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**Evaluating the populist challenge:  
partisanship and the making of immigration policy in France (1974-2011)**

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**Abstract**

The objective of this paper is to study the policy impact the populist right has had on established actors in the French party system. To do so, it adopts a long-term perspective by looking at developments in immigration policies since the early 1970s. The paper generates a number of empirical measures to assess policy change and the partisan motivations underlying new legislations. The analysis demonstrates that policy inputs by parties of the right have been significantly more vulnerable to exogenous contagion effects by the FN. Left-wing parties in contrast have not abdicated from their ideological preferences for expansive immigration policies. Lastly, whilst the findings suggest historical continuity in the politics of immigration control by the right since the mid-1970s, they point to significant policy and positional shifts in the area of immigrant integration, particularly after 2010. As a consequence, party polarization has dramatically increased.

Keywords: right-wing populism, immigration, policy contagion effect, partisanship, FN, France

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The puzzle of the rise of right-wing populist parties in Western democracies has received a great deal of attention. There is a vast literature seeking to account for the electoral fortunes of those parties. In the last ten years research has devoted more effort to casting light on the reciprocity of the relationship between the populist right and its political environment (Minkenberg 2001, Rydgren 2005, Arzheimer and Carter 2006). With right-wing populists breaking through into elected office across a number of European countries, studies have also become gradually interested in reflecting on those parties' performances in government (Heinisch 2003, Albertazzi and McDonnell 2010, Duncan 2010, Mazzoleni and Skenderovic 2007).

More recently, new questions have arisen around the issue of populist right impact on the other competitors in the party system. There is now a growing body of research on the strategic and programmatic responses articulated by parties of the mainstream in order to confront their new rivals (Garner 2005, Williams 2006, Zaslove 2006, Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup 2008, Bale et al. 2010). This scholarly work aims to address the key question of the contagion effect by right-wing populists on other parties' policy positions (van Spanje 2010).

A case study of the political impact by the Front national (FN) in France fits this research agenda. In France, mainstream parties have witnessed the growth and stabilization in the electoral support for the populist right since the mid-1980s. Whilst they have successfully managed to bar the FN from entering the arena of policy elaboration (Ivaldi 2007), the external political influence and nuisance power of right-wing populism have grown larger over the years.

Policy impact hypotheses have been put forward. Bale (2008:457) suggests for example that "policy being a response to the far-right is probably most evident in France". Restrictive and repressive policies introduced in the areas of immigration and law-and-order have been interpreted as a reaction by the moderate right to the electoral entrenchment of the FN within the party system (Schain 2006). To many observers, the swing has culminated under Nicolas Sarkozy's leadership over the UMP right-wing coalition. Since 2006, immigration and law-and-order have topped the French political agenda, and the UMP has been widely criticized for adopting the postures and policies of the populist right with a view to secure its electoral appeal to FN voters (Marthaler 2008).

For those familiar with the public debates surrounding each of the many dramatic episodes that have punctuated the electoral advent of the populist right in France, the recurrence of those themes is notorious. Whilst there seems to be a large consensus about the fact that the FN has exerted significant influence on other parties in the political system, there has been little effort on the other hand to provide empirical evidence for such assumptions of ideological pervasiveness and policy shifts to the right.

The main purpose of this paper is therefore to put the 'policy contagion' argument under more meticulous scrutiny. It sets out to examine whether claims of political impact by the FN can be sustained in a systematic empirical way and, if the case, which indicators of populist right contamination can be resorted to within the framework of a national case-study. To try answer those questions, this contribution adopts a long-term perspective by looking at developments in immigration policies in particular since the early 1970s and the extent to which these can be viewed as corollary to the exogenous influence by the FN.

To this end, the paper generates original data to document policy changes across time. These are complemented with a quantitative analysis of the political framing of immigration policy preferences and the partisan motivations underlying new policy inputs.

### **Evaluating populist right impact: issues, venues and actors**

When trying to assess policy contagion effects exerted by the populist right, a first question to ask is that of the perimeter in which to perform the search. On the supply-side of electoral politics, the surge in popularity of right-wing populist parties has brought new cultural issues to the forefront of the West European electoral agenda (Kitschelt 1995, Ignazi 2003). In France, the political agenda marked out by the populist right is one that typically amalgamates nationalist exclusionism and socio-cultural authoritarianism as its ultimate ideological features. Immigration and crime in particular have traditionally formed a typical set of salient issues for the FN both at party and mass level. If one should probably not overlook the role of some of the other lines of conflict that structure political competition in France<sup>1</sup>, the ‘cultural’ axis arguably constitutes a focal domain where to look for impact by the populist right.

Within it, opposition to immigration is the most publicized issue. Over the years, the FN has framed multifaceted public concerns about immigration in the competitive space. The nationalist immigration platform of the party reaches far beyond immigration control to encompass cultural protectionism, an exclusive citizenry and the promotion of welfare chauvinist policies. These form part of the ‘nativist’ agenda that is constitutive of the new right-wing populist parties’ core ethno-pluralist ideology and electoral appeal to voters (Betz and Johnson 2004, Mudde 2007).

Our research compass being set to this particular cluster of issues, a second question that precedes the empirical work is that of venues of party competition where to look for influence by the populist right. In this contribution, the scope for analysis is set to substantive policy making and executive actions. This shift in emphasis is dictated by the need to reflect on the (dis)continuous process in possible contagion effects. Whilst national elections represent critical moments in the programmatic activity by political parties, more attention needs perhaps to be devoted to what happens during the interval in mass public opinion or second-order elections. Assuming fluctuating populist pressure, new policy targets may well be defined during legislatures and these might represent significant departures from the preferences articulated in party platforms during the electoral campaign.

The ‘real-life’ policy examination that is proposed here aims thereby to complement studies of party competition and programmatic change (e.g. Kriesi et al. 2008, Bornschier 2010, Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009) and can be deemed an effort to enrich the scholarly works that strive to narrow the gap between the fields of policy and party politics (Triadafilopoulos and Zaslove 2006, Statham and Geddes 2007, Gudbrandsen 2010).

This focus on the legislative arena allows to explore the behavior of partisan actors in enacting substantive policy choices, and the political discourse surrounding policy innovation. This brings us to the third and last opening question, which relates to the political actors involved in the contagion effect by the populist right. Parties of the conservative right are likely to be more vulnerable to such pressure (Norris 2005). In the French case, it is not over-

exaggerated to say that the right has spent over two decades trying to recapture the vote lost to the FN (Shields 2010). It is often argued that, as a consequence of the contamination of political discourses by the populist right's themes, the center of gravity of the whole French party system has moved to the right.

Crossing over to the other side of the political spectrum, the French left itself has not proved totally immune to the electoral success of the FN. A dire reminder of this political reality came in the dramatic episode of 21<sup>st</sup> April 2002, which saw the elimination of socialist candidate Jospin in the first round of the presidential election. More decisively, parties of the left have been affected by the dealignment process in their traditional blue-collar constituency, and the mass desertion to the FN by working-class voters since the late 1980s (Perrineau 2009). A wider angle is therefore needed to examine the extent to which the contagion impact of right-wing populism concerns the party system as a whole.

### Analysis

The analysis presented here is threefold and begins with the measurement of policy salience. A first indication of impact is that of the FN's influence on policy agenda formation. The study of immigration policy developments needs to be incorporated in the more general framework that takes account of the specific combinatory in the mobilisatory appeal by the populist right. It is therefore important to place immigration policies in the more general context of legislation change on issues of law-and-order and cultural liberalism to better evaluate the trajectories of the successive French governments, and the extent to which their policy programs might have moved closer to the core constitutive elements of the FN agenda.

A similar way of reasoning applies to the examination of the alterations and adjustments that have been made to immigration policies in particular. The claim that mainstream parties have undergone a rightward shift and espoused more restrictive immigration policies is common in the literature (e.g. Harmel and Svasand 1997, Norris 2005). Yet the sole notion of restrictiveness is too vague to approximate populist right impact. If the objective is to establish the extent to which the main ideological features of right-wing populism have penetrated mainstream policy preferences, then it might be necessary to disentangle those policies and seek differential effects across various domains of the legislative activity on immigration.

Lastly, one third area of interest is that of evaluating frameworks of policy revision. These can be uncovered by the discursive universes and strategies by political actors in the course of elaborating new policies. Together with the 'hard evidence' of legislation implementation, it is important to look at partisan motivations and elite-level conflicts underlying policy inputs, as well as the internal and external sources of incentive for legislative change. If one agrees with Vink (2010:42) that parliamentary debates are 'residuals of wider societal debates', then there is a strong case for looking at policy preferences and the ideological polarization revealed in the positioning by partisan actors in the parliamentary arena.

It is too often assumed that opportunistic parties of the moderate right go fish for the populist vote by simply copy-cattng the positions of their populist challengers. More attention should be devoted to the transformative process by which those issues are transported into mainstream policy development (Messina 2007, Bale 2003). A focus on parliamentary

debates permits the assessment of how established parties attempt to gain control of and (re)frame issues politicized by the populist right, within the boundaries imposed by imperatives of intra-party competition, programmatic acceptability and, increasingly so, a common European policy framework.

Europeanization comes of course as a matter of crucial importance to the understanding of the framing of immigration issues by political elites. Since the mid-1990s, immigration as a policy domain has moved further away from the control of national governments. The European context in which national parties operate can hardly be ignored. Nor can we overlook the development of a common European immigration policy framework and the consequent standardization that has occurred in national models (Joppke 2007, Duncan and Van Hecke 2008, Luedtke 2010). As will be discussed, this presupposes that the analysis of debates in the parliamentary arena controls for EU-related factors but also reflects on how European issues are mobilized as strategic discursive resources by national politicians.

