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Inequality, Identity and the People: New Patterns of Right-Wing Competition and Sarkozy's 'Winning Formula' in the 2007 French Presidential Election

Gilles Ivaldi
URMIS, University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis, CNRS

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11-28 Old Concepts, New Puzzles: Competing With the Radical Right in Europe

Abstract

Building on the analysis of party communication in the 2007 presidential campaign in France, this paper explores two correlated aspects of change in patterns of partisan competition in the right pole of French politics. Looking at the strategic responses by the UMP to the rise of the FN in 2002, we examine first the process of profound ideological revision under Sarkozy's leadership. The emphasis is on the reformulation of two archaeological repertoires of the French conservative New Right –namely anti-egalitarianism and cultural differentialism– and how this 'winning formula' was successfully articulated with strong populist and anti-establishment appeals. In the second section, this distinctive trajectory is contrasted with the transformation and adaptation of the FN to the new party system configuration that emerged from Le Pen's Pyrrhic victory of 2002. The focus is on the de-radicalisation of the party's programmatic appeal in 2007 and a significant re-interpretation of its traditional ethnicised mythology of national identity. Implications for the characterisation of the radical Right phenomenon in France are discussed in the conclusion.

Keywords: France, UMP, Sarkozy, Front national, radical right, presidential election, party competition, immigration, national identity

Introduction

Since the mid-1980s, the voluminous comparative literature on radical Right politics has identified the many political, cultural or economic explanatory factors that may help explain the upsurge and rise of those parties, be they electorally persistent or simply ‘flash’ phenomena fed by short-term popular discontent (Mudde 2007). In the past few years, however, the situation has changed dramatically as a number of prominent radical Right parties have experienced severe setbacks in the polls. With ‘electoral failure’ a new dependent variable, the emphasis has in part shifted from radical Right movements themselves to established political parties. A greater deal of attention has been devoted to the impact of the electoral success of radical Right parties on European party systems, and how mainstream actors have adapted gradually to the challenges by those new competitors in the electoral market (Bale 2003, Schain 2006, Art 2007).

Such agent-based notion of ‘party response’ is intrinsically multi-faceted and can be disaggregated into a plurality of dimensions. Taken in its broader aspect, however, the ‘supply-side’ approach to radical Right voting fits a general ‘political opportunity structure’ framework, a particular focus being placed on contextual variables and the strategic interactions between actors within the party system (Van der Brug et al 2005, Arzheimer and Carter 2006, Rydgren 2005, Cole 2005, Kestilä and Söderlund 2007).

These variables are certainly most relevant to the study of the electoral collapse of the Front national (FN) in the 2007 elections in France¹, and point to some important aspects of change in patterns of party competition in the right pole of the political system. There is strong empirical evidence that the mainstream right-wing UMP was the main beneficiary from the electoral losses by the FN in 2007 (Mayer 2007). Nicolas Sarkozy’s predatory re-appropriation of Le Pen’s proprietary issues of immigration and crime was widely commented on by observers of French politics before and during the campaign, and was often regarded as a key explanatory factor for his success in the presidential contest.

Simply considering however Sarkozy’s issue-driven communication a short-term opportunistic deviation from the mainstream destined to capture the FN’s electorate would fail to account for the magnitude and significance of the electoral re-alignment that took place at the right pole of the French political spectrum. If only because such copy-cat manoeuvring was no novelty in the history of the French party system: in the past there had been similar – yet less successful – attempts by the RPR/UDF coalition to adjust their positions on immigration and crime to the expectations and concerns of those voters who were deserting to the FN. The political manufacturing of an authoritarian position on regalian issues was evident for instance in the formal policies adopted by the incumbent RPR/UDF in 1986/88 and again in 1993/97, as well as in the controversial symbolics by right-wing party leaders to regain ground among Le Pen’s voters (Schain, 1999).

¹ In the first round of the presidential contest, Jean-Marie Le Pen polled a mere 10.4% of the vote cast, compared with his record high performance of 2002 (16.9%). In the subsequent legislative ballot, the FN’s score dropped down to 4.3%, which plunged the party into a deep internal crisis over ideology, future strategy and leadership, left aside the critical financial losses entailed by the candidates’ poor showing in the polls.

In this paper, we suggest that Sarkozy's competitiveness and attractiveness to extreme Right supporters in 2007 resulted first and foremost from a process of deep ideological revision by the conventional Right under his leadership. To borrow from Kitschelt's (1995) seminal conceptualisation of the new radical Right, the contention is that Sarkozy's appeal to former FN voters consisted of a 'winning formula' which entailed a distinctive centrifugal shift on both the socio-economic and cultural axes of party competition.

In strict spatial or directional terms, further survey research needs to be done to assess empirically the intensity of Sarkozy's move towards the 'capitalist-authoritarian' quadrant. The exact topography of this trajectory in the multi-dimensional space is yet to be established. Here, the emphasis will be rather on the transformative and symbolic elements in the distinctive political narratives by the UMP leader. Building on the analysis of party communication in the presidential campaign, we look first at crucial alterations to the programmatic substance through the deployment and reformulation of two interwoven archaeological repertoires of the Right, namely 'anti-egalitarianism' and a cultural-differentialist approach to the definition of 'national identity'. We then move onto examining the new symbolism in Sarkozy's campaign spectacle and political *praxis*, the performative role-play of the 'self-assertive' Right, and the populist exploitation of anti-establishment attitudes.

Despite the profundity of the doctrinal innovation and Sarkozy's new 'language' of politics, the 2007 electoral swing from radical to mainstream Right cannot be comprehended without an account of important contextual variables, political opportunity factors and the 'endogenous dynamics of party competition' (Laver, 2005). It is essential to examine how radical Right movements themselves evolve ideologically and adapt to changing party system configuration in order to sustain electoral competitiveness. In the last section of this paper, we pinpoint the coincidence of the repositioning of the mainstream UMP with a number of disorienting strategic moves by the FN. As will be discussed, these moves were consecutive to Le Pen's Pyrrhic victory of 2002 and were dictated by the need for the party to escape political isolation and to increase its level of policy credibility.

I. Anti-egalitarianism and cultural-differentialist identity politics: Sarkozy's 'winning formula'

Beyond political tactics and the many previous attempts by the mainstream Right to win back FN voters, one crucial factor of Sarkozy's taking over such a significant segment of the extreme Right electoral constituency lies with the profound redefinition of right-wing thought by the UMP presidential candidate, which was facilitated by his quasi-hegemonic intra-party position. This transformation was essentially archaeological and a rehabilitation of some standard features of the cognitive map of the Right.

