—Ministry of Education, *Repères et références statistiques*, 2010.

NOTE.—BTS = Brevet de technicien supérieur; DUT = Diplôme universitaire de technologie; CPGE = preparatory classes to the *grandes écoles*.

TABLE A3
PARENTS' OCCUPATION FOR TERTIARY LEAVERS (%)

Origin	Both Manual Workers	Clerk or Worker/ Clerks	Technicians	Independents	Professionals/ Managers	Unknown
Portugal	24	48	9	14	4	1
North Africa	51	30	5	6	3	5
Mixed	7	30	11	14	36	2
Other	15	30	11	14	29	1
France	6	28	12	14	39	1

SOURCE.—Céreq Génération 2004 survey, higher education leavers.

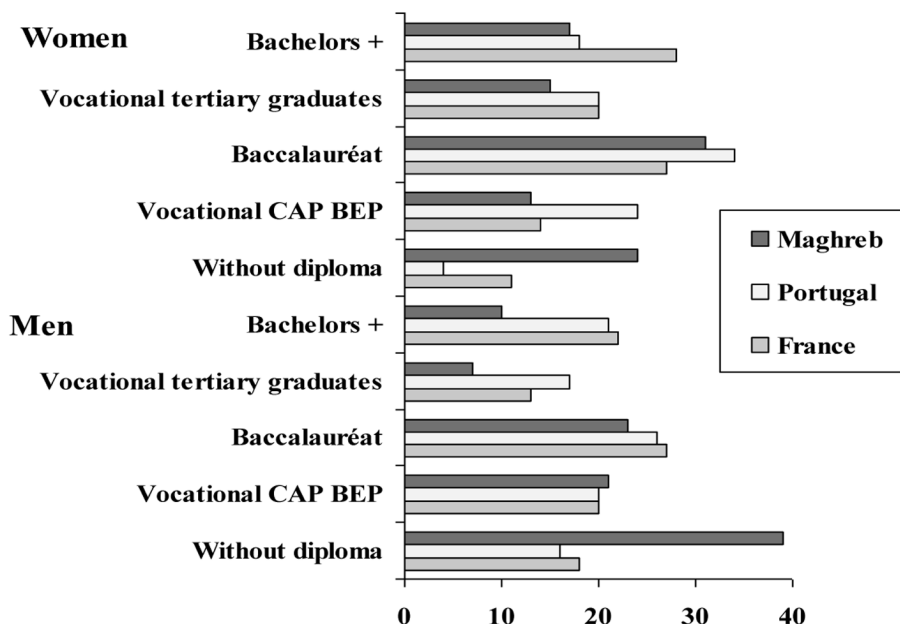


FIG. A1.—Level of diploma of youths who left the French education system in 2004 according to origin. SOURCE.—Céreq Génération 2004 survey, all school leavers.

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