

**A new radical right economic agenda?  
The transformation of the Front National in France**

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The Front national (FN) has made an impressive come back in the 2012 French presidential election winning 17.9 per cent of the first-round vote. Such performance was bolstered by the economic and political context: in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, France had entered a period of economic instability, rising unemployment and deep social pessimism. This paper looks at how the FN has striven to adapt to the social demand for protection and redistribution in the French public. Under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the party has undergone significant changes in its economic policies and endorsed statist redistributive economic policies. This paper examines the magnitude of this strategic programmatic shift by the FN, and to which extent the formulation of a renewed economic agenda has enabled the party to evolve towards an electorally more beneficial position in the 2012 presidential race.

Since its first national breakthrough in the 1984 European elections, the Front National (FN) has established itself as a key feature of the French party system. The party reached a first electoral peak in the presidential election of April 2002, where Jean-Marie Le Pen received 16.9 per cent of the first round vote and progressed into the second round run-off against incumbent right-wing president Chirac. The 2002 political shock paved the way to Nicolas Sarkozy's bid of shifting the UMP further to the right to poach on FN territory with promises of more restrictive immigration policies and tougher stance on crime (Marthaler 2008). In the 2007 elections, Sarkozy was able to reclaim a sizeable proportion of voters who had previously deserted to the radical right. As a consequence, the FN saw its vote drop down to 10.4 and 4.3 per cent in the presidential and legislative ballots respectively (Perrineau 2009). This electoral debacle was followed with a period of shallow electoral waters in the 2008 and 2009 local and European ballots.

Table 1 here

The party resurfaced in the 2010 regional and, most significantly in the 2011 cantonal elections, where it benefited both from political dissatisfaction with Sarkozy's presidency and from the context of economic crisis. In the lead up to the 2012 elections, the austerity packages put forward by the centre-right UMP government increased the financial pressure on voters already severely hit by the recession. France entered a period of economic instability and deep social pessimism<sup>1</sup>, marked with a decrease in household purchasing power and growing unemployment –up to ten per cent of the active population in the first quarter of 2012, the highest rate since the late 1990s.

The outcome of the 2012 presidential race reflected the widespread uncertainty provoked by these deteriorating economic conditions. Growing anxiety and frustrations among the electorate benefited protest parties on both sides of the political axis, revealing the breadth and depth of political discontent directed at Sarkozy's presidency. His re-election bid was marked with the lowest level of incumbent popularity. The rise of anti-system actors changed the contours of the party system, resulting in a centrifugal shift in the balance of forces, which resembled the more polarized pattern of competition that had occurred in the 2002 presidential election. In the first round of the presidential election, Marine Le Pen mounted a successful campaign, achieving her party's best performance ever with 17.9 per cent of the vote and just under 6.5 million votes<sup>2</sup>.

### **1. The transformation of the FN**

The popularity of the FN at the polls in 2012 revealed the party's ability to meet some of the political challenges that had arisen from the 2007 electoral defeat and, to some extent, from Le Pen's 'Pyrrhic victory' in the 2002 presidential run-off. By far the most significant was of course the change in party leader after nearly four decades of unlimited rule by Jean-Marie Le

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<sup>1</sup> Trends in public perceptions of economic prosperity, as revealed in Gallup's end of the year barometers, showed a marked increase in pessimism, with a record high negative net score contracting to -79 in December 2011, making France the most pessimistic of all 51 countries included in the survey worldwide (GIA Annual Global End of the Year Barometer on Hope and Despair). Similarly, the yearly barometer polls by the Department of Health showed that feelings of growing socio-economic inequalities had become pervasive to nearly nine out of ten (89 per cent) respondents in 2011 (DREES 2011:13-4).

<sup>2</sup> In the legislative elections that followed, the FN received 13.6 per cent nationally and won two seats of MPs allowing the radical right to return to parliament after nearly fifteen years of absence.

Pen<sup>3</sup>. Marine Le Pen's election to party leadership has been associated with a number of transformative processes: 1) a strategic modernization of the party's behavior and language, which aims to alter public perceptions of the FN as a 'far right' party, in the FN's own words the "de-demonization" strategy; 2) a more conciliatory approach vis-à-vis the mainstream right, which was revealed by the forming of the Rassemblement Bleu Marine (RBM) in the legislative elections of June 2012; 3) significant programmatic changes with regards to the party's economic platform<sup>4</sup>.

Strategically, important efforts were put into presenting the FN in a more affable style (Dezé 2012, Crépon 2012)<sup>5</sup>, which, as shown in Figure 1 below, certainly helped increase the party's democratic legitimacy in French public opinion. Beyond these few cosmetic changes, however, the FN has upheld its position to the extremity of the authoritarian-libertarian axis of competition. Despite a relative toning down by the FN of its agenda on immigration or law-and-order (Shields 2013:191), the so-called 'de-demonization' strategy has not yet produced any substantial ideological revision. The FN has retained the vast majority of its core radical illiberal policies on immigration, crime or traditionally value-laden issues such as abortion or gay rights, which have been cornerstone to the party's programmatic development since the 1980s (Ivaldi 2012). Moreover the party has persisted in its critique of the pluralist political principles that underpin liberal democracy. Its opposition to fundamental universal and egalitarian values remains a recognisable feature of the populist radical right party family (Mudde 2007, Betz & Johnson 2004, Rydgren 2004). Finally, the FN has not deviated from its core 'nativism' and cultural protectionism. This was well in evidence in the 2012 campaign against the so-called threats of 'islamization' and 'green fascism' in French society, which despite a tactical manipulation of France's tradition of secularity (*laïcité*) showed no major alteration to the mainstays of the FN's ethno-pluralist doctrine.

Figure 1 here

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<sup>3</sup> In January 2011, Marine Le Pen was elected party leader with 67.7 per cent of the members' vote in the XIV<sup>th</sup> party congress in Tours.

<sup>4</sup> One crucial aim of the preparatory work on the 2012 presidential manifesto was to build the FN's credentials on the wide range of economic and debt reduction issues which had dominated the political agenda since 2008. In this sense, economic issues not only increased in salience during the campaign, but also they became more autonomous from the bulk of cultural issues which generally typify the radical right.

<sup>5</sup> Marine Le Pen has been extremely careful to avoid the incendiary methods that were customary in Jean-Marie Le Pen's outspoken statements, banning in particular anti-Semitism and revisionism.

