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Neither Right, Nor Left, But French? Historical Legacies, the Rise of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment, and the Far Right in France

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Abstract
Although the Front National began as an outlier on the French political system’s fringes because of its authoritarian tendencies and xenophobic positions, it is today considered a key political actor with an extremely influential agenda. With consistent electoral returns of about 15% of the vote from the period of 1988-2002 the party has secured what appears to be a stable presence in French politics. My thesis will identify the factors driving the popular success of this radically right wing party. First, the Front has been able to unite various national right wing movements from France’s past. Secondly, I will argue that the Front National’s success is based on Le Pen’s ability to identify a niche in the French political landscape. The driving factors behind filling this niche have been the FN’s protest appeal and its anti-immigrant stances.

Keywords
France, Extreme right, xenophobia, Le Pen, Front National, Social Sciences, Political Science, Richard Johnston, Johnston, Richard

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Neither Right, Nor Left, But French?

*Historical Legacies, the Rise of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment, and the Far Right in France*
“Ni droite, ni gauche, Francais.”

-Front National Campaign Slogan, meaning “Neither right, nor left, but French.”

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INTRODUCTION

The Recent Growth of the Front National:

Although the Front National began as an outlier on the French political system’s fringes, it is today considered a key political actor with an extremely influential agenda. Its presidential and legislative results demonstrate a dramatic increase in voter support (please see Graph 1 below\(^1\)). In 1974, two years after the Party’s founding, Le Pen received less than 1% of the popular vote in the presidential election’s first round and in its first decade of existence the Front was largely seen as politically irrelevant\(^2\). Yet, FN electoral support greatly increased in the 1980s. More specifically, in 1983 the party saw a breakthrough in the city of Dreux’s municipal elections when Jean-Pierre Stirbois captured 16.7% of the vote. Such a victory gave Le Pen and his followers greater

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\(^1\) Additionally, see Charts 1 and 2 in Appendix

\(^2\) In fact, in 1981 Le Pen was not even able to secure the 500 signatures from the "grand electors" necessary to run in the presidential election.
legitimacy and a national audience. This effect was compounded in 1984 with the Front’s attainment of 10% of the vote in European elections and in 1986 when the party won thirty five National Assembly seats (Klandermans and Mayer, 2005). By 1988, after receiving 14% of the popular vote in the first round of the presidential election, Le Pen was an undeniable force in French politics.

If the 1980s saw the Front's breakthrough, then the 1990s were about the party's endurance and quest for permanence (DeClair, 1999). In the presidential election of 1995, Jean-Marie Le Pen came in third place with 15% of the vote. The Front capitalized on this momentum and went on to win several municipal elections (Davies, 1999). Shockingly, in 2002, just twenty seven years after the party’s founding, Le Pen was the runner up to the presidency with just under one fifth of the vote (17.79%). Via these consistent electoral returns of about 15% of the vote from the period of 1988-2002 the party has secured what appears to be a stable presence in French politics.

At face value, this increase in voter support over the last twenty years is quite surprising. After all, France is a state with a long history of democracy and republicanism whose national motto is “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité”. Throughout the 20th century, French voters have generally valued multiculturalism and taken predominantly liberal positions. For instance, the Communist and Socialist Party have had remarkably prominent roles and influenced much of the national agenda (Mcmillan, 1999).

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3 For example, in 1995, Daniel Simonpieri won in Marignane with 37% of the vote and Jean-Marie Le Chevallier won in Toulon with 37%. Additionally, in 1997, Catherine Mégret, won the municipal election of the Vitrolles commune in the Bouches-du-Rhône department with an absolute majority of 52.48% of the vote.

4 Similarly, in the legislative elections, after a steep rise in the early 1980s, the FN has consistently won at least 10% of the vote. It peaked in 1997 with 14.95% in the first round and 5.7% in the second round.

5 Meaning “Liberty, equality, fraternity” where fraternity means brotherhood.
In fact, even in comparison to a country such as the United States, France is far less conservative and far more progressive (Pierce, 2001). Yet, the Front, a radically right wing party with authoritarian tendencies and xenophobic positions, is achieving consistently strong electoral returns. This is a party whose controversial leader has, among other things, denied the occurrence of the Holocaust and been accused by French newspapers of torturing Algerians (Le Monde, May 2003). How does one reconcile the France of such thinkers as Rousseau, Weil, and Sartre, with the France of the Front National?

**What Drives Le Pen’s Success?**

My thesis will identify the factors that drive Le Pen’s success. This success must be understood in the context of French political history. The Front has united various national right wing movements of old. This is impressive considering their diversity and complicated historical legacies. Le Pen holds these groups together by adopting their diverse authoritarian, nationalist, xenophobic, and traditionalist values. He is aided in this endeavor by the sheer force of his personality. I will argue that the Front National’s success is based on Le Pen’s ability to identify a niche in the French political landscape. The driving factors behind filling this niche have been the FN’s protest appeal and its anti-immigrant stances. First, Front support gives voters a way of punishing the political establishment and therefore is a manifestation of French disillusionment with mainstream parties. This disenchantment with political institutions reflects the recent convergence of the traditional Right and Left. The malaise associated with the state’s governmental

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6 One need only look as far as the FN’s website to see the extent of its xenophobic stances: http://www.frontnational.com/programmeimmigration.php.
7 As recently as 2006, Le Pen called the Holocaust “a minute point in history” (Le Monde, July 2006).
institutions is in large part due to the nation’s transition from an industrial to a post-industrial state in a more globalized century. Secondly, the party caters shamelessly to the anti-immigrant fears of its supporters who are threatened by the vast increase in immigrant arrivals in recent years (see Figure 1 in Appendix).

The Front National as a “Niche Party”:

The salience of the FN’s stance on immigration can be better understood in relation to Bonnie Meguid’s contemporary work on niche parties (2005)\(^8\). She defines niche parties as small political groups that have emerged in the last thirty years via their emphasis on previously ignored issues such as the environment or regionalism. The Front National can be characterized as such a party because it has systematically constructed its political identity based predominantly on its anti-immigrant positions. Niche Parties are different from mainstream parties\(^9\) in several significant ways (2005). First, they reject the traditional class-based orientation of politics. Essentially this means that they prioritize sets of issues which have been generally sidelined amidst party competition. Secondly, niche parties raise issues that are outside the existing spheres of political discussion. In this sense, they are able to appeal to voters across the political spectrum\(^10\). For example, the Front National clearly emerges from a right-wing tradition in France, yet it has also been able to capture French Communist Party voters (Baldwin-

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\(^8\) In this article she relies on evidence from case studies in party interaction to examine the effect of mainstream party responses to rising green and radical right party in advanced industrial Western Europe democracies on electoral results. She specifically focuses on green and radical right party vote in 17 Western European countries from 1970 to 2000.

\(^9\) Where mainstream parties are defined as “electorally dominant actors in the center-left, center, and center-right blocs on the Left-Right political spectrum” (Meguid, 2005). In France, this includes the variants of existing socialist, liberal, and conservative parties. This classification explicitly excludes left-libertarian, right-authoritarian, or right-wing, populist parties, etc.

\(^10\) For example, in Great Britain in 1989 British Conservatives moved to the Green Party (O’Neill, 1997).
Edwards and Schain, 1994). Finally, niche parties also tend to have a fairly restrictive platform. They bypass policy positions common to mainstream political actors and rather focus on a designated set of concerns. This is evident in the FN’s lack of a coherent program for the French economy.

Why is Understanding the Success of Parties Such as the Front National Relevant?

Furthering academic understanding of niche parties is important because such groups are increasingly prevalent in Western Europe and acquiring greater influence\textsuperscript{11}. In fact, there has been an unprecedented rise in extreme right parties, beginning in the 1970s and gaining strength and attention in the 1980s and 1990s (Kitschelt, 1995). It is no coincidence that the last fifteen years have seen greater activity from extremist parties in almost all the European countries, including Austria (i.e. the Austrian Freedom Party or FPO), Belgium (Vlaams Belang), and Italy (La Liga Norte) among others. Of course, these groups have seen varying electoral results\textsuperscript{12} and the Front National remains unique due to its impressive and stable success. In this sense, the party is a worthy example for the consideration of a general phenomenon.

The Front National must also be understood in that it represents a potentially dangerous force in European politics and societies (Tamir-Bar-On, 2007). It demonstrates how extremist actors can become normalized in the collective national conscious. The Front has been one of the only parties in France to see dynamic political

\textsuperscript{11} Meguid notes that in the past thirty years, “approximately 110 niche parties have contested elections in 18 countries”. These countries are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. She adds that since 1960 over half of the green, radical right, and ethno-territorial parties in Western Europe have held seats in their national legislatures, almost 10% of them have participated in coalition governments, and the participation of over half of those parties was pivotal to the formation of majority governments (2005).

\textsuperscript{12} Only 24% manage to receive as much as 5% of the national vote (Mackie and Rose, 1997).
growth in the last ten years (DeClaire, 1999). Le Pen’s success intrinsically threatens the electoral and governmental dominance of the traditional right and left. As will be discussed later, in transposing Meguid’s arguments onto the strategies of established French parties, it would appear that such actors have a tactical choice between converging and diverging towards the Front’s positions. Therefore, the French political system in its entirety has been affected by Le Pen’s illiberal discourse and immigration as an issue is increasingly portrayed in line with the concerns of the Front National (Schain, 1996). For instance, to see how the FN’s basic vocabulary has infused mainstream language, one need only look as far as Nicolas Sarkozy’s 2007 presidential campaign and its unabashed rightist themes.\(^\text{13}\)

Furthermore, the Front National’s prominence has also proved problematic for those seeking authentic democratic discussion. It is argued that the presence of such a radical group prevents a proper national debate on important questions from taking place (Tribalet, 2003). After all, a great deal of time and energy is spent merely on discrediting Le Penist discourse, at the expense of real discussion. Issues that the Front does push to the forefront are often done in a manner that hurts the debate. Perhaps most strikingly, its presentation of immigration leads to incoherence, oversimplification, and untruth on the issue (Brubaker, 1996). Increasingly, Le Pen’s “droit à la différence”\(^\text{14}\) depiction of citizenship is accepted by the public. Such distortion is not to be taken lightly as it has

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\(^\text{13}\) In the Herald Tribune on June 24, 2005, Manuel Aeschlimann, the UMP’s top pollster, in describing Sarkozy’s courtship of FN voters said, “The idea is to try to win voters who are not naturally inclined to vote for Nicolas Sarkozy, but who will do so if he addresses their demands.”