### **Methods and data**

The paper adopts a national case-study perspective and aims to develop empirical measures for a systematic comparison of immigration policies over time. Given the already long history of the FN since its first electoral breakthrough in 1983/84, it is necessary to trace impact back to the early 1970s. It is generally accepted that the politicization of immigration and its incorporation into the framework for executive and legislative action began in the late 1960s in France (Weil 1991).

The selection of extensive time series measures covering nearly four decades provides a comprehensive portrait of France's immigration policies. It supplies the amount of party-based and time-related variance that is required to address the role of partisanship in policy making, and eventually help place the recent evolution of the mainstream right in historical perspective. Using the same methodological criteria allows track of change and continuity within a given legislature. It also helps compare pre-and-post FN emergence phases, which can be seen as one way of building empirically upon the counterfactual argument that some of the trends that have been observed in French immigration policies originated in the period that preceded the electoral upsurge of the populist right.

The first part of the analysis is concerned with the degree of autonomy of immigration as a distinct policy domain within the more general 'libertarian-authoritarian' agenda. It starts by a quantitative assessment of policy salience defined as the amount of legislation devoted to specific policy areas within the legislative process as a whole. The focus is on laws pertaining to immigration, law-and-order or security and, more generally, to the core orientations of a cultural libertarian agenda that comes into opposition with the traditional social-authoritarian stances of the FN. The latter category covers a range of policies as diverse as gender equality, civil rights and individual liberties, the recognition of minorities and fight against discriminations, measures against social exclusion or racism, which all form part of the cultural liberalization process that was initiated in the 1970s.

These make up a total set of 2,162 parliamentary laws from May 1974 to May 2011 available to a policy domain analysis<sup>2</sup>. Partisanship is taken from the make up of parliamentary majorities in each successive legislature (V<sup>th</sup> to XIII<sup>th</sup>). Political orientations (left/right) are

derived accordingly. It must be noted here that the analysis concerns exclusively parliamentary acts that have been adopted and put into force. Abandoned pieces of legislation, amendments rejected during parliamentary sessions or controversial provisions censored by the Constitutional Council are excluded from the analysis. Given their significance, extensive accounts of these are found of course in the data on parliamentary debates.

In the second part of the analysis, the focus is more specifically on the subset of immigration policies with a view to measure empirically the direction taken in certain key areas over a similar time span. Policy is taken here in a broader sense including all parliamentary acts as well as administrative rulings (i.e. governmental decrees, *ordonnances* and circulars), the latter being of particular significance to the government's autonomous regulatory power under the provisions of the French constitution (art. 34 & 37).

The operationalization builds upon and aims to expand the work by Givens and Luedtke (2005) in their comparative study of European immigration policies. The authors suggest to differentiate between two areas of 'immigration control' and 'immigrant integration' (p.3). Here policy is divided into three main types: immigration control, immigrant integration and labour immigration, which can be broken down into the following policy areas:

- Immigration control: illegal immigration, political asylum and refugees, visas, border control, detention, student permits
- Immigrant integration: citizenship, family reunion, marriage, residency requirements, anti-discrimination
- Labour immigration: legal labour immigration, work permits

This deviates from earlier classifications on two important accounts. First, policy relating to family reunification is put under 'immigrant integration' as it pertains to the rights of people who are already legally settled in France. Second, it seems preferable to specify labour immigration as a third category distinct from the control dimension. Again a strong rationale for this is found in the reality of French immigration policies which have traditionally singularized economic migration, even more so in the recent period. *In fine* these three types correspond more closely with the general framing of the political debate on immigration and its legislative translation in France.

The coding is done for each individual provision contained in the pieces of legislation included in the analysis. This choice is dictated by the recent evolution of immigration policy making whereby legislation has become increasingly complex. Policies are not of one piece and it is often the case that a particular bill contains a package of measures going in opposite directions across different areas. Additionally it is important to take into account the interconnection that exists between different policy domains, mostly in the area of immigrant integration where provisions scatter across employment, social cohesion, healthcare or education laws. Conversely, some measures to tighten immigration control must be sought in security bills.

This second data set includes all legislative and regulatory provisions pertaining to immigration from 1974 to May 2011, which add up to a total of 715. The latter cases represent of course only a small part of the vast body of legislative acts and administrative rulings that exist in France. In particular, the analysis leaves out a large number of 'technical'

secondary application decrees as well as the many administrative decisions dealing with remit, competences or civil servant nominations, where no particular trend is discernable. To avoid duplication, case selection also takes into account the existing hierarchy of administrative norms, whereby similar provisions can be found in decrees and their subsidiary rulings. A provision that spreads across several articles of a same bill or ruling is only coded once. On the contrary, articles that contain two provisions or more are disaggregated and coded accordingly.

Each of these provisions is coded in terms of its direction towards more liberalization / expansiveness (+1) or control / restrictiveness (-1). This implies that no particular assumption is made regarding the symbolic or emotional impact of the provisions considered for analysis. It should also be noted that the coding of policy change is mostly relative rather than absolute, and therefore differs from studies that aim to contrast French immigration policies against international benchmarks (Givens and Luedtke 2005, Bauböck et al. 2006, Howard 2010). In the vast majority of cases, provisions are compared to those already contained in the existing domestic legislation in terms of their downgrading or upgrading previously established standards. This is largely facilitated by the fact that most legislative modifications have been made to the reference *Ordonnance* of 2 November 1945 through successive amendments and repeals by parliamentary majorities of both the left and right since the late 1970s.

Whereas there are few coding problems on the ‘control’ dimension, there is some uncertainty as to how to process some policy provisions on immigrant integration and labour. Considering the Republican model of universalistic cultural assimilation that has historically prevailed in France, attribution of a clear direction to some civic integration policy aspects is sometimes more problematic. The 2010 bill that banned the Islamic face veil (*niqab*) from public places is one clear instance of such ambiguity. Whilst a possible ‘assimilationist’ bias cannot be ignored, the choice was made to penalise coercive civic integration policies and therefore code as restrictive (-1) all provisions that would place most of the responsibility for assimilation on the immigrant alone. This was the case for instance for ‘civic integration’ requirements such as obligatory language, history or civic tests, as well as for provisions such as those contained in the anti-Niqab bill.

Similarly, there are some problems associated with coding sanctions against employers of illegal immigrants. In that case multiple inference is required, which leads to processing those particular sets of measures across two dimensions. On the one hand, provisions to crack down on companies that employ undocumented workers are restrictive on the control dimension insofar as they participate of the fight against illegal immigration. On the other hand, these can simultaneously be viewed as expansive on the labour dimension on the account that they could possibly lead to greater recognition –legalization– of illegal workers with regard to their contribution to the national economy.

The third and last data set that is envisaged here is drawn from a systematic analysis of parliamentary debates on immigration. The focus is on the party elite discursive constructions that accompany the development of legislation, as well as the make up and structure of partisan competition over those issues. This part of the study is based upon quantitative relational content analysis (Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings 2001). A method applicable to a wide range of political texts, quantitative relational content analysis is designed to code relations between ‘political objects’. It measures actors’ positioning in a public debate as well as the overall level of partisan polarization that exists in it.



The basic unit for analysis is the *core sentence* which, in the present case, is obtained from disaggregating public statements made by French MPs and Ministers during parliamentary debates over immigration bills. The focus is on relations between political actors (actor – actor – issue sentences) –most particularly of course cases where speakers from the opposition comment upon provisions contained in the draft bill by the government–, and relations between actors and issues. The relationship between the two objects is measured quantitatively using a five-point scale from -1 to +1 with intermediary positions (-.5, 0 and +.5), where a negative sign indicates criticism or rejection, as opposed to support or positive appraisal. Combined with the above actor/issue dichotomy, the directional measure enables the analysis to evaluate polarization in both its relational and ideological forms.

Given the objective to reflect on how some of the issues politicized by the populist right are transported into mainstream policy making, the coding of political issues is designed to encompass a reasonably large number of individual categories which in turn can be grouped into main domains for the purpose of comparison over time. With regard to the political affiliation of actors, speakers are considered at party level and, where appropriate, according to their belonging to well identified party factions. These can be further aggregated in terms of parliamentary groups of the majority and the opposition, which in the context of France’s majoritarian system overlaps with the left/right axis.

Drawing on the work by Dolezal et. al (2010) on the cross-national analysis of public debates over Islam, core sentences are also coded in terms of frames defined as ‘patterns of justification’ (p.179). The authors suggest to differentiate between three main types of frame: pragmatic, identity-based and moral-universal. The first type refers to arguments based upon pragmatic evaluations in terms of efficiency or cost-benefits with no particular normative judgment associated. Identity-based frames point to values that are peculiar of a community or a political camp. Conversely, moral-universal arguments relate to universal principles of justice and rights which are independent of established political cleavages. To be applicable to parliamentary debates, two additional types need to be considered: first a report-statistics category which refers to instances where the argument is based on statistics, reports or international comparison; second a type of ‘legal’ argument which is often used and relates to existing national legislation, international treaties or case law.

Lastly, it is important to place parliamentary discussions in the context of the development of a common immigration policy framework at EU level. A dummy ‘EU-related’ variable is therefore used to distinguish statements where a clear reference is made to European institutions –most obviously in cases of implementing European directives in national legislation– from those relating to strictly domestic aspects in the debate.

The data are drawn from records of parliamentary readings of immigration bills by the National Assembly, which are published *in extenso* in the *Journal Officiel* (French Gazette). All sections of the debates are considered for the analysis including preliminary general discussions, statements of motives, discussion of individual articles and amendments, as well as explanations of votes where appropriate.

This last data set is part of what should make a broader research project on French immigration policies. The analysis presented here is restricted to preliminary findings from the 1980 and 2011 government bills on immigration. In a way these represent the two ends of the temporal continuum, and therefore contribute to a first –incomplete– derivation of elements of continuity and change in the political framing of immigration policy in France<sup>3</sup>.