Put in historical perspective, the core elements of Sarkozy's *Weltanschauung* are indebted to the ideological heritage of the Right and, more particularly, the doctrinal arsenal of the conservative wing of the French New Right. This movement was embodied in think-tanks (*Club de l'Horloge*, *AGRIF*, *CAR*), books, conferences and newspapers (Louis Pauwels' *Figaro Magazine*), all located at the fringe of the conventional Right in the intersectional space with the FN (Krikorian 1986). Considered a major undertaking to counter the ideological dominance of the Left, the 'national-liberal-authoritarian' synthesis set the basis

for structuring the ‘right-of-the-Right’ pole of national politics in the late 1970s before reshaping the FN ideological agenda in the 1980s. An intellectual anthropology of the ‘neoconservative revolution’ in France would be beyond the scope of this paper (see for instance Taguieff 1994), but the analysis of Sarkozy’s narratives provides evidence for the conflation of two interrelated discursive repertoires of the conservative New Right’s ‘meta-political perspective’: anti-egalitarianism and cultural differentialism.

Blistering attacks on the so-called hegemonic left-wing ‘egalitarian dogma’ lied at the very heart of Sarkozy’s presidential electioneering in 2007. The ideological depth of the individualistic anti-egalitarian tenet in the right-wing movement has been widely documented, back from counter-revolutionary harbingers to post-1968 New Right intellectuals and, eventually, the Front national. What is remarkable is the re-actualisation by Sarkozy of this specific ‘space of dissension’ in partisan competition. Table 1 shows how key features of this particular repertoire were articulated in the candidate’s rhetoric during the campaign.

Table 1. A summary of Sarkozy’s semantics of left-wing ‘egalitarianism’ versus right-wing meritocracy in the 2007 presidential campaign

Left	Right
Socio-economic axis	
Nivellement, égalitarisme, relativisme, mai 1968	Promotion sociale, effort, engagement, courage
Corporatisme, clientélisme, immobilisme, bureaucratie	
Irresponsabilité, assistanat, 35 heures	Responsabilité, exigence
Droits, facilité	Devoirs, obligations, travail, mérite, effort, assiduité, sérieux, initiative, risque, la France qui travaille, la France qui se lève tôt, récompense
Inculture, médiocrité, dégradant, vulnérable, dépendant, dévalorisation, enfermement	Excellence, estime de soi, dignité, fierté, émancipation
Infantiliser	Instruire
Echec, déqualification, chômage	Réussite, travail, promotion
Assisté	Travailleur
Recevoir	Donner
Etat-Providence, dirigisme, étatismes	Propriété, patrimoine, famille, transmission
Cultural axis	
Abandon	Volonté
Permissivité, laxisme, fraude, abus, escroquerie, voyous	Discipline, autorité, liberté, sanction, civisme, morale, honnêteté, échelle des valeurs, obéissance
Cynisme, culte de l’argent roi, profit	Règles, normes, morale, respect, éthique
Capitalisme financier, parachutes dorés, patrons voyous, spéculation	Capitalisme populaire, succession, transmettre, fruit du travail
Mal, faux	Bien, vrai
Crise morale	Civilisation, culture

The symbolic significance of the anti-egalitarian discourse reached far beyond the traditional role-play in Left/Right competition to provide a solid value-based substrata pervasive to all policy proposals by the mainstream Right in the 2007 elections. Moreover, the anti-egalitarian ideological scheme possessed a high degree of operability on both the socio-economic and cultural axes in the competitive space. With respect to the former dimension, it paved the way for the many de-regulatory and ‘smaller government’ policies advocated by the mainstream Right in the presidential race. The individualistic and meritocratic idioms of personal enhancement against the ‘ideology of standardisation’ underpinned the UMP’s programmatic appeal on welfare retrenchment and domestic labour market flexibility.

Yet, it is perhaps the fabrication by Sarkozy of an aspirational *Gemeinschaft* that proved most effective given the specific set of constraints that exist in the context of the national public debate on France's adaptation to the global economy, societal pessimism and electoral demand for social protection. The negative valence of globalisation and economic liberalism had been clearly discernible from the deployment of elites' narrative stories during and immediately after the ECT-referendum campaign. In 2007, the reiteration by the UMP of the typical arguments of the reactionary ideological arsenal helped the mainstream Right avoid the electoral damage that would have been inevitably caused by overt liberal and pro-market campaigning in the French context. Instead, the strong social-conservative and moral elements in Sarkozy's rhetorics laid ground for the candidate's notion of regulated 'popular capitalism' based upon traditional values of private property and family patrimony.

Paternalism activated simultaneously a *recitativo obligato* of comprehensive economic protectionism –skilfully transposed at European level– against destructive forces behind the interests of profit-driven multinational corporations and global markets. Surprisingly, the spurious promise of a new 'simplified Treaty', combined with an overall negative evaluation of the EU, helped the UMP leader put the European giant back to sleep in 2007 despite the fierceness of the oppositional public move to the ECT that had developed in 2005. As will be discussed, the image of European politics invoked by Sarkozy fitted also the anti-establishment identification framework contraposing the people to the elite, national politicians and European bureaucrats alike (see Table 2).

Table 2. Discursive productions of the EU in Sarkozy's political communication in 2007

Europe (negative evaluation)	Europe (positive normative projection)
Technocratie, bureaucratie, gestion, machine, dérives, abus, dépolitisée, peuples dépossédés, spécialistes	Idéal, projet, avenir, valeurs, civilisation, fraternité, prospérité, puissance, démocratie, peuples
Elargissement, dilution, dissolution, Turquie, mort	Limites, frontières, identité, bornes, maîtrise, nécessité vitale, sécurité, défense
Cheval de Troie de la mondialisation, dumping, concurrence déloyale, laissez-faire, libre-échange, unilatéral, égoïsmes, chacun pour soi, Chine, Inde	Préférence communautaire, subsidiarité, réciprocité, solidarité, union, règles, volonté commune, Traité simplifié
Euro fort, hausse des prix, délocalisations, désindustrialisation, BCE	Politique monétaire, gouvernement économique, intervention de l'Etat, harmonisation fiscale, USA
Renoncement collectif, médiocre, sans ambition, enlisement, fuite en avant, bras croisés, paralysie, blocage, immobile, abandon, impuissance, fatalité, victime expiatoire, spectateur, capitulation, suicide, étrangler	Agir, volonté, décision, acteur, maîtriser, ambition, croire en soi, affirmer, confiance, croissance, innovation, investir
Alibis, excuses, naïveté, virtuelle, schéma artificiel, sans boussole, tergiversations, dogme, idéologie, contradictions	Fait, réalité, concret, réalisme, raison
Désarmée, subir, peur, inquiétude, se dérober, affaiblissement, désert	Protéger, aider, réguler, assurer, indemniser, rééquilibrer, responsabilités, défendre, indépendance
Capitalisme financier, rentes colossales, profits gigantesques, spéculation, actionnaires, déshumanisé, prédateurs, patrons voyous, pillage, fonds d'investissements, rentabilité, court-terme	Equitable, humaniser, moraliser,
	Co-développement, Afrique, Sud, Méditerranée, négociation, coopération
« L'Europe là où il faut, quand il le faut, pas plus qu'il ne faut »	

This ideological syncretism is of particular relevance to the comprehension of Sarkozy's competitiveness in attracting former extreme Right voters. It is first significant that 'popular capitalism' and the phraseology of social inheritance have been cornerstones to the FN liberal-conservative programme since the mid-1980s (Le Pen 1984, Camus 1985, Taguieff 1989), and crucial to the party's electoral appeal to the petty-bourgeois clientele in France (Mayer and Perrineau 1990). Equally important is the role of economic protectionism and Euroscepticism in the process of mass electoral mobilisation by parties of the populist radical Right (Betz 2003, Mudde 2007). In skilfully combining those elements, Sarkozy crafted a socio-economic message compatible with some of the core demands and political preferences from within the ranks of Le Pen's supporters.