\(^\text{14}\) Herein, it is the ‘real’ French and only they who have their own right to be different, giving them the supreme right to preserve their own ‘identity’ from unwanted admixture with immigrants.
repercussions in the policy domain and creates a climate where racial and cultural
discrimination become more prevalent (Brubaker, 1996).

In sum, the question of the FN’s electoral success is relevant because it relates to
the conditions that give rise to extremism, and says something about party interaction and
the effect of niche parties on the general political debate. The answers in relation to this
study of the Front National may provide a better understanding of similar phenomena in a
larger context.

**Organization of the Thesis:**

In my first section, I will begin by laying out a history of the far right in modern
France and the influences of these ideologies on Le Pen’s party. I will argue that Le Pen
united various strands of right wing political thought and that the Front National is the
latest reincarnation of these traditions. In my second section, I will argue that the FN’s
voters are united by sentiments of disillusionment with mainstream parties and a sense of
socio-economic deprivation. They are dismayed by the extent to which the moderate
right and left have converged. This opens up space on the political landscape for actors
positioned away from the center. In response, Le Pen positions himself as the anti-
establishment candidate. I will use the election of 2002 as an example and argue that the
Front’s extraordinary success that year reflects voter desire to punish the traditional left
and right. My third section will argue that Le Pen has also attracted voters by blaming
immigrants for France’s problems and making xenophobic and nationalist appeals. I will
then consider the tactics that mainstream parties may adopt in response to a niche party
like the Front. Here, I will use the presidential election of 2007 as an example of how
Sarkozy usurped Le Pen’s discourse and was thus able to marginalize the FN’s appeal.
THE FAR RIGHT IN MODERN FRENCH HISTORY:

Historically, France’s right wing movements have been marked by a variety of values. Most notably, these have included authoritarian inclinations, populism, traditionalistic social views, and nationalist rhetoric with anti-Semitic and xenophobic undertones. These movements generally reject universalistic and egalitarian values, and even democratic competition. The Front National, with its exclusionary view of citizenship, call for strong state leadership, rejection of Europeanization, and focus on law and order, follows suite. In this section I will argue that the FN is the latest culmination of various French far right wing traditions. Despite their distinct values, it has combined these groups. I will argue this by laying out the extreme right wing evolution from the Revolution of 1789 up until the FN’s foundation in 1972 and identifying commonalities and important legacies within this transition. Such a depiction will help to contextualize the niche in the political landscape that Le Pen has identified.

A History of the Radical Right Wing in France from Counterrevolutionaries to Le Pen:

With the French Revolution and its promoters came the development of a counter-revolutionary rejoinder by a section of society and intellectuals who opposed republicanism and Universalist ideas. During the Bourbon Restoration, from 1815-1830, these counterrevolutionaries were most notably represented by the ultra-royalists, a reactionary faction of the French parliament. They were pro-monarchy to the point of
being given the appellation “plus royalist que le roi” (more monarchist than the king) and
they strongly opposed the constitutional monarchy headed by Louis XVIII (1815-1824)
on the grounds that it unacceptably limited sovereign power (Winock, 1995). They
ultimately hoped to restore the Ancien Régime as it had been. Due to a strongly
restricted voting suffrage\textsuperscript{15}, these ultra-royalists maintained a majority in the Chamber of
Deputies and were able to be the dominant political faction during the reigns of Louis
XVIII and Charles X (1824-1830).

The 1830 July Revolution brought the Orléanist family to the throne (until 1848)
and fostered a new permutation of the ultra-royalist strand, the Légitimistes. This new
group softened their views in response to the restoration and mainly sought to phase out
the Orléans family in order to replace them with the House of Bourbon. They saw this
latter branch as comprising the true heirs to the throne. In response, the Orléans branch
countered the Légitimistes by forming their own political group, the Orléanists. This
group rejected the monarchic rule favored by their Bourbon peers while also deeply
criticizing the notion of a French Empire under the House of Bonaparte (Bonapartisme).
They considered both to be inacceptable systems of submission as they put the rights of
all men under one despotic ruler (Winock, 1995). Yet, the Orléanists also worried that
government in the hands of the masses entailed risk. They found the ideal system in the
example of the constitutional monarchy of Britain where the middle class was
represented with a parliament (Pilbeam, 2000)\textsuperscript{16}. As the Orléanists ascended, the rival

\textsuperscript{15} The Constitution of September 14, 1791 called for a restricted suffrage whereupon only men, older than
25 years of age who paid a tax of a specific amount (called the “cens”) were allowed to vote. This
monetary requirement prevented a large portion of the population from voting. Then in 1795, the ruling
was altered to include those who had participated in a military campaign. In 1799, universal male suffrage
returned, only to go back to the “cens” system in 1815 (Rosanvallon, 1992).

\textsuperscript{16} They referred to this as the “juste-milieu”, a path between absolutism and liberal democracy.
Légitimistes and their deeply royalist tendencies were increasingly politically marginalized\textsuperscript{17} and many withdrew from active participation in the political sphere (Changy, 2004). Both groups were weakened by their reluctance to work together and delegitimized by their repudiation of the French Revolution (Winock, 1994)\textsuperscript{18}.

Interestingly, differences exhibited between the Légitimistes and Orléanists survive to this day. Their disagreement over the role of a monarch was essentially a disagreement about how much power should be granted to the executive branch, and right wing groups remain divided by this question. For example, contemporary groups such as the Alliance Royale continue to call for the return of the monarchy\textsuperscript{19}. Meanwhile, others, such as the FN, are not royalists, yet they share a preference for a strong executive with consolidated power. Additionally, the Légitimistes and Orléanists passed down a close relationship with the Catholic Church. This legacy remains visible today. For instance, the FN has a large Catholic base (Mayer, 1999) and its deeply anti-abortionist stance reflects its Catholic values (Klandermans and Mayer, 2005).

In 1894, the Dreyfus Affair\textsuperscript{20} altered the political landscape completely. It crystallized French political divisions that would be visible for decades to come and made nationalism the strongest component to right wing ideology. This political scandal with anti-Semitic overtones revolved around Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the

\textsuperscript{17} Eventually, despite remaining popular with a large (if relatively insignificant) part of the old aristocracy, the death of the Comte de Chambord in 1883 effectively dissolved the Légitimistes as they considered him the last surviving heir. He was offered the throne, but he refused it on the grounds that it would have been at the head of a constitutional monarchy.

\textsuperscript{18} Even as King Louis Philippe fell in 1848, the Légitimistes and the Orléanists remained divided, unable to agree over specific points (i.e. the declaration of divine right in justifying a monarch’s rule).

\textsuperscript{19} See the group’s website for political platforms: http://www.alliance-royale.com.

\textsuperscript{20} For an account of the entire affair, see the book The Dreyfus Affair: A Chronological History by George Whyte.
French military accused of treason\(^{21}\). Although the original charges against him were void of any evidence, the military engendered a cover-up to justify them. They feared withdrawing the prosecution would lead to a scandal capable of bringing down the highest levels of the military institution (Doise, 1984). This mentality reflects French self-consciousness and insecurity following its humiliating military defeat to Bismarck’s Prussian forces in 1870 (Doise, 1984). Additionally, the case’s particularly anti-Semitic nature was a popular response to recent waves of Eastern European immigration (Cahm, 1996). This recalls contemporary France’s anti-Islamic reaction in the face of increasing North African and Middle Eastern immigrants.

The entire nation was captivated by the events that followed Dreyfus’s conviction. In effect, the Affair brought long-simmering alternative conceptions of state and citizenship under the national magnifying glass. Left and right-wing contingencies opposed themselves vehemently over perceptions of justice, human rights, nationalism, and the role of the military (Cahm, 1996). The Dreyfusards (supporters of the Officer) tended to be socialists and republicans, while the anti-Dreyfusards were typically from various factions of the royalists, conservatives, or proponents of the Catholic Church. Those opposed to the officer’s cause shared a general sentiment that support of the nation’s military institutions took precedence over any unjust treatment shown to a Jew (Doise, 1984). Meanwhile, intellectuals, perhaps most prominently Emile Zola\(^{22}\), rushed to the political fray, joined the debate, and voiced their outrage at Dreyfus’s treatment.

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\(^{21}\) A military tribunal convicted him of spying for the German empire.

\(^{22}\) The writer Émile Zola sought to expose the affair to the general public in a famously incendiary open letter to President Félix Faure, published January 13, 1898 in the newspaper L’Aurore (The Dawn), and given the headline “J’accuse!” (I accuse!). Zola’s intent was to force his own prosecution for libel so that the emerging facts of the Dreyfus case could be thoroughly aired. The author’s worldwide fame and respected reputation brought international attention for Dreyfus.
(Whyte, 2005). This showdown between the intellectual elite, the military, and the labor classes who saw themselves as threatened by immigration, has parallels to today. The far right has retained a deep dislike of the very educated (Davies, 1999). In fact, while inactive members of the labor market and the undereducated are proportionally overrepresented among FN voters, high level educated professionals and university students are vastly underrepresented (Mayer, 1999).

In addition, the Dreyfus Affair accorded a monopoly over nationalist arguments and definitions to the right. Nationalism had until quite recently been a concept dominated by the left and associated with the ideals of revolution (Smith, 2002). Now, it was re-appropriated by the right into a form of ethnic selectivity, blended with anti-Semitism and xenophobia. It is noteworthy that the Front similarly places their understanding of the “French” nation at the crux of their value system and strategy (Rydgren, 2004). Finally, the liberal side’s ultimate victory in freeing Dreyfus served to push the rightist movements to the fray of French politics (Cahm, 1996). They increasingly defined themselves by their outsider status. They embraced this position and enthusiastically rejected the mainstream society and intellectual elites who had disowned them. If such a disavowal by their liberal counterparts, pushed far right wing groups towards extremist positions, it also united them. After all, they shared a sense of loss and subsequent feelings of injustice and marginalization.

The Dreyfus Affair also gave birth to new political groups on the far right. Often anti-Semitic, with militarist, nationalist, and anti-parliamentary mentalities, they even exhibited violent behavior. Perhaps the best example is the creation of Action Française.