More importantly, the 2012 presidential campaign by the FN has been characterised by a leftwards shift on the economic axis, representing a significant departure from the rightist position occupied in the past. A systematic longitudinal assessment of the FN's placement on economic issues since 1973 shows a distinctive trajectory, which helps trace changes in the programmatic development by the party. The data are drawn from a directional content analysis of the economic positions by the FN, based on the manual coding of all economic policy proposals (pledges) in the electoral manifestos published by the party between 1973 and 2012 (Ivaldi 2013) <sup>6</sup>. The operationalization of the economic dimension follows the classic model of polarity between the state and market. The latter is described by Kitschelt (1994) as a conflict between 'socialist' and 'capitalist' economic policies, and are referred to here in terms of 'left' and 'right'. The former pole of the axis is characterized by demand-side economics based on state intervention in the economy, more social spending for welfare or higher progressive redistributive taxation. The capitalist-right pole of the axis represents on the other hand liberal competitive free market supply-side economics, which favors lower taxes, smaller government and the deregulation of the economy (see summary table in Appendix 2). Each economic policy proposal was coded on a simple 2-point left-right scale (Left=-1; Right=+1). The FN's economic position was then calculated as the difference between right-wing and left-wing policies divided by their sum in each manifesto  $(R-L)/(R+L)$  (Lowe et al 2011). Changes in the FN's economic positions on the economic axis between 1973 and 2012 are summarised in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 here

In a first period (1973-1986), the location of the FN on the economic axis of competition corroborated the 'winning formula' popularized by Kitschelt (1995) as a combination of authoritarianism, particularism and economic liberalism. During that period, the party advocated rightist free market economics and wholeheartedly embraced the neoliberal agenda of small government, tax cuts and welfare retrenchment. The capitalist appeal culminated in the 1986 legislative manifesto in which no less than 82 per cent of the policy proposals were

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<sup>6</sup> Coded manifestos are listed in Appendix 1. The final dataset consists of 822 policy proposals over the 1973-2012 period of time. I am grateful to Valérie Igounet for providing a copy of the 1973 manifesto.

located to the right of the economic axis.

A first programmatic shift occurred in the mid-1990s, which was characterized by a relatively low-magnitude move towards the centre of the economic dimension. The FN manifesto data here confirms McGann and Kitschelt's hypothesis of a 'weak' form of the new radical-right formula with a muted appeal to free-market liberalism (2005: 150). Central to this policy move was the adoption by the FN of new themes of social protection and redistribution – as revealed for instance in the party's new ideological motto "social without socialism" (1993:220)–, which reflected the consolidation of a strong FN working-class constituency traditionally leaning towards the left (Perrineau 1995). Let us recall that a similar trajectory has been identified in a number of radical right parties across Europe (De Lange 2007). As argued by Betz (2002), radical right parties have progressively put less emphasis on economic liberalism to prioritize xenophobic exclusion during the 1990s, which in turn has allowed them to substantially increase their working class support. Like other right-wing populist actors in Europe (Bornschieer 2005, Zaslove 2008), the FN endorsed an array of anti-globalization and protectionist themes which appeared clearly antagonistic with its former free-trade and *laissez-faire* agenda. These new anti-globalization policies allowed the party to travel a centripetal direction in the 1990s, while preserving some of its more traditional right-wing economics in the domestic realm. This hybrid programme is well exemplified by the 1997 manifesto which contains an almost equal proportion of proposals located on the left and the right of the economic dimension (46 and 54 per cent respectively).

A second strategic shift took place in 2012, consecutive to the election of Marine Le Pen as party leader, whereby the FN moved clearly to the left on the economic axis. In the 2012 presidential, no less than 68 per cent of the policy pledges were located to the left on the economic axis, a shift corroborated by the analysis of the legislative platform<sup>7</sup>. In spatial terms, the 2012 strategic crossing over the centre of the economic axis is also notable for its magnitude. Over the 1984-2007 period, the average distance of the policy shifts by the FN on the dimension is of .2 policy units (up to .3 in 1993). In contrast, the 2012 manifesto is the largest economic policy shift since the mid-1980s and is thrice in size that of the previous periods (.6 policy units).

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<sup>7</sup> In the June legislatives, the economic platform of the FN was still unambiguously situated to the left of the ideological spectrum, with over three quarters (77 per cent) of the party's policies located to the left of the centre of the economic axis ( $N=73$  proposals).

Under Marine Le Pen's leadership, the party has endorsed a new domestic economic agenda of Colbertist state intervention, government spending and public services expansion, which has taken the party further away from the deregulatory and laissez-faire core beliefs of classical liberalism. Unlike the anti-globalization shift of the 1990s, this reorientation concerned predominantly economic policies in the domestic arena, with a strong focus on the increasingly salient issue of 'purchasing power'. The 2012 fiscal policies of the FN emphasized also income redistribution and focused on pocketbook issues of 'purchasing power' for lower and middle-class voters<sup>8</sup>.

The 2012 transformative step showed however no significant reduction in the amount of policy variance when compared with the preceding periods. The economic platform of the FN has been continuously characterised by a significant amount of policy variance. Policy flexibility and a combination of preferences borrowed from both sides of the political spectrum are permanent features of the FN's economics, which is consistent with the findings by Rovny (2013:19) that radical right parties tend to avoid precise economic placement.

Policy heterogeneity can be further addressed by looking more closely at the structure of economic positions and how policy preferences are distributed across certain dimensions which form part of the socialist-capitalist axis of competition. Otjes et al (2012) suggest to distinguish between four clusters of economic positions which can be combined with right-wing populism, namely 'economic liberalism', 'economic egalitarianism', 'economic nationalism' and the 'deserving poor' (pp.4/5). Figure 3 below shows the frequency distribution for these socio-economic themes in the 2012 presidential manifesto.

Figure 3 here

The significance of the economic policy shift by the FN is evidenced by the data in Figure 3. Economic egalitarianism was the dominant category in the 2012 presidential manifesto of the

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<sup>8</sup> The emergence of 'purchasing power' as one of the issues topping the populist agenda of the 2012 presidential election is an indication of the growing salience of the new 'politics of revenues'. According to the SOFRES-TriElec poll, 'improving purchasing power' was reported as one of the most important issues by over a third (34 per cent) of Le Pen presidential voters, which was the highest salience observed across all electorates.