On the cultural dimension, the use of the discursive repertoire of anti-egalitarianism served undeniably another critical purpose of confronting the so-called 'permissive' political philosophy of the libertarian Left inherited from the social movements of 1968. Noteworthy was the fusion of the tough stance on criminality – a constant of the mainstream Right since the mid-1980s – with a more profound attitudinal syndrome amalgamating social-conformism and a claim to re-establish social hierarchies. The proximity with the classic organicist mentality of the conservative Right – which had largely become the prerogative of the sole FN – manifested itself in the semantic construction by Sarkozy of a typical hierarchical distribution of society, the apology of compliance, social duties and the many references to, in the words of Edmund Burke, 'that proud submission, that dignified obedience' (Burke 1864:515). To quote Sarkozy here:

“Le principe d'autorité est le principe même de la civilisation (...) Mai 68 est hélas passé par là. À bas l'autorité ! C'était cela le programme de mai 68. À bas l'autorité ! Le moment était venu de vivre sans contrainte et de jouir sans entrave. À bas l'autorité ! C'était, prétendaient-ils, la condition de la libération de l'homme aliéné par le travail, par la vie en société, par l'économie, par son éducation et même par sa famille. À bas l'autorité ! Cela voulait dire : L'obéissance de l'enfant à ses parents, c'est fini ! Démodé ! La supériorité du maître sur l'élève, c'est fini ! Ringard ! La soumission à la loi, c'est fini ! Dépassé ! Le pouvoir de police, c'est fini ! Enfin ! Le respect de l'État et de ceux qui le représentent, c'est fini ! L'amour de la patrie, la fidélité à la France, à son drapeau, la gratitude vis-à-vis de ceux qui ses sont battus pour elle, c'est fini ! La morale, c'est fini ! L'humilité devant le savoir, devant les grandes œuvres de l'esprit humain, c'est fini ! La hiérarchie des valeurs, c'est fini ! La politesse, la courtoisie, le respect pour la personne âgée, pour la femme ! C'est fini ! À bas l'autorité ! Cela voulait dire : Désormais tout se vaut. Le bien comme le mal, la grandeur comme la bassesse, le vrai comme le faux, le beau comme le laid. Tout se vaut : La parole de l'élève vaut celle de l'instituteur. Une émission de variétés vaut une pièce de Racine. L'intérêt particulier vaut l'intérêt général. Le délinquant vaut la victime. La loi des bandes vaut celle de la République. Le non travail vaut autant que le travail. Et bien je suis venu à Perpignan pour vous dire qu'il est temps de dire non à ce formidable mouvement d'inversion des valeurs” (Nicolas Sarkozy, Discours à Perpignan (23/02/07)).

The ideological distance with the extreme Right was further decreased by Sarkozy's decisive and most controversial turn on national identity politics in the final stage of the presidential race. The tactical facet of this move is hardly controvertible but it nevertheless represented a significant alteration from the standard line of argumentation by the mainstream Right. Until then, the latter had been more reluctant to engage on relating immigration issues to that of national identity explicitly, most evidently because of the strong negative connotation inherited from the Vichy regime (Noiriel 2006). In the context of the recession of the 1970s, the main focus was on the socio-economic dimension and what eventually became a cross-party consensus over the need to stem the flow of new immigrants admitted into France, a position that culminated with the 'zero-immigration' policy advocated by the RPR in the mid-1990s (Gastaud 2004).

In 2007, Sarkozy reclaiming identity politics was therefore contingent to the historicised process of transformation of the immigration debate in the political arena, which had resulted in a marked shift from economic to cultural and religious issues. At the heart of that transmutation lied the initial contribution on 'differentialist neo-racism' to the FN core ideology by the New Right in the 1980s. In particular, former FN leaders Bruno Mégret, Jean-Yves Le Gallou and other members of the *Club de l'Horloge* or AGRIF (*Alliance générale contre le racisme et pour le respect de l'identité française*) played a central role to the revival of ethnoculturalism by formalising the party's political theory of national identity and mutual exclusionism (Taguieff 1987, Honoré 1985, Spektorowski 2000).

Throughout the 1990s, inter-party competition on immigration was progressively framed by the neo-racist agenda of the extreme Right as Le Pen's party was increasingly gaining political visibility. As Schain explains, the definition of immigration issues made a transition from 'a labour-market problem to an integration/incorporation problem, to a problem that touches on national identity, problems of education, housing, law and order, as well as the requirements for citizenship' (Schain 1995). The post-9/11 international context and the 2005 urban riots in France contributed further to exacerbate cultural xenophobia, in particular popular fears and negative feelings towards Islam (Tiberj 2008). Sarkozy's account of the causes behind urban violence of 2005 reflected this transportation from socio-economic to ethno-cultural foundations, and helped the UMP leader relate violence to problems of social disintegration allegedly inherent in the multiplication of polygamous families. Such an ethnicisation of violence in Sarkozy's narratives would uncover underlying racial categorisation and essentialist prototypicality, as revealed in the following quote:

"Il y a plus de problèmes pour un enfant d'un immigré d'Afrique noire ou d'Afrique du Nord que pour un fils de Suédois, de Danois ou de Hongrois. Parce que la culture, parce que la polygamie, parce que les origines sociales font qu'il a plus de difficultés" (Sarkozy, France 2, 10/11/2005).

Thus, in 2007, the electoral demise of the FN contrasted sharply with the widespread acceptance of its ideas by the public, as was revealed by MPF candidate Villiers jumping on the bandwagon of ethno-nationalism in an attempt to capture the bulk of the racist vote. The realisation by Sarkozy of the changing nature of public concern vis-à-vis immigration and the making of contemporary France's personality was key to the ethnicisation of his presidential communication. Public attitudes towards immigrants and the existing level of support to the provisions of the 2006 immigration bill bore testimony to the increased salience of cultural fears over economic matters. As was revealed by Sarkozy's most controversial statements on Muslims (see below), the UMP candidate succumbed –at least episodically– to the temptation of islamophobia in the course of the presidential competition. The endorsement by Sarkozy of organic cultural ethnocentrism was further enhanced by his unveiling of direct connections between cultural identity and the Christian roots of both France and Europe. His claim that religion has a part to play in social life came as a distant yet unambiguous echo to the traditional religion-based portrayal of French identity by the Front national.

