

RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN FRANCE – DEPARTMENTAL DIFFERENCES IN THE VOTE FOR THE NATIONAL FRONT

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Abstract: *Although many studies have addressed the electoral success of right-wing parties and, in particular, the French National Front, no analysis has so far explored departmental differences in the share of votes. This analysis fills this gap by evaluating socio-structural factors and intervening institutional and political variables that have influenced the electoral success of the radical right in the 96 departments of metropolitan France. In this respect, the unemployment rate, crime rate, the degree of urbanization, the electoral system type, the turnout rate as well as the vote share for the moderate right are regressed against the vote share of the National Front. This pooled time series analysis reveals that the degree of urbanization and the turnout rate are the two significant variables accounting for department specific differences in the vote share of the FN.*

Keywords: right wing parties, National Front, France, departments, extremism

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Introduction

Electoral support for right-wing extremist parties¹ increased in many European countries from the 1980s to the early 2000s allowing these parties to become a significant political force in Western European democracies (Betz 2001: 401). The 2002 contests in France and the Netherlands marked the high point for right-wing extremist support. In the 2002 presidential election in France, electoral support for the National Front candidate, Jean Marie Le Pen contributed to the defeat of Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin. In the Netherlands, following the 2002 parliamentary elections, the anti-immigrant list Pim Fortuyn became the second largest party in the Dutch Parliament and helped form the governing coalition. Similarly, extreme right-wing parties acquired seats in the Austrian, Belgian, Danish, Italian, Norwegian, and Swiss parliaments.

Although there has been no spectacular victory of any extremist party or candidate following Le Pen's coup in 2002, it is still too early to conclude that extremist right wing parties are on their way out. Recently, support for the radical right has dropped in some countries but not in others. In the Netherlands, following the 2006 national election the list Pim Fortuyn is no longer represented in parliament, and in France, the vote share of the FN has considerably declined in the 2006 presidential (from 16,9% in 2002 to 10,75% in 2007) and parliamentary elections (from 11.3% in 2002 to less than 5% in 2007). Yet, in countries such as Austria, the Freedom Party could consolidate its position. Currently, it occupies 11 percent of the seats in the National Assembly of Austria.

The mixed tendencies in radical right wing support reveals that these extremist parties continue to be a threat to democracy. Extremist parties, such as the French National Front, reject universal and egalitarian values and the principles of representative democracy (Mudde 2000: 12). They believe in a natural, harmonious, organic order (e. g., the nation and the family) that is ethically good. Everything (e. g., globalization and ethnic diversity) that breaks this organic order is seen as ethically reprehensible (Rydgren 2004: 10). This political monism, combined with radical, ethnic nationalism, threatens core democratic values of a pluralistic society. The extremist right, embracing

¹ A far right-wing party is a party that either explicitly or strategically opposes the democratic order. These parties are hostile to egalitarian values and human rights, and make ideological appeals. They try to fight the democratic legitimacy, as revealed by their populist discourse and actions (Ignazi 1992, 2003).

elements of populism or, as some scholars claim, neo-fascism¹, also aims at the repression of differences and dissent and the closing down of the market of ideas (Lipset and Raab 1970: 6). Moreover, populist rhetoric incites ethnic violence, and some of the extremist parties engage, at least partly, in historical revisionism.² In view of their platforms³, the far right could also have serious effects on basic human rights and freedoms.⁴

Academics have extensively analyzed the electoral breakthrough and parliamentary progress of the extreme right through case studies (Mayer and Perrineau 1992, Simmons 1996, Holsteyn, 2003, Rydgren 2004) as well as comparative analyses (Beyme 1988, Betz 1994, Carter 2005, Norris 2005). These studies focus almost exclusively on the state level and examine myriad factors including institutional arrangements (such as the electoral system), cultural shifts (such as the emergence of a post-industrialized society), socio-structural features (such as immigration), and political events and developments (such as the convergence of the centre parties).

Intra-country variance in the electoral support for right-wing extremist parties has received only limited attention, even though the spatial distribution of electoral support has varied considerably for parties such as Austria's Freedom Party, Italy's Northern League, Belgium's Flemish Bloc and the French National Front (Jesuit and Mahler, 2004). This spatial unevenness in electoral support deserves closer scrutiny. Critical intra-country variance in the economic conditions, crime rates and the degree of urbanization might explain differences in the electoral success of the far-right wing parties in relatively small geographical entities. Studies that focus exclusively on the state level obscure these differences and provide a simplistic picture.

