

# A new course for the French radical-right?

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**A new course for the French radical-right? The Front National and de-demonization**

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## Abstract

This chapter examines the FN in the current French party system. It looks at the extent to which 'de-demonization' has changed the party's strategic and programmatic profile. We ask whether these changes have affected the status of the party across three main aspects as political outsider, niche and radical party, and consider the internal and external stimuli for party modernization. We conclude that, despite the moderation of its rhetoric and the softer packaging of its policies, the FN has not yet shed its populist radical right profile, and that de-demonization is primarily a vote-maximizing strategy. De-demonization is increasingly putting the cordon sanitaire under pressure however, creating new competitive opportunities for the FN.

For over four decades, the French Front National (FN) has epitomized the populist radical right party in Western Europe (Mudde, 2007: 41). According to Rydgren (2005), the FN has pioneered a new potent 'master frame' combining ethno-nationalist xenophobia with anti-political-establishment populism, which has shaped political mobilization by the European PRR during the 1980s. The electoral development of the FN has been associated with the mobilization of a specific set of issues alongside the 'cultural' dimension of competition (Kitschelt 1995). The FN's focus on immigration and crime has created a niche in the electoral arena, galvanizing radical right voters since the mid-1980s (Perrineau 1998). The FN represents also the archetypal 'political pariah' secluded behind the cordon sanitaire because of its historical legacy of French far right extremism.

Since Marine Le Pen's accession in 2011, however, the FN has claimed to break away from its extreme right status. Changes in the party's strategic and programmatic profile have been embedded in the rhetoric of '*dédiabolisation*' (de-demonization). Party normalization emerged immediately after the 2002 presidential election and has been central ever since to the new course set by Marine Le Pen for her party [1]. The recent electoral rejuvenation of the FN suggests that de-demonization has allowed the radical right to broaden its support base, setting new historical records in the 2012 presidential and 2014 European elections with 17.9 and 24.9 per cent of the vote, respectively.

[1] Similar attempts had been made in the past. In the mid-1980s, the strategy of 'notabilization' had materialized in the Rassemblement National (RN), attracting right-wing defectors such as Bruno Mégret. In the 1990s, the rise of Mégret's modernist faction paved the way for tactical pacts with local leaders of the non-Gaullist Right in the 1998 regional elections.

However successful electorally, de-demonization is still a debated issue. Most journalistic accounts of ongoing FN modernization tend to focus on changes in the party's narratives. Marine Le Pen has undeniably succeeded in presenting a more amenable face for her party in the media, but there is little evidence of more substantial changes to the FN's ideology, culture and party system status beyond this softer 'packaging' (Dézé 2012, Crépon 2012, Mayer 2013, Shields 2013).

This chapter looks at the extent to which 'de-demonization' has altered the party's strategic and programmatic profile. We assess changes in the status of the FN across three main aspects as political outsider, niche and radical party, which all represent strategic features of the populist radical right family. We then look at stimuli for party modernization, both internal and external, and the factors which have induced the new FN trajectory after 2002. We conclude that the party has not yet shed its populist radical right profile despite the moderation of its rhetoric and the softer packaging of its policies, and that de-demonization is primarily a vote-maximizing strategy.

## 1. Aspects of party change

This first section looks at the strategic and programmatic changes embedded in 'de-demonization'. It asks whether the FN has become more 'mainstream' over time. Changes are evaluated across three main aspects of niche, radical and outsider party.