"Qu'est-ce qu'une intégration réussie sinon de se sentir français à part entière ? Sinon d'être fier d'être français ? (...) À ceux qui veulent vivre en France, la France ne demande au fond qu'une chose, c'est qu'ils admettent que la France ne commence pas avec eux mais qu'elle a commencé il y a bien longtemps et qu'elle veut seulement qu'on l'aime et qu'on respecte ses valeurs, qu'on prenne en partage son histoire, qu'on se sente partie prenante de sa destinée. Il n'y a pas de place en France pour la polygamie, pour l'excision, pour les mariages forcés, pour le voile à l'école, pour la haine de la France. On m'a reproché d'avoir dit que ceux qui méprisent la France, ceux qui la haïssent ne sont pas obligés de rester. Mais qu'avons-nous d'autre à offrir à ceux qui veulent vivre en France, sinon d'abord la fierté d'être Français ?" (Nicolas Sarkozy, Tours, 10/04/07).

“Je suis le premier homme politique de droite à dire qu'il faut une immigration choisie. Mais je dis aussi une chose avec la plus grande force: personne n'est obligé d'habiter en France. Et quand on aime la France, on la respecte. On respecte ses règles, c'est-à-dire qu'on n'est pas polygame, on ne pratique pas l'excision sur ses filles, on n'égorge pas le mouton dans son appartement et on respecte les règles républicaines” (Sarkozy, TF1, 05/02/07).

“Je veux dire que la France, c'est aussi 2.000 ans d'héritage chrétien intégré à la morale laïque française. Que dans les villages de France, il y a les mairies et il y a les clochers. Que sous la Troisième République, il y avait les instituteurs et il y avait la catéchèse. Et que la rencontre des deux, ça a donné de bons citoyens. Et dans le patrimoine de l'identité nationale française, il y a ce long manteau d'églises qui couvre la totalité du territoire français (...) L'héritage chrétien intégré à la morale laïque, ça signifie quelque chose dans un pays comme la France” (Sarkozy, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, 16/04/2007).

II. The new symbolism of right-wing politics: self-assertion and anti-establishment populism

Together with the (re)definition of a coherent set of beliefs, we must recognise the symbolic dimension in Sarkozy's electioneering in order to understand the dynamics of the electoral success of the UMP leader amongst FN voters in 2007. In looking at the 'passing parade of abstract symbols' (Edelman 1964:5) that made up his campaign, two key features are of particular relevance: the performative role-play of the 'self-assertive' Right and the recurrent employment of populist anti-establishment resources.

Self-assertion and the appropriation of a right-wing political identity acted as signalling symbolic devices directed both at UMP voters and the conservative fringe of the FN electorate. The candidate's strategy to enact 'polar identification' to win support on the right of the political spectrum was consistent with the value-based ideological revision undertaken by his camp. This reveals again the degree of ideological similarity with the French New Right's original commitment to gaining cultural hegemony in the meta-political sphere of the late 1970s (see for instance De Besnoit's *Vu de Droite* 1977).

“Je n'ai pas à m'excuser d'appartenir à la droite républicaine. Voilà la réalité des choses (...) Si je suis élu président de la République, tout ce que la droite républicaine n'osait plus faire parce qu'elle avait honte d'être la droite, je le ferai. Tout ce que la droite républicaine et le centre ont abandonné à la gauche et à l'extrême droite, je m'en saisirai” (Sarkozy, Toulouse, 12/04/07).

“Le vrai sujet de cette présidentielle, ce sont les valeurs (...) Cette année, derrière les apparences d'un certain zapping, tout – le travail, l'éducation, l'immigration, la sécurité – s'ordonne autour de la crise d'identité que traverse la France. D'où ma campagne sur le sens et sur les valeurs, qui désoriente certains commentateurs mais dont les Français ont bien compris la nouveauté : je ne mène pas un combat politique mais un combat idéologique (...) Depuis 2002, j'ai donc engagé un combat pour la maîtrise du débat d'idées. Tous les soirs, je parle de l'école, en dénonçant l'héritage de 1968. Je dénonce le relativisme intellectuel, culturel, moral... Et la violence de la gauche à mon endroit vient du fait qu'elle a compris de quoi il s'agissait” (Sarkozy, in *Le Figaro*, 17/04/07)

Scholars studying the conditions for the growth of the radical Right have isolated the importance of populist anti-establishment postures in the electoral mobilisation by those parties (Betz 2004, De Lange 2007, Jagers and Walgrave 2007). In France, a strong anti-establishment rhetoric has traditionally been regarded a core feature of the appeal by the FN. The 2002 presidential election was remarkable for the organisation of the competitive space along the systemic axis, and the unprecedented rejection of mainstream actors by voters on both sides of the political spectrum (Cautrès and Mayer 2004). This vertical line of cleavage re-emerged subsequently in the 2005 referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty (Ivaldi 2006).

The rise of populist anti-system actors has significantly affected the dynamics of French party competition in 2007 and triggered specific responses by established parties not only in terms of defining salient issues in public debate, but also with regard to each candidate's individual positioning and campaigning tone. One interesting observation here is perhaps that of the symmetry in mainstream party adaptative strategies to the rise of anti-establishment challengers. Clearly, anti-establishment attitudes were embraced by most candidates in the 2007 presidential election, marginal and mainstream alike. In different fashion and to a varying extent, the diffuse rhetoric of 'change', self-distanciation from 'politics as usual', and the pledge to move away from France's traditional elite conservatism or corporatism were displayed by all competitors across the political spectrum.

Yet anti-establishment culminated in Sarkozy's boldest presidential communication, combined with familiar populist resources. This was first recognisable in the recurrent use of casual –at times crude– French by the UMP candidate. Such strategy of prejudiced dysphemism (*voyous, racaille, Kärcher*) was the linguistic vehicle by which Sarkozy broke the codes of the traditionally inflated, pacified and euphemistic style associated with mainstream politics to project himself as the people's candidate against the elite. The offensive terminology was thereby part of the UMP leader's message to disillusioned voters who had walked the path of abstention or anti-system vote in 2002. The abundant rhetoric of 'obviousness' and the need to come back to 'common sense' in policy definition –as opposed to abstract ideological dogmatism– fuelled the demagogic and plebiscitary discourse.

Above all, it was the normative construction by Sarkozy of a profound antagonism between the French citizens and their disconnected political elite which best resumed the populist essence of the candidate's courting of the electorate (see Mudde 2004 for a definition of populism). The principal terms of the opposition between political correctness or status quo and the general will of the 'exasperated people' are summarised in Table 3. Let us add here that this model of binary social categorisation was by no means restricted to recoding the political grid alone, but encompassed a variety of vertical classifications which, in line with natural authoritarian thinking (Levinson 1950), were based upon over-simplification and generalisation: e.g. *immigration choisie / immigration subie, voyous / honnêtes gens, assistés / la France qui se lève tôt, bourreaux / victimes, prédateurs / entrepreneurs, fraudeurs / travailleurs*.