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23 Due to the public attention, the case was reopened in 1899 whereupon Dreyfus was reconvicted, and then subsequently pardoned and freed. In 1906, he was fully exonerated.
This new organization, originally mobilized in 1899 as a review in response to the Dreyfus case, became quite strong as a political party in the early 20th century, and endured into the 1970s (Prévotat, 2004). More specifically, Action Française exemplifies the way old affiliations were abandoned and replaced with new associations, sometimes creating odd couplings. In fact, Charles Maurras, the principal ideologist behind this group, was himself agnostic, yet as head of a monarchist movement, he strategically chose to advocate a Catholic revival (Prévotat, 2001). He saw this religious emphasis as the necessary element for unifying the type of nation he envisioned. Similarly, many Royalists allied with Action Française despite the fact that it had no intention of restoring real power to a king and merely sought to use the monarch as a symbolic rallying point towards the reformation of what it saw as a corrupt and inefficient Third Republic24 (Prévotat, 2001).

The pre-war period following the Dreyfus affair gave birth to themes prominent among Le Pen’s major platforms today. Most notably, right wing groups increasingly defined themselves by their opposition to “outsiders” (Tombs, 1991). For example, Action Française was a prominent proponent of a form of nationalism which described the nation as a pure entity which could only be kept strong by eliminating tainted external elements. Charles Maurras himself stigmatized “internal foreigners” or what he identified as the Catholic, white, and born in France (Weber, 1964). He entitled this conglomerate of perceived enemies as the “anti-France” and frequently blamed the nation’s ills on them.

24 This was not the only area where the Royalists and their new partners in A. F. differed. Additionally, in direct contrast to the Royalists, the latter pushed for a restoration of pre-Revolutionary “liberties” to the ancient provinces of France (replaced during the Revolution by the departmental system) and a general decentralization.
In the early 20th century and into the interwar years, Fascism entered the French political culture. Yet it was never as strong in France as in Italy. Some scholars have argued that France was protected by Fascism as its economic crisis was not as severe as in other states (Remond, 1982). Secondly, France had a deeper democratic tradition, which prevented it from turning towards Fascism. Finally there are those that argue that the presence of monarchist and Catholic groups (i.e. l’Action Française) stifled interest in fascist doctrines (Sternhell, 2000). Of course, there were a handful of groups with small followings and even smaller audiences that overtly declared themselves Fascist and acted out ideologies in line with Italian Fascism (Soucy, 1992). Perhaps, Fascism in France would more accurately be portrayed as a propensity exhibited by certain groups than as a concrete political movement or ideology (Rémond, 1982). Essentially, this propensity was a function of a reaction to rising groups on the left and the economic crisis of the 1930s. It was defined by both a more radical turn towards nationalism and conservatism, as well as a search for a nonconformist “third way” alternative to political elites (Soucy, 1992). These groups did exhibit the violent tendencies of their Italian counterparts. The interwar years saw frequent military parades, street brawls, demonstrations and riots led by far right groups, as exhibited by Action Française’s youth organizations who frequently instigated street brawls and engaged their opponents in scuffles (Sternhell, 2000).

Nazi Germany’s 1940 invasion of France was the exceptional event it would take to put French Fascists in power. Extreme right groups rejoiced at the fall of the Third

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25 Pierre Taittinger formed the Jeunesses Patriotes in 1924, which imitated the Italian Fascist style yet remained a more traditional authoritarian movement. Similarly, in 1933, the wealthy perfumer François Coty founded Solidarité Française and Marcel Bucard formed Francisme, which existed thanks to subsidies from Mussolini.
Republic and joined the new Vichy regime en masse (Sternhell, 2000). After all, as seen in the Dreyfus affair, their strong affiliations to the military organization ingrained them immediately into Marshal Pétain's government over occupied France\(^\text{26}\). The new regime declared an all encompassing "Révolution nationale" program\(^\text{27}\) aimed at "regenerating the Nation" (Fieschi, 2004). The Vichy government’s xenophobic rhetoric was put into tragic action as they willfully collaborated with Nazi Germany to a high degree. For instance, the French police organized raids to capture Jews and others considered "undesirable" (Burrin, 1995).

Such wartime behavior followed by the fall of Hitler and the Vichy regime, immensely discredited far right wing groups. They have been harshly criticized in the collective national memory and by historical accounts. Even today they are still associated with the collaborationist government and Hitler’s atrocities (Berezin, 2008). This demonization solidified a mentality of isolation and rejection among them. Interestingly, contemporary Front voters have conceptions of politics and society that are profoundly shaped by their sense of “not belonging” (Klandermans and Mayer, 2005). This has affected FN political strategy and led to a party tactic of cultivating marginal identities. Le Pen’s supporters have gravitated towards his anti-establishment claims and his refusal to apologize for morally questionable events in French history (Birnbaum, 1993). It would appear that the party has sought to provide meaning and refuge to a family linked by the sentiment of exclusion.

\(^{26}\) The National Assembly voted on July 10, 1940 to grant extraordinary powers to Marshal Philippe Pétain. He held the title of "President of the Council" instead of President of France. The Vichy Regime ruled from July 1940 until August 1944.

\(^{27}\) Whose motto was Travail, Famille, Patrice ("Work, Family, Fatherland"), which replaced the Republican motto Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité.
Although, at the beginning of the Fourth Republic, the extreme right found itself pushed to the wayside, very quickly new derivatives of the far right again emerged onto the electoral scene. Action Française itself was dissolved in 1944 yet remnants survived\textsuperscript{28}. The most prominent of the right wing groups in the 1950s were the Poujadistes led by Pierre Poujade, founder of l’Union de Défense de Commerçants et Artisans (Union for the Defense of Merchants and Artisans). Poujade led an anti-tax revolt by small shopkeepers and peasants and experienced brief electoral success, before again being swept to the side by the Algerian crisis\textsuperscript{29} (Bouclier, 2006). Such small businesspeople felt that they were suffering the most from financial reform while large industrial groups and corporations went unscathed. Despite the brevity of Poujadism, its mantra that the establishment cared little for the daily struggles of the everyman is still exhibited today by the Front. It is perhaps not all that surprising that FN supporters have conceptions of politics and society that are profoundly marked by feelings of subjugation to other social and economic classes (Klandermans and Mayer, 2005).

Far right wing groups during this period were aided by the fact that in the 1950s partisan identification was low due to the size and complexity of the French 4\textsuperscript{th} Republic\textsuperscript{30} (Converse and Pierce, 1986). In fact, politics during this period were characterized by instability\textsuperscript{31}. With few enduring commitments to specific parties and an uncertain politic climate, voters gravitated towards De Gaulle’s rallying message. On

\textsuperscript{28} The party was reformed under the influence of Maurice Pujo who created the newspaper Aspects de la France (AF) and it returned in 1947 as the counter-revolutionary movement, "la Restauration Nationale" ("National Restoration").

\textsuperscript{29} The events surrounding Algerian independence and de Gaulle’s subsequent return to power divided them, many joined the Gaullists, and the party was eliminated.

\textsuperscript{30} Which lasted from 1946 until 1958.

\textsuperscript{31} In a comparative study done in 1989 it was found that France has experienced more high-volatility elections in the post WWII period than any other country surveyed (Pierce, 2001).
June 1958, de Gaulle became Premier and was given emergency powers for six months by the National Assembly. Six months later, he was elected President of France. The General was Catholic and came from a militarist background, both reminiscent of anti-Dreyfusards characteristics, but he was not of the extreme right. In fact, his republican and statist convictions helped create a mainstream right and its popularity marginalized far right actors (Hauss, 1991). De Gaulle had no interest in working with Fascists or anti-Semites, however the conservative Gaullist Party was nonetheless able to win over many of their traditionalist and Catholic voters (Hauss, 1991). On the other hand, the Gaullists did lose pro-French Algerian voters by calling for the withdrawal of French citizens and thus freeing the colony. In fact, some have still never forgiven the mainstream right for the loss of Algeria.

The Algerian War (1954-1962) elicited controversy in France and its politicization reunited old right wing extremists. A group of the French military opposed to the independence of Algeria, formed a terrorist group called l’Organization de l’Armée Secrete (OAS). Many of its members were former fascists and Action Française members (Kauffer, 2002). Furthermore, many of its members were linked by their activity in various anti-communist struggles and this era is seen as having fostered influential anti-communist and anti-left stirrings on the right (Klandermans and Mayer, 2005). Clearly, there had never been much love lost between the two sides of the political spectrum but in light of the notion that the Left’s cowardice had cost France a piece of its territory, an even deeper antagonism set in. The left’s inability to take serious

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32 His party was called the Union des Démocrates pour la République (UDR) and won a comfortable majority (78% of the vote) in November, 1958.

33 The “Pied Noirs” or former colonialist French-Algerians vote in high numbers for the FN (Mayer, 1999).
action and truly protect the French is a point emphasized to this day by Le Pen. This is particularly obvious in the FN’s strict approach to law and order which it juxtaposes with its depiction of a lackadaisical and craven left.

Charles de Gaulle’s long tenure in power exemplifies the tendency on the Right towards populism and a single dominant leader. The General himself advocated the need for strong leadership presiding over a powerful and well organized state, and believed that a ruler need to have the will to exert strength and keep his followers in line (Mahoney, 1996). He fully trusted in democracy yet saw the other branches as somewhat tempering with the executive’s ability to operate. Ever since the Bonapartist referendum on the Directory, the right had exhibited a tendency to appeal directly to the masses for the consolidation of executive power. Similarly, de Gaulle called for a popular referendum to replace the Fourth Republic thus bypassing lengthy institutional change and the consultation of other branches (Hauss, 1991).

Finally, de Gaulle was also extremely nationalist and pursued political grandeur (Mahoney, 1996). To this day there is a certain French admiration for leaders who reflect the role and weight of history, and speak to a national memory of French greatness.

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34 For instance, the Front advocates the reinstatement of the death penalty. Similarly, it has made law enforcement a recurrent theme and demands higher sentences for practically all crimes. When in power, the Front often allocates spending towards security services such as municipal police.

35 He was present in French politics beginning in WWII (as the leader of the resistance to the occupation) and through his Presidency from 1958 until 1968.