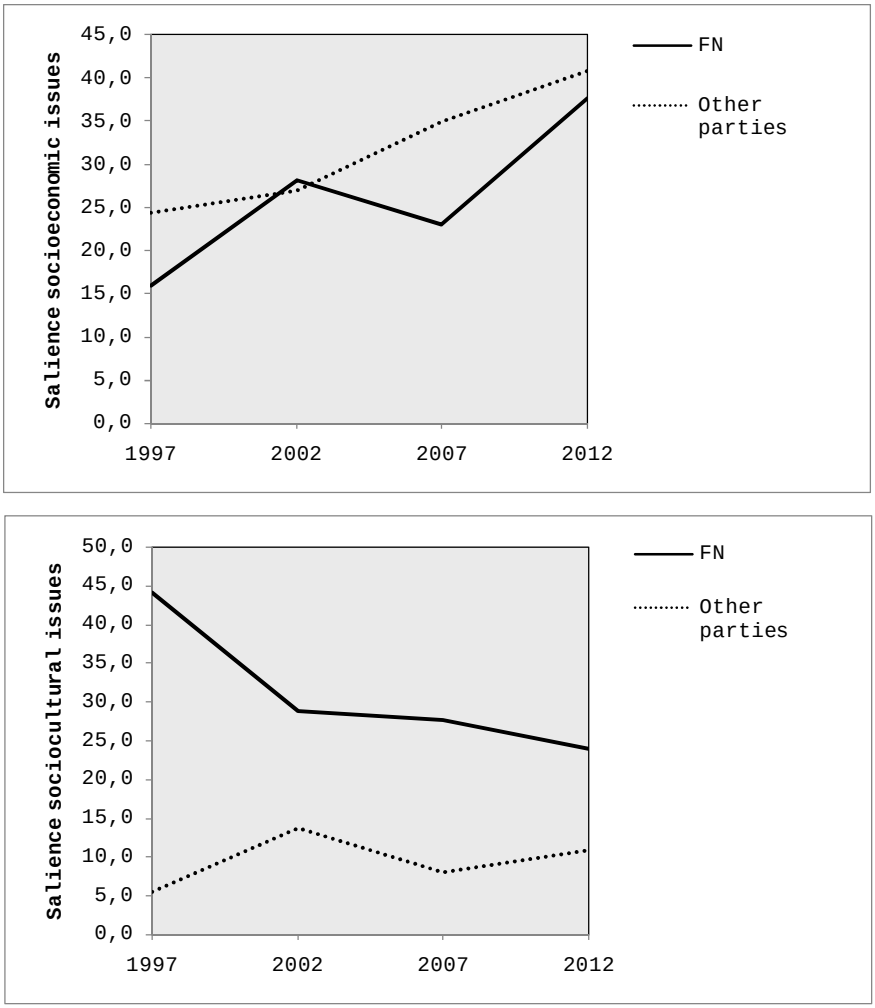
### *1. Niche*

RRPPs parties have emerged as 'niche' parties in West European party systems. According to Meguid (2008), niche parties are distinguished from the mainstream by the emphasis they put on certain issues which are neglected by their more established competitors. RRPPs parties compete primarily on a set of cultural issues such as immigration and crime, and they tend on the other hand to 'de-emphasize' economic matters (Rovny 2013).

Whether RRPPs are shedding their niche profile can be measured by the salience they attach to various policy domains. Changes in the salience profile of the FN are examined using the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data for France [2]. CMP data provide party specific measures of the relative salience of political issues in party platforms across time (Budge et al. 2001). To assess the niche status of the FN, we measure the deviation from the mean salience of the social-economic and socio-cultural policy domains [3]. According to Meyer and Wagner (2013), a party de/emphasizes an issue more than its competitors if its salience is at least one standard deviation below/above the mean party system salience [4].

[2] The original CMP dataset is complemented with the coding of all French party manifestos in the 2012 elections –which at the time of writing were still uncoded.
[3] To ensure consistency with the comparative analyses in this volume, the salience of socio-economic issues is calculated by adding up categories per401 till per416, as well as categories per504 till 507. The salience of socio-cultural issues is calculated by adding up issues per601 till per608.
[4] Party system salience is calculated for all parties other than the FN. We use non weighted measures.

**Figure 1. Changes in the FN's economic and sociocultural salience profile**




The economic and sociocultural salience profiles of the FN relative to the other actors in the French party system are summarized in Figure 1. The data reveal that the FN has indeed broadened its programme over time to include a larger set of socio-economic issues. The latter made up 38 per cent of its 2012 manifesto as opposed to 15 per cent in the mid-1990s. Simultaneously, there has been a decrease in socio-cultural salience from 44 down to 24 per cent since 1997. A brief glance at the structure of the 2012 presidential platform confirms this shift in issue emphasis, with household income, the Euro, employment, public debt, pensions and taxes coming before traditional issues of immigration and law-and-order.

In party system terms, the FN continues to differentiate its policy agenda from other competitors on the socio-cultural dimension, while simultaneously pursuing mainstream strategies on socio-economic issues. In 2012, the FN maintained a distinctive niche status

on socio-cultural issues compared with the other French parties, with a difference to the mean of about two standard deviations. On economic issues, on the other hand, the party has adopted a more mainstream profile –with a difference in salience smaller than the standard deviation in the French party system– which suggests a move towards office-seeking strategies.

These results corroborate the 'valence' agenda pushed by Marine Le Pen to profile her party as a more credible party of government. Economic issues were already prioritized in the 2007 election [5] and party 'technocratization' has been central ever since to Marine Le Pen's agenda of normalization. The greater emphasis put on economic credibility was revealed for instance by the appointment of a former high ranking administrative civil servant, Florian Philippot, as strategic campaign director in October 2011. During the presidential campaign, the FN made every effort to present a credible costing for its socio-economic programme, while simultaneously seeking expert advice on its plan to shed the Euro.

Despite significant changes in salience profile, however, the FN has not yet shifted from niche to mainstream status. As public demand for anti-immigration policies grows, there are strong vote-seeking incentives for the FN to maintain its distinctive focus on socio-cultural issues. In 2012, the two most important issues reported by Le Pen's supporters were immigration (77 per cent) and crime (54 per cent) (IPSOS-Fiducial exit-poll survey, 22 April 2012). French voters are now even more concerned about immigration, national identity or crime. Polls show high levels of public opinion support for the FN's cultural views (see Table 1 below). The vast majority of the French hold negative opinions of Islam and adhere to the FN's claim that there are too many foreigners in the country.