FN, which had a strong focus on progressive redistributive policies, an increase in taxation and support for public services expansion. The 2007 presidential platform had already incorporated important alterations to the party's economics, heralding the more substantial 'Keynesian' swing that was to occur five years later. The FN pushed for instance measures of temporary nationalizations in strategic sectors ('francization'), more generous government spending on a wide range of social welfare programs, and demand-oriented economic stimulation wage policies directed at low-income families.

A brief glance at the structure of the 2012 presidential platform reveals a shift in issue emphasis by the party, with household income, the Euro, employment, public debt, pensions and taxes coming before the party's traditional issues of immigration and security. With regards to income, the FN pledged for an increase in low wages, a control over commodity and food prices, as well as an increase in small pensions and in the minimum allowance for the elderly, and a return to 60 as retirement age. The FN advocated 'progressiveness and social justice' through higher taxes on the wealthiest, more progressive income tax bands, an increase in VAT for luxury goods, an increase in corporate taxes including a special tax on company relocations and the automatic adjustment of wages for inflation. The manifesto called also for the public control of banking and claimed that public services should be 'available to all', which led the party to oppose the centre-right RGPP policy not to replace one in two civil servants going into retirement. Support for the 'deserving poor' was notable in the social policies directed at pensioners and the disabled.

As shown by the data, however, despite its unambiguous positional shift towards redistributive egalitarianism, the FN did not entirely abandon its fundamental constitution as a party of the right. The continuing ambiguity in the FN's economic platform can be accounted for by the presence of a small array of 'residual' polarizing elements of classical economic liberalism such as tax cuts for small businesses, budgetary discipline in administrations, the enactment of a French small business act or the claim to reform representation in trade unions. In 2012, a number of those policies overlapped with the notion of 'undeserving poor' through the moral stigmatization of social welfare 'dependency' (*assistanat*) and benefit fraud. Derks (2006) argues that right-wing populist actors address a form of 'economic populism' combining egalitarianism with anti-welfarism in order to reconcile their discourse with the economic preferences of lower status voters. De Koster et al (2012) suggest that economic egalitarianism and support for the welfare state may in fact form two distinct independent

ideological dimensions, and that both are represented in the ideology of the radical right. As stated by Achterberg et al. (2011): “these parties do not portray the welfare state as an instrument aimed at helping poor people who ‘really’ need it, but view it as an effort to (...) cater to a class of ‘welfare scroungers’ that freeloads on the hard work of the common man” (p.749). In 2012, harsh criticism of benefit fraud was put to the forefront of the FN agenda of budgetary rigor and reduction in government spending, with a claim that a more efficient fight against social security ‘cheaters’ and those undeserving assistance would provide an additional 25 Bn Euros in revenue to the French state. The manifesto called also for the suppression of all social benefits to offenders and all those sentenced to one year imprisonment or more, as well as to all social fraud recidivists.

Finally, the analysis of the 2012 manifesto reveals the persistence and accentuation of economic nationalism, whose constitutive elements have been at the core of the party’s ideology since the mid-1990s. This was true for instance of the chauvinistic defence of the socio-economic interests of French citizens as the FN continued to advocate its core ‘national preference’ scheme whereby French citizens should enjoy priority access to welfare provisions or jobs while foreigners are portrayed as undeserving beneficiaries of social protection. Central to the 2012 campaign by the FN was in particular the opposition to state medical assistance to migrants (AME) and to their entitlement to a minimum retirement allowance.

The 2012 campaign did not significantly depart from the party’s traditional national-protectionist anti-globalization and Eurosceptic agenda. Hostility to the European integration process is hardly novel to the programmatic appeal by the FN which has long been opposing federalism in favour of the ‘Europe of nations’. Eurosceptic policies were emphasized in the 2002 presidential election, where the FN explicitly formulated its autarkic position, calling for France to renegotiate all existing European treaties and to hold a national referendum on abandoning the Euro. Criticism of the European Union was temporarily curbed during the 2007 campaign, but was promptly brought back to the forefront of the party’s narratives in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. In 2010, the FN unveiled a planned exit from the Euro, which became cornerstone to its economic and budgetary policies, and a pillar of Marine Le Pen’s presidential platform. As the Eurozone crisis unfolded, the FN leader strongly opposed bailout plans and austerity packages by the European Union, echoing the development of a new form of sovereign-debt chauvinism which has become ubiquitous among many parties of



the European radical right.

Anti-globalization themes were at the centre of Marine Le Pen's presidential bid in 2012. The combination of leftist and protectionist economic policies was subsumed in the concept of 'alter-nationalism' put forward by Le Pen in her book *Pour que vive la France* (2012), which was a clear reference to the anti-globalization protest groups that are found on the left of the political spectrum in France. While advocating strong protectionist policies, the FN continued its nationalist appeal against the 'evil' forces of '*mondialisme*' (globalism) embodied pell-mell by the EU, financial markets, multinational corporations, immigration and, ultimately, France's political 'establishment'. Harsh criticism of free-market and 'ultra-liberal' economics were pervasive to the presidential marketing of the FN, embracing part of the anti-capitalist agenda typical of the extreme left, and was resumed by the concept of a 'patriotic shield' (Speech in Bordeaux, 22 January 2012).

## **2. A winning strategy? The diversification of the radical right constituency**

Turning our attention from the supply side of the equation to the demand side, the combination of the Keynesian shift and the softening of the party's image which have underpinned the transformation of the FN have important implications for the understanding of the party's performance in the 2012 elections. Model 1 in Table 2 shows the logistic regression coefficients for a number of socio-demographic factors and their influence on voting for the FN, together with relative size of each group within the general electorate. To a large extent, the 2012 electorate retains some of the previous features of the French radical right, in particular with regards to the over-representation of blue-collar workers and voters with low levels of education. However, the FN was able to make significant electoral inroads among voters who were adverse to the radical right and to assemble support from more diverse social groups.

Table 2 here

One first finding stands out immediately, which is the performance by Marine Le Pen among women and the disappearance of the radical right gender gap characteristic of the FN's electorate since the mid-1980s (Barisione and Mayer 2013). Whilst female voters have been traditionally more adverse to the radical right, gender does not come out anymore as a significant factor of support for Marine Le Pen in the 2012 election, with similar probabilities of a FN vote among men and women (0.19 and 0.17, respectively). That women turned in greater proportion to the radical right can be partly accounted for by the softening of the party's political rhetoric and the personality of its new leader in terms of both age and gender, but it might also reflect some important changes in the economic motivation and the class structure of the radical right phenomenon in France.