Table 3. The elite versus the ‘exasperated’ people: Sarkozy’s reformulation of the typical populist view of politics

Elite	People
Elites, tenants de la pensée unique, le politiquement correct, là-haut, cette petite élite qui s'est arrogé le droit de dire ce qui est bien et ce qui est mal, donneurs de leçons, le système, appareils, notables, bien pensant, commissaires européens, Banques Centrales, cabinets ministériels, grands corps, experts, bureaucraties, corporatismes, lobbies, technocratie, syndicalistes, accaparement du pouvoir	La France de toujours, la vraie France, le peuple français, les sans-grade, anonymes, gens ordinaires, majorité silencieuse, ceux qui travaillent dur, la France exaspérée, les honnêtes gens, la France qui souffre, la France qui se lève tôt, cri de révolte, cette France qui en a assez d'être sacrifiée, qui en a assez de payer pour des erreurs qu'elle n'a pas commises, qui en a assez qu'on se moque d'elle
Idéologie, dogmatisme	Bon sens, réalisme, au nom de quoi ?,
Immobilisme, renoncement, inefficacité, injustice	Avenir, changement, réforme, imagination, volonté, énergie, intelligence, force, espoir, révolte
La gauche mondaine, la gauche qui a pris goût aux privilèges, la gauche qui n'aime pas la nation	Porte-parole du peuple
Coalition hétéroclite, front anti-Sarkozy, déni de démocratie, procès stalinien, fascistes, guerre, sectarisme, mépris, arrogance, violence, haine, hargne, outrance, injure	Ouverture, rassemblement, ensemble, tous, tolérance
Hommes politiques, médias, contentement, politique pour soi-même, intérêts particuliers, clientélisme	Peuples dépossédés de leurs destins
Mensonge, hypocrisie, trahison, insinuation, dénigrement, escamoter le peuple, langue de bois, cynisme, partis, combinaisons, <i>combinazione</i> , tapis vert, calculs électoraux, combines des partis dans le dos des Français, manœuvres politiciennes, IV ^{ème} République, Italie, connivences, intérêts, duplicité	Vérité, honnêteté, authenticité, liberté, parole, penser, cœur, Je dis tout haut ce que tout le monde pense tout bas, sincérité, amour de la République

Anti-establishment discourse is dominated by the symbolic ‘de-differentiation’ of the ruling elite and the contraposition of the political self against what is vilipended as a colluding block of power (Schedler 1996:295). In the French context, anti-system actors have traditionally resorted to this semantic scheme to condemn mainstream parties’ common policy fiascos, and present themselves as agents of true political change. In 2007, this particular syncretism was achieved by Sarkozy through the multi-faceted notion of ‘*rupture*’ (break away) which had originally crystallised in the dispute over France’s ‘social model’ during the ECT referendum campaign. As political circumstances evolved, this cognitive shortcut proved rather elusive but its most noticeable features rested with the allocation by Sarkozy of irresponsiveness to the political class as a whole, and his confrontational self-definition as a vector of hope and a force for change against all established parties, Chirac’s RPR/UMP notably included.

“Quand je pense à ce que j’ai entendu quand j’ai parlé de rupture ! Aujourd’hui, on se l’arrache, mais mon antériorité devrait jouer en ma faveur. Depuis 2002, je me suis construit en marge d’un système qui ne voulait pas de moi comme président de l’UMP, qui récusait mes idées comme ministre de l’Intérieur et qui contestait mes propositions” (Sarkozy, in Le Figaro, 17/04/07)

“Le combat que je mène aujourd’hui en tant que ministre de l’intérieur, celui que nous allons mener ensemble pour gagner en 2007, c’est un combat qui va bien au-delà des alternances traditionnelles que notre pays connaît depuis 25 ans. Nous devons changer notre pays, nous devons le changer profondément, nous devons rompre avec ce système politique, économique et social qui, depuis trente ans, ne produit que de la dette, du chômage et de l’immobilisme. C’est cela que j’appelle la rupture” (Sarkozy Discours Réunion des nouveaux adhérents UMP, Paris, 19/11/2005)

“J’ai le devoir de parler à tous ceux que la politique a trahis pour leur demander de me croire car j’ai la volonté de tout dire avant l’élection parce que je ferai tout après. Je vous demande d’y croire

à nouveau parce que c'est la France qui est en jeu. Je veux de l'honnêteté, de l'authenticité, de la vérité dans la vie politique française" (Sarkozy, Discours au Futuroscope à Poitiers (26/01/07))

One last dimension of Sarkozy's political *praxis* which ought to be carefully dissected is that of his manipulation of the emotional repertoire. As suggested, the latter was pivotal to the candidate's politics of exasperation and courting of the 'fed-up' voter. It played an equally important role in triggering emotional responses to crime and violence in French society. Psychology research has offered insight into the role of fear in opening the gates to political persuasion. At a symbolic level, systematically taking the victims' side contributed also to the self-projection by Sarkozy as spokesman of the 'silent majority' against what was described as the ideological permissiveness and dogma of rehabilitation expounded by the elite. Politically, the omnipresence of the emotional appeal to voters' anxiety served the zero-tolerance programme and the hard stance on law-and-order, an area in which the UMP leader had acquired strong policy credibility since 2002 (see *infra.*).

"Je suis allé, dans cette campagne, avec toute la douleur à laquelle il m'a été donné d'être confronté. J'y suis allé avec en moi le souvenir de toutes ces rencontres, de cette famille à La Courneuve qui pleurait la mort d'un petit garçon de onze ans. C'était le jour de la fête des pères, deux bandes rivales s'affrontaient au pied de l'immeuble et ce petit garçon a pris une balle perdue. C'était le jour où j'ai parlé du Karcher. Je ne regrette pas d'avoir stigmatisé celui qui est capable de tuer un petit garçon de 11 ans le jour de la fête des pères. Je suis allé à la rencontre des Français avec dans ma mémoire la douleur des parents de cette jeune fille brûlée vive dans un bus auquel des voyous avaient mis le feu pour s'amuser. On ne s'amuse pas avec la vie d'une victime. J'y suis allé avec dans la tête la voix de ce petit garçon, par une belle après-midi, à Saint-Malo, petit garçon que je tenais par la main devant le cercueil de son père gendarme et qui me tirait par la manche en me disant : "Sors mon papa de la boîte !" Je n'oublierai jamais ce moment. J'y suis allé avec devant les yeux l'image de la jeune Ghofrane, et de sa mère si digne, Ghofrane battue à mort, torturée parce qu'elle refusait de donner son numéro de carte bleue à ses bourreaux. Il y avait deux euros cinquante sur son compte. Jamais nous ne pourrions accepter une telle barbarie" (Sarkozy, discours à Bercy, 29/04/07).

III. Endogeneity of party system dynamics and the transformation of the FN

Despite its significance, the above prism of ideological revision and symbolic transformation does not suffice to tell the entire story of mass defection by former FN voters to the UMP in 2007. The general political opportunity structure framework compels to examine the specific context of the 2007 presidential election. With respect to the endogenous dynamics of the French party system, there had been a number of substantial alterations consecutive to Le Pen's unanticipated progression to the second round of the 2002 presidential contest.