**Table 1. Salience of the FN niche cultural agenda**

| Item | % agree |
|---|---|
| There are too many foreigners in France | 66 |
| Islam is not compatible with the values of French society | 63 |
| We should give more power to our country even if this limits that of the EU | 70 |
| In France, things were better in the past | 74 |
| In general, foreigners don't make much of an effort to assimilate in French society | 59 |
| We need a strong leader in France to put everything in order | 84 |
| Politicians don't really care about people like us | 88 |
| Most men and women in French politics are corrupt | 65 |

Source: IPSOS-CEVIPOF survey. Les Nouvelles fractures françaises, January 2014 (http://www.ipsos.fr/ipsos-public-affairs/actualites/2014-01-21-nouvelles-fractures-francaises-resultats-et-analyse-l-enquete-ipsos-steria: retrieved 7 June 2014)

[5] These issues topped the agenda of the FN's summer university in Avignon in September 2006, where the party set up thematic committees (*Commissions d'Action présidentielle*, CAP) to tap a wide range of socio-economic issues in order to enhance its sectoral expertise.

In contrast, the party's economic strategy lacks credibility and is met with strong public skepticism. Claims by the party that it is preparing itself to assume power hardly conceal the flaws in its economic programme and the uncertainty regarding its Euro-exit platform which is rejected by the vast majority of French voters. Looking at the FN's platforms since the mid-1980s, Ivaldi (2013) suggests also that the party has shifted to the left on the economic axis of competition, endorsing a new domestic economic agenda of state intervention, government spending and public services expansion, while simultaneously accentuating economic nationalism and anti-globalization.

### *2. Radical*

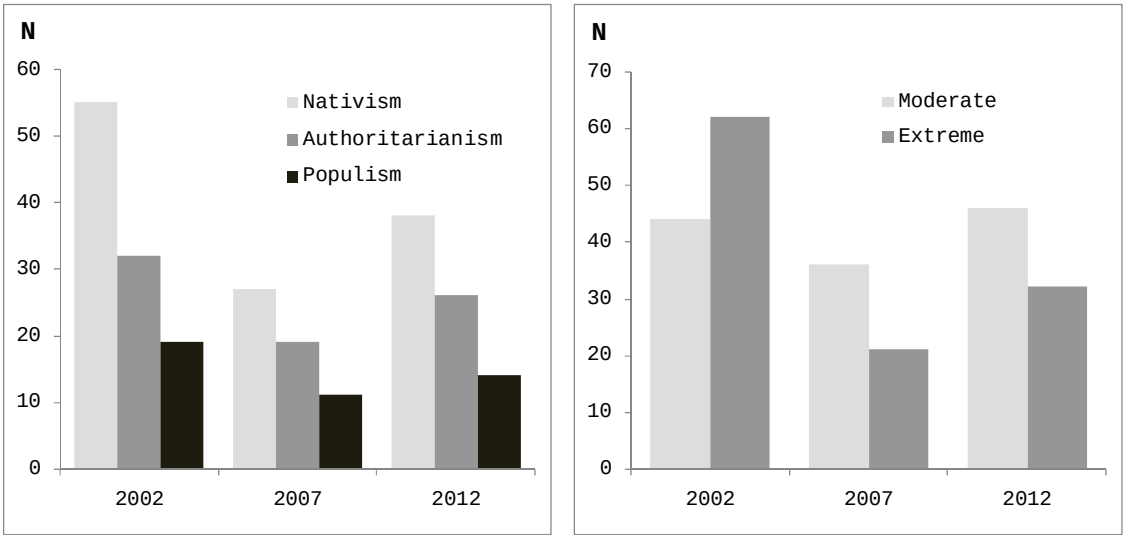
The French FN epitomizes the populist radical right, which according to Mudde (2007) combines nativism, authoritarianism and populism. Nativism is defined as "an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation" (p.19). Nativism is core to the ideological profile of RRPPs and implies welfare chauvinist, ethno-differentialist and Eurosceptic policies. Authoritarianism refers to "the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely" (p.23). Finally, populism is defined as "a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'. It argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale*, i.e. the general will of the people (Mudde 2004).

To what extent has the new political marketing of 'de-demonization' altered the nativist, authoritarian and populist beliefs of the FN? In this section, we examine the content of FN presidential manifestos from 2002 to 2012. Party programmes are analyzed exhaustively in order to extract all policy pledges that form part of the FN's radical agenda, reflecting changes in the specific policy commitments made by the party over time. Although nativist, authoritarian and populist policies are radical 'in essence', they may vary however according to their formulation and the degree to which they challenge constitutional rules or universalist values. Pledges are therefore coded on a 3-point scale to differentiate between extreme (+1), moderate (+.5) and status quo (0) positions. They are then assigned to one of the following categories –nativism, authoritarianism or populism. To improve coding consistency, a unique ID is attributed to each individual policy pledge, which allows also to trace changes in specific issue positions over time. Let us note here that no liberal, cosmopolitarian or progressive positions were found that would require to consider opposite scores such as those used by Akkerman (2012). Pledges to maintain the existing status quo were also almost inexistent.