## Results

This first part is concerned with degrees of policy salience. It draws from the analysis of the legislative trajectories followed by successive French governments in the areas of immigration, law-and-order and cultural liberalism since the early 1970s. Table 1 below presents a summary of the amount of legislation concerned with those three policy areas in each of the French legislatures since 1974. Given the variability in the lifespan of parliamentary majorities –from 82 months under Giscard’s presidency between 1974 and 1981 down to only 25 months during the first period of cohabitation in 1986/88–, the salience of each policy domain is expressed as a percentage of the total number of laws passed during the legislature<sup>4</sup>.

As revealed in Table 1, immigration as a political issue has been on the French legislative agenda since the early 1970s. The results first remind us that there never was in France any ‘conspiracy of silence’ nor dismissive strategies by established political parties. Rather, there has been a common recognition by both the left and the right of the need to produce policies to address the presence of already well established immigrants on French soil as well as to set rules for the admission of newcomers. Overall, left and right have very similar shares of immigration laws (of about 1.8 per cent), notwithstanding the differences that might exist in their policy preferences, and which will be examined in the second part of the analysis.

[ Table 1 Here ]

If we look for immigration policy impact, then the first post-FN emergence right-wing government of Jacques Chirac in 1986 does not significantly depart from this general pattern and shows no actual tendency towards legislative inflation in this particular area. This holds true even when taking into account the aborted most controversial bill on nationality that the RPR/UDF coalition tried to put forward during their first time of coming back into office after the 1981 alternation to the left. The policy salience of immigration sees its first significant increase in the second Mitterrand presidency. With the exception of the Jospin left-wing government between 1997 and 2002, immigration laws represent a stable proportion of legislation from 1988 onwards, with a peak observed under Chirac’s second term between 2002 and 2007. Placed in historical perspective, the relative amount of immigration acts under Sarkozy is not dissimilar to that of his right-wing predecessors.

Differences between the left and the right are more pronounced with respect to their propensity to legislate in the domain of law-and-order. Across the whole period, the relative amount of security laws by right-wing governments is twice that of their left counterparts (2.9 as opposed 1.4 per cent). Unlike immigration, law-and-order issues gained legislative prominence in 1986-1988 during the first cohabitation, immediately after the FN made its

appearance on the forefront of the French political stage. When juxtaposed to the dearth of legislation in this area up to the mid-1980s, the abundance (5.6 per cent) of security-related bills during the short period of right-wing incumbency between 1986 and 1988 provides stronger empirical support to the 'policy reaction' hypothesis.

Contrary to the general assumption of intense law-and-order legislative activity by Sarkozy in his role as Minister of Interior, and despite the salience of criminality issues in the 2002 presidential campaign, the second Chirac presidency does not stand out as devoting greater attention to security matters than had been the case under the previous right-wing governments of 1986 and 1993. With respect to law-and-order, the acceleration in the legislative process is clearly more pronounced during the first four years of Sarkozy's term as president, with a total of twelve security bills making up 5.8 % of all legislative texts adopted since 2007, a proportion similar to that found in 1986-1988.

A perhaps clearer picture emerges in the amalgamation of immigration and security issues, which is most typical of the programmatic appeal by the populist right. Irrespective of the partisan making of parliamentary majorities, controlling for pre-and-post FN emergence period indicates that the amount of legislative work devoted to immigration and criminality has grown larger in size and come to occupy more space in the parliamentary arena after 1986 (from 1.5 up to 5.7 per cent of all legislative bills).

This is particularly true of parties on the right side of the political spectrum. All post-1986 right-wing governments are found to have a significantly higher contingent of laws addressing the FN proprietary issues of immigration and crime, fluctuating around an average of 6 per cent of all legislative acts. This compares with 3.1 per cent across all left-wing governments. The amount of legislation devoted to those two constitutive dimensions of the populist right agenda stands also in striking contrast with the pattern of legislative action found under the Giscard presidency where the combination of immigration and security policies represented only a marginal 1.2 per cent share of all laws adopted between 1974 and 1981. Commensurate with the assumption that the UMP has moved further to the right under Sarkozy's leadership, the FN agenda has had the highest level of legislative salience since 2007 with no less than 17 laws representing 8.2 per cent of all bills adopted in parliament.

Thus, there is a substantial increase in the legislative weight of populist right issues in the legislative work by the moderate right after 1986, which has culminated in the most recent period. The significance of this shift in policy focus to the overall process of transformation of the French legislative agenda is further informed by looking at concomitant developments in the third and last area of cultural liberalism since the early 1970s.

Not surprisingly, this area differentiates more dramatically between the left and the right. One practical reason for this is that a clearer ideological direction assumption is inherent in the process of selecting this last set of laws. Here the singularity of the Jospin left-wing government is truly remarkable and ought to be highlighted. The analysis of legislative bills introduced between 1997 and 2002 points to over thirty laws of cultural liberalization (14 per cent), with a strong focus on equality policies in the employment and gender-based violence fields, by far the largest proportion across all French governments since the early 1970s.

That the Greens were part of the 'plural left' parliamentary majority supporting the Jospin government is one explanation for the exceptional policy salience of the libertarian agenda.

The intensity in the legislative effort devoted to cultural issues must also be connected with the Europeanization process and the development of anti-discrimination and equal rights policy initiatives at EU level. For example, the 2001 law on the fight against discrimination was a translation into French legislation of important provisions contained in both the Amsterdam Treaty and the 2000 European Racial Equality Directive.

This said, and in sharp contrast to this ‘new left’ policy agenda characteristic of the Jospin era, the right-wing governments of Chirac (1986-88) and Balladur/Juppé (1993-97) in particular are characterized by their paucity of cultural liberalization or equal rights legislation. It is noteworthy that the results for the Giscard presidency point to a much more equilibrated effort in promoting cultural and family modernization laws throughout the 1970s –of which the most emblematic probably were the 1975 and 1979 Veil laws on liberalizing the right to abortion.

This declining importance of issues of cultural modernization in the legislative record of the moderate right immediately after 1986 can be seen as another indication of the reshaping of policy priorities entailed by the need to formulate a swift response to the upsurge of the FN. With respect to this last dimension, it is important to note that this deficit in cultural liberalization policies has been waning in the more recent period of right-wing incumbency. Beginning with the Chirac presidency in 2002 and further accentuated under Sarkozy’s since 2007, there has been a trend towards a progressive reincorporation of culturally liberal policy initiatives, whose justification is also to be found in some of the constraints exerted by EU regulations on domestic public policy<sup>5</sup>.

The above analysis of immigration policy activity and elite-level salience in the context of other important domains within the ‘cultural divide’ ought of course to be complemented with an examination of the direction taken by the successive French governments over time. The politicization of immigration by the FN is not restricted to the sole area of control but encompasses clusters of issue positions in relation to immigrant integration, competition in the labour market or access to welfare. To better evaluate the impact of the populist right on mainstream immigration policy profiles, one must therefore disentangle immigration provisions.

The results for the longitudinal analysis of immigration policy provisions implemented over the 1974-2011 time span are summarized in Table 2. For the reasons discussed above, all legislative and regulatory measures have been grouped into three main types of immigration control, immigrant integration and labour immigration, and their direction coded either restrictive (-1) or expansive (+1) with regard to changes made to existing legislative standards. The average direction is taken over all measures introduced by each successive legislature.

[ Table 2 Here ]

Over the whole 1974-2011 period, France’s immigration policies can be best defined by their skewness towards the restrictive pole on the control dimension (mean of -.46) and a leaning in favour of more expansive policies in the area of immigrant integration (.36). These two policy domains make up 43.9 and 38.8 per cent of all provisions respectively. Because of its smaller

size (17.3 per cent), labour migration legislation displays less clearly discernible trends. Yet, with the notable exception of Giscard's presidency, wherever efforts were made to legislate, these were predominantly oriented towards encouraging –or at the very least organizing– labour immigration rather than stopping it.

As was anticipated, partisanship contributes a great deal to shaping French immigration policy positioning over time. If a contagion effect by the FN is to be sought, then it is clear that it will vary in nature and size according to the partisan making of parliamentary majorities. Discrepancies are particularly striking in the area of immigrant integration where left-wing governments show a highly positive score (.88 as opposed to .06 for the right), and that of immigration control where governments of the moderate right stand out as significantly more restrictive in their policy making (-.64 compared with .10 for the left).

Beginning with the left, there is a high level of policy consistency in the area of immigrant integration across the whole period, with highly positive average scores and no substantial variation when controlling for pre-and-post FN emergence. That the French left has been able to sustain expansive immigrant integration policies confirms some of the conclusions that were made earlier regarding the more general agenda for cultural liberalization put forward since its first coming into office in the early 1980s. It is significant that 31.5 per cent of all immigration policy provisions implemented by the left during its three intervals in power were drawn from other legislative domains such as employment, social cohesion, healthcare or education laws (compared with only 8.6 per cent for the right).

A slightly more nuanced picture emerges from the analysis of control policies. Whilst expansive legislation was introduced during the first Mitterrand presidency (average score of .33), there was a notable displacement towards less generous measures after his re-election in 1988 (-.21). That this correction coincided with the rise of the FN is commensurate with the general 'policy reaction' thesis. It is also consistent with the argument that the French left had somehow to respond to a mass desertion to the far right by its former working-class voters in the first round of the 1988 presidential election. Significantly their response was restricted to the sole area of immigration control thereby preserving programmatic and ideological coherence in the defence of immigrant integration. Additionally, the post-1988 turn in control policies must be placed in the context of the minority government led by the socialists during the IX<sup>th</sup> legislature and the need to seek alliance with some of the centrist factions in parliament.