Intra-country variance in far-right wing support may be more considerable than variance in cross-country support. For example, departmental electoral support for the French National Front in the 2002 presidential election

¹ For discussion whether or not right-wing parties, especially the French National Front, are fascist, neo-fascist, extremist, or populist see Milza (1987), Harris (1994), Simmons (1996) and Declair (1999).

² In 1988 Le Pen called the Holocaust a detail of history, and questioned whether millions of Jewish people were killed in the gas chambers (Crif 2006).

³ Betz (1993) neatly summarizes right wing ideology: Radical-right wing parties are radical in their rejection of the established socio-cultural and socio-political system. They are right wing in their rejection of individual and social equality, in their opposition to the social integration of marginalised groups, and in their appeal to xenophobia, even racism. They are populist in their instrumentalization of anxiety and disenchantment and in their appeal to the common man and his allegedly superior common sense (413).

⁴ Far right-wing parties not only breach Article 14 on the European Convention on Human Rights, which provides that "the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status", but they also create a climate that encourages violence (Council of Europe 2006).

ranged from 5 to over 30 percent. In contrast, the national variance in right-wing support in other European countries with a strong extreme-right stood only between 10 and 16.8 percent for the same period¹. In the French context, it is well established that since its first breakthrough in 1984, the FN has drawn disproportionate support in the east of an imaginary Le Havre Valence Perpignan line. Western France until now has appeared more reluctant to support Le Pen party (Gérault 2004). Yet, even in those regions where the vote for the FN is generally high, vast departmental differences occur. For example, in the 2007 presidential election Le Pen received in the region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, 16.55 percent of the vote in the department Hautes Alpes and 8.92 percent of the suffrages in the department Hautes Alpes.

This study focuses on departmental differences in voting for the French National Front and highlights three socio-economic, two institutional and one political condition that might facilitate the rise of the National Front. The focus of the socio-economic features is on the unemployment rate, the crime rate and the degree of urbanization. According to scholars (e.g., Taguieff and Tribalat 1998, Bihr 1998) and the party platform of the FN favorable economic and structural conditions might explain the rise and long-term success of the FN. In addition, the two institutional factors – the electoral system and the turnout rates – as important intervening variables may reveal whether electoral incentives influence the vote share of this extremist party. Finally, the political factor, the percentage of votes for the moderate right (*Union Pour Un Mouvement Populaire*), is likely to highlight whether a possible FN voter fluctuates from the moderate to the radical right.

Due to the centralized nature of the fifth French Republic, political factors such as welfare policy, immigration laws, the educational system and employment policy apply to the entire nation. As constants, these policies cannot account for departmental variations in electoral success for the FN. Religious factors should also be irrelevant as France is a relatively secular state where no party (the FN included) emphasizes religion in its platform. Other factors, such as the political climate or the national and international context, may help to explain the electoral success of the FN. For example, a corruption scandal at the national or regional level, involving one or several of the major parties or politicians, might catapult the vote for the FN. Yet, such a scandal should only have short-term effects. Politicians' popularity figures also change quickly over time. Therefore, they are also not a reliable indicator in accounting for long-term trends. The three economic and social conditions, the two intervening institutional variables and the one political factor should therefore

¹ National electoral scores of other far right parties in the legislative elections 2002-2004 were: Austrian FPÖ (10%), Belgian VB (16.8%), the Danish DF (12%), the Italian MSI/AN (12%), and the Norwegian FLP (14.6%) (Carter 2005, 4-5).

offer a sound explanation for why the FN repeatedly receives higher vote shares in some parts of France than in others.

FN activities, such as rallies and campaigning, might also contribute to regional differences in electoral support. However, regional or departmental data on these activities are not available. The FN headquarters keeps regional membership numbers confidential, and in only six regions - Alsace, Franche-Comté, Ile de France, Languedoc, Lorraine, Picardie, and Rhône-Alpes - does the FN have regional websites. These regions are electoral strongholds of the FN, and one can assume an interaction between the popularity of this right-wing party and its political activities and mobilization. Public activity can generate support, which in turn can generate further grass-roots activity. Electoral popularity should attract more members and thus should generate more grass-roots activity. However, due to the shortage of reliable data, this analysis cannot include mobilization factors.

The analysis involves a diachronical study of France's 96 metropolitan departments. Departmental differences in the vote share of the Front National will be analyzed over the last 6 elections – the 2002 presidential elections, the 2002 legislative elections, the 2004 European elections, the 2004 regional elections, and the 2007 presidential and legislative elections. The study begins with a short historical overview of the rise of the French National Front in the various parts of France. This will be followed by a cross-departmental evaluation of the 7 different socio-economic institutional and political factors. A regression research design will be used to determine the relative causal importance of the different factors.