Figure 2 below has the size and structure of the FN's radical agenda in presidential elections between 2002 and 2012. The overall size of the FN's radical platform shows a significant decrease in 2007 where the total number of radical policy pledges was halved from 106 in 2002 down to 58, followed by an augmentation up to a total 80 proposals in 2012. The 2002 manifesto stands out also as significantly more radical with regards to the overall number of 'extreme' policies across all three measured dimensions (62 as

opposed to 21 and 32 in 2007 and 2012, respectively).

**Figure 2. Size and degree of extremeness in the FN's radical agenda*: 2002-2012**




*Number of policy pledges in presidential manifestos

The use of unique policy pledge IDs over time allows to track changes in the policy profile of the FN. We distinguish between three main groups of policies. A first group concerns the stable radical right core of the FN. It consists of a total of 59 policies that can be found across the whole 2002-2012 period [6]. More than half (54.2 per cent) of those are nativist policies, while authoritarian and populist policies account for another quarter (25.4) and fifth (20.3), respectively. This stable radical right core includes some of the FN's historical policies such as the repatriation of all illegal immigrants and foreign offenders, the end of legal immigration, a drastic reduction in asylum, national preference, opposition to the building of mosques, death penalty and a more severe punishment for offenders and criminals including minors aged 13+, the suppression of family reunion rights for migrants, more powers to the police, the fight against "anti-French racism", an exit from Schengen and ultimately from the EU, a call for discipline and authority in schools, the fight against trade union monopolies and against the politicization of civil servants, or the greater use of the referendum and proportional representation. All policies in this first group exhibit stability in their goals and show also little variation with regards to their degree of 'extremeness': cases where the FN has adopted a more moderate position in 2012 compared with ten years earlier represent about a fifth (22 per cent) of all 59 policies in this stable radical right group, the most notable change being the party's official position now acknowledging abortion rights.

[6] Of these, 38 are present in all three manifestos, while another 21 are only common to the 2002 and 2012 programmes.

The second group refers to new radical right policies which have emerged in the 2012 party's manifesto and which can be regarded as representative of Marine Le Pen's modernization agenda. This second group has a total of 21 policy pledges of which more than half (57.1 per cent) have a focus on law-and-order issues –in particular repression against violent behavior in schools, more rights for victims in courts, citizen supervision of criminal trials or the suppression of social welfare for repeat offenders. Another third (33.3 per cent) concern nativist policies, mostly articulated around the new secular agenda and the fight against "*communautarisme*", as well as anti- immigration measures such as a legal ban on undocumented migrant regularization.

The third group contains the FN's old radical right policies abandoned after 2002. In about half (48.9 per cent) of the cases, these concern nativist policies, in particular proposals such as national preference in company layoffs, the dismantling of emergency homes for migrants, sanitary controls at France's borders to fight AIDS, a safety deposit for tourists, the control of naturalization of migrants by municipal councils, extended powers to the police to check migrants or a compulsory medical examination for visa applicants. For another third (34 per cent), these old policies refer to law-and-order issues such as police checks in schools, forced labor camps for offenders and criminals, or restoring high-security quarters in prisons. With regards to the degree of extremeness, it must be noted than this third group shows no statistically significant differences with policies in the former two groups i.e. the stable radical right core and the more recent policies adopted in 2012.

These results suggest that the FN has somewhat de-radicalized over the past ten years. The party has shed a number of its former extreme nativist and authoritarian policies [7] while simultaneously moderating its social conservative views on issues such as abortion or civil union [8]. From 2007 onwards, the FN has shown a strategic reformulation of its ethnopluralist platform, downplaying national identity issues [9] to focus on the alleged stand-off between Islam and liberal democracy. The 2012 campaign referred to the so-called threats of 'islamization' and 'green fascism' in French society. To evade accusations of racism or xenophobia, the party has endorsed the secular values that are pivotal to the French Republican model of immigrant integration [10]. Finally, other significant behavioral changes include the shedding of anti-Semitism and Holocaust

[7] In 2002, the *Pour un avenir français* presidential programme prioritized the ethno-differentialist arguments laid out in Mégret's *50 propositions* on immigration in 1991. Immigration was depicted as a 'deadly threat to France's identity' that 'profoundly alters the very substance of the French people', while the party pledged to 'halt the islamization of France'.

[8] Together with Marine Le Pen's personality, this sidelining of traditional and religious issues has helped the party overcome the gender gap inherent in PRR male chauvinistic politics (Mayer 2013).