One first important aspect is that of the tactical dimension in the electoral swing that took place on the right of the political spectrum in 2007. Five years earlier, Le Pen's Pyrrhic victory in France's key first-order election had demonstrated the FN's lack of political viability beside its traditional role as a nuisance party and spoiler of elections. The disappointing showing in the decisive round of the 2002 presidential contest might have prompted voters to abandon a low-electability candidate in 2007 when Le Pen's popularity had not diminished dramatically and his ideas were still receiving substantial public opinion support.

Avoiding the 'wasted vote' was largely facilitated by the clear deficit in the competitive credibility balance between the FN and UMP candidates. In 2002, the realisation by the public of the paucity of tangible policy proposals in Le Pen's programme had been devastating to the FN leader's appeal in the second round of the presidential election. Prior to the 2007 campaign, the need to increase policy credibility was central to the efforts by the FN to set up thematic committees (*Commissions d'Action présidentielle*, CAP) to tap a wide range of socio-economic issues beyond the party's classic arguments on immigration and crime. Developing the party's sectoral expertise and incumbency-profile topped also the agenda of the FN summer university in Avignon in September 2006.

Yet, all polls pointed to Le Pen's continuing lack of presidential credibility which contrasted with the strength in the more positive public evaluation of Sarkozy as a competent and experienced presidential hopeful. The latter's aura was most noticeable in the FN's proprietary areas of immigration and crime, where the UMP leader enjoyed enduring levels of public support built upon his 'Rose Garden strategy' of gaining political visibility at the Ministry of Interior since 2002 (Ivaldi 2007). Clearly Sarkozy's high-profile management of the 2005 urban riots had contributed a great deal to firmly establish his tough-on-crime reputation (Perrineau 2008), a public image which was further cultivated through the making of a number of security and anti-criminality bills between 2003 and 2006. In 2007, the UMP hard-line policy credibility and the candidate's electoral promise to tackle multiple-offender crimes considerably diminished the political space available to the FN in the law-and-order policy arena.

On the strategic terrain, the 'lost cause' factor was undoubtedly reinforced by the systemic isolation of the FN, its situation as political pariah, and the refusal by the UMP to accommodate the extreme Right. In that, the marked ideological and stylistic shift to the right in Sarkozy's electioneering did not entail any notable departure from the uncompromising attitude by the RPR/UDF leaders since the late 1990s. Confinement to the margins of the party system was further revealed in the failure by the FN to set up an umbrella organisation (*Union patriotique*) for the purpose of unifying the whole of the French nationalist Right. On the contrary, diverging tactical views within the FN national leadership led to intra-party factionalism and turmoil. At organisational level, this came in sharp contrast with the acceleration of party aggregation under the auspices of the UMP (Haegel 2007), which ironically was in part a consequence of the growing electoral impact of the FN in the 2002 presidential contest.

In considering the opportunity structure behind the electoral defeat of the FN in 2007, one final relevant dimension involves the evolution of Le Pen's party itself. On the supply-side of right-wing politics, it can be reasonably assumed that the disorienting tactical re-positioning by the FN in the course of the 2007 campaign played a significant role in estranging some of its former supporters. One important lesson was perhaps the inappropriateness of Le Pen's self-labelled 'tortoise' strategy. This strategy of 'non-campaign' was somehow justified by the previous experience of the 2002 election and the miscalculation that the increased salience of immigration and crime issues in the presidential agenda would naturally speak in favour of the FN and inevitably lead to another 'divine surprise' in the polls.

"Les événements travaillent pour moi (...) Si je regarde les programmes défendus par mes concurrents, ils sont peu ou prou toujours venus sur mes terrains. Le public doit me reconnaître d'avoir été celui qui a vu clair et qui a vu loin, qui a deviné avant les autres les problèmes du pays (...) Les électeurs préféreront toujours l'original à la copie" (Le Pen, BFM, 03/04/07)

Behavioural and rhetorical changes in particular further contributed to blurring the electoral appeal of the far Right. Most importantly, these changes mirrored the transformation undergone by the mainstream Right. The UMP's ideological shift to the right and flirtation with anti-establishment politics was met with a centripetal move by the FN and a significant process of 'de-radicalisation'. Confronted with the 2002 incapacity to garner sufficient second-round electoral support, Le Pen's party had undertaken to downgrade its traditional anti-system stance in order to gain democratic legitimacy. This more conciliatory approach had been instigated by the modernist wing of the national leadership (i.e. Marine Le Pen, Olivier Martinelli, Louis Aliot, Jean-François Touzé and others) and endorsed by Le Pen at the FN party congress in Nice in April 2003. In the 2007 campaign, changes were perceptible in Le Pen's symbolic claim to occupy the 'centre-right' of the political spectrum as well as in a notable inflexion of relational and ideological anti-systemness which had been the party's trademark since the mid-1990s. A glance at the political dramaturgy of Le Pen points to those strategic adjustments at the beginning of the campaign (see below).

"On dit que Jean-Marie Le Pen est un extrémiste, que c'est l'extrême-droite pour disqualifier on message. C'est faux, je suis un homme de centre-droit. J'ai appartenu en 1958 au Centre national des indépendants et paysans d'Antoine Pinay, j'étais du centre-droit. Je défendais les mêmes idées que maintenant (...) Ce n'est pas moi qui me suis déporté vers l'extrême droite, c'est le corps politique français qui s'est décalé vers la gauche" (Le Pen in Paris-Match, 04/01/2007).

"Je n'ai pas de contentieux personnel avec M. Sarkozy comme j'en avais avec M. Chirac, non pas de mon fait mais de son fait à lui (...) Je ne considère pas avoir des ennemis mais des concurrents, même à gauche (...) Ces dernières années, c'est Chirac qui a fait preuve d'ostracisme à l'encontre du FN, et non pas l'inverse. Chirac ne voulait pas parler avec nous. Si M. Sarkozy veut parler avec tous les partis politiques y compris le Front national, c'est une ère nouvelle, oui. Si Sarkozy dit qu'il est d'accord pour un rapprochement, pourquoi pas ? Cela dépendra de l'intérêt de notre pays et de l'intérêt de notre mouvement. En tous les cas nous n'avons pas d'a priori, ni contre lui, ni contre personne (...) Sur des sujets comme l'école, la réforme fiscale, la réforme des retraites, il doit y avoir des points possibles d'accord et de convergence" (Le Pen in Le Figaro, 11/04/2007).

Second, and most crucially, the 2007 presidential campaign saw a notable alteration in the general value framing of the FN's political message on immigration and nationhood, precisely at a time when the mainstream Right would venture exploring the likely electoral benefits of identity politics. This change entailed both a greater emphasis on the political economy of international migrations and the dissociation with the cultural neo-racist agenda that had prevailed in the party for over two decades. A traditional feature of the FN communication on immigration, the metaphor of a swamping uncontrolled immigration as an immediate external threat remained central to the 2007 agenda of the far Right. Yet immigration issues merged almost exclusively the socio-economic dimension and were essentially associated with citizenship or, ultimately, the party's fundamental line of 'national preference'. This welfare-chauvinistic appeal was combined with a call for an effective zero-immigration policy against Sarkozy's notion of '*immigration choisie*'.