By way of contrast, the partisan make up of the alliance of socialists, radicals, greens and communists in the 1997 Jospin government translated into significantly more open immigration control policies (.43). One interesting finding that singularizes the 'plural left' experience of immigration legislation is that of the discrepancy found between highly expansive legislative provisions (1.0) and more restrictive administrative rulings (-.20) in the area of control. A similar deduction applies to the few measures that were taken to adapt migrations to the labour market, which were all introduced by the means of regulatory power.

Turning to parties of the moderate right, one first important conclusion to be drawn from the data is that of historical continuity in immigration control policies pursued since the early 1970s. The politics of control was already well in place under the Giscard presidency, in the absence of substantial electoral threat from the populist right. These empirical findings are consistent with qualitative analyses conducted by historians of immigration in France (Gastaut

2004, Spire 2005, Noiriel 2007). The data provide therefore limited empirical support to a general 'policy contamination' hypothesis, with similar mean scores across the pre- and post FN emergence periods (both at -.64). On the contrary, they demonstrate that immigration control policies had moved towards a more rigorous stance long before the FN had made its first appearance. Moreover, the findings suggest that this rightward shift in immigration control during the 1970s concerned predominantly the normative legislative arena where restrictiveness was even more pronounced (-.71 as opposed to -.50 in regulatory measures). Severe control policies were thereby highly publicized and given symbolic significance, rather than concealed behind less visible administrative rulings.

These results do not entirely rule out the 'policy response' hypothesis however. Established parties of the right have not been immobile. The most stringent immigration control policies are indeed found in the 1986 right-wing government led by Jacques Chirac (-1.0). This accentuation coincides with both the electoral breakthrough of the FN and the short-lived experience of the populist right in French parliament between 1986 and 1988, consecutive to the change to a PR-based electoral system in 1985. This policy movement persists in 1993-1997 albeit less markedly (-.78). In both cases, there is a very clear tendency towards strengthening the existing legislation, which, in the case of the Balladur and Juppé governments of 1993 and 1995, is complemented with a generous amount of highly restrictive decrees or circulars (-1.0).

A more substantial negative repositioning is found in the area of immigrant integration where the policy impact by the FN is more visible. Whilst right-wing policy changes were in favour of integrating migrants into French society up to the early 1980s, they then evolved towards more obligatory trends once the FN had set foot on the political stage (from .55 in 1974-1981 down to -.01 over the post-1986 period). The highest level of polarization on this second dimension is found during the 1993-1997 period where firmer control legislation is associated with a marked shift towards cultural assimilationist policies (-.47). Over the whole period covered here, the governments of Balladur and Juppé distinguish themselves from all other right-wing incumbents by this particular combination of strict control and harsh civic integration policies.

To elaborate, what is discernible in our empirical results is a two-stage response by the moderate right to the electoral ascent of the FN. In 1986, the strategic calculations by the RPR/UDF coalition concerned immigration control essentially, and led to an accentuation of the already on-going trend towards restrictiveness that had been inaugurated by the centre-right in the mid-1970s. In contrast, the 1993-1997 period of right-wing incumbency can be interpreted as an attempt to pre-empt further the FN political agenda by articulating drastic policy changes across both the control and immigrant integration dimensions.

What about the more recent evolution by the moderate right? One important contribution by this analysis is to provide an empirical basis for comparison over time. Before we turn to examining the development of immigration policies since 2002, let us note that the findings show no significant differences between the two phases of right-wing government under the Chirac and Sarkozy presidencies. Very similar mean scores are found on each of the three dimensions under scrutiny. This stresses the permanence in policy preferences across both periods of incumbency, and corroborates the central role played by Sarkozy in modelling France's immigration policies during his time as Minister of Interior between 2002 and 2007.

This said, time series analysis helps re-evaluate claims of a marked shift to the right in immigration policies over the more recent period. Whilst Sarkozy's policies point to the continued overwhelming dominance of the politics of control that has been common to all right-wing governments since the mid-1970s, it must be noted however that the directional scores of the moderate right for 2002-2007 and subsequently (-.56 and -.52 respectively) remain lower than those observed in 1986 or 1993 and, to a lesser extent, that of the Giscard presidency between 1974 and 1981. That more drastic policy provisions are found in the legislative area (-.64) compared with administrative rulings (-.47) might reveal conflicting strategies by the mainstream right. On the one hand, legislation is employed as a highly symbolic political device to send a message of firmness to the public. On the other hand, the making of everyday policy through regulatory power uncovers the need for a slightly more pragmatic approach to immigration control.

Pragmatism undoubtedly dominates the area of labour migration where Sarkozy's personal input is more evident. As was briefly discussed earlier, a positive attitude towards effective labour migration management emerges from our data as a constant of immigration policies in France since the early 1980s, the only significant departure from this model being found during the Giscard presidency<sup>6</sup>. This calls into question the FN policy contagion effect hypothesis. The recognition by all mainstream parties of the continuing need for foreign workforce comes in sharp opposition with the broad welfare chauvinist agenda of the populist right, which in the French case is best resumed in the FN most cherished 'national preference' scheme and traditional 'zero immigration' claim.

The pursuit of sectoral labour immigration policies under Sarkozy's presidency is particularly remarkable in terms of the amount of policy provisions that have been introduced in both the legislative and regulatory arenas since 2007. This quantity of policy activity contrasts with all previous legislatures in France, where measures concerning immigration in the labour market come in short supply and are often limited to sparse administrative rulings rather than more politically emblematic changes in parliament. A discussion of the contradictory logics underpinning both the political and economic interests –Freeman's client politics (1995)– falls beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the insistence on privileging debatable legislative reform to allow for 'selective immigration' policies distinguishes Sarkozy from his right-wing predecessors' predilection for less detectable policy changes in this area. This is particularly true for instance of the Chirac government in 1986, where the very few measures put forward in the area of labour immigration were almost exclusively confined to the regulatory domain.

Lastly, placed in historical perspective, the average policy scores obtained by the mainstream right on the immigrant integration dimension since 2002 denote the strong ambivalence in policy making in this particular area (.03 in 2002-2007 and .12 since 2007). As can be seen from Table 2 above, all right-wing governments since 1986 present a larger variance in the direction taken by immigrant integration policies, which contrasts with the more homogenous pattern of policy preferences found on the left.

This greater amount of variance lifts the veil on some of the dilemma which the moderate right has faced over the years, and the array of conflicting external constraints to which these parties are subjected. Joppke (1998) argues that European governments have only 'self-limited sovereignty' in areas such as family immigration because of legal-constitutional constraints and the moral obligations that postcolonial regimes have towards certain

immigrant groups. Attempts by the conservative right to move closer to the exclusionist and assimilationist agenda of the populist right are irremediably bound by international conventions and domestic courts, not to mention of course European rules.

To close this section, there is one last important conclusion to be drawn from looking at changes in policy positioning by the French right over the past ten years. The relatively large number of policy measures (N=246) introduced since the election of Chirac in May 2002 enables us to track those changes over time. These are graphed for both the immigration control and immigrant integration areas in Figure 1 below.

From this figure it can be seen that integration policies have been far more variable than those put forward in the domain of immigration control. Most importantly, the slope exhibits a progressive move towards less expansive immigrant integration measures, with a substantial shift after 2010. Let us not that the average direction of all integration policy provisions introduced during the first months of 2011 is down to -.67, the lowest score of all French governments on that dimension.

That this sharp move towards highly restrictionist measures coincides with the FN's new lease of life by the beginning of 2010 corroborates some of the claims made earlier that immigrant integration as a distinct policy area is more vulnerable to policy impact by the populist right in France. As will be discussed below, the examination of the polarization in actors' positions in recent parliamentary debates points to the significance of this policy move.

[ Figure 1 Here ]

This takes us to our last section which concerns the political framing of immigration issues and their transportation into mainstream via the legislative process. The influence of the populist right does not restrict itself to the area of agenda setting. Its impact is also likely to extend to the way immigration as a contentious political issue is defined and constructed by partisan actors in the parliamentary arena.

This last part presents the preliminary results of the quantitative relational content analysis parliamentary sessions on immigration. In this paper, the findings are restricted to the 1979 and 2010 debates on the government immigration bills. These already allow to look at some of the transformations that have taken place in the political space over time, which can be derived from actors' positioning in the parliamentary arena<sup>7</sup>.

In terms first of actor-to-actor relations, polarization proves remarkably stable over time. In both the 1979 and 2010 debates, core sentences that have the government as target object represent a constant 30.5 per cent of all statements by French MPs (N=823). Criticism of the executive culminates naturally in left-wing parties of the parliamentary opposition, at an average of -.961 in 1979 and -.873 in 2010. Within the left camp, the Greens in 2010 (-.917) have replaced the Communist party of the late 1970s as the most virulent 'oppositional' force in parliament (-.969 in 1979 down to -.813 in 2010). More notable is perhaps that statements disapproving of the government are also found in core sentences by members of the parliamentary majority. Internal disunity is particularly noteworthy in the 2010 debate where a small group of UMP speakers exhibit a high level of antagonism to the government's



proposed policies (mean direction of -.694). Most of these backbenchers are representatives of the traditional 'Gaullist' wing within the UMP close to former President Chirac and former PM Villepin, and often come in vehement disagreement with some of the more conservative groups in the National Assembly.

In 2010, such 'opposition from within' reveals the internal constraints that weigh on policy making at agency level and the degree of ideological polarization that exists between the various centrist and rightist factions constitutive of the UMP. Looking at who takes part in the debate over immigration policy provisions in parliament, there is a disproportionate influence by members of the *Droite populaire* (DP), the rightist national-conservative wing of the UMP<sup>8</sup>.