[9] Quite remarkably, the terms 'national identity' would appear only once in 2007, and would be found in the chapter dedicated by the FN to the environment. The party would also limit itself to pointing out the risk of Islamic terrorism for national security and French laicity. Other possibly disorientating policy moves included for instance the release in December 2006 of electoral posters portraying a young black woman wearing low-waisted jeans and a piercing.

[10] Such evolution was not entirely novel to the FN. A similar line had temporarily surfaced in the 1999 European elections, in intra-party controversy over 'multi-denominational France'. This *realpolitik* of immigration and multiculturalism had been abandoned however as the FN confronted ideological competition from the neo-racist islamophobic platform of splinter MNR.

denial which were customary of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the past, without formally condemning such statements. However effective in terms of political marketing, the new policy 'packaging' should not conceal the persistence of a substantial and stable nativist, authoritarian and populist ideology characteristic of the radical right. Moreover, the recent cultural policies adopted by the FN in 2012 show no significant departure from the more established radical right core.

### *3. Outsider*

Anti-establishment populism is a strategic feature of the PRR. According to Schedler (1996), anti-political-establishment parties symbolically construct a double conflict contraposing the political elite against citizens and against themselves. For over four decades, the French FN has operated on this form of radical opposition to the system, vilipending 'decadent' and 'corrupt' elites, opposing the 'gang of four' in reference to the parties of the mainstream, while simultaneously claiming to speak for the ordinary people. The FN represents also the archetypical 'outsider' party, kept out of mainstream politics by the cordon sanitaire, and often being no more than an electoral nuisance for other parties. The FN has never achieved coalition potential at national level and only on rare occasions it has shared power in local or regional governments.

De-demonization aims to shed the FN's pariah status in order to get more public legitimacy and augment its electoral appeal. During most of the 1990s and early 2000s, as a result of its ostracization by the RPR/UDF cartel, the FN pursued mainly adversarial strategies vis-à-vis the mainstream right, although it managed to forge tactical regional alliances in 1998. The party's 'neither left nor right' strategy was epitomized in the 1997 and 2002 elections, which demonstrated also its nuisance against both camps. In 2007, Le Pen only temporarily toned down the FN's traditional anti-political-establishment rhetoric, claiming to be 'centre-right' and explicitly calling for co-operation with Sarkozy's right. In 2012, the party returned to its role as political nuisance. Le Pen's strong anti-UMP campaign had a significant impact, depriving Sarkozy of the votes needed to defeat Hollande in the presidential runoff [11].

Since Marine Le Pen's accession to power, the party has returned to the 'two-tier' competitive strategy that had been briefly endorsed by the party in the late 1990s, and which is characterized by the dominance of anti-political-establishment populism (Ivaldi 2007). At national level, the FN persists in its violent attacks against mainstream parties and the so-called 'UMPS caste' [12]. The party claims to represent a third competitive bloc and a political alternative to France's two-bloc polity, while simultaneously ruling out co-operation with other actors in the system. The FN opposes also the existing political status quo –as revealed for instance in its opposition to European integration, while challenging the fundamental pluralist principles. The anti-liberal culture of the FN is

[11] Polls indicated that only half of the FN voters supported Sarkozy, throwing the election to Hollande.
[12] In the 2012 presidential runoff, Marine Le Pen refused to endorse either candidate, while vilipending the 'evil' forces of '*mondialisme*' (globalism) i.e. the EU, financial markets, multinational corporations, immigration and France's political 'establishment'.

exemplified by its critique of intermediary bodies, constitutional courts, checks and balances, parliamentarianism or trade unions. At sub-national level, on the other hand, the FN seeks political *désenclavement*. It has adopted a more conciliatory approach in the 2012 legislatives, calling for local pacts with the UMP, a position which was reiterated in its 2014 municipal election charter. Vertical differentiation of the party's competitive strategies is corroborated also by the variation in its policy platforms. In the 2014 municipals, the FN has adopted a right-wing agenda combining anti-immigration, law-and-order with tax cuts and the fight against local bureaucracy, which contrasted with its more leftist and statist positions in the national arena.

Significant changes have occurred in the FN's political environment. The electoral revival and softening of the FN's image are certainly putting the cordon sanitaire under strain. Since 2002, the UMP has maintained a strict demarcation from the FN, repeatedly reiterating its exclusionary stance vis-à-vis the radical right. In 2012, however, Sarkozy pushed the political legitimation of the FN one step further by acknowledging the 'democratic nature' of Marine Le Pen's party and its 'compatibility with Republican values'. Recent years have also seen the deterioration of the Front Républicain [13] after the mainstream right has adopted a 'neither, nor' strategy. Since 2011, the UMP has maintained its candidates in all three-way contests, urging voters to reject both the FN and the Left. This has created a more favorable structure of opportunity in constituencies with strong FN presence, particularly in the Southern regions.