The rise of the National Front and regional variance in its success

The *Front National* (FN) was the first right-wing party in Europe to entrench itself after World War II as a major political. On average, this party has garnered more than 10 percent of the vote in elections over the last 20 years (Eatwell 2000: 408). Founded in October 1972, the National Front was unsuccessful during the 1970s and 1980s, when it won, on average, less than one percent of the vote in presidential, parliamentary, European, and regional elections (Rydgren 2004: 18). In 1982, this extremist party enjoyed its first considerable electoral success in the local elections. For example, the party garnered 13.6 percent of the vote in Grande-Synthe and 12.6 percent in Dreux-Ouest (Perrineau 1996: 41). The National Front broke onto the national scene in 1984 after receiving 11 percent of the vote and sending 10 deputies to the European Parliament (Marcus 1995: 57). This success not only increased the political visibility and legitimacy of this right-wing party, but also allowed the National Front to build up an organizational structure, enabling the FN to attract recruits at the grass-roots, mid-rank, and intellectual levels (Rydgren 2004: 19).

In the two subsequent national elections – the 1986 legislative election and the 1988 presidential election – the National Front won 9.8 percent and 14.6 percent of the vote, solidifying its position as a major actor in French politics (Perrineau 1997: 32-35). In the following elections, the overall electoral support for the National Front varied considerably. During the 1998 regional election, (its temporary high point), this party won a solid 15.3 percent of the vote, which translated into 250 regional counselors (Hainsworth and Mitchell 2000: 443). The rise of the FN seemed unstoppable. Yet, in 1999, the party split because of internal rivalries between Jean Marie Le Pen and *de facto* number two, Bruno Mégret. Mégret left the party and founded a rival party –the *Front National Movement* –later renamed the *Mouvement National Républicain*. A considerable number of party activists and elected candidates followed Mégret (Darmon and Rossi 1999). This split hurt the National Front; it only received around 6 percent of the vote in the 1999 European elections, its worst electoral result in more than a decade, while Mégret’s party won around 3 percent of the popular vote¹ (Rydgren 2004: 21).

Whereas the strength of the *Mouvement National Républicain* waned, the National Front recovered from its temporary decline. In the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks, the FN enjoyed its greatest success since its founding in the first round of the 2002 presidential elections. Le Pen won 16.9 percent of the vote and qualified for the second round. After massive mobilization to oust the radical right, the National Front could not repeat its performance in the legislative election of 2002, but still won a solid 11.3 percent of the vote (Rydgren 2004: 22). In 2004, the National Front garnered 12.7 percent of the vote in the regional elections and 9.8 percent of the vote in the European elections. Yet, in the 2006 contests its vote share declined considerably. In the presidential elections Le Pen only received 10.75 percent of the vote, and in the parliamentary elections the vote share of the right wing extremist party further dropped to less than 5 percent, the worst result in two decades. Merely the next elections can show if this decline is of permanent or temporary nature.

Despite its electoral success in the past 20 years, the FN could not gain representation at the national level because of the plural electoral system. Only for a short intermezzo from 1986 to 1988, when proportional representation was introduced, was the FN represented in parliament.² Yet, in regional politics the FN is a major player, with a total of 156 legislative seats in 17 of the 21 regions (Le Front National 2006a) and 7 deputies in Brussels and Strasbourg.

¹ Because the success of Mégret’s party was only temporary, the votes this party received in elections are not analyzed.

² Due to the short introduction of PR in between 1986 and 1988 the FN could win 35 mandates. In 1988 and 1997 the FN could win one seat in parliament (Le Front National 2006a)

Regional strongholds of the National Front in its electoral breakthrough in 1984 were the Mediterranean coast, the east, and Paris. For example, in the 1984 European Election, Le Pen's party gained 19.1 percent of the vote in Alpes-Côtes d'Azur and 12.5 percent of the vote in Alsace (Observatoire Interrégional du Politique 2005). The regions where the FN has been most successful - Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Rhône-Alpes, Languedoc, Ile de France, Alsace, and Lorraine - are highly urbanized, have a multi-cultural outlook, and relatively high crime rates. Moreover, they have been most severely affected by the economic crisis that began in the mid -1980s. General patterns of support for the FN have been relatively stable for the last 20 years, with the exception of the Paris region, where support has declined.

In the eastern parts of France and the Mediterranean areas the extreme right gained, on average, between 14 and 19 percent of the vote in the past 6 elections. This vote share makes the National Front a major player in elections and political processes, enabling this right-wing party to challenge the two main parties, le *Parti Socialiste* and *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*. In the rest of France the FN is supported by an average of 7 to 13 percent of voting citizens. This percentage still makes it the third or fourth largest force in the political arena.