A similar conclusion applies to the growth in support for the FN among younger people. Whilst the radical right's appeal to the younger cohorts had significantly diminished in previous elections, in 2012, Marine Le Pen achieved her best scores among the under the youngest tranche of the electorate, particularly those under 25 years. As can be seen from model 1, the latter were markedly over-represented in the FN pool of voters in 2012 while older voters aged 65 years+ were significantly under-represented. The data attest to the decrease in the propensity to vote for the FN with the elevation of age, showing a steeper decline in the youngest cohorts. While partly attributable to the more 'modern' image of the new FN leader, Marine Le Pen's performance among young voters reflected somewhat the impact of the severe rise in unemployment on the subgroups suffering the most obvious effects of the recession, most notably young adults and low-skilled voters. Youth unemployment has been structurally high in France, and deteriorated further to reach 22.5 per cent of the under 25 years in the second quarter of 2012 (INSEE). The election survey data confirms this: unemployment was as high as 27.5 per cent among the youngest cohort of voters as opposed to 11 per cent in those aged 25-64 years.

Beyond candidate personality traits and party rhetoric, however, the affinity of women and young voters to the 'new' FN points towards some of the transformations that have occurred in France's employment structure. The recent literature on new social class boundaries in contemporary post-industrial economies has highlighted important reconfigurations of class and the development of a new form of unskilled proletariat in the service sector (Oesch 2006), whose objective economic conditions and subjective political preferences might become increasingly similar to those of the old industrial working class. That women are significantly

over-represented among the ‘underemployed’ (INSEE) or in the new ‘service proletariat’ might help further elucidate the narrowing of the traditional radical right gender gap. In the 2012 election, the party received its largest support from classes with fewer assets and resources such as low-skilled operatives and service workers, while being still less popular among the upper social strata with higher education and economic assets. That the radical right continued to suffer a palpable deficit in credibility among those categories reflected the persistence of a deep educational divide and higher odds of opting for the FN among voters with low educational grades relative to those with university degrees.

Model 1 shows that both education and class location have significant individual effects, with Wald statistics for the block of coefficients in each predictor significant at the 0.005 level. The model shows the probability of the FN vote to be higher among both production and service workers, reflecting in particular the growing attractiveness of the radical right to the new ‘proletariat’ in the routine service sector in which women are in the majority and are often suffering a disadvantaged class position. Technical and socio-cultural specialists were on the other hand still under-represented in the radical right support, as were individuals in managerial and clerical positions.

Interestingly, model 1 shows the traditional petty-bourgeois sector of the FN electorate was no longer significantly over-represented in the make up of the 2012 radical right constituency. Kitschelt’s prototype of the ‘new radical right’ was based on a ‘winning formula’ consisting of authoritarianism, particularism and economic liberalism, which would draw a typical cross-class alliance of voters threatened by advance capitalism modernization. Under this hypothesis, the new radical right’s support was made up of small-business owners, manual workers and the ‘residual’ population of people inactive in the labour market i.e. retirees and housewives. Whilst Kitschelt’s master case winning formula was more visible throughout the 1990s, the 2012 economic policy shift has taken the FN closer to fitting the ‘welfare chauvinist’ strategy which combines economically leftist positions with authoritarian and exclusivist political views (1995: 22-4). In 2012, the leftward programmatic shift by the FN on the economic dimension might have alienated part of its former support among shopkeepers, small entrepreneurs or craftsmen, whose distinctive policy preferences continued to be unambiguously located on the right of the economic spectrum. On the other hand, Sarkozy’s liberalizing agenda of welfare retrenchment and public sector cuts certainly increased the level of attractiveness for the mainstream right among petty-bourgeois voters.

The weight of the least advantaged classes in the 2012 make up of the FN electorate amplifies the trend towards the ‘proletarianization’ of the political support for the radical right. In France, this phenomenon –which has been characterized both as ‘*gaucho-lepénisme*’ ideologically (Perrineau 1995) and ‘*ouvriéro-lepénisme*’ with respect to the party’s changing sociology (Mayer 2002)– began to develop in the late 1980s and continued across all major elections<sup>9</sup>. Let us recall here that Kitschelt argued originally that “the racist-authoritarian strategy may explicitly move to the defence of income redistribution and of the ‘little people’ in the street against the large corporations and trusts” (1995:22). During the 2012 campaign, Marine Le Pen continuously emphasized such differences between ‘little’ and ‘big’ people across all economic sectors, while virulently attacking big businesses and international corporations. The FN leader’s ‘plebeian’ appeal to all those at ‘the bottom of society’ (*la France d’en-bas*) attempted to mobilize the so-called ‘invisible constituency’ that felt abandoned, forgotten or simply ignored by the dominant parties of the mainstream. As can be seen from Figure 4, subjective social location had a significant impact on the propensity to vote for the FN candidate in the 2002 presidential election. Voters who would situate themselves “at the bottom of society” were significantly more likely to support the radical right, in particular women.

Figure 4 here

Whilst capturing significant effects of class, education and age, model 1 performs poorly in terms of its predictive power and explained variability. Model 2 introduces voter positions on a number of issue dimensions which are crucial to the radical right vote. Four additional predictors are therefore tested, which relate to economic liberalism, cultural protectionism, anti-establishment attitudes and support for the European Union<sup>10</sup>. Overall, incorporating attitudinal factors augments the quality of the model with a significant reduction in log-

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<sup>9</sup> As demonstrated by Gougou (2007), this dealignment process had a strong generational component and formed part of a gradual and more general decline in support for parties of the left among younger cohorts of blue-collar voters over time.

<sup>10</sup> Economic positions are derived from a binary indicator about voter preferences for ‘competitiveness over employees’ conditions’ (*item w3*); cultural protectionism refers to the 4-point scale item ‘One no longer feels at home like in the old days’ (*item w1\_3*); anti-establishment attitudes are taken from a 11-point scale of ‘trust in politicians’ (*item i6*); support for the EU is measured from whether or not the respondent feels that ‘France has benefited from EU membership’ (*item g2*).

likelihood. Unsurprisingly, the cultural dimension is found to have by far the strongest influence on voting for the FN, with particularistic views significantly increasing the probability to support the radical right. Anti-establishment feelings represent the second most influential parameter in the model as the propensity to vote for the FN grows significantly with the degree of mistrust in politicians. Support for the EU has the third most important effect: a negative perception of France's membership to the European Union increase the likelihood of voting for the radical right.