The FN seems to begin reaping the fruits of these efforts to polish the party's image. Public opinion data point to the increasing normalization of Marine Le Pen's party (see Table 2). In 2014, only 50 per cent of the French said that 'the FN was a threat to democracy' compared with 75 per cent in the mid-1990s. Other indicators of de-demonization include popularity ratings for both the FN and its leader, which have doubled since Marine Le Pen's accession, as well as public support for the FN's ideas which are now shared by over a third (34 per cent) of the French.

**Table 2. Public opinion indicators of de-demonization: 1997-2012**

| | 1997 | 2002 | 2007 | 2014 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Average % FN popularity(1) | 13 | 11 | 12 | 23 |
| Average % leader popularity(1) | 15 | 13 | 13 | 27 |
| Is threat to democracy (%) | 75 | 70 | 60 | 50 |
| Agreement with FN ideas (%) | 20 | 28 | 26 | 34 |

(1) Annual average of monthly popularity ratings
Source: TNS-SOFRES popularities and annual barometer surveys

[13] The Republican Front (Front républicain) consists of ad hoc local alliances of parties across the spectrum wherever and whenever a radical right candidate is likely to win a decisive round.

## 2. Conditions for party change

This second section looks briefly at the internal and external stimuli for FN party transformation and the contextual factors which help account for changes that have occurred in the FN's policy and strategic profile. Harmel and Janda (1994) suggest that "party change is normally a result of leadership change, a change of dominant faction within the party and/or an external stimulus for change" (p.262). It is therefore important to look at "the parties' own decision-making processes in effecting organizational change" (p.261). However, agent-based models are not sufficient to explain party change. We also need to consider the broader political and institutional context in which parties operate.

### *1. External stimuli for change*

The strategic choices made by the FN must be first situated within the political context of the 2002 'earthquake' presidential election. Jean-Marie Le Pen's progression to the second-round runoff was the paroxysm of the FN as electoral nuisance. Mass anti-FN mobilization between the two rounds demonstrated however strong resistance to the far right and its continuing political exclusion. It helped contain the growth in support for Le Pen in the decisive round, resulting in Chirac's reelection with over 82 per cent of the vote. Le Pen's success in *trompe l'oeil* suggested that the FN had hit its electoral ceiling, contradicting its claim to represent a viable political alternative. The relatively poor showing by the FN in the subsequent legislatives attested to its lack of support. Finally, the election campaign revealed the low economic credibility of the party.

The 2002 (mis)performance was bitterly disappointing to the party's rank and file, and it acted as a powerful catalyst for party change. The FN entered a period of internal turmoil and intense fractionalization over party strategy, creating opportunities for the 'modernist' factions. Modernization was brought to the agenda of the 2003 party congress by the younger generation of elite around Marine Le Pen –e.g. Olivier Martinelli, Louis Aliot or Jean-François Touzé–, while Marine Le Pen was also appointed as vice-president. In 2007, she was given the strategic direction of the presidential campaign. As noted earlier, significant attempts were made to soften the party's image and to formulate more credible economic policies which were felt to be missing in 2002. Le Pen's family autocratic leadership led to the departure of prominent national cadres such as Jacques Bompard, Carl Lang or Jean-Claude Martinez [14].

Strategic issues resurfaced immediately after the 2007 elections. Despite the FN's poor presidential showing, Marine Le Pen emerged as the most serious contender for taking over the party [15]. Her political momentum profoundly altered the factional balance of

[14] Jacques Bompard was expelled in September 2005; Carl Lang et Jean-Claude Martinez left the party in November 2008. Other key figures such as Martine Lehideux, Martial Bild, Myriam Baeckeroot, Michel Bayvet and Michel de Rostolan stepped down in January 2009.

[15] Marine Le Pen's ability to survive the legislative debacle in her Northern constituency made her the frontrunner in the succession race to replace her father. Highly publicized local campaigns in the city of Hénin-Beaumont in 2008 and 2009 helped her gain more visibility at national level. She won another

power, resulting in the decline of the orthodox wing led by her rival, Bruno Gollnisch, while new '*mariniste*' elites rose to all top-level positions [16]. In the wake of their defeat in the 2011 party congress, Gollnisch and his followers stepped down from all official posts, paving the way for the strategic transformation of the party. Marine Le Pen had publicly indicated earlier that she would distance herself from the most radical factions of the French far right, which for some of them had already left the FN in 2007 [17].

### *2. Party organization and leadership*

A second set of factors concerns party organization and leadership. The rise of Marine Le Pen somewhat reflects the move by the FN towards greater intra-party democracy and its endorsement of a more open procedure of leader selection. In 2011, the decision to hold a competitive membership election for the new leader helped arbitrate between diverging strategic lines. The leadership election participated in Marine Le Pen's momentum, as she took clear advantage of her position of strength in the polls. She won 67.7 per cent of the members' vote in the 2011 party congress in Tours. That the vast majority of the grassroots were inclined towards party modernization contrasted with the previous balance of power in the party's middle level elites [18]. The central committee election in the 2011 congress showed also a rebalancing towards the '*mariniste*' camp which won 57 per cent of the seats against 41 per cent for Gollnisch's supporters.