36 The Directoire executive (Executive Directory) was a body of 5 Directors that held executive power in France following the Convention and preceding the Consulate (From November 2, 1795 until November 10, 1799). This was commonly known as the Directory (or Directoire) era, and constituted one of the final stages of the French Revolution. Such a government was the republican left’s attempt to answer worries about executive power. It was not popular. The Directory ended with the coup d’état referred to as the 18 Brumaire in which General Napoleon Bonaparte overthrew the Directory and replaced it with the Consulate of which he was a consul. He would later declare himself First (and only) Counsel and then Emperor.
Voters are intrigued by the myth of the hero, and politicians deploy such conceptions into generic presidential discourse (Gaffney, 2004). Interestingly, most fascist and radical right parties exhibit the prevalence of charismatic leadership (Kitschelt, 1998). The Front National headed by Le Pen is such an example. He is credible to diverse groups of voters because of his personal political skill and his party has been greatly aided by the sheer force of his charisma. Additionally, Le Pen has cultivated a larger than life persona for himself and often attempts to evoke the strongman personality of de Gaulle. His provocative comments and intriguing life story, often exaggerated by his followers, set him apart from other politicians.

**Le Pen Appeals to Tendencies From This Far Right History:**

The Front National has forged its identity in the context of this complex French far right history which can be characterized by sometimes contradictory tendencies. René Rémond, the historian and political economist, summarized such parties and movements throughout French history by placing them within three different currents (1982). He famously identified these groupings as; Légitimism, Orléanisme, and Bonapartism, noting that each appeared during a particular phase of French history. Bonapartism, is often characterized (in likeness to its namesake) by charismatic leadership, authoritarian characteristics, and populism. Meanwhile, Légitimism refers to 19th century royalists who refused to accept the French Republic and the new concepts of citizenry and nationhood that it introduced. Adherents to this “counter-revolutionary” school of thought bemoaned the French revolution on the grounds that it would

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37 Examples include Boulangisme and Gaullism headed by Georges Boulanger (1837-1891) and Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970) respectively.
eventually lead to catastrophe. They feared what they saw as misguided liberalism and cited the revolution’s violent excesses as proof of coming national decline. Finally, the Orléanists, largely upper-middle class, were a more economically minded constituency, and somewhat less radical. Its members prioritized the concerns of the bourgeois and small merchants. This strand importantly initiated the liberal economic ideas of present-day conservatives.

More recently and based on a more empirical approach, Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer have argued that the Front National essentially unites two different families of the extreme right into one nationalistic, xenophobic, and authoritarian movement (2005). Their alternative model, although quite similar to Rémond’s, describes two distinctive rightist traditions beginning with the right that emerged in the aftermath of the 1789 revolution; a monarchist and Catholic reactionary group who rejected the spirit of revolution and the philosophy of the enlightenment. The second grouping emerged later, developing primarily out of the Dreyfus affair, and is characterized by nationalism, populism, and anti-Semitism. This latter cluster is embodied by the anti-parliamentary, fascist, and quasi-fascist groups of the 20th century.

Jean-Marie Le Pen’s own life has unfolded alongside these varied extreme right movements prevailing in post World War II France. He was born in a small town in Brittany, a Northwestern region of France, to a devoutly Roman Catholic family. World War II left a lasting effect on him, as he was orphaned in 1942 when his fisherman

38 Today, although some Royalist groups remain autonomous and active, most organizations of old are split; some remain devoted to the Bourbon dynasty, others have joined traditional Catholic movements, and yet more have aligned with the Front National or de Villiers’ Mouvement pour la France. These are small circles but they are quite active.

39 The following information and further information can be found in Le Pen: Biographie by Gilles Bressons and Christian Lionet.
father’s boat was blown up by a mine. He had to fend for himself and at quite a young age, he started selling Action Française's newspaper, *Aspects de la France*, in the street for spending money. Later, he enlisted in the army, joining the foreign legion, and became an intelligence officer. Le Pen was deployed to Algeria in 1957 and for the rest of his life would consider the loss of the French colony to be an abject failure on his government’s part. His actual political career began when he headed the student union in Toulouse. In 1956, he was elected to the National Assembly in Paris as a member of Poujade's UDCA. A year later, he became the General Secretary of the Front National des Combattants (National Front of Combatants), a veteran's organization. In 1957 he broke with Poujade and was re-elected to the National Assembly as a member of the Centre National des Indépendants et Paysans (CNIP) party, led by Antoine Pinay. He gained further political experience when he directed the 1965 presidential campaign of far-right candidate Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour.

Michel Winock, a prominent French historian, characterizes the Front National as the conjunction of all far-right French traditions: the counter-revolutionaries, fascists, the pétainistes, and OAS members (1994). In fact, scholars have found the relative diversity of the party’s electorate to be exceptional compared to that of other extremist parties in Europe and they hypothesize that this is perhaps due to its fusion of various ideologies (Klandermans and Mayer, 2005). It is quite telling in terms of right wing historical influences, that members generally see themselves as monarchist, Catholic, and often have ties to the anti-communist right and affiliations to French Algerian networks and communities (Kitschelt, 1998). Additionally, many FN members claim to have

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40 At the age of twenty-eight, Le Pen was the youngest member of the Assembly.  
41 Tixier-Vignancour obtained 5.19% of the votes in the first round.  
42 The name given to collaborationists supporting Marshal Petain under Vichy France.
belonged to and been active among the far right family even before 1945 (Klandermans and Mayer, 2005). Surely, this is a reflection of Le Pen absorption of practically all the parties of the extreme right (with the exception of neo-Nazi groups). In fact, at the party’s founding in 1972, Le Pen chose to incorporate older generation of right wingers into his new movement; he enlisted former O.A.S. member Jacques Bompard, and former Collaborationist Roland Gaucher, among other relics of Vichy France, neo-nazi groups, and Catholic fundamentalists (Davies, 1999)\textsuperscript{43}.

This diversity is quite impressive considering the fact that these various far right families (i.e. Traditionalist Catholics, royalists, neo-fascists, etc.) are fiercely independent, sectarian, and ultimately share few ideals apart from a distrust of liberal democracy and staunch anti-communism. It is in fact somewhat odd that such different groups have been united under the Front National banner. For instance, Le Pen does well among the “petit bourgeois” or the small independent craftspeople, shopkeepers and farmers who recall the Poujadists of the past (Mayer, 1999). One might think that this group would have different priorities than Le Pen’s other large voting bases; blue collar workers and residual populations without employment\textsuperscript{44}. The diversity of his supporters manifests itself in Le Pen’s often contradictory positions. For example, the Front National has oddly called for vigorous state paternalism while also endorsing free market capitalism. At times it demands a strong welfare state to protect families in need\textsuperscript{45} and

\textsuperscript{43} Additionally, in the beginning of the 1980s, various old Action Française figures, such as Georges-Paul Wagner and Philippe Colombani joined the ranks of the FN. Similarly, in this period, royalists such as Michel de Rostolan, Thibault de la Tocnaye and Olivier d’Ormesson joined the party, identifying it as upholding the goals of their royalist movements.

\textsuperscript{44} This includes pensioners, homemakers, and the unemployed (Kitschelt, 1998).

\textsuperscript{45} Throughout the late 1990s Le Pen increasingly tried to depict the FN as the “party of welfare” (Davies, 1999). Additionally, in what Bourseiller describes as “calculated populism”, the FN has sought support via its social work channels and volunteering activity among local communities (1991).
supports protectionist policies such as tariffs on cheap imports (Bourseiller, 1991). At other times the party rejects redistributive schemes, advocating for the reallocation of resources through market institutions and calling for tax cuts (Kitschelt, 1998). This is inconsistent. Of course, most politicians are not innocent of pandering to diverse interests, yet Le Pen’s actions are more egregious. It would appear that he is demagogically telling voters what they want to hear, when they want to hear it.

Finally, it should also be noted that over the course of its long history, portions of the extreme wing in France have evolved towards a belated acceptance of the French Revolution’s republican ideals. In comparing the Front to its aforementioned post-Revolutionary ancestors or to today’s fervent royalists, it is of note that, unlike them, the FN has accepted the political legacy of 1789 and now participates in the democratic electoral process. Le Pen for all his extremist rhetoric and vehement criticisms is essentially willing to partake in the political system’s institutions. It is this choice that has truly allowed the FN to progress and gain power and it is a defining difference between the Front and other far right factions (Remond, 1983).46

**Conclusion:**

In sum, the FN is the latest incarnation of a historically multifaceted right. Le Pen’s Front National reflects the legacy of a right wing that supported authoritarian measures, embraced nationalism, rejected “outsiders”, and felt marginalized by the political establishment. Part of the Front National’s success has been its ability to unite these different groups under its leadership. The question that now poses itself centers on

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46 This is a point of contention in academic circles. For example, Pascal Perrineau disagrees and cites Le Pen’s statements against the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen as clear signs of the party’s opposition to the French Revolution (1997).
the basis of the party’s appeal to voters. In the next section I shall describe Le Pen’s protest appeal as the driving force behind his support.

LE PEN AND THE PROTEST VOTE

Introduction:

Numerous scholars have contributed to the debate on what drives the Front’s electoral success. These different theories each have their merits. In this section I will consider these arguments and argue that a driving force behind Front National support is its protest appeal. This relates to niche party theory; as people become disaffected with existing parties, political space for new parties opens up\textsuperscript{47}. Le Pen voters generally have sentiments of political alienation and disillusionment with established elites. They see their participation in elections as one of the sole means left to them by which they may express this dissatisfaction. In voting for Le Pen, they are sending a signal to the moderate right and left. Supporting the Front is therefore a form of mainstream punishment.

Voters Choose Extremist Parties Due to Sentiments of Socio-Economic Deprivation:

Le Pen’s audience is predominantly made up of social groups that face or at least believe that they face difficult socio-economic conditions. Herbert Kitschelt, among

\textsuperscript{47} Rydgren argues that ideological space opens up based on political demand (i.e. the attitudes of voters) and political supply (i.e. parties). A gap develops if the two diverge and then voters turn to new sources of identification and representation that fill this gap (2004).
others, explains Front National success based on the challenges that large European social democracies face in the globalized age (1995). All of Europe has seen a period of transformation where the rising prosperity of early postwar decades gave way to lower growth, higher inflation and unemployment (Pharr and Putnam, 2000). Additionally, today’s economic interdependence and cross border mobility has transformed the ways in which national leaders and institutions operate, in effect marginalizing political organizations of old. In essence, post-industrial globalization means that the political autonomy of the nation-state is diminished and its latitude for egalitarian redistribution and social insurance is circumscribed (Bardhan, Bowles and Wallerstein, 2006). Thus, Kitschelt’s school of thought makes the institutionalist argument that the welfare state is increasingly ill-equipped to deal with contemporary challenges. As citizens grapple amidst these dissatisfactory conditions they turn to extremist actors who offer an alternative form of governmental representation.