Economic positions, on the other hand, fail to reach significance when measured on the traditional socialist-capitalist dimension. One final issue of importance here is whether the new leftist economic agenda by Marine Le Pen was reflected in the policy preferences of her supporters in the 2012 presidential election, particularly in relation to the cluster of positions identified in the preceding section. Cross-national studies have shown that the disparate social groups attracted by the radical right often share heterogeneous if not conflicting views about the economy (Ivarsflaten 2005). Table 3 presents the mean position of FN voters on a number of economic issues which relate to economic egalitarianism, the undeserving poor, classical liberalism and economic nationalism. All scores were standardized in order to allow for cross-item comparison. On each issue, the mean position of the group of FN supporters is contrasted with that of supporters of both the mainstream left and the conservative right using a simple analysis of variance with Bonferroni post-hoc tests for multiple comparisons.

Table 3 here

Economic attitudes distinguish FN voters from their counterparts on the right and the left of the political spectrum on the first three dimensions considered in Table 3, namely economic egalitarianism, the undeserving poor and classical liberalism. All differences are found to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level with the exception of the item concerning the need for the state to 'balance the deficits and surpluses', where there are no significant differences between the FN and the mainstream left ( $p=0.84$ ). Overall, the positions of radical right's voters are located at the centre of the scale on nearly all economic items, equidistant from those of the left and the right on a number of items such as the increase in the welfare tax, privatizations, nationalizations and, to a lesser extent, the question regarding the number of

civil servants. As suggested earlier, this attests to the heterogeneity in the economic policy preferences of radical right supporters rather than truly 'centrist' or moderate positions.

On average, FN voters appear to be closer to their right-wing counterparts on economic egalitarianism while less ideologically distant from those of the left on the items of classical economic liberalism and economic nationalism. Thus, the FN supporters seem to progressively accompany their party's shift away from its original free-market capitalist agenda, yet they seem to be generally more reluctant to endorse egalitarian and truly progressive redistributive or statist policies. Let us note here that the supporters of both the mainstream left and the radical right share very similar positions on the item concerning the need for the state to balance deficits, which is of course consistent with the salience of anti-austerity themes in Marine Le Pen's presidential campaign. Finally, FN voters are clearly distinguished by their strong opposition to the undeserving poor and their higher level of economic nationalism. They show the highest scores on the item about the willingness of unemployed people to find work, where they take a markedly rightist stance, and on the item concerning the negative impact of the EU as a threat to social protection where they occupy the most protectionist position.

### **Conclusion: the future of French populism**

For many years the FN has epitomised the West-European variant of Kitschelt's 'new radical radical right'. Under the new leadership of Marine Le Pen, it has endorsed a Keynesian agenda of economic redistribution and state intervention, which manifests a unique trajectory towards the archetypal competitive 'authoritarian welfare-chauvinist' strategy described by Kitschelt as one possible alternative to the radical right's winning formula. Whilst the more 'centrist' economic position taken by the FN in the mid-1990s was essentially the result of the party's adopting strong 'anti-globalization' and protectionist stances in the international domain, the leftwards shift on the economy in 2012 concerned predominantly the domestic realm, thereby altering some of the core economic policy preferences of the radical right.

In his original essay, Kitschelt predicted the failure of parties with a welfare-chauvinist appeal, arguing that "there is no 'structural location' in advanced capitalism in which [those parties] can entrench themselves" (1995:23). His anticipation was based upon the fact that the

electoral constituency for authoritarian and welfare chauvinist strategies relied too heavily on the narrow confines of the working-class while significantly under-representing other main socioeconomic groups, in particular small business and middle-class support. On the other hand, Kitschelt argued that a significant rise of those parties could only be provoked by a severe aggravation of the economy, resulting into a major increase in unemployment across large sectors of the workforce (1995:23). In the 2012 presidential election, the context of economic crisis and the deep discontent with Sarkozy allowed the FN to assemble a sizeable electoral constituency. It remains to be established however to what extent this was dependent upon the specific socio-economic conditions that developed in France in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, and whether the FN would be in a position to sustain its level of electoral attractiveness in a less adverse economic context.

Under current political and economic conditions, the French radical right has bright electoral prospects. Despite encouraging signs of a timid recovery of the national economy, there continue to be serious concerns about high unemployment and taxes raises, which have forced the government into calling for a 'fiscal pause'. Negative ratings of the socialist executive remain at a very high level at about 70 per cent, while Marine Le Pen seems to be increasingly gaining popularity among the French. The salient issues of immigration surrounding the 'Roma' controversy, security and taxes are progressively returning to the forefront of the political agenda a few months ahead of crucial local elections in March 2014 in which the FN is expected to demonstrate its political strengths. The rejuvenation of the radical right and the attenuation in the FN's oppositional strategy might also have important implications for the future of party competition on the right. The 2012 legislative elections have confirmed the convergence that exists, particularly in the Southern regions of the country, and the decision by the mainstream right to abandon the 'republican front' strategy increases dramatically the likelihood of localized UMP-FN pacts. Finally, the EU elections of June 2014 will certainly provide a very favorable structure of opportunity for the FN to ride the tide of public discontent fed by anti-EU feelings.

Despite bright electoral prospects, however, there are important challenges confronting the FN. The first one is that of its positioning within the party system. Given the strong institutional constraints that exist in France's bipolar majoritarian system, the FN will to some degree be forced into political co-operation with the other parties of the right. Yet collaborative strategies at the national level can only be achieved if the FN agrees on revising

some of its most extreme policies on immigration, crime and most importantly the EU. Then there would be a risk that a 'de-radicalized' FN could lose its appeal to disenfranchised protest voters, or could experience yet another schism by its most orthodox factions.

The second challenge concerns evidently the new economic agenda of the FN, which, as suggested in this paper, might have increased the distance between the party and voters on a number of economic issues, while still lacking the amount of policy credibility necessary to claim governmental responsibilities. There are signs that the general public mood might swing against the redistributive policies of the current socialist majority, with voter attitudes shifting back towards a more liberal agenda of tax cuts and deregulation. A first adaptive step has already been taken by the FN in the form of a more rightist platform for the 2014 municipal elections. Yet the party will have to address the issue of its location on the economic dimension and the sustainability of its new 'leftist' agenda in the future.