What significantly differed however from the past was the re-interpretation by the FN of immigration issues within a strict citizenship framework with no allusion to the ethnic, cultural or religious aspects that had profoundly shaped the party's rhetoric of the French community for years. Such evolution was not entirely novel to the FN. An 'assimilationist' line had temporarily surfaced in the 1999 European elections as exemplified in the short-lived intra-party controversy over 'multi-denominational France'. The need for a *realpolitik* of immigration and implicit acceptance of multiculturalism was foreshadowed at a time when the FN was being challenged by the neo-racist and strong islamophobic stance of the then newly created splinter MNR.

“L’immigration est un problème politique, pas à proprement parler un problème religieux. Il y a depuis très longtemps des musulmans en France. Des dizaines voire des centaines de milliers de musulmans sont morts pour le drapeau français sans que cela ne pose problème. Vous ne verrez pas dans les villes de France des musulmans se prosternant trois fois par jour, en masse, tournés vers La Mecque. Ce n’est pas parce qu’il y a des musulmans qu’il y a problème. C’est parce que ces étrangers ont la double nationalité. Je suis de plus en plus inquiet de la situation que l’immigration peut créer” (Le Pen, Press conference in Orange, 03/09/1999).

In September 2006, Le Pen’s speech delivered in Valmy represented a key moment in the renewed attempt by the FN to distance itself from cultural xenophobia and ‘de-racialise’ its portrayal of immigration. The speech received widespread media coverage and was notable for the celebration of second-generation immigrants as an integral part of the national community. That the FN was again considering a ‘cultural’ turn had already been perceptible during the 2005 urban riots, where Le Pen refuted publicly the idea that the uprising had ethnic or religious causes. It was further revealed in the launch in December 2006 of electoral posters portraying a young black woman wearing low-waisted jeans and a piercing (see Figure 1), as well as in the controversial visit by Le Pen in Argenteuil in April 2007.

“Et vous aussi Français d’origine étrangère, je vous invite à nous rejoindre (...) Oui, vous aussi Français d’origine étrangère, je vous appelle à communier sur nos valeurs, dans la mesure où vous respectez nos coutumes et nos lois, dans la mesure où vous n’aspirez qu’à vous élever dans ce pays par le travail, nous sommes prêts, comme nous le fîmes toujours par le passé, à vous fondre dans le creuset national et républicain, avec les mêmes droits, mais aussi les mêmes devoirs. Il y eut un Platini, il y a eu un Zidane... pourquoi ce grand dessein ne serait plus possible demain ? Oui tous, non pas Français de souche ou de papier mais Français de coeur et d’esprit, nous pouvons constituer demain, dans un grand élan d’union nationale, cette armée hétéroclite des soldats de Valmy rassemblée autour d’une même idée - de cette France, qui est d’abord une idée - celle de la République, une et indivisible, fière de son histoire et assimilatrice, respectueuse de la liberté et soucieuse des humbles, et plus que tout éprise de justice et d’égalité , celle de la République, selon notre Constitution : Laïque, Démocratique et Sociale” (Le Pen in Valmy, 20/09/2006)

“Le mot beur est déjà un mot qui rejette l’assimilation, il vous a été imposé par la pensée unique. Vous êtes les branches de l’arbre France, vous êtes des français à part entière. Si certains veulent vous Kärcheriser pour vous exclure, nous voulons, nous, vous aider à sortir de ces ghettos de banlieues où les politiciens français vous ont parqués, pour vous traiter de racaille par la suite. Il n’y a pas de beuritude, pour moi vous n’êtes ni des potes, ni des blacks, ni des beurs, vous êtes des citoyens français, des enfants légitimes de la France faisant partie de notre république. Vous avez les mêmes droits et devoirs comme nous tous, comme la préférence nationale car seuls vous pouvez parfaitement comprendre pourquoi il est urgent de l’appliquer” (Le Pen in Argenteuil, 06/04/2007).

Figure 1. FN electoral poster in the 2007 presidential election



Concurring signs were also tangible in party manifesto writing. In 2002, the *Pour un avenir français* presidential programme had retained most features of the FN's generic ethno-cultural argumentation on national identity that had culminated in the *50 propositions* on immigration published in 1991 under the auspices of the party's National Delegation then headed by Mégret. Analysis on the structure and language of the 2002 manifesto confirms the central role by national identity against the alleged 'cosmopolitarian' ideology of the political establishment. Then, the logic was that immigration be considered a 'deadly threat to France's identity' that 'profoundly alters the very substance of the French people' 'derived historically from the fusion of three European components: Celtic, Latin and Germanic', these being regarded as the authentic source of cultural homogeneity across the continent. The neo-racist agenda was supplemented with the rejection of multiculturalism and overt hostility towards Islam expressed in the strong call to 'halt the islamisation of France'.

"Le refus de la société multiculturelle, au nom de l'identité de la France, est le combat fondamental du Front National. L'identité est, à la Nation, ce que la personnalité est à l'individu. Elles sont la condition de sa vie et de sa liberté (...) L'histoire de l'humanité et l'observation des peuplements de la planète confirment cette loi : partout où cohabitent des peuples de race, de langue, de culture ou de religion radicalement différentes, l'assimilation se révèle impossible et des conflits surviennent, tôt ou tard. Or, l'immigration massive que nous subissons porte atteinte à notre identité et, par voie de conséquence, à l'existence de la France" (*Pour un avenir français*, FN 2002 presidential programme).

A clear aggiornamento can be detected in the 2007 presidential manifesto unveiled in the party presidential convention in Lille in February, which abandoned the old commitment to radical right-wing culturalism and revised the defence of identity policies. A quick glance at the content of the programme confirms this move into the new sphere of looking almost exclusively at the economic implications of immigration. It is remarkable that the terms 'national identity' appear only once in the chapter dedicated to the FN environmental policies while the party's traditional attacks on Islam limit themselves to pointing out the risk of Islamic terrorism to national security or reaffirming France's basic principle of laicity.

More generally, the partisan tactics of ‘opening up’ the FN resulted in significant adjustments in some of the party’s most identifiable socio-economic and cultural policy proposals. Again, the contrast with the main vector of Sarkozy’s trajectory in the competitive space was striking and noteworthy. Whilst the UMP successfully took up the social-conservative agenda, Le Pen’s party strove to break abruptly with its moral and faith-based stance on abortion and the civil solidarity pact’s implicit provisions for homosexual union (PACS). At party level, this policy shift was again determined by the changing balance of power between various groups of elites and a consequence of the rise of the ‘progressive’ faction led by Marine Le Pen. The cultural move beyond social conservatism was intended to extend the electoral appeal of the party beyond the traditional boundaries of the small fundamentalist catholic constituency. It was also considered a means of reducing the gender gap customary to extreme right male chauvinistic politics.