Some socio-economic arguments also relate Europeanization to FN success. It is asserted that transnational institutions have limited the capabilities of governments (Kitschelt and Rehm, 2006). Supranational organizations such as the E.U. mean less national autonomy in key areas of economic policy and so states’ intricate systems of social protections cannot always survive. In response the FN offers a vision of a more powerful France, standing up to the dangers of European Federalism\textsuperscript{48} and reclaiming its historical independence (Davies, 1999). Additionally, it is argued that political elites have proved incapable of guiding their citizens through the processes of change and

\textsuperscript{48} The Front National was also one of several parties that backed France’s 2005 rejection of the Treaty for a European Constitution. In Le Pen’s opinion, France should not join any organization that could overrule its own national decisions.
acclimating them to their new 21st century identities. Berezin in particular cites numerous examples including the Amsterdam Treaty and its perceived failure in the eyes of the French citizenry who saw themselves as inadequately consulted by the government in regards to the treaty. She argues that as a result of Europeanization voters are left grasping confusedly for their old identifications and thus cling to a party with such simplistic and unabashed nationalism (2008).

Institutionalist theories note that because groups are finding themselves without cultural or economic capital and in a situation of social decline and status deprivation, they are increasingly disenchanted with the political organisms in charge. As a result, voters become susceptible to extremists. This is perhaps because as voter loyalty to old affiliations decreases, the electoral arena opens up and political resources are freed for new actors (Rydren, 2004). Kitschelt emphasizes sentiments of powerless and argues that popular mood depends overwhelmingly on the distribution of income, market power, and sentiments of opportunity. He concludes that for some of the electorate, these needs are going unanswered. The frustration of disenfranchised groups often expresses itself via an attraction to extreme political choices and a rejection of democratic systems (Bar-On, 2007). Certainly in France, voters living under conditions of real or perceived deprivation are far more prone to vote for the Front National49 (Kitschelt, 1995). It is noteworthy that such extreme right parties are far less present in countries where the post-industrial welfare state is not present (i.e. Greece, Spain, or Ireland).

I will use the next two sections to add to such arguments and deepen an explanation of FN success by focusing on the French context.

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49 They also are more likely to hold authoritarian, ethno-nationalist, and xenophobic attitudes.
Disillusionment with the Political Establishment:

The rejection of political elites correlates to perceptions of their performance and citizen confidence in their abilities (Pharr and Putnam, 2000). Unfortunately, they are not seen to be doing very well; academics have painted a picture of spreading disillusionment with political leaders and institutions throughout Europe (Newton and Norris, 2000). More specifically, in France voters have become disillusioned with political elites due to the high levels of perceived corruption. This is largely a result of several high profile cases in recent years. Similarly, the nation has seen a proliferation of events leading to the indictment and incarceration of prominent politicians (Tribalat, 2003). This is significant because in terms of setting a general political impression, French candidates are more visible to voters than parties (Converse and Pierce, 1986). There is also the sense that these same corrupt actors are always present and in power (Pierce, 2001). This popular perception is not so far off. France’s practice of holding multiple offices (“cumul des mandats”) has ensured that the available political positions are in the hands of a limited few. Although “Cumul des mandats” augments elected officials’ status, experience, and resources, it also gives them hegemony over political power. Interestingly, in countries characterized by patronage and clientelism, extreme parties using political populism and anti-state messages thrive (Kitschelt, 1998).

Additionally, in the eyes of the French electorate, traditional parties have inadequately adapted to changing voter priorities. The 1990s saw a proliferation of issues which transcended the traditional right and left ideological categories such as the

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50 There is a striking correlation between corruption and citizen confidence (Bardhan, Bowles, and Wallerstein, 2000).
environment or Europeanization (Berezin, 2008). Voter concerns no longer fit easily into
the obvious domain of any traditional political party or traditional party position (Hardin,
2000). Similarly, the once influential Communist party now appears outdated. This
previously dominant party of the working class was discredited by the collapse of the
Soviet Union and has been in irreversible decline for the past few decades 51 (Milner and
Parsons, 2003). In response to such concerns, Le Pen portrays himself as an alternative
to technocratic elites out of touch with reality and the needs of ordinary citizens (Davies,
1999).

**Mainstream Party Ideological Convergence:**

As mainstream parties grapple for political power, they go through processes of
strategic convergence in which they alternate government and join coalitions52 (Kitschelt,
1998). In France, this convergence between conventional right and left parties has left
them indistinct in the eyes of some voters. The former left-right antagonism has been
reduced to a very short spread, such as those who prefer more generous welfare programs
to those who prefer somewhat less generous programs. Such convergence hurts
mainstream party ideological credibility. For example, French voters often lament that
there is no clear difference between the economic policies of the mainstream right and
left (Berezin, 2008). This effect has only been augmented by confusing interactions at
the elite level as old parties splinter, new organizations emerge, and individuals assert

51 Please see Figure 2 in the Appendix.
52 A notable example is the historical movements of the European lefts towards accommodation with liberal
capitalism.
themselves away from old allegiances in rapid succession. An example would be Sarkozy’s defection from Chirac’s RPR to form the new UMP; many voters would be hard-pressed to name key differences between the RPR and the UMP. Furthermore, voters who tend even to the slightest degree away from the center feel alienated by converging mainstream policy positions. Kitschelt argues that if there is relatively little distance between mainstream parties then niche parties see better electoral returns (1998).

Figure 3:

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53 Complex coalition strategies obscure electoral choices for ordinary citizens and lead to uncertainty regarding party identification (Pierce, 2001).
54 He specifically studies right authoritarian groups in the context of electoral coalitions.
The graph in Figure 3 clearly shows the extent to which the mainstream right and left have converged on policy positions. Over the last twenty years, the right, the PS, and the PCF, demonstrate a systematic shift towards centrist orientations. Additionally, the graph illustrates that as mainstream party policy orientation increased in similitude, the Front chose a more extremist direction, thus differentiating itself more. The erosion in the dominance of the two bloc party system opened up space for political entrepreneurs such as Le Pen (Pierce, 2001). The convergence of the established parties demonstrated in the graph coincides with the Front National’s rising voter support in the 1980s. Such Votes for the FN represent the manifestations of disappointment with the political system and are a means for the electorate to punish mainstream parties. In this sense, they are protest votes. The Front National capitalizes on such conditions by perpetually positioning itself in direct opposition to this bloc of converged right and left. The party has sought to portray itself as outside of such a system and therefore implicitly superior to it (Simmons, 1995). To drive this point home, Le Pen groups all the parties together in his rhetoric and refuses to take sides between them (Simmons, 1995).

2002 Presidential Election as an Example:

55 The data used in making this graph comes from the Campaign Manifesto Project. This incorporates data from various campaigns and party rhetoric from the end of World War II until 1993 (Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, Budge, and Tanenbaum, 2001) and recently has published similar data with some new categorical additions going up until 2002 (Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, Budge, and McDonald, 2006). 56 The Front National considers this tainted "establishment", to include other political parties and most journalists (Davies, 1999).
The presidential election of 2002 exemplifies the consequences of French voter disillusionment towards mainstream parties. Out of sixteen other candidates, Le Pen advanced to the second round alongside RPR candidate Jacques Chirac by procuring 16.9% of the vote or 4.8 million voters. Shockingly, he defeated Lionel Jospin, the socialist candidate and an expected second round candidate, by 200,000 votes. In the general election, Chirac beat him with 82.21% of the vote compared to his 17.79%.

In a sense, 2002 was an anomaly. First, the Socialists were not competitive and proved incapable of attracting the number of votes that usually edge out the Front. This was in large part due to the number of candidates running within the left’s ranks which fractured its total support base. Secondly, on both sides of the political spectrum candidates were largely viewed as uninspiring. In fact, Chirac and Jospin, the main candidates were considered unimpressive and even bluntly disliked (Gaffney, 2004). It should be noted that a sizeable proportion of the French simply chose not to vote and

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57 For more information please see Figure 4 in the Appendix and for a visual representation see Figure 5 on the following page.
58 As if to prove this point, such impressive results by the FN were not quite matched in the legislative elections a few weeks later where the party failed to gain a single seat and only won 1.85% of the vote in the 2nd round (Gaffney, 2004).  
59 Additionally the PCF had been in a state of decline for a while and were seen as ideologically irrelevant (Wilson, 2002).
abstention was quite high\textsuperscript{60}. Thirdly, the mainstream candidates were seen as representative of all that was wrong with the political establishment. Chirac, the ineffective leader of the RPR, had been discredited by recent scandal and his party’s losses in the last legislative elections\textsuperscript{61}. Meanwhile, Jospin was seen as a poor leader past his prime after five unimpressive years as Prime Minister. Additionally, their dysfunctional and competitive relationship within the unusual institutional configuration of cohabitation\textsuperscript{62} had alienated and disillusioned many voters. A socialist and RPR dual executive added to the impression that mainstream right and left were one and the same, not to mention ineffectual. This arrangement played into Le Pen's arguments that the political elite was corrupt, incompetent and that the major parties were actually one collusive unit hoarding power. Adding to this mainstream party convergence effect was the fact that during their campaigns both Jospin and Chirac had sought middle ground to the extent that they did not disagree over any big issues and Le Pen was able to stand out. The FN’s ability to be noticed was aided by the post 9/11 media’s obsessive coverage of "l’insecurité" which amplified the importance of an area of positions which the party heavily emphasizes.

Finally, particularities of the electoral institutions helped the Front. France's two round presidential voting system meant that some of the electorate used their first vote to send a message, thus voting for Le Pen as an indication of dissatisfaction while fully

\textsuperscript{60} Please see Figure 5 in the Appendix.
\textsuperscript{61} A coalition of the Left won the Legislative Elections of April 21, 1997. Because Chirac himself had dissolved parliament called for these elections, his reputation was hurt, and his credibility damaged (Lewis-Beck, 1999).
\textsuperscript{62} The French practice what Duverger called a semi-presidential system in that they have a Prime Minister and a President (1980). In effect, the French constitution transposes a powerful presidency on to a traditional form of parliamentary government where the President’s Prime Minister and cabinet come from the majority in the National Assembly. Thus, for an extended period of time, the Prime Minister and the President of the same government can be from different parties.
planning on using their second vote towards a candidate they truly supported (Gaffney, 2004). In this sense, they voted to punish the more moderate parties, not anticipating the real effect it would have. Support for this can be seen in the fact that Chirac so easily beat the FN candidate in the second round. Essentially, a two round voting system for makes the option of a Le Pen protest vote possible.