If we now turn to mean directions in actor-issue relationships summarized in Table 3 (N=1,622 core sentences), the analysis suggests a significant change towards more restrictive positions in the French party system as a whole, from .116 in 1979 down to -.081 in 2010. This first result would lend support to the argument that a 'right shift' has occurred in the space for elite-level conflict over immigration issues in France since the late 1970s. This conceals however an increase in partisan polarization, the apparent shift being due more to the centrifugal swing by the right camp. In 1979, right-wing parties have a mean score of -.151 on all immigration issues as opposed to -.371 in 2010, whereas the left remains at a steady (.581 /.573) over the same time span. On the right of the political continuum, the negative repositioning is clearly accentuated in the DP (-.492), but is also visible in the more moderate factions of the UMP parliamentary party (-.258).

[ Table 3 Here ]

Consistent with our previous findings on policy implementation, the data in Table 3 indicate that ideological polarization varies across issues of immigration control, immigrant integration and labour migration. On the latter economic dimension, there is a significant reduction in the ideological distance between parties of the left and those of the right between 1979 ( $\Delta=.843$ ) and 2010 ( $\Delta=.489$ ). This convergence is largely accounted for by a move towards more expansive economic migration policy preferences by parties of the right in 2010 (mean direction of 0.192) compared with the restrictive views by the RPR/UDF coalition in 1979 (-.063).

With regard to illegal immigration, the parliamentary data point to fairly similar levels of partisan polarization over time ( $\Delta=.843$  and  $\Delta=.948$  in 1979 and 2010 respectively). The left and the right retain very distinctive directional profiles on the issue, with openness being a characteristic of the political left and restrictiveness a typical feature of the right. What the results suggest is a notable displacement between 1979 and 2010, due to moves towards more expansiveness by both the left (.200 up to .531) and the right (-.643 up to -.418).

The most dramatic change is discernible in the area of immigrant integration policies where ideological polarization between the left and the right culminates in 2010 ( $\Delta=1.059$  as opposed to  $\Delta=0.367$  in 1979). This strong centrifugal tendency is essentially accounted for by the harder line accommodated by parties of the mainstream right, from a relatively expansive position in the late 1970s (.233) to a substantially more exclusive one in the recent years (-

.527). At party level, the contribution by the national-conservative wing of the UMP to this repositioning on immigrant integration issues is clear (mean direction of -.642) but the move towards obligatory measures concerns the more centrist groups of elites within the parliamentary party as well (-.415). In contrast, there is no sizeable change in the stances by the left on this distinctive set of issues over time (.600 and .532 in 1979 and 2010 respectively).

This is consistent with previous findings that the moderate right has noticeably shifted its positions on the integration of established immigrants in the past couple of years and has endorsed restrictive policies regarding those issues. The analysis of party competition in parliamentary debates allows us to take the assertion one step further by looking in more detail at the salience of particular issues and the patterns of justification that are employed by political actors when taking concrete positions on those issues.

Looking first at the relative salience of issue categories in the 1979 and 2010 parliamentary debates shows the increasing salience of immigrant integration issues over time (see Table 4). In 1979, the discussion of the government's bill revolved around legal and illegal immigration (40.4 per cent) while about a third of the debate concerned immigrant integration (34.5 per cent). Labour market and economic issues occupied about a fifth (19.2 per cent) of the general discussion. In 2010, immigrant integration issues dominate the political debate in parliament and make up no less than 59.7 per cent of all core sentences by French MPs, while the relative size of statements concerning immigration control (both legal and illegal) and labour migration is down to 24.9 and 10.8 per cent respectively.

[ Table 4 Here ]

Moreover, the thematic content of the debate in the specific area of immigrant integration, as is revealed by quantitative content analysis, has been transformed in the recent period (figures are summarized in italics in Table 4 above). In 2010, issues of citizenship, cultural assimilation and national identity profoundly shape the discussion on immigrant integration in France, and represent about half (45.1 per cent) of the core sentences in this particular area, as opposed to only 20.5 per cent of the positions taken by MPs in 1979. In contrast, a substantial size (34 per cent) of the debate on immigrant integration in the late 1970s turned around the civil and political rights of foreigners in France, their culture and traditions. By 2010, these make up a mere 11.1 per cent of the arguments about how to integrate migrants into French society. Lastly, the discussion of the 2010 bill on immigration sees a remarkable emergence of issues pertaining to health and welfare. These questions account for a fifth (19.9 per cent) of all statements made with regards to immigrant integration, whereas they were totally absent in 1979.

This leads us to the argumentative frames mobilized by partisan actors in deploying their causal stories of immigration. The data drawn from parliamentary readings allows to explore the patterns of justification that are utilized, as well as the propensity for political actors to use European integration as a strategic resource to rework specific issues in controversy. Table 5 contrasts figures for the main categories of frames employed in the 1979 and 2010 parliamentary debates. The relative proportions of EU-related arguments are summarized in the bottom rows of the table.

[ Table 5 Here ]

The data in Table 5 point to significant changes in the general argumentative structure of immigration debates over time. In the late 1970s, parliamentary discussions were mostly framed pragmatically (42.7 per cent) and, to a lesser extent, would resort to moral contentions relative to general universal principles (25.9 per cent). The more recent period sees a sharp decrease in both sets of frames down to 30.1 and 13.8 per cent respectively. By 2010, the legal framing of immigration issues has grown in importance (30.1 per cent). This must of course be placed in the context of the European integration process: whilst references to the European Union are quasi absent from immigration debates in the late 1970s, EU-related positions make up 14.2 per cent of all statements by French MPs in 2010. Recall that one important objective of the draft bill on immigration, integration, and nationality of March 2010 was to transpose three European Union directives into French legislation<sup>9</sup>.

It is interesting to note that the European framing of immigration is more frequent on the right side of the parliamentary assembly (16.4 per cent compared with 9.3 per cent on the left). This is commensurate with the general assumption that policy preferences by the French conservatives are congruent with the common European agenda on immigration. In return, the necessity to conform to the European integration process provides a useful set of argumentative tools to French policy makers when introducing new legislation. The vast majority (77.4 per cent) of EU-related statements by right-wing speakers in the National Assembly use the legal frame in reference to the three aforementioned directives, as well as to other sets of European rules.

Lastly, there is a notable increase in the overall share of identity-based frames (from 3.5 in 1979 up to 18.9 per cent in 2010). With respect to the most recent period, this pattern of 'cultural' justification is over-represented in the line of reasoning by right-wing MPs (23.8 per cent) and culminates in members of the DP (31.1 per cent). More importantly, identity-based frames are more often resorted to by right-wing actors in the area of immigrant integration (35.9 per cent) and are almost exclusively restricted to domestic aspects, with very few mentions of the EU.

To conclude, combined with the evidence of more stringent policies in the area of immigrant integration, these empirical results substantiate general claims made about the 'new politics' of immigration by the moderate right in France since 2007. The data clearly indicate that elite-level conflicts over immigration have become more salient in 2010 than they were in the late 1970s, although the analysis evidently needs to be extended to all intermediary stages in the development of immigration laws over the whole period in order to identify trends behind such an increase in prominence.

In the course of the 2010 debate, questions such as cultural assimilation, national identity, the loss of French citizenship or the fight against marriage fraud have topped the legislative agenda of the right. This comes in line of course with the general framing of public controversies as would be for instance revealed by contextualized media coverage analysis. Some of those changes would have been anticipated after the launch of the highly criticized 'national identity' debate by the government in October 2009 or the controversial speech

made by Sarkozy on immigration and crime during the summer of 2010 in Grenoble. Transposed into the parliamentary arena, disputes over immigrant integration have seen a considerable increase in party polarization, mostly due to a strong directional shift towards more radical stances by parties of the right. The weight of identity-based assertions together with their independence from a more general European agenda on immigration bear testimony to the symbolic importance allotted to reframing immigrant integration issues both culturally and domestically.

The analysis of actors' positions in the general public debate provides therefore further empirical evidence of the ideological re-orientation by the UMP on some of the core foundations of the populist right agenda in France. That this transformation is particularly visible in 2010 cannot of course be entirely dissociated from the process of electoral realignment that has occurred on the right pole of French politics in the regional elections of March 2010, which gave important gains to the FN at the expenses of the ruling UMP majority<sup>10</sup>.

A similar hypothesis is supported by our results pointing to the emergence of a specific set of mostly domestic issues relating to immigrants' access to healthcare and welfare provisions. In 2010, a number of legislative amendments to the draft governmental Bill were introduced by members of the DP as an attempt to strengthen the legislation on those two signature issues of the populist right. Remarkably, these parliamentary initiatives coincided with the development of an aggressive welfare chauvinist campaign by the FN against existing public health and pension allowances granted to foreigners in France.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Based on the empirical case-study of the political development of the FN in France, this paper set out the objective to advance our understanding of populist right impact. Notwithstanding what we learn from studies of other crucial political venues such as party manifestos, the mass media or electoral campaigns, the main focus of this contribution has been on party competition in the legislative arena, with a particular emphasis on policy issues constitutive of the cultural axis that has been central to the electoral appeal by the FN since the mid-1980s.

The systematic analysis of time series data for policy change puts in evidence the asymmetrical propensity for partisan actors to endorse the political agenda publicized by the populist right. Partisanship does matter, and the influence exerted by the FN is not of the same nature nor magnitude whether one considers policies pursued by parties to the left of the political spectrum or by those to the right of it.

These results provide important empirical evidence for the partisan 'pendulum' swing that has been identified by policy analysts in France, whereby most adjustments in immigration policies have consisted of each camp undoing the changes made by its predecessor. As suggested, however, by Lochak (1997), this view of a quasi-perpetual swing in immigration policies can be partly misleading as the pendulum never quite balances all the way back to where it originally was. More importantly, as a consequence of the longer period of the right in office since 2002, there are cumulative effects whereby restrictive changes come as an addition to already restrictive measures. This was the case for instance with the recent

2010/2011 provisional Bill on immigration which built on some of the substantial policy moves already entailed by the 2003, 2006 and 2007 immigration laws.