Lastly, on the socio-economic axis, the party claimed to revisit the political economy of both the Left and the Right, and to develop the ‘neither Left nor Right’ line of argument that had embodied the distinctively divergent approach by the FN since the mid-1990s. Comparative research has emphasised strategic adjustments in free-market anti-taxation economics of the European radical Right in the late 1990s, with a centripetal move towards more redistributive economic policies (MacGann and Kitschelt 2005, De Lange 2007). At its electoral apogee in 2002, the FN leftwards turn had not been balanced with any notable revision of the traditional liberal anti-tax agenda, which had resulted in an increased level of ideological heterogeneity. Such ambiguity in the party platform was revealed in Le Pen’s ‘*socialement de gauche, économiquement de droite*’ presidential slogan which hardly concealed conflicting policy priorities and budgetary incoherence.

In 2007, anti-globalisation and economic protectionism remained central to the ‘working class’ agenda of the French far Right. One important element of change involved however muting fiscal and monetary demagoguery in order to strengthen the party’s historically low economic credibility that had been exposed to the forefront of electoral competition in 2002. Changes in the party’s views on income and wealth taxes or the 35-hour working week were revealing instances of this attempt by the FN to bend its policies towards the centre, and place its economic programme within the boundary of governmental ‘reasonableness’.

Conclusion

The above analysis of the political opportunity structure underpinning the misfortunes of the French extreme Right in the 2007 national elections has touched upon factors that may help account for the size of the electoral swing that took place between the FN and the UMP on that occasion. In line with the recent literature on radical Right politics, the focus has been on patterns of inter-party competition and a number of relevant ‘supply-side’ variables behind the electoral conversion of former radical Right supporters. In particular, this paper has examined the strategic response articulated by the mainstream Right to the rise of the FN while considering simultaneously the transformation of the latter under the new party system constraints that had paradoxically arisen from Le Pen’s success in 2002.

To better illustrate perhaps the quasi-functional link that existed between the 2002 and 2007 presidential contests, some of our hypotheses can be usefully encapsulated in the concept of 'delayed vote for change' derived from the American literature on third-party voting (see for instance Abramson et al. 1995). It posits that a vote for a third-party can be viewed as a signal and incentive for dominant actors to alter the direction of their current policies in order to tap the reason why voters defected to the peripheral candidate. The ideologically-driven campaign and political transformation instigated by Sarkozy is a prominent example of this attempt to influence Le Pen's supporters to return to the mainstream. In 2007, a significant proportion of FN voters did so not only to avoid wasting their ballot on a candidate with little prospects –which they had done on many occasions in the past–, but also because they perceived that their preferences were being 'truly' addressed by the UMP candidate.

What actually lied behind 'truly' is of course of tremendous axiomatic importance. The argument developed here is that Sarkozy's adaptative strategy to the rise of the far Right resulted in a profound reconstruction of the Right's ideological corpus and a marked shift on both the socio-economic and cultural axes of competition. At a behavioural level, the UMP candidate proved particularly skilful in crafting a populist appeal to the 'silent majority' and the 'fed-up people' against the political elite. His 'politics of exasperation' generated a confrontational style of protest politics from within the mainstream, which allowed him to exploit existing popular resentment with established parties and, to a lesser extent, the EU, most crucially perhaps among former FN voters.

In substantive terms, the doctrinal revision by the UMP leader reconciled his political camp with some of the core values and basic positions of the Right on the structure of society. In 2007, Sarkozy's winning formula consisted of the communion between anti-egalitarianism and national identity politics underpinned by differentialist ethnocultural assertiveness. His conservative and authoritarian representation of an organic *Gemeinschaft* instilled the whole range of policy proposals by the UMP and provided a solid value-based terrain for its ambitious reformative programme. In more than one way, Sarkozy's main discursive repertoires were strikingly reminiscent of the meta-political programme of the conservative fringe of the French new Right in the 1980s, which had survived into present times embedded in the FN ideology. Not only their reformulation provided the mythical foundation for Sarkozy's combat for ideological dominance but also it participated in the UMP candidate's electoral attractiveness to former extreme Right voters in 2007.

Put in comparative perspective, the collapse of the FN is paradigmatic of the difficulty for populist radical parties in general to sustain electoral competitiveness when confronted with the challenges of governmental responsibility (Delwit and Poirier 2007). One lesson to be drawn from the French experience is that of Le Pen's party incapacity to achieve presidential credibility and break free from the anti-system approach that had dominated its *praxis* for decades. Moreover, the FN's desperate search for credibility resulted most notably in a dampening of its political agenda on national identity, cultural and socio-economic policies, which contrasted sharply with the renewed electoral marketing by the mainstream Right.

To conclude, this crossing of the UMP and FN diverging trajectories within the competitive space bears important implications with regard to the changing nature of the extreme Right phenomenon in France since the mid-1980s. The French FN has traditionally been considered a typical occurrence of Kitschelt's new radical Right party both in terms of its programmatic appeal and capacity to build a cross-class alliance of petty-bourgeois and working class voters (Kitschelt 1995:ch.3). Notable alterations in the party's political economy were well under

way in the late 1990s to accommodate the political preferences of the FN's growing working class constituency: anti-globalisation, economic protectionism and anti-EU rhetorics contributed a great deal to the more 'leftist' approach at a time when the party was still able to sustain an unambiguous line combining anti-systemness and strong cultural xenophobia (Ivaldi 2003).

Reviewing some demand-side empirical evidence for the 2007 presidential vote in France points to some important changes in the structure of electoral competition on the right of the political spectrum. We can advance the hypothesis that Sarkozy's wide-ranging reinterpretation of anti-egalitarianism helped recapture the clientele of small-business owners that had converted to the FN in the early stage of its electoral development in the mid-1980s. Preliminary election survey results tend to indicate that those defecting from the FN were more rightist on the socio-economic dimension and had a higher socio-economic status compared with those who remained loyal to the far Right (Mayer 2007). That Sarkozy managed simultaneously to increase the mainstream Right's level of support amongst manual workers and the lower *salariat* (Brézet 2008) lends weight to the assumption that his appeal based upon authoritarianism, popular capitalism, national identity exclusionism and anti-establishment politics revitalised the 'winning formula' that had governed the electoral fortunes of new radical Right and neoconservative parties in the 1980s.

Conversely, the electoral base of the FN clearly lacked in 2007 the strong petty-bourgeois component that was characteristic of its previous performances in the polls (Fourquet 2008). In taxonomic terms, the FN seems to have undergone a significant transformation to resemble Kitschelt's 'welfare chauvinist' party, a type associated with an essentially working class and low education constituency. Behind Le Pen's low-tide showing in the 2007 presidential election there lies the reality of his party's more persistent electoral strengths amongst impoverished lower social strata. This sheds light on the continuing significance of two core elements of the far Right's programmatic appeal: the nativist welfare chauvinist call for national preference, on the one hand, and the strong anti-EU –most importantly anti-Euro–stance on the other hand. Both policies clearly fall beyond the boundary of the region of acceptability. In that they posed impassable limits to the mainstream Right's takeover bid in 2007 despite Sarkozy's willingness to push public debate to the limits in many other areas. In the future, these might well offer the FN a fallback electoral niche from where to exploit popular discontent with the new presidency.

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