**Conclusion:**

In sum, in this section I considered institutionalist arguments for the Front’s presence such as Kitschelt’s theories about underlying socio-economic problems in European social democracies. I also examined theories such as Berezin’s which relate the project of Europe to FN success. I then focused more specifically on France and described disillusionment with mainstream parties as a factor leading to Front support. This is in large part due to the convergence of the moderate right and left. The election of 2002 demonstrates how by supporting Le Pen in the first round, French voters sought to punish the mainstream parties. In this sense, his second place finish gives credence to arguments that FN support is based on the party’s protest appeal. In the next section I will add that Le Pen’s anti-immigrant stance is the other major factor in explaining Front electoral success.

**IMMIGRATION: A DRIVING FORCE BEHIND FN SUPPORT**

**Introduction:**
The French make their electoral choices based on both long term forces such as ideological positioning, which tend to be stable over time, and short term forces, such as the attractiveness of a particular candidate or a vote in response to a contemporary issue. Forces within the latter category are often related to sources and factors of transformation that induce voters to depart from their historical attachments or ideological affiliations (Pierce, 2001). In my previous section, I considered structural forces which lead to popular disillusionment as a factor in electoral choice. Now I turn to a short term force, rising immigration\textsuperscript{63}, to explain voter choice for the FN. In this section I will consider the arguments that assert that xenophobia has served as a catalyst for the success of Le Pen’s anti-immigrant party. In this sense, the Front National is the quintessential niche party that Meguid describes; a party who has identified a popular position to which the major, more moderate, parties are not willing or able to cater without alienating their constituents. I argue that voters have proven susceptible to this anti-immigrant position as it promotes a return to an idealized status quo and gives them a deeper ethno-national identity.

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Fear of the Outsider”:

As previously discussed, some political scientists have argued that FN’s revival of fascist rhetoric and nationalist ideology is a symptom of the social democratic state’s transformations as it adapts to an internationalized world. They argue that in such capitalist democracies, institutional change has led to economic crisis. In France, the situation is not helped by domestic disenchantment with elites and the convergence of

\textsuperscript{63} Please refer back to Figure 1 in the Appendix for a visual representation.
mainstream parties. However, there are also other arguments to explain the Front’s success. Academics such as Paul Sniderman, consider extreme right party success to be a response to the increasing multi-culturalization of Western European societies (2000). After all, with the decreased costs of mobility, immigration has increased\(^{64}\). It is not that such theorists disagree with the arguments discussed in my previous section; it is that they consider immigration to be the factor that puts socio-economic worries into focus. In other words, popular discontent with economic cleavages is fomented by rising immigration. For example, post-industrial Western Europeans form a connection between their observations of the simultaneous occurrences of both high unemployment and the proliferation of immigrants. In the French case, socioeconomic restructuring and economic downturns following the oil shocks of the 1970s altered the need that French employers had for (legal) foreign labor\(^{65}\). More specifically, as economic expansion slowed down, conflict emerged over competition within the labor force and immigrants were portrayed as stealing jobs rightfully belonging to Frenchmen (Berstein, Rémond, and Sirinelli, 2003). In addition, the sudden activity in policymaking to remedy such concerns introduced a large number of inexperienced elected local officials and administrators into important roles\(^{66}\). Their political interests were not restricted to improving immigration policy and Schain argues that this rapid expansion of an immature network of partisan actors politicized immigration (1996). The issue became a strategic means for attracting new allies or voters and its basic facts were often distorted

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\(^{64}\) It is estimated that of France’s 61 million citizens today, 10% are foreign born. Additionally, it is thought that between 200,000-400,000 unauthorized immigrations are living there as well (data from the Migration Policy Institute’s website: www.migrationpolicy.org).

\(^{65}\) In contrast to the immediate post war period when immigration to France had been quite encouraged by the government (Schain, 1996,).

\(^{66}\) Poor policymaking is problematic as intergroup social relations hinge on the government’s capacity to institute policies that facilitate immigrant integration (Ireland, 2004).
in forums of discussion. Voters were repeatedly told by actors across the political spectrum that immigration was a deep problem and the cause of many national ills.

Sniderman argues that, in addition to this scapegoating of immigrants, Europeans are also deeply ethno-centric. They have a high degree of antipathy and fear of “the other”. Such intolerant characteristics have been made more evident by rising immigration. In fact, race and ethnicity are increasingly sources of dissatisfaction in Europe (Pharr and Putnam, 2003). Cultural differences, particularly in France with its emphasis on secularism, are not easily accepted and their absorption is a long process (Jenkins, 1996). Additionally, immigration policy in France has focused primarily on controlling migration while also demanding assimilation from those that do stay (Schain, 1990). This couplet internalized an intrinsic link between definitions of “nationality” and the formation of immigration policy into the French conscious. It was commonly understood that being an immigrant implied having inherently opposed tendencies to French culture (Taguieff, 1988). Sniderman notes that countries that exhibit strains of intolerance focused on immigrants and foreigners give rise to at least one political party publicly committed to mobilizing public resentment against these “outsiders” (2000). Such radical groups claim that immigrants sop up public benefits, spread disease, promote crime, and increase unemployment.

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67 Sniderman argues that sentiments of intolerance reflect experiences as adults in a large society and economy (2000). He does not deny that there is an irrational psychological root to such prejudice but he adds that it is also engendered by the socio-economic circumstances of individuals.

68 He argues that this is based on a fear of sharing power and resources with culturally and physically remote entities as discrepancies between actors’ interests might mean fewer returns on resources and power.
The Front National is such a party. In fact, it does best among those who most see a tension between their interests and the increased number of immigrants in France (Rydgren, 2004). The party has characterized immigrants in two ways: as illegitimate competitors for scarce resources and as factors behind the denigration of traditional French culture. Le Pen advances the notion that France as it once was; morally righteous, overwhelmingly White, Christian, and safe, is no more. The party argues that this detriment is in direct correlation to the uncontrolled arrival of immigrants who denigrate national traditions and disrespect the system, thus tarnishing national identity (Davies, 1999). Unsurprisingly, the party finds some of its strongest supporters among those that

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69 Please see Figure 7 on the previous page.
70 More specifically, the FN laments the growing influence of Muslims from North Africa, West Africa, and the Middle East.
most see an erosion of tradition, habits, religion, and class loyalties (Pharr and Putnam, 2000).

**The Front National is a Niche Party:**

Bonnie Meguid would argue that the FN’s anti-immigrant stance in response to such conditions qualifies it as a niche party (2005). It is not that Meguid disagrees with institutional and societal explanations for the FN’s electoral gains, it is rather that she sees these theories as stopping short of telling the full story\(^7\). By citing several cases, Meguid notes that the aforementioned models cannot account sufficiently for the performance of specific small parties\(^2\). Her argument is that these theories downplay the intrinsic role that other parties play in determining a niche party’s success. Because the salience of a specific issue is anything but fixed, party strategies matter. Meguid asserts that, as voters take their cues from political parties, it follows that a party’s ability to downplay or accentuate an issue can attract votes\(^3\). A party’s ownership of an issue shapes its fortunes and its credibility in advocating policy. In this sense, issues serve as tools for a party to maneuver within its political environment. Thus, Meguid might argue that the Front National’s success is in large part due to its ownership of the issue of immigration.

**Mainstream Parties and Immigration:**

\(^7\) For example, exogenous factors such as natural disasters or financial crises change the importance levels of issues. Secondly studies have shown that parties can manipulate the perceived salience of issues within the political arena (Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987).

\(^2\) As shown in cross-national analyses of new party vote, both sociological and institutional approaches stumble in the face of the numerous green and radical right parties that attract little support under propitious circumstances and significant support under inauspicious ones (Swank and Betz, 2003).

\(^3\) In fact, issue positions are much better predictors of left or right placement than party preference (Kitschelt, 1998).
As the FN has increasingly politicized immigration, mainstream parties have had to respond. Even if a party's voter base is not directly threatened by the Front’s success, it may suffer as Le Pen’s presence transforms national dialogue and the political agenda. After all, the Front, via its continual barrage of xenophobic discourse, has affected the priorities of voters (Schain, 1996). Even those that continue to support other political parties have become convinced that immigration is a top concern. For example, in 1984, relatively few voters considered immigration to be a top priority. By 1988, a little over five years into the Front’s rise, immigration had become a prominent concern (Schain, 1999). In fact, voters ranked it among other top priorities such as social inequality, and it had vastly surpassed concerns about Europeanization, the environment, or corruption (Schain, 1999). Indeed, what initially may appear to be an issue or party of short term interest can nonetheless leave a long lasting impact on the content of political debate.

The FN’s influence has meant that the mainstream right and left have had to adapt their strategies in order to compete on the issue of immigration. Downs famously argued that rational political actors choose policy positions to minimize the distance between themselves, other parties, and voters (1957). It follows that if voters consider immigration to be a priority then mainstream parties must pick up on it or face electoral losses. Meguid refers to this as “issue ownership” and argues that parties can go so far as to manipulate the very salience of issues. She asserts that niche party achievement reflects mainstream parties’ ability to either marginalize or usurp a niche party's major platforms. Compounding the importance of such strategies, features of the French

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74 In fact, only unemployment held a higher spot.
75 Meguid points to the fact that the environment and immigration have become undoubted stalwarts on the campaign topic list in Western Europe, despite the common disappearance or marginalization of the niche parties that introduced them. In essence, the success of a niche party issue is distinct from a niche party's electoral success (2005).
political system further propel immigration related issues into the competitive arena. The French electoral system is that of a winner-take-all. Unlike the multi-polar party systems in other continental European countries which encourage complex coalitions across multiple policy areas, this has led the left and right to exaggerate partisan differences. Finally, it is possible for the issue to be used so competitively because of the relative newness of immigration policy (Schain, 1996).

Meguid specifically focuses on the position mainstream parties take in reaction to a niche party's issue or what she terms *mainstream party entry*. Essentially, as a niche party introduces or reframes an issue, established moderate parties must decide whether or not to recognize it and if they do, how they will respond and characterize their position. A party may choose "non-action", or to deliberately ignore or dismiss an issue. This is usually because they consider an issue too trivial or too difficult for them to address. Such a move signals to voters that the mainstream party sees the issue as lacking in merit. On the other hand, a party may also choose to compete with the niche party by taking a stand on the issue. Merely in entering the fray, they do two things. First, they assume a role in determining the issue's dimensions. Secondly, they legitimize the relevancy of the issue, making it part of mainstream debate, and thus altering its salience in the eyes of voters.