With regards to de-demonization, this suggests continuity rather than significant change in FN personnel over time, as most of Le Pen's close supporters have made their political career within the inner circles of the party. Florian Philippot or Gilbert Collard aside, no significant new entries have occurred and none of Gollnisch's most prominent supporters have left the party since 2011. Changes which have taken place are mostly generational, with the rise of a younger cohort of FN elites, represented by Marine Le Pen herself. At grassroots level, the succession of political controversies regarding racism and anti-Semitism since 2011 attests also to the persistence of the far right legacy.

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personal success in the 2010 regional elections topping her father's best performance.

[16] After the 2011 congress, Marine Le Pen's supporters had nearly 70 per cent of the seats in the political bureau. Ironically these included former *mégrétistes* such as Steeve Briois, Bruno Bilde or Nicolas Bay

[17] In December 2010, Marine Le Pen said: "I don't want radical groups, which are a political caricature and an anachronism, to return to the FN. Between traditionalist Catholics, pétainists and those obsessed with the Holocaust, it doesn't seem coherent to me. The FN won't serve as an echo chamber for their obsessions" (http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2010/12/07/97001-20101207FILWWW00388-fn-gollnish-s-en-prend-a-marin-le-pen.php: retrieved 6 June 2014).

[18] In the party congress in Bordeaux in November 2007, Bruno Gollnisch had topped the central committee election with 85.2 per cent of the delegates' vote ahead of Marine Le Pen (75.6 per cent).

Strategic considerations of candidate viability were critical in 2011. The internal leadership election served practically as presidential primary and there is little doubt that FN members saw in Marine Le Pen a candidate with stronger presidential prospects. By January 2011, polls were showing a wide gap in the electoral potential of the two contenders as well as a notable variation in their level of attractiveness to the mainstream right electorate [19].

In policy terms, the FN has maintained a less democratic profile. Marine Le Pen's new leadership shows no significant departure from the past. It features a highly centralized organizational structure in which power is held at the top and in which the leadership is relatively unconstrained in its decisions. The political bureau around Marine Le Pen continues to control policy making and to dominate the internal life of the FN. Kitschelt (1994) defines this model of hierarchical organization as "'innovation from above', whereby party leaders act autonomously from a party's internal process of interest aggregation" (p.212).

### *3. Institutional and party system factors*

Finally, we must consider the incentives generated by electoral system features and institutional arrangements. Two important systemic challenges confront the FN. First, the majoritarian system, which forms the electoral backbone of the Fifth Republic, manufactures parliamentary majorities in ways that are primarily detrimental to minor party alternatives. In terms of this system, disproportionality accounts for the FN's inability to win enough seats to achieve coalition potential [20]. Secondly, France's majoritarianism tends to a clustered multiparty system, with two separate party subsystems of the left and the right. This divide is deeply institutionalized, shaping the behavior of parties and voters. It requires that parties within each bloc co-operate to build competitive alliances in order to win a majority, therefore leaving little space to parties outside the two main blocs.

De-demonization seeks to address these challenges. It aims primarily to appeal to a wider cross-section of voters to maximize electoral support. Mainstream politicians might contemplate in the future the implications of the deterioration of Front Républicain. Runoffs with three or more candidates promote the viability of middle-sized parties and the possibility that the FN will win seats without a clear majority of the votes. Moreover, de-demonization aims to stop political ostracism. The FN's current accommodative position at local level hopes to dislodge the UMP coalition on the ground, while simultaneously putting the cordon sanitaire under strain. National coalitions between the

[19] A CSA-*Marianne* poll revealed for instance that 20 per cent would consider voting for Marine Le Pen in 2012, as opposed to only 7 per cent for Gollnisch. Amongst UMP sympathisers, the comparable figures were 28 and 4 per cent, respectively (*Marianne*, 14 January 2011). A month earlier, a BVA-*Canal+* poll had Marine Le Pen to best represent the FN's ideas against only 3 per cent for Gollnisch: the former would also receive 17 per cent in the presidential election as opposed to 8 per cent for Gollnisch (BVA-*Canal+*, 10 December 2010).

[20] Let us note here that proportional representation would have given the FN up to 76 out of 577 seats in 2012 as opposed to only 2 in the current legislature.

FN and the UMP look unlikely, but the normalization of the FN in the eyes of voters makes it increasingly difficult for the UMP to legitimate political exclusion of their radical challenger [21]. As can be seen from Table 3, the radicalization of the mainstream right since 2007 has further decreased the attitudinal distance between the core support of both the conservative UMP and FN with regards to immigration and law-and-order issues. There has also been substantial increase in public support for electoral pacts between the moderate and the radical right: in March 2014, more than half (55 per cent) of UMP voters said they were in favor of local pacts with the FN as opposed to 36 per cent in 1998 [22].