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## Appendix 1. List of FN manifestos and number of coded economic policy proposals

| Manifesto  | (N)        |
|--|------------|
| 1973: <i>Défendre les Français</i> . Programme du Front national   | 77         |
| 1984: <i>Droite et démocratie économique</i> (éd. 1984)            | 78         |
| 1986: <i>Pour la France</i> : programme du FN                      | 82         |
| 1993: <i>300 Mesures pour la renaissance de la France</i>          | 160        |
| 1997: <i>Le grand changement</i> : programme du Front national     | 46         |
| 2002: <i>Pour un avenir français</i> : programme du Front national | 144        |
| 2007: Programme de gouvernement de Jean-Marie Le Pen               | 106        |
| 2012: Projet présidentiel de Marine Le Pen                         | 129        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>822</b> |

## Appendix 2. Specification of the economic dimension in party manifesto analysis

| Left (-1)                              | Right (+1)                      |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Government intervention in the economy | Free market competition         |
| Public sector expansion                | Small government                |
| Nationalisations                       | Privatisations                  |
| Protectionism                          | Free trade                      |
| More government spending               | Less government spending        |
| Expansion of welfare                   | Welfare retrenchment            |
| Market regulation                      | Deregulation                    |
| Redistribution and Keynesian economics | Supply-side economics           |
| Labour market control                  | Labour market flexibility       |
| Higher taxes                           | Lower taxes                     |
| Trade unions : positive opinion        | Trade unions : negative opinion |

## Tables and Figures

**Table 1. FN electoral results since 1984**

| Year | Election     | % valid | Year | Election        | % valid |
|------|--------------|---------|------|-----------------|---------|
| 1984 | European     | 11.0    | 2002 | Presidential    | 16.9    |
| 1986 | Legislative  | 9.6     | 2002 | Presidential(1) | 17.8    |
| 1986 | Regional     | 9.6     | 2002 | Legislative     | 11.3    |
| 1988 | Presidential | 14.4    | 2004 | Regional        | 14.7    |
| 1988 | Legislative  | 9.7     | 2004 | European        | 9.8     |
| 1989 | European     | 11.7    | 2007 | Presidential    | 10.4    |
| 1992 | Regional     | 13.7    | 2007 | Legislative     | 4.3     |
| 1993 | Legislative  | 12.4    | 2009 | European        | 6.3     |
| 1994 | European     | 10.5    | 2010 | Regional        | 11.4    |
| 1995 | Presidential | 15.0    | 2011 | Cantonal(2)     | 15.1    |
| 1997 | Legislative  | 14.9    | 2012 | Presidential    | 17.9    |
| 1998 | Regional     | 15.0    | 2012 | Legislative     | 13.6    |
| 1999 | European     | 5.7     |      |                 |         |

(1) Second-round runoff; (2) Local elections contested in half of the cantons (N=2,026)

**Table 2. Binary Logistic Regressions of voting for the FN in 2012**

|  | <i>Model 1</i> |           |     | <i>Model 2</i> |           |     | <i>Size</i> <sup>(2)</sup> |
|--|----------------|-----------|-----|----------------|-----------|-----|----------------------------|
|  | <i>Coeff.</i>  | <i>SE</i> |     | <i>Coeff.</i>  | <i>SE</i> |     |                            |
| Intercept                              | -3.71          | .44       | *** | -3.77          | .63       | *** |                            |
| Gender                                 |                |           |     |                |           |     |                            |
| Male                                   | —              |           |     | —              |           |     | 47.6                       |
| Female                                 | -.05           | .18       |     | -.18           | .20       |     | 52.4                       |
| Age                                    |                |           |     |                |           |     |                            |
| Under 25 yrs                           | 1.77           | .37       | *** | 1.87           | .43       | *** | 10.8                       |
| 25-64 yrs                              | .74            | .22       | *** | .80            | .25       | *** | 66.2                       |
| 65 yrs+                                | —              |           |     | —              |           |     | 23.0                       |
| Education                              |                |           |     |                |           |     |                            |
| Primary-Secondary                      | .88            | .24       | *** | .52            | .28       |     | 47.2                       |
| Baccalauréat                           | .59            | .26       | **  | .36            | .29       |     | 20.2                       |
| University                             | —              |           |     | —              |           |     | 32.6                       |
| Class                                  |                |           |     |                |           |     |                            |
| Socio-cultural specialists             | —              |           |     | —              |           |     | 11.2                       |
| Service workers                        | .99            | .43       | **  | .31            | .47       |     | 21.2                       |
| Technical specialists                  | .27            | .53       |     | -.11           | .60       |     | 7.7                        |
| Production workers                     | 1.37           | .44       | *** | .56            | .48       |     | 19.1                       |
| Managers                               | .65            | .42       |     | .21            | .46       |     | 17.5                       |
| Clerks                                 | .27            | .47       |     | -.28           | .51       |     | 11.4                       |
| Traditional bourgeoisie <sup>(1)</sup> | -1.06          | 1.30      |     | -1.28          | 1.34      |     | 2.3                        |
| Small business owners                  | .82            | .46       |     | .09            | .51       |     | 9.6                        |
| Income                                 |                |           |     |                |           |     |                            |
| Lowest Quartile (--)                   | .08            | .26       |     | -.11           | .30       |     | 28.1                       |
| -                                      | .28            | .27       |     | .23            | .31       |     | 16.8                       |
| +                                      | .50            | .23       | *   | .35            | .26       |     | 29.9                       |
| Highest Quartile (++)                  | —              |           |     | —              |           |     | 25.2                       |
| ECO: Priority in upcoming years        |                |           |     |                |           |     |                            |
| Competitiveness                        |                |           |     | -.17           | .19       |     | 42.7                       |
| Employees conditions                   |                |           |     | —              |           |     | 57.3                       |
| CULT: No longer feel at home           |                |           |     |                |           |     |                            |
| Strongly agrees                        |                |           |     | 2.83           | .40       | *** | 22.2                       |
| Somewhat agrees                        |                |           |     | 1.89           | .40       | *** | 28.2                       |
| Somewhat disagrees                     |                |           |     | .69            | .42       |     | 29.6                       |
| Strongly disagrees                     |                |           |     | —              |           |     | 20.0                       |
| POL: Trust in politicians (scale)      |                |           |     | -.23           | .04       | *** |                            |
| EU: France's membership                |                |           |     |                |           |     |                            |
| Benefited                              |                |           |     | —              |           |     | 59.2                       |
| Not benefited                          |                |           |     | .64            | .18       | *** | 40.8                       |
| -2 log-likelihood                      | 1010.58        |           |     | 818.59         |           |     |                            |