**Accommodative vs. Adversarial Strategies:**

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76 It is still undeveloped terrain. In fact, no laws on immigration were passed by parliament between the end of WWII and January 1980. Then, as macroeconomic and industrial policy ceased to be as divisive political topics, the political left and right seized on new issues such as immigration.
Once the mainstream party initiates competition with the niche party within a particular issue space, Meguid argues that it faces a further choice. It may adopt an "accommodative" or an "adversarial" strategy. In other words, it may converge towards the niche party's position or diverge from it. An accommodative approach undermines the exclusivity and distinctiveness of the niche's party's position. Meanwhile, an adversarial strategy accords attention and distinctiveness to the niche party. Therefore, Meguid advises mainstream parties to adopt strategies which give the niche party and its position as little attention as possible. It should be noted that established parties do have certain advantages versus a niche party. For one, they have greater legislative and governing experience. Additionally, the mainstream party has greater access to voters and thus may more easily publicize its issue positions and utilize brand recognition.

In France, mainstream parties are still grappling with their approaches to the issue of immigration. Some political groups have chosen accommodative stances in order to procure votes and divert political attention away from the FN. Accommodative actions include the adoption of language and policies typically associated with the extreme right (Hainsworth and Mitchell, 2000). For instance, Chirac's 1986 government tightened immigration controls, restored random identity card checks, and even chartered a plane to deport 1001 Malian refugees. The Left\(^7\) has taken similar action; Edith Cresson while Socialist Prime Minister in the early 1990s enacted a Front-like policy of setting up detention centers for those seeking asylum. Similarly, she gave the police extra stop and

\(^7\) One might assume that the mainstream left is not as vulnerable to Le Pen as the mainstream right. Yet, as Sniderman argues, the constituency for authoritarian values is in actuality not confined to the right. This is because the correspondence between ideological self-conception and ideological commitments is imperfect. In other words, some of those that consider themselves politically to the left actually hold some rightist beliefs. In particular, Sniderman finds that those handicapped by limited education are most open to persuasion.
search powers. In fact, socialists, communists, and trade unionists who once favored immigrants have shown a general trend of increasingly ambivalent commitments to them (Schain, 1996). For example, the communist party, who is particularly threatened by the FN’s usurpation of their working class constituents, distributed a text in the early 1990s, called *Immigration: The View of the Communists*, which although condemning racism and xenophobia, went on to relate drug, violence, and delinquency problems to immigration (Marcus, 1995). The party issued this text as part of a general anti-immigrant campaign which tied immigrants to criminality and housing scarcity.

Mainstream parties have even gone so far as to make alliances with the FN to secure greater power or win specific elections. The RPR and UDF have done this most frequently and generally in municipal elections. In fact, in 1983 in Dreux (where the FN is seen as having broken into the national spotlight) the party’s success was in large part due to its unification with the RPR and UDF who feared that if divided they would lose to their leftist rivals (Libération, 2002). Although rarer, the left has also allied itself with the Front on several occasions. For example, in March 1973, Georges Frêche, a socialist candidate in Montpellier's legislative elections, encouraged FN voters (whose candidate André Troisiehad been defeated in the first round) to ally with him in the second round against a UDR candidate (Alazy, 1989).

Mainstream groups have also assumed an adversarial stance in response to Le Pen. In fact, the rise of the Front has also seen a mushrooming in the number of national and local organizations dedicated to spreading an anti-Front and pro-interracial tolerance

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78 It is notable that as Le Pen’s electoral results have risen, theirs have fallen tremendously (Schain, 1999).
79 At the time, right leaders as Bernard Stasi and Simone Veil voiced their disapproval. Yet, others, such as Raymond Arun, argued that such an alliance was the only way to defeat the Socialists (Giespert, 2006).
80 This was odd considering Frêche had previously explicitly denounced the Front. Yet, despite the rival UDR candidate’s substantial popularity, Frêche went on to win by about a hundred votes.
message (Hainsworth and Mitchell, 2000). For instance, in 1990, Socialist Minister of the interior Pierre Joxe reacted to the Islamic headscarf affair by inviting representatives of Islamic organizations to form a policy research institution towards the advancement of Muslim interests\(^{81}\) (Feldblum, 1993). Additionally, some political leaders have made a point to denounce the Front and state their opposition to its ideologies. For example, the major right parties have officially condemned the FN\(^{82}\). However, when the right does take an adversarial stance to FN arguments, it continues to stress certain themes as to not alienate or offend its more extremist supporters. For instance, although Chirac’s Interior Minister, Charles Pasqua\(^{83}\), gave a generally positive speech at the inauguration of a new mosque in Lyon in 1994, his praise also emphasized the importance of "moderate" Islamic thought and the need for Muslim practices to remain compatible with French Republican traditions (Hargreaves, 1995).

Accommodative stances can be quite challenging because of the contentious nature of niche party platforms. The mainstream right in particular has attempted to benefit from its relative ideological proximity to the FN\(^{84}\) while not actually fully acknowledging their shared positions. This is because in overtly projecting the Front's xenophobic elements, it runs the risk of alienating its voter base. The break up of the UDF in the late 1990s illustrates this challenge (Hargreaves, 1995). Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s UDF accomplished an impressive feat in the 1970s. It rallied the non-Gaullist right (i.e. economic liberals and centrist Christian democrats) and managed to

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\(^{81}\) Called the Deliberative Council on the Future of Islam in France (CORIF), it was an institution that would be the parallel of comparable organizations of Catholics, Protestants and Jews, by setting a unified political agenda and working towards Muslim’s rights.

\(^{82}\) The RPR did so in September 1988, as did the Parti républicain in 1991. Candidates that continue to pursue such alliances are often punished by their organizations.

\(^{83}\) A Gaullist politician. He was Interior Minister from 1986 to 1988.

\(^{84}\) In contrast to the left, the mainstream right has the inherent advantages of having a stronger pull on FN voters simply as a result of its ideological foundations and history (Budge and Farlie, 1983).
create a party capable of countering Chirac's RPR (Berstein, Rémont, and Sirinelli, 2003). Even more impressively, despite being plagued with factional divisions it was able to survive the years. However, in 1998 the UDF’s incorporation of Front National politicians into its ranks led to a crisis as various members of the party’s coalition left in protest. This abandonment decimated the party and left it irrefutably weakened.

Mainstream parties’ often deal with this challenge by paradoxically condemning the Front in public but nonetheless adopting its discourse. It would appear that voters do not want to see an explicit connection to groups such as the Front but they do not mind imagery and rhetoric reminiscent of Lepenist positions. For instance, while the Republican left publicly rejects an ethno-cultural definition of French nationality, it does call for a level of cultural conformity that infringes upon cultural diversity (Fysh and Wolfreys, 1998).

**The Presidential Election of 2007:**

The Presidential election of 2007\(^{85}\) exemplifies how the mainstream right’s\(^{86}\) accommodative approach was able to marginalize the Front’s niche party advantages. The data source I used for my graph in Figure 2 does not yet have information for elections after 2002, however I predict that future data claims would indicate the mainstream right now diverging from the left, an action that is having the effect of closing the niche that was so widely opened for the Front. Essentially, Nicolas Sarkozy’s “copy” stance on the immigration issue became more attractive than the niche party’s “original” to voters. The UMP captured portions of the Front’s voter base by utilizing a brand of populism mixed with deep conservatism. In particular, Sarkozy won

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\(^{85}\) To see election results please consider Figure 8 of the Appendix.

\(^{86}\) More specifically, the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP).
over older voters who often select their candidate based on concerns of security and law and order. By increasing its emphasis on these matters during the campaign (See Figure 3 on the following page), the UMP usurped one of Le Pen’s primary positions. He also captured constituencies that are more accepting of authoritarian values, such as blue-collar workers. Furthermore, he went directly after Le Pen’s strongest base\textsuperscript{87} by making numerous visits to parts of the South and catering to the repatriated French Algerians there. To such groups Sarkozy lauded France’s imperial past and appealed to patriotism\textsuperscript{88}.

Figure 3: Prevalence of Party Discourse on Law and Order in Campaign Rhetoric

\textsuperscript{87} Please see Figure 9 in the Appendix. I have juxtaposed the regions Le Pen won in 2002 with the regions Sarkozy won in 2007.

\textsuperscript{88} For example, he described Marshal Lyautey regime in Morocco as “enlightened colonialism”.
In 2007’s campaign the mainstream right also emphasized nationalistic rhetoric and called for policies typically associated with the far right. For example, in debates and his campaign platforms, Sarkozy emphasized ostensibly anti-immigrant positions such as deporting undocumented immigrants. Additionally, he frequently stressed France’s secular republican tradition, stating a refusal to make accommodations for Muslim practices. A recurrent theme in his speeches was an opposition to the imperative of being “politically correct”. He frequently attacked France’s “national repentance” and claimed that the time for apologizing for Nazi occupation and the colonial period was at an end. Perhaps, he also gained an edge over Le Pen via his business knowledge and entrepreneurialist experience as he was identified as the natural candidate of France’s business leaders. After all, Le Pen’s weakness in voter’s eyes has often been his economic incoherence.

The election of 2007 also demonstrates the precarious position of a party that relies so heavily on one favored issue. As Meguid notes, it is uncertain that niche party strategies can truly achieve political power while so reliant on the salience of one matter. This makes them especially vulnerable to mainstream party tactics. The graph in Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the FN’s move towards more central policy positions beginning in 1997. Perhaps this recent attempt to appeal to mainstream voters signifies the Front’s own understanding that to reap greater success; it must expand its

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89 For example, Sarkozy borrowed a page from the Front’s xenophobic book and said things such as “Those who criticize France are not obliged to live here” that tapped into strains of racism and authoritarianism (RFI, 2006).

90 Similarly, on the left, Ségolène Royal, the Socialist candidate, also emphasized French family values in a traditionalist vein and called for stricter measures to combat insecurity. For example, she notably suggested that juvenile delinquents be placed under military authority (Telegraph, 2007).