**Table 3. Cultural attitudinal polarization**

| Item | Left | UMP | FN |
|---|---|---|---|
| There are too many foreigners in France | 39 | 82 | 98 |
| Islam is not compatible with the values of French society | 46 | 72 | 91 |
| In France, things were better in the past | 58 | 80 | 94 |
| In general, foreigners don't make much of an effort to assimilate in French society | 38 | 71 | 88 |
| People no longer feel at home | 40 | 75 | 94 |
| Death penalty should be reinstated | 22 | 60 | 79 |
| The FN is a useful party | 20 | 67 | 95 |

% of respondents who agree ;
Source: IPSOS-CEVIPOF survey. Les Nouvelles fractures françaises, January 2014 (http://www.ipsos.fr/ipsos-public-affairs/actualites/2014-01-21-nouvelles-fractures-francaises-resultats-et-analyse-l-enquete-ipsos-steria: retrieved 7 June 2014)

## Conclusion

This chapter offers an account of the current normalization of the French Front National. Since Marine Le Pen's accession, the FN has been seeking a new strategic equilibrium to shed its pariah profile and maximize its political opportunities. Beginning with the 2002 pyrrhic victory, the party leadership has striven to address crucial credibility and identity issues. This evolution attests to the current stage of the FN's development within the French party system, which is that of its entrenchment. Harmel and Svåsand's (1993) suggest that the final stage of populist party institutionalization targets credibility and cooperation. The FN succession supports their assertion that integration requires a more pragmatic and 'power-seeking' leader.

In this chapter, we asked whether de-demonization has altered the populist radical right features of the FN as niche, radical and outsider party. We found that, despite significant

[21] The mainstream right's growing difficulty maintaining a clear demarcation with the FN was revealed in September 2013 in the controversy by former Prime Minister François Fillon who demanded that his party combat 'sectarism' and abandon the ostracism of the FN.
[22] http://www.atlantico.fr/decryptage/majorite-sympathisants-ump-et-fn-en-faveur-accords-locaux-sondage-exclusif-ifop-1020547.html: retrieved 7 June 2014

changes in salience profile and the broadening of its economic platform, the FN has not yet shifted from niche to mainstream status. It has accentuated its nationalist anti-globalization stance while endorsing left-wing economic policies. De-demonization has produced only limited amounts of policy moderation and change in the party's anti-liberal culture. The FN has primarily filtered its political rhetoric but core radical populist policies have not disappeared. Instead these have been diluted into a narrative of republican secularism employed as a strategic device to elude accusations of racism and xenophobia. Finally, the FN has not varied in its competitive positioning vis-à-vis other actors in the system. Its current position attest to the dominance of populist anti-political-establishment strategies juxtaposed with timid efforts of opening the party locally. The FN continues on the other hand to be politically ostracized by its neighbouring competitors of the French right, although de-demonization is certainly increasing the pressure on the cordon sanitaire. The disappearing of the Front Républicain increases the political legitimacy of the FN and might create new opportunities for competition in the more fragmented right pole of French politics in the future.

Reflecting on this persistence of the FN's populist radical right niche status and lack of coalition opportunities, de-demonization can be considered a primarily vote-maximizing strategy and, for that matter, one that has recently been quite successful electorally. As suggested elsewhere in this volume, a vote-seeking strategy is the most realistic option for RRPPs when they are ostracized and stigmatized by their mainstream competitors. The French case corroborates the assumption that majority systems and cordon sanitaire tend to impede RRPPs to choose an office-seeking strategy. Moreover, policy profiles as niche, radical or outsider parties generally go well together with strategies of vote maximization. Policy differentiation and policy radicalism rather than competing for the median voter enhance niche parties' competitiveness in elections (Ezrow 2008).

The FN faces a trade-off between policy and office. On the one hand, the FN must shed its radical right profile to grow its representation or it will otherwise continue to alienate the moderate sectors of the electorate. But normalization strategies may on the other hand be costly in terms of votes. Niche parties risk losing their distinctiveness and support if they move too far beyond their core issues. Adams et al. (2006) show that niche parties are punished at the polls when they attempt to moderate their policy positions. Additionally, considering France's current economic and political context, the FN has strong incentives to uphold its 'catch-all' populist anti-political-establishment appeal to mobilize a broad coalition of disenfranchised and protest voters. De-demonization aims therefore to resolve the somewhat antagonistic goals of dislodging the party's radical right status in the eyes of the mass public on the one hand while sustaining its appeal to non-centrist and protest voters on the other hand. Finally, the FN will also need to address political co-operation with the mainstream right and, therefore, its position within France's bipolar system of competition.

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