<sup>(1)</sup> N < 35; <sup>(2)</sup> As percentage of registered voters; Coefficient significance: \*: 0.05; \*\*: 0.01; \*\*\*:0.001; N=1,186 cases with valid data across both models

Data: French Election Study 2012 (TNS-SOFRES / CEE Sciences-Po Paris)

**Table 3. Mean economic positions of FN voters contrasted with those of the mainstream left and right**

|                      |      | <i>Economic egalitarianism</i>        |  |   | <i>Economic nationalism</i>                           |
|----------------------|------|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|
|                      |      | <i>Approve increase of wealth tax</i> | <i>Approve the need to reduce income disparities</i> | <i>Respondent's position on increasing the number of civil servants</i> | <i>Afraid of less social protection because of EU</i> |
| Left <sup>(1)</sup>  | Mean | 0.26***                               | 0.31***  | 0.28***   | 0.01  |
|                      | SD   | 0.85                                  | 0.73   | 0.87  | 0.99  |
|                      | N    | 489                                   | 502  | 497   | 498   |
| Right <sup>(2)</sup> | Mean | -0.26***                              | -0.30***   | -0.38***  | -0.21***  |
|                      | SD   | 1.03                                  | 1.11   | 0.98  | 1.06  |
|                      | N    | 611                                   | 630  | 629   | 623   |
| FN                   | Mean | -0.03                                 | -0.11  | -0.10   | 0.15  |
|                      | SD   | 1.01                                  | 1.01   | 1.05  | 0.92  |
|                      | N    | 298                                   | 305  | 302   | 301   |

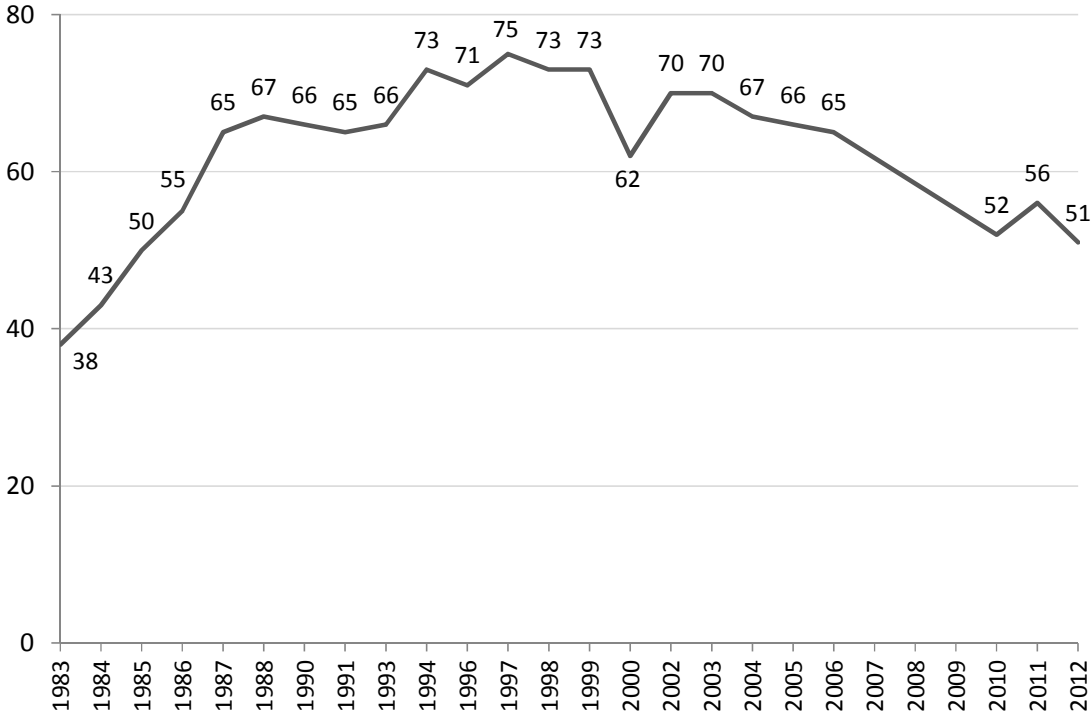
  

|                      |      | <i>Undeserving Poor</i>   | <i>Classical liberalism</i>  |  |  |
|----------------------|------|---|--|--|--|
|                      |      | <i>Degree of approval: The unemployed could find work if they really wanted</i> | <i>Degree of approval: The state should balance the deficits and surpluses</i> | <i>Level of positiveness: Privatizations</i> | <i>Level of positiveness: Nationalizations</i> |
| Left <sup>(1)</sup>  | Mean | -0.39***  | -0.05  | -0.22***                                     | 0.20***  |
|                      | SD   | 0.95  | 0.99   | 0.89   | 0.92   |
|                      | N    | 503   | 482  | 469  | 451  |
| Right <sup>(2)</sup> | Mean | 0.22***   | 0.19***  | 0.40***                                      | -0.29***                                       |
|                      | SD   | 0.91  | 0.94   | 0.97   | 0.96   |
|                      | N    | 614   | 611  | 548  | 550  |
| FN                   | Mean | 0.51  | -0.03  | 0.08   | -0.05  |
|                      | SD   | 0.87  | 1.05   | 0.99   | 1.11   |
|                      | N    | 304   | 296  | 266  | 284  |

<sup>(1)</sup> Left=Hollande (PS)+Joly (EELV); <sup>(2)</sup> Right=Sarkozy (UMP)+Bayrou (Modem)+Dupont-Aignan (DLR); all standardized variables