With respect to the French left, the resilience of a broad policy agenda of cultural liberalism is remarkable across all periods of government, irrespective of the electoral weight or popularity of the FN. Similar trends towards a new left transformation and the cultural modernization of French society are found in all left-wing governments since the early 1980s. This effort culminates during the five years of the Jospin 'plural left' in office due to the 'greener' make up the parliamentary support for the government and the concomitant development of a framework of social modernization at European level.

Parties of the left in France have not abdicated from their 'natural' ideology in determining immigration policies. This can be judged by the intensity and direction in the legislative activity around issues of social cohesion, anti-discriminations, family reunion, citizenship acquisition or the regularization of undocumented migrants. The liberal agenda is most visible in the area of immigrant integration where the libertarian-universalistic preferences by the French left stand in firm antagonism to the culturally protectionist and strict assimilationist positions by the FN. The salience of the left-right cleavage is equally perceptible in the more expansive policy positions by the left in relation to immigration control and inflows of new immigrants, although there have been adjustments towards more restrictive policies in the late 1980s and, in less visible manner, in the late 1990s, which can arguably be construed as strategic responses to the electoral pressure by the populist right.

A whole different reality is found of course to the right of the political system, where contamination by the populist right is more predictable. The time series analysis in this paper suggests that right-wing governments are more prone to accommodate policies that resonate with some of the core features of the populist right agenda. Such preferences cannot of course be attributed to the sole political influence by the FN. As Bale (2008) rightly points out, conservative parties have every good reason to be preoccupied with immigration, and it is their *raison d'être* to defend the socio-economic and cultural status quo.

Put in historical perspective, the tightening of immigration control policies, which is often interpreted as a key response by the mainstream right to the populist challenge, was already well under way during the late 1970s at a time when the FN had not yet achieved electoral relevance. The policy analysis points to the symbolic importance of the new immigration legislation introduced by the centre-right government in 1979. Concurrently the longitudinal examination of actors' positions in parliamentary discussions shows that the French right had tougher stances on issues of illegal or labour immigration in the late 1970s when compared with the more recent period.

This is not to say evidently that parties of the moderate right have been immune to the external pressure by the FN. The hard line on immigration control inaugurated under the Giscard presidency was clearly accentuated during both the 1986-1988 and 1993-1997 periods of UDF/RPR government after the FN made important electoral gains. Parties of the right have proved particularly susceptible to the impact by their populist challenger in other important areas of policy making. This is true of the co-optation of the broader populist agenda on immigration and crime by the RPR/UDF coalition from the mid-1980s onwards, as revealed in the higher contingent of immigration and, more specifically, security laws in the post-FN emergence stage of the party system. Looking back at the 1986 experience of the

French right returning to power, it is first and foremost in the formation of a strong law-and-order agenda by the Chirac government that the influence of the FN manifests itself.

From a wider policy angle, it is also clear that a damaging collateral effect of the electoral success of the populist right has been to hinder the expansion of policies of cultural and family modernization such as those introduced by the centre-right majority during the 1970s. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the moderate right has abandoned the cultural liberal agenda to prioritize social conservative and authoritarian policies directed at immigration and crime. This conservative backlash within the French right is further evidenced by the policy moves towards cultural protectionism in the area of immigrant integration throughout the 1980s and, most dramatically, the 1990s. By 1993, the stringent civic integration legislation by the right comes in striking contrast with the more integrative policies introduced during the Giscard era. The content analysis of political debates over immigration in the late 1970s indicates simultaneously that questions of immigrants' civic and cultural rights would be given substantial attention by centre-right policy makers, but have since disappeared from the bulk of the conservative legislative agenda.

The findings for the more recent period of right-wing incumbency since 2002 provide empirical evidence to corroborate the assumption of continuity in the 'reactionary' profile characteristic of the RPR/UDF bloc in the 1990s. The unrelenting salience of the populist right agenda is visible in the accumulation of immigration and security laws throughout the 2000s under both Chirac and Sarkozy's presidential terms. The policy analysis points also to the persistence of strict immigration control policies and the political use of high profile immigration legislation as a strategic communicational device to send a message of firmness to voters, which contrasts with more balanced policy moves in the less publicized domain of regulatory power.

Overall, when contrasted with previous right-wing experiences of addressing the populist agenda, the general response articulated by the UMP after 2002 does not show any major departure from the reactions observed in the 1980s and the 1990s. Nor does it reveal any substantial differences in the average direction of immigration policy positioning across the Chirac and Sarkozy's presidencies. In this respect, the results in this paper lead perhaps to a more nuanced appraisal of the proposition that the moderate right in France has undergone a process of deep programmatic revision of immigration policies under Sarkozy's leadership. Contrary to common perceptions, this analysis finds a small centripetal policy move in the area of immigrant integration in the first stage of the Sarkozy's presidency, together with a partial reintroduction of the social modernization agenda that had almost completely fallen into oblivion during the previous periods of right-wing incumbency of the 1990s.

There are equally important implications for the shape and ideological polarization of immigration policy positions in the party system. Looking at substantive policy making over the long period, there is a relatively modest level of policy polarization between mainstream parties in the French political space. In opposition to the chauvinist economic positions by the FN, mainstream policy convergence is most evident in the area of labour migration where partisan differences are the least perceptible and point to a common recognition of the continuous demand for migrant labour in France's labour market. The moderate right in particular has moved away from the restrictive stance taken by the Chirac and Barre's governments in the 1970s. This repositioning is consistent with both a classic clients-politics hypothesis and the setting of a shared European agenda for economic migration since the

early 2000s. What is revealed by the empirical data is the decreased policy salience of labour migration throughout the 1990s –with all governments carefully avoiding the issue in the policy making process– before the question was given new publicity and reframed into ‘selective immigration’ by Sarkozy in the mid-2000s.

To continue with policy polarization, in the long run, neither the moderate right on immigrant integration nor the left on immigration control are found on the opposite side of the policy continuum but rather in a mean position adjacent to zero. This can be somewhat regarded as a consequence of the greater variance found in ‘adverse’ policy preferences by each political camp over time. Policy revision tends to fluctuate more in areas where natural partisan inclinations are challenged. This is particularly striking in left-wing periods of government where the amount of policy variance on the control dimension is more than twice that of immigrant integration. A similar conclusion applies in the opposite direction to parties of the right with regard to their policies of integration, albeit less markedly.

These results highlight the different political dilemmas faced by partisan actors in France in their definition of immigration policies over time. The French left has never endorsed the ‘open border’ political programme put forward by a number of NGOs, and has chosen instead to give priority to immigrant integration policies, which can be reconciled with its traditional egalitarian agenda of social cohesion. The move towards libertarian-universalistic positions together with a relative reluctance to engage in more stringent immigration control policies can be seen as antagonistic with the social demands that emanate from the traditional working-class and lower salariat constituencies of the left, and might therefore have participated of their electoral dealignment.

As for parties of the mainstream right’s moderate score on integration issues, the emphasis must be put on the array of pressures that surround policy making and might have prevented the French right to preempt further the cultural protectionist agenda of the FN. The data in this paper shed light on the tension that exists between a wide range of often contradictory economic, social, legal or political objectives and interests. At the level of intra-party competition, the analysis has highlighted the role by the centrist groups of elites within the UMP in promoting a temperate response to the some of the more radical positions advocated by the national-conservative wing of the party in the parliamentary arena. Simultaneously it is necessary to incorporate external policy making constraints consecutive to the development of a widespread body of international legal norms. That for instance more liberal legislative measures have been brought back to the forefront of the French policy agenda since the early 2000s owes probably more to the moderating effect by the expanding European framework of equality and rights since the mid-1990s than to a genuine change in domestic policy positioning by the UMP.

Finally, one important conclusion to be drawn from the empirical policy data is the recognizable progression by the UMP towards more restrictive integration procedures, together with the reemergence of a strong assimilationist agenda of civic integration and exclusive citizenry in 2010/11. This sharp policy move is clearly apparent in the identity-based positions taken by right-wing actors in the 2010 parliamentary debate that was dominated by the FN proprietary issues of loss of nationality, marriage fraud, immigrant welfare or access to healthcare. The distance between the partisan positions of the left and the right has grown much larger since the late 1970s, due mostly to this radical shift by parties of

the moderate right. And this dramatic increase in party polarization concerns predominantly the area of immigrant integration.

As the 2012 presidential campaign approaches, such accentuation in policy preferences by the French right is concomitant with both the electoral revival of the FN under the new leadership of Marine Le Pen, and Sarkozy's record low levels of presidential popularity<sup>11</sup>. Yet the data in this paper reveal the depth of the policy revision that has been undertaken by the moderate right in the most recent period. The continuation in 2011 of a passionate debate over immigration, Islam or the failure of integration lends further support to the contention that the UMP is currently abandoning the more 'middle-of-the-road' policies that were implemented during the first years of the Chirac and Sarkozy presidencies.

Furthermore, the new highly restrictive measures presented by the government in the area of labour migration in May 2011 mark an abrupt u-turn from the more expansive legislation put forward since 2003, and as such a significant alteration to the policy profile of the UMP<sup>12</sup>. Combined with the inflation in security laws since 2003, the pursuit of strict immigration control policies and the preference for increasingly more drastic immigrant integration procedures, this latest policy move towards economic chauvinism would seem to complete the policy radicalization of the UMP, and could lead eventually to an authentic 'populist right moment' in the history of the French right.