91 In his 2007 Presidential campaign Le Pen reached out to minorities and women with generally unsuccessful results.
platforms. Thus, the party finds itself at a crossroads: to stand by Le Pen’s original radical message might mean never attaining true political influence. Yet, a more “centrist” strategy might compromise its uniqueness (Kitschelt, 1998). For the FN to now become more moderate would antagonize extremist voters that want to see product differentiation. In modifying his message, Le Pen would run the very serious political risk of alienating his base and losing the infamous brand he has marketed himself on. Additionally, in better defining itself, the party would reveal how loose an ideological foundation it rests upon. Furthermore, Le Pen’s own controversial statements prevent him from appearing credible as a mainstream actor. After all, he has called for such divisive things as isolating those infected with H.I.V. by placing them on a quarantined island (New York Times, and as recently as in 2005, Le Pen claimed that the occupation of France by Nazi Germany “was not particularly inhumane”.

An instance that perhaps best exemplifies the debate over which direction the party should take, is visible in the debilitating 1998 split between Le Pen and his chief lieutenant, Bruno Mégret. At root was a disagreement over the basic strategy of the party; Megret, the deputy leader of the FN, wanted to make a tactical alliance with the

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92 Kitschelt has argued that although a niche party’s catalysts towards success are often based on a single issue response, the party can only remain successful in the long run if it can identify a broader agenda (1995).
93 Perhaps Rene Monzat says it best when he describes the FN as a “subversive right, devoid of real doctrinal coherency and ready to exploit any social, cultural or political malaise in France” (1992).
94 He has also said that “the Holocaust” was a “detail” of history (“Jean Marie Le-Pen’s notorious ‘detail’ remark”, 2002).
95 In December 1998, Bruno Mégret quit the party to found what would become Le Mouvement National Républicain. He was followed by other major FN members who shared his view that Le Pen’s provocative behavior was limiting the party’s future. This splinter movement attracted the majority of the FN’s departmental secretaries and city councilors who felt that in practice, Le Pen’s strategies were not giving them the sorts of results they believed could be achieved. This divisive step led to a major reorganization of the Front’s leadership and in effect displaced the party’s more centrist members.
mainstream right and thus integrate the political establishment. He thought that Le Pen’s “extremist” positions and anti-system approach were a limitation towards obtaining executive political positions (Hargreaves and Mitchell, 2002).

**Conclusion:**

In sum, like its right wing predecessors, the Front has capitalized on specific social, economic, and political conditions to attract support. A surge in immigration, socio-economic transformations, and the erosion in the dominance of the two bloc system opened the way for Le Pen. His party has made serious efforts to politicize immigration in a manner favorable to itself. In this sense, the Front National is the quintessential niche party that Meguid describes; a party who has identified a popular position to which the major, more moderate, parties are not willing or able to cater without alienating their constituents. It has portrayed immigration as a threat to French ethno-nationalist identity, as a major cause of unemployment and criminality, and as the root to the problems of the welfare state entering a new century. This characterization increased voter support and has meant that mainstream parties have had to strategically position themselves on issues such as immigration as well. In fact, Sarkozy won in 2007 in large part because he was able to marginalize the force of the Front National by making its two largest foci, immigration and security, into his main political platforms.

**CONCLUSION:**

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96 At the time several conservative leaders demonstrated their interest in forming alliances, generally through regional councils.
I have sought to explain Le Pen’s Front National’s surprising electoral success in the last thirty years. Although founded as recently as 1972, this party has done remarkably well for an extremist party; continually securing at least 10% of the popular vote in presidential and legislative elections. First, I noted that the FN combines various far right wing traditions from movements of France’s post-Revolution past. From this complicated legacy, Le Pen has created a party characterized by a rejection of the establishment, right-authoritarian themes, and a particularly potent brand of reactionary nationalism. I argued that via the catalysts of nationalist and xenophobic sentiment, the Front has mobilized a portion of the electorate in its favor by manipulating popular dissatisfaction with the status quo. In this sense, voting for the FN is a protest vote, as exemplified by the Presidential election of 2002, against mainstream elites and increased immigration. Furthermore, I argued that because its anti-immigration stance is a driving force behind the Front’s success, then it is a niche party as described by Bonnie Meguid. Due to such characteristics, the Front’s success has depended on the way mainstream parties react to the immigration issue and whether or not they are able to marginalize it, or adopt it as their own. I concluded by nothing that the Front faces a difficult course in the future. Although, it may certainly retain its most loyal base, it is increasingly threatened by the mainstream right’s adoption of some of its rhetoric.

Looking to the future, it is unclear where the FN will be in ten or even five years. After all, Jean-Marie Le Pen is today almost 80 years old and the Front National must know that it will not be able to depend so thoroughly on his pugnacious and charismatic personality for much longer. The question of who will replace him has thus far has been
controversial. Yet, regardless of whether the FN will eventually fade from the French political scene, its current presence suggests that political extremists even in the most democratic places may always achieve a degree of success. More specifically, conditions of popular dissatisfaction, whether due to governmental failings, questions of identity, or economic insecurity, will create an audience susceptible to radicals. The electoral achievements of the FN suggest that this is because such actors represent a form of protest for the electorate. Liberal democracies must be continually wary of these extremist groups as they pose a very real threat. For proof, one need only consider the manner in which Le Pen’s extremist agenda affects the entire political climate of contemporary France, going so far as to influence government policy.

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97 In 2003, Le Pen chose his daughter, Marine Le Pen, as the new executive of the party which led to contestation within the party, as other big FN players questioned this choice. Party insiders felt that such an undertaking was inappropriate and feared a possible family dynasty with no room for other power players (Simons, 2006).
APPENDIX

Chart 1:
French Presidential Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election year</th>
<th># of 1st round votes</th>
<th>% of 1st round vote</th>
<th># of 2nd round votes</th>
<th>% of 2nd round vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>190,921</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>4,376,742</td>
<td>14.50%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>4,571,138</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>4,805,307</td>
<td>16.86%</td>
<td>5,525,906</td>
<td>17.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>3,835,029</td>
<td>10.44%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 2:
French National Assembly Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election year</th>
<th># of 1st round votes</th>
<th>% of 1st round vote</th>
<th># of 2nd round votes</th>
<th>% of 2nd round vote</th>
<th># of seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>82,743</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>44,414</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>2,705,336</td>
<td>9.70%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>2,359,528</td>
<td>9.70%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>3,152,543</td>
<td>13.80%</td>
<td>1,168,160</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>3,800,785</td>
<td>14.95%</td>
<td>1,434,854</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2,862,960</td>
<td>11.30%</td>
<td>393,205</td>
<td>1.85%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1,116,005</td>
<td>4.29%</td>
<td>17,107</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Immigration to France

Source: Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques, INED (2005)
Figure 2: Communist Party Voter Loss

Source: http://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMParti?codePays=FRACodeParti=pcf
Figure 4: Summary of the 21 April and 5 May 2002 French presidential election results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Nominating parties</th>
<th>Votes 1st round</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Votes 2nd round</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacques Chirac</td>
<td>Rassemblement pour la République</td>
<td>5,665,855</td>
<td>19.88%</td>
<td>25,537,956</td>
<td>82.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jean-Marie Le Pen</td>
<td>Front national</td>
<td>4,804,713</td>
<td>16.86%</td>
<td>5,525,032</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
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<td>Lionel Jospin</td>
<td>Parti Socialiste</td>
<td>4,610,113</td>
<td>16.18%</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>François Bayrou</td>
<td>Union pour la démocratie française</td>
<td>1,949,170</td>
<td>6.84%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlette Laguiller</td>
<td>Lutte ouvrière</td>
<td>1,630,045</td>
<td>5.72%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jean-Pierre Chevènement</td>
<td>Mouvement des citoyens</td>
<td>1,518,528</td>
<td>5.33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noël Mamère</td>
<td>Les verts</td>
<td>1,495,724</td>
<td>5.25%</td>
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<td>Olivier Besancenot</td>
<td>Ligue communiste révolutionnaire</td>
<td>1,210,562</td>
<td>4.25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Saint-Josse</td>
<td>Chasse, pêche, nature, traditions)</td>
<td>1,204,689</td>
<td>4.23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alain Madelin</td>
<td>Démocratie libérale</td>
<td>1,113,484</td>
<td>3.91%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Hue</td>
<td>Parti communiste français</td>
<td>960,480</td>
<td>3.37%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruno Mégret</td>
<td>Mouvement national républicain</td>
<td>667,026</td>
<td>2.34%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christiane Taubira</td>
<td>Parti radical de gauche</td>
<td>660,447</td>
<td>2.32%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corinne Lepage</td>
<td>Citoyenneté action participation pour le XXIe siècle</td>
<td>535,837</td>
<td>1.88%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine Boutin</td>
<td>Forum des républicains sociaux</td>
<td>339,112</td>
<td>1.19%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Gluckstein</td>
<td>Parti des travailleurs</td>
<td>132,686</td>
<td>0.47%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (turnout 71.6 %)</td>
<td></td>
<td>28,498,471</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>31,062,984</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 6: 2002 Presidential Election Voting Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Round (April 21\textsuperscript{st}, 2002)</th>
<th>Second Round (May 5\textsuperscript{th}, 2002)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered Voters</td>
<td>41,191,169</td>
<td>41,191,169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Voters</td>
<td>29,495,733 (71.6%)</td>
<td>32,832,295 (79.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank Votes</td>
<td>1,768,307 (5.99%)</td>
<td>1,768,307 (5.39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstention</td>
<td>11,698,956 (28.4%)</td>
<td>8,357,688 (20.29%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 8: Summary of the 22 April and 6 May 2007 French presidential election results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates – Parties</th>
<th>1st round</th>
<th>2nd round</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Votes</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolas Sarkozy</td>
<td>11,448,663</td>
<td>31.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ségolène Royal</td>
<td>9,500,112</td>
<td>25.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>François Bayrou</td>
<td>6,820,119</td>
<td>18.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Marie Le Pen</td>
<td>3,834,530</td>
<td>10.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivier Besancenot</td>
<td>1,498,581</td>
<td>4.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippe de Villiers</td>
<td>818,407</td>
<td>2.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie-George Buffet</td>
<td>707,268</td>
<td>1.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominique Voynet</td>
<td>576,666</td>
<td>1.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlette Laguiller</td>
<td>487,857</td>
<td>1.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Candidate 1</td>
<td>Candidate 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Jacques Chirac</td>
<td>Jean-Marie Le Pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Nicolas Sarkozy</td>
<td>Ségolène Royale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/](http://commons.wikimedia.org/)
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