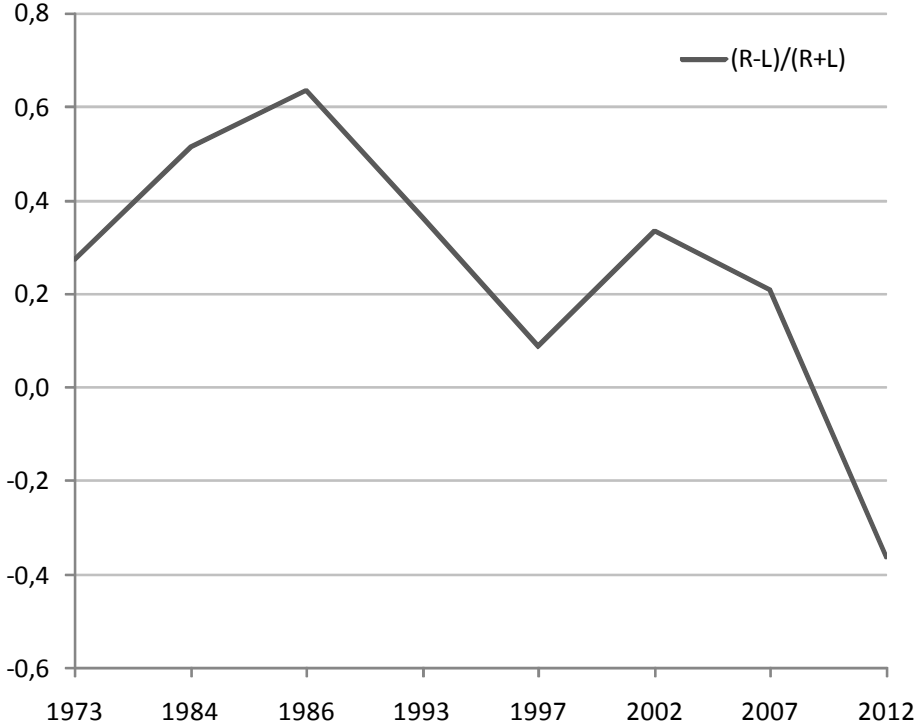
Data: French Election Study 2012 (TNS-SOFRES / CEE Sciences-Po Paris)

**Figure 1 - Public perception of the Front national as a 'threat to democracy' (1983-2012)**



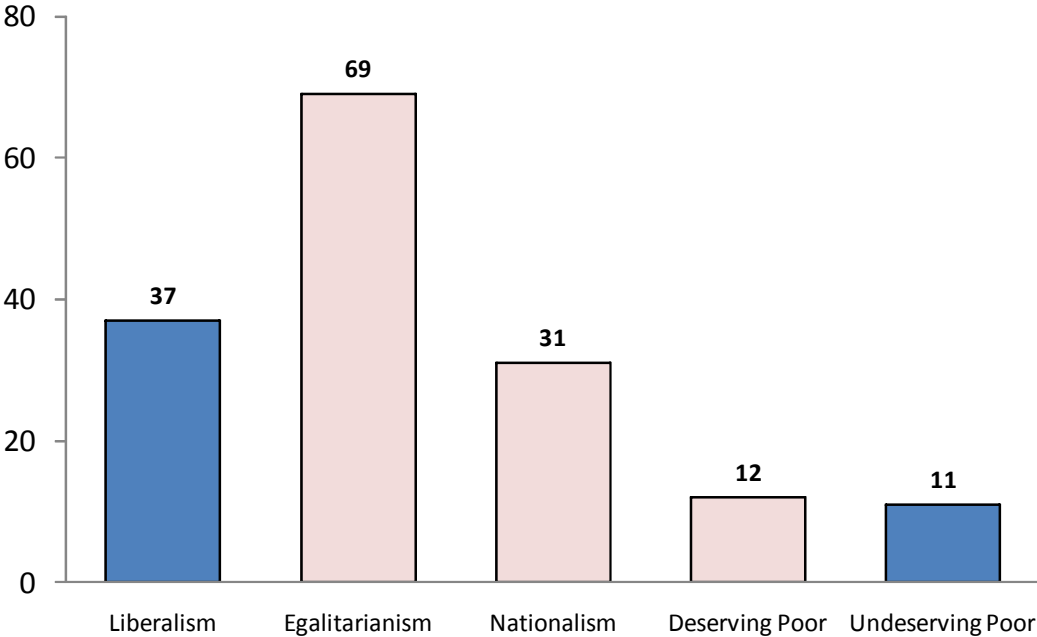
Source: TNS-SOFRES surveys.

**Figure 2. FN's economic positions: 1973-2012\***



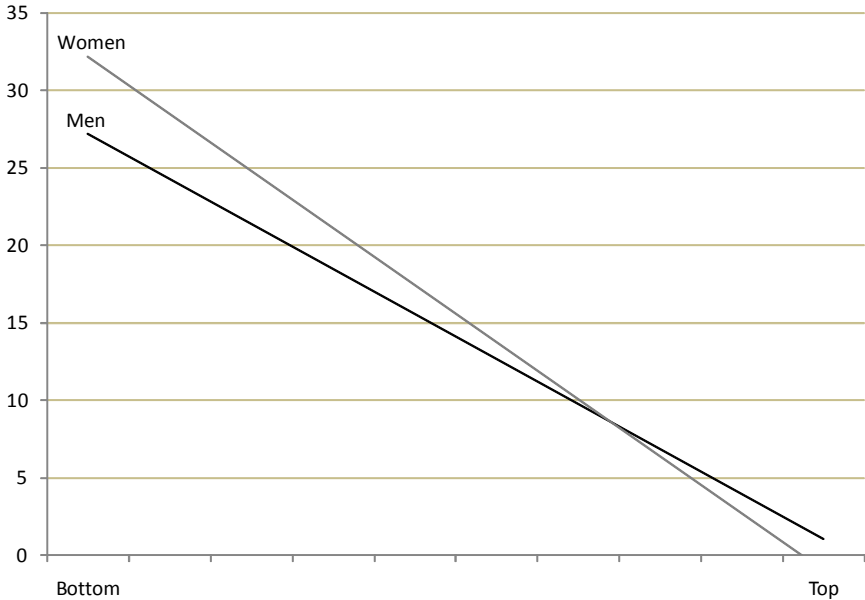
\*Difference between right-wing and left-wing policy proposals (R-L) divided by their sum (R+L) in each manifesto (Lowe et al 2011)

**Figure 3. Socio-economic themes in the 2012 presidential manifesto \***



\* number of economic policy pledges in each category.

**Figure 4. Voting for the FN according to the respondent’s self-placement on the social ladder**



Data: French Election Study 2012 (TNS-SOFRES / CEE Sciences-Po Paris)