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## Tables and figures

Table 1. Immigration, law-and-order and cultural liberalism laws by legislature, parliamentary majority and pre-FN period: 1974-2011

Parliamentary Legislature	Majority	% FN <sup>(d)</sup>	Number of Laws (%)				All
			Immigr.	Law and order	FN Agenda	Cultural liberalism	
-V/VI-Giscard <sup>(a)</sup> (1974-1981)	Right	0.7	4 (0.8)	2 (0.4)	6 (1.2)	19 (3.7)	516
-VII-Mitterrand (1981-1986)	Left	0.4	5 (1.4)	2 (0.6)	7 (2.0)	17 (4.9)	348
-VIII-Chirac (1986-1988)	Right <sup>(b)</sup>	9.6	1 (0.8)	7 (5.6)	8 (6.3)	3 (2.4)	126
-IX-Mitterrand (1988-1993)	Left	14.4	7 (2.5)	3 (1.1)	10 (3.6)	12 (4.3)	281
-X-Balladur/Juppé (1993-1997)	Right <sup>(b)</sup>	12.4	6 (2.6)	8 (3.5)	14 (6.1)	3 (1.3)	230
-XI-Jospin (1997-2002)	Left <sup>(b)</sup>	14.9	2 (0.9)	7 (3.2)	9 (4.1)	31 (14.0)	221
-XII-Chirac (2002-2007) <sup>(c)</sup>	Right	16.9	8 (3.4)	9 (3.9)	16 (6.9)	13 (5.6)	233
-XIII-Sarkozy (2007-) <sup>(c)</sup>	Right	10.4	6 (2.9)	12 (5.8)	17 (8.2)	9 (4.3)	207
<b>Partisanship</b>	Left		14 (1.6)	12 (1.4)	26 (3.1)	60 (7.1)	850
	Right		25 (1.9)	38 (2.9)	61 (4.6)	47 (3.6)	1312
<b>Period</b>	Pre-FN		9 (1.0)	4 (0.5)	13 (1.5)	36 (4.2)	864
	Post-FN		30 (2.3)	46 (3.5)	74 (5.7)	71 (5.5)	1,298
	<b>All</b>		<b>39 (1.8)</b>	<b>50 (2.3)</b>	<b>87 (4.0)</b>	<b>107 (4.9)</b>	<b>2,162</b>

<sup>a</sup> From May 1974 to May 1981 (excluding the beginning of the Fifth legislature)

<sup>b</sup> Cohabitation period: partisanship is derived from parliamentary majority; 1995/1997: Jacques Chirac's presidency

<sup>c</sup> Discrepancies in the FN agenda's total number of laws are due to the coding of two laws (2006 & 2008) relative to border controls and the fight against crime on both the security and immigration dimensions

<sup>d</sup> Percentage of the national vote for the FN at the beginning of the legislature (presidential score in 1988, 2002 and 2007; parliamentary otherwise).

Table 2. Mean direction of immigration policy provisions: 1974-2011

Parliamentary Legislature	Majority	% FN <sup>(c)</sup>	Policy provisions		
			Control (N=314)	Integration (N=277)	Labour (N=124)
-V/VI-Giscard <sup>(a)</sup> (1974-1981)	Right	0.7	-.64 (24) .790	.55 (23) .858	-.67 (12) .778
-VII-Mitterrand (1981-1986)	Left	0.4	.33 (19) .970	.83 (36) .568	.89 (18) .471
-VIII-Chirac (1986-1988)	Right <sup>(b)</sup>	9.6	-1.00 (19) .000	.29 (14) .994	1.00 (9) .000
-IX-Mitterrand (1988-1993)	Left	14.4	-.21 (38) .991	.93 (29) .371	.67 (12) .778
-X-Balladur/Juppé (1993-1997)	Right <sup>(b)</sup>	12.4	-.78 (55) .629	-.47 (30) .900	1.00 (4) .000
-XI-Jospin (1997-2002)	Left <sup>(b)</sup>	14.9	.43 (21) .926	.89 (37) .458	1.00 (4) .000
-XII-Chirac (2002-2007)	Right	16.9	-.56 (63) .838	.03 (58) 1.008	1.00 (19) .000
-XIII-Sarkozy (2007-)	Right	10.4	-.52 (75) .860	.12 (50) 1.003	1.00 (46) .000
<b>Partisanship</b>	Left		.10 (80) 1.001	.88 (103) .471	.82 (34) .576
	Right		-.64 (234) .769	.06 (174) 1.001	.78 (90) .632
<b>Period</b>	Pre-FN		-.20 (40) .992	.72 (57) .701	.27 (30) .980
	Post-FN		-.49 (274) .874	.27 (220) .964	.96 (94) .290
	<b>All</b>	Mean	-.46	.36	.79
		N	(314)	(277)	(124)
		St.dev.	.889	.935	.615

<sup>a</sup> From May 1974 to May 1981 (excluding the beginning of the Fifth legislature)

<sup>b</sup> Cohabitation period: partisanship is derived from parliamentary majority; 1995/1997: Jacques Chirac's presidency

<sup>c</sup> Percentage of the national vote for the FN at the beginning of the legislature (presidential score in 1988, 2002 and 2007; parliamentary otherwise).

Table 3. Salience and positions of actors in parliamentary immigration debates: 1979-2010

Target	Actor	1979 <sup>(a)</sup>			2010 <sup>(b)</sup>			
		Position (Mean)	Salience (%)	Std. Dev.	Actor	Position (Mean)	Salience (%)	Std. Dev.
All immigration issues	PC	0.658	14.9	0.648	PC	0.514	5.3	0.492
	PS	0.527	21.6	0.722	Greens	0.721	2.5	0.280
	UDF	-0.173	44.3	0.806	PS	0.570	22.9	0.465
	RPR	-0.102	19.2	0.797	Modem/NC	-0.167	1.3	0.727
					UMP	-0.258	35.3	0.641
					UMP/DP <sup>(c)</sup>	-0.492	30.8	0.571
					DLR <sup>(d)</sup>	-0.660	1.8	0.553
	Left	0.581	36.5	0.692	Left	0.573	30.7	0.459
	Right	-0.151	63.5	0.802	Right	-0.371	69.3	0.622
	$\Delta$	0.732			$\Delta$	0.943		
<b>All</b>	<b>0.116</b>	<b>(N=255)</b>	<b>0.840</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>-0.081</b>	<b>(N=1,367)</b>	<b>0.723</b>	
Illegal Immigration	PC	0.500	5.5	0.707	PC	0.462	4.9	0.477
	PS	0.000	8.2	1.095	Greens	0.500	1.5	0.000
	UDF	-0.716	60.3	0.449	PS	0.552	18.1	0.464
	RPR	-0.474	26.0	0.696	Modem/NC	-0.357	2.6	0.626
					UMP	-0.288	39.2	0.610
					UMP/DP <sup>(c)</sup>	-0.543	30.6	0.462
					DLR <sup>(d)</sup>	-0.875	3.0	0.231
	Left	0.200	13.7	0.948	Left	0.531	24.5	0.449
	Right	-0.643	86.3	0.542	Right	-0.418	75.5	0.562
	$\Delta$	0.843			$\Delta$	0.948		
<b>All</b>	<b>-0.527</b>	<b>(N=73)</b>	<b>0.671</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>-0.185</b>	<b>(N=265)</b>	<b>0.674</b>	
Immigrant integration	PC	0.846	14.8	0.427	PC	0.500	4.7	0.419
	PS	0.500	36.4	0.729	Greens	0.740	3.1	0.293
	UDF	0.204	30.7	0.787	PS	0.511	23.0	0.493
	RPR	0.281	18.2	0.729	Modem/NC	-0.500	0.4	0.866
					UMP	-0.415	35.2	0.594
					UMP/DP <sup>(c)</sup>	-0.642	32.5	0.456
					DLR <sup>(d)</sup>	-0.750	1.2	0.485
	Left	0.600	51.1	0.670	Left	0.532	30.8	0.470
	Right	0.233	48.9	0.758	Right	-0.527	69.2	0.544
	$\Delta$	0.367			$\Delta$	1.059		
<b>All</b>	<b>0.420</b>	<b>(N=88)</b>	<b>0.734</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>-0.202</b>	<b>(N=816)</b>	<b>0.715</b>	
Labour migration and the economy	PC	0.824	34.7	0.498	PC	0.531	10.9	0.644
	PS	0.688	16.3	0.593	Greens	0.667	2.0	0.288
	UDF	0.056	36.7	0.838	PS	0.730	34.0	0.338
	RPR	-0.417	12.2	0.736	Modem/NC	-0.750	1.4	0.353
					UMP	0.244	27.9	0.603
					UMP/DP <sup>(c)</sup>	0.328	19.7	0.735
					DLR <sup>(d)</sup>	-0.500	4.1	0.547
	Left	0.780	51.0	0.522	Left	0.681	46.9	0.428
	Right	-0.063	49.0	0.825	Right	0.192	53.1	0.689
	$\Delta$	0.843			$\Delta$	0.489		
<b>All</b>	<b>0.367</b>	<b>(N=49)</b>	<b>0.802</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>0.422</b>	<b>(N=147)</b>	<b>0.629</b>	

<sup>a</sup> Loi n°80-9 du 10 janvier 1980 portant modification de l'ordonnance no 45-2658 du 2 novembre 1945 relative aux conditions d'entrée et de séjour en France des étrangers (Loi Bonnet)

<sup>b</sup> Projet de loi relatif à l'immigration, à l'intégration et à la nationalité, n°2400, déposé le 31 mars 2010 ; provisional results for 65 per cent of all core sentences in the first reading of the Bill

<sup>c</sup> UMP/DP=UMP Droite Populaire ; <sup>d</sup> DLR=Debout la République (Right-Wing Eurosceptic, 2 MPs)

Table 4. Issue salience in parliamentary immigration debates: 1979-2010

Issue	1979 <sup>(a)</sup>	2010 <sup>(b)</sup>
	Saliency %	Saliency %
- Illegal immigration	28.6	19.4
- Legal migration and asylum	11.8	5.5
- Immigrant integration	34.5	59.7
- <i>Civil rights, discriminations, immigrant culture and traditions</i>	34.0	11.1
- <i>Citizenship, naturalization, assimilation, national identity</i>	20.5	45.1
- <i>Regularizations of undocumented migrants</i>	18.2	4.8
- <i>Crime, law-and-order, violence, double punishment</i>	11.4	7.9
- <i>Family reunion, marriage</i>	9.1	7.5
- <i>Health and welfare</i>	2.3	19.9
- <i>Islam and polygamy</i>	—	2.0
- <i>Other</i>	4.5	1.7
	100.0	100.0
- Labour migration and the economy	19.2	10.8
- Other (general, unspecified)	5.9	4.7
	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>All<sup>(c)</sup></b>	<b>(N=255)</b>	<b>(N=1,367)</b>

<sup>a</sup> Loi n°80-9 du 10 janvier 1980 portant modification de l'ordonnance no 45-2658 du 2 novembre 1945 relative aux conditions d'entrée et de séjour en France des étrangers (Loi Bonnet)

<sup>b</sup> Projet de loi relatif à l'immigration, à l'intégration et à la nationalité, n°2400, déposé le 31 mars 2010 ; provisional results for 65 per cent of all core sentences in the first reading of the Bill

<sup>c</sup> All actor-issue core sentences.

Table 5. Partisan framing of parliamentary immigration debates: 1979-2010

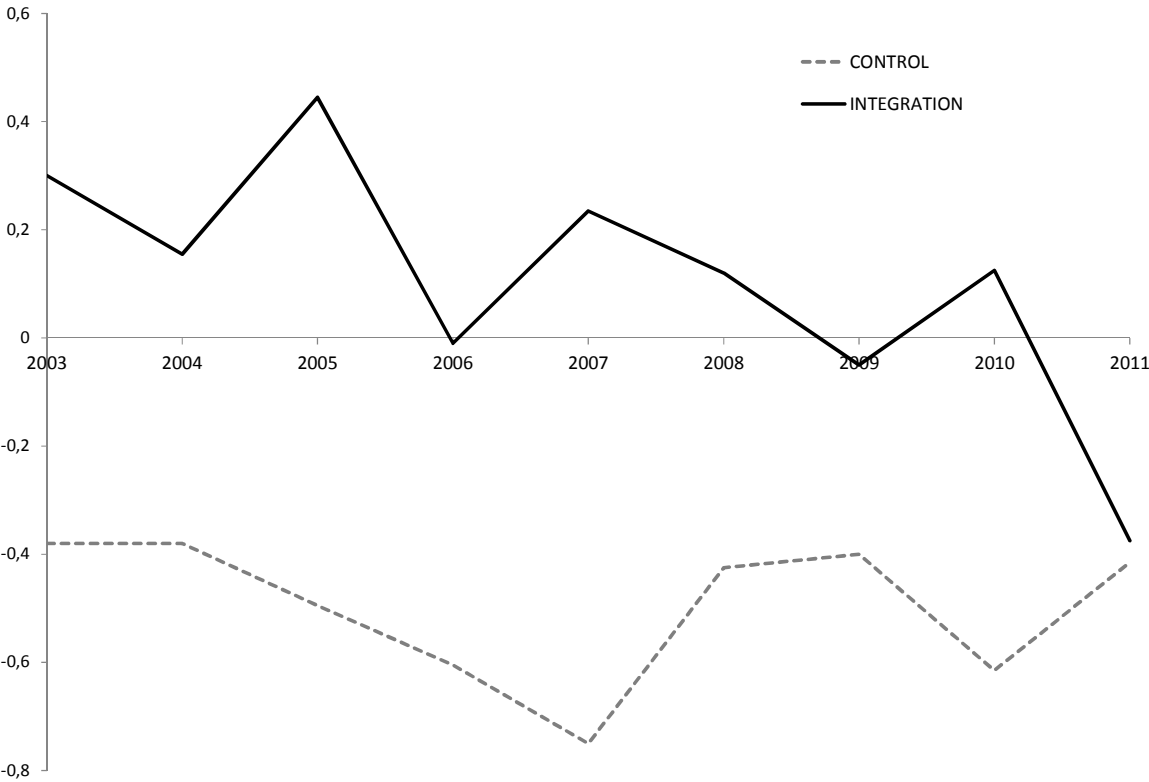
Frames	1979 <sup>(a)</sup>			2010 <sup>(b)</sup>		
	Left	Right	All	Left	Right	All
-Report, statistics, int. compar.	6.5	7.4	7.1	7.4	7.0	7.1
-Pragmatic, utilitarian	46.2	40.7	42.7	39.3	26.1	30.1
-Identity-based	3.2	3.7	3.5	8.1	23.8	18.9
-Moral-universal	33.3	21.6	25.9	23.3	9.5	13.8
-Legal-rational	10.8	26.5	20.8	21.9	33.7	30.1
	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>% EU-related</b>						
-No	97.8	98.8	98.4	90.7	83.6	85.8
-Yes	2.2	1.2	1.6	9.3	16.4	14.2
	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>All<sup>(c)</sup></b>	<b>(N=93)</b>	<b>(N=162)</b>	<b>(N=255)</b>	<b>(N=420)</b>	<b>(N=947)</b>	<b>(N=1,367)</b>

<sup>a</sup> Loi n°80-9 du 10 janvier 1980 portant modification de l'ordonnance no 45-2658 du 2 novembre 1945 relative aux conditions d'entrée et de séjour en France des étrangers (Loi Bonnet)

<sup>b</sup> Projet de loi relatif à l'immigration, à l'intégration et à la nationalité, n°2400, déposé le 31 mars 2010 ; provisional results for 65 per cent of all core sentences in the first reading of the Bill

<sup>c</sup> All actor-issue core sentences.

Figure 1. Yearly average scores<sup>(a)</sup> for immigration control and immigrant integration policy provisions: 2003-2011



<sup>a</sup> Smoothing: simple 2-yr moving average



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Since the mid-1980s, the strong anti-tax and small-state demagoguery has been for example a crucial constitutive element of the FN programmatic appeal to the petty-bourgeois electoral constituency.

<sup>2</sup> Cases where international treaties and agreements are brought to the parliament for approval are excluded from calculations.

<sup>3</sup> Loi n°80-9 du 10 janvier 1980 portant modification de l'ordonnance no 45-2658 du 2 novembre 1945 relative aux conditions d'entrée et de séjour en France des étrangers (Loi Bonnet) ; Projet de loi relatif à l'immigration, à l'intégration et à la nationalité, n°2400, déposé le 31 mars 2010. In the 1979 data, there are a total of 368 core sentences in both the first and second reading of the immigration Bill across 4 sessions in Parliament in May/June and December. In 2010, the first two-thirds (65 per cent) of the first reading of the provisional Bill represent a total of 2,077 core sentences. In 2010, the debate is spanning 14 sessions in September/October 2010, to which one must add another 7 sessions for the second reading of the law in March 2011.

<sup>4</sup> The Fifth legislature started in April 1973 under the presidency of Georges Pompidou. Yet, the analysis here is restricted to the period covering both the end of the Fifth and whole of Sixth legislatures under the Giscard d'Estaing presidency. No significant piece of legislation was passed during the short interval spanning 1973/74 that is left out by this analysis.

<sup>5</sup> This was the case for instance of the Equal opportunity law of February 2005, or the December 2004 law that created the High Authority to fight against discriminations and promote equality (HALDE), which both fell within the framework of the European Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC).

<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that this strong restrictive stance in the late 1970s would have been further accentuated under the provisions of the abandoned 1979 draft bill on immigrant guest workers, which planned for a number of stringent measures to control labour migration such as the loss of residency permit in case of unemployment, or the introduction of regional quotas for migrant workers.

<sup>7</sup> Due to limitations of time, the analysis of the 2010 debate is restricted here to the first 65 per cent the first reading only.

<sup>8</sup> Statements by members of the DP represent a total of 42.8 per cent of all UMP core sentences during the first reading of the provisional immigration bill. By way of contrast, the 42 MPs officially affiliated with the DP make up a total of 13.4 per cent of all 313 members of the UMP parliamentary party. Moreover, two of the most prominent leaders of the DP acted as official recorder and law committee's spokesman respectively during the 2010 sessions on immigration.

<sup>9</sup> Namely the directive on "return" of December 2008, (Directive 2008/115/EC on Common Standards and Procedures in Member States for Returning Illegally Staying Third-Country Nationals), the "blue card" directive of May 2009, (Directive 2009-50/EC on the Conditions of Entry and Residence of Third Country Nationals for the Purpose of Highly Qualified Employment) and that on "sanctions" of June 2009, (Directive 2009/52/EC Providing for Minimum Standards on Sanctions and Measures Against Employers of Illegally Staying Third-Country Nationals).

<sup>10</sup> In 2010, the FN regained substantial ground in the March regional elections where it received 11.4 per cent of the vote nationwide. Significant gains were made in the second round in the party's strongholds of Mediterranean and Northern France where Jean-Marie and Marine Le Pen polled 23.8 and 22.2 per cent respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Capitalizing on the surge in popularity for Marine Le Pen, the FN made an impressive breakthrough in the March 2011 cantonal elections with 15.1 per cent of the national vote and an average progression of about 10 percentage points between the two rounds. Since January 2011, most opinion polls have pointed to a significant rise in popular support for the FN candidate at about 18-23 per cent in the forthcoming presidential contest. During the Spring, a number of polls put Marine Le Pen ahead of the UMP candidate in the first round of the election.

<sup>12</sup> Interior Minister Guéant launched a debate over the need to reduce immigration to the labour market due to the economic downturn consecutive to the 2008 financial crisis. The controversy was further fuelled by Labour Minister Bertrand who made a rapprochement between immigration and unemployment. On 31 May 2011, the government issued a first circular that restrained considerably the conditions for admission of third-country nationals to employment in France.