Different factors that affect the FN vote

Hypothesis 1: The higher the unemployment rate in a department, the more likely people are to support the FN

The component of economic performance that is most closely linked to extreme right-wing party support is unemployment. When jobs are scarce and unemployment is widespread, it is possible that foreigners would be held accountable for the lack of jobs. Consequently, the FN states on its website: "Massive and uncontrolled immigration takes more than 1 million jobs away from the French and severely punishes our economy by imposing costs of over 300 billion francs" (Le Front National 2006b).

Studies conducted by, among others, Jackman and Voltert (1996) and Golder (2003) found evidence that high unemployment stimulates support for right-wing parties. According to Golder this effect is especially strong under conditions of high immigration. However, other scholars such as Knigge (1998) and Norris (2005) did not find support for the above thesis. This study will measure whether high aggregate rates of unemployment increase electoral support for the FN.

Hypothesis 2: People are more likely to support the FN in departments with high crime rates than in departments with low crime rates

None of the recent studies about Western Europe (e.g. Eatwell 2000, Lubbers et al. 2002, Carter 2005, and Norris 2005) evaluates the impact of crime on support for right-wing extremist parties. Although DeAngelis (2003) mentioned crime as a major contributor to the rise of xenophobic populism in Western Europe, he did not gauge its effect. In the French context, Bréchon and Kuma (1992) revealed through survey data that fear, a state of general insecurity, and violent crime are correlated with the rise of right-wing extremism.

Even if not frequently employed in other studies, regional crime rates will be used in this analysis. High crime rates might lead to feelings of insecurity to population, which could drive people into the hands of extremist parties. These parties claim that moderate parties are incapable of efficiently fighting crime. Further right-wing politicians claim that large number of immigrants cause high crime rates. On its website the militant bloc of the FN states:

“Because of immigration and multiculturalism crime rates have reached unbearable levels in France. There is a multiplication of violent acts against white people, but these aggressions are denied (...) According to official discourse, only white people can be racist (Vox-FN 2006)”

Not only is insecurity one of the four main pillars of the FN’s program, but the European Council (2006) has also identified the increase in violence as a major contributor to the rise of right-wing extremism. This body has advised national governments, as early as in the year 2000, to fight crime. Among other effects, a reduction of violence in the public and private spheres may deprive extremist parties of their popular base. Though fighting crime is a main pillar of the program of the FN, and despite the fact that politicians have been aware that high crime rates can generate extremist support, so far academic studies have unjustifiably neglected the issue of public insecurity in their studies. By including crime in the evaluation this analysis attempts to fill the gap.

Hypothesis 3: The electoral results of the FN will be higher in urban areas than in rural areas

Like the previous variable, crime, the degree of urbanization has not been frequently included in studies of right-wing extremism. In one instance, Scheck et al. (1974) noted that Canadian and US citizens, who reside in middle class rural areas, express more of a right-wing ideology than middle-class people in urban areas. Because of the dynamics in France – the countryside has

preserved its culture, values, and traditions - individuals who live in urban areas ought to be more inclined to adhere to the FN ideology.

Multiculturalism, such as the “Americanization” of French culture and ethnic diversity are features of cities and agglomerations. Some might perceive globalization as a threat to their national culture. They might fear that the global proliferation of trends, icons, and consumer brands will undermine their identity. Moreover, as Betz (1990) affirms, “contemporary demands for flexibility and mobility have led to the fragmentation and decomposition of traditional milieus and social institutions (47).” The disappearance of small neighbourhood markets, called *épiceries*, the vanishing of neighbourhood associations are examples of the anonymity that has been taking root in France. The National Front focuses on these cultural factors. On its website this extremist party asserts that France suffers from a cultural genocide:

“Immigration, globalization, and Europeanization have liquidated the natural and spiritual roots of France’s culture. The French citizens have to liberate themselves from this totalitarian conformity of their culture (Le Front National 2006c).”

City residents might perceive the uprooting of French culture more strongly than those citizens living in the countryside because they experience the negative effects of globalization and modularization to a higher degree. Consequently, town dwellers are more likely to be attracted by the FN discourse than citizens residing in rural areas.

Hypothesis 4: The electoral strength of the FN will be higher in the European and regional elections held under proportional representation than in the legislative and presidential elections held under plurality rule

Some scholars consider the electoral system a key feature in explaining the success of parties at the polls (Mair 1991, Lijphart 1994, Katz 1997). They argue that small and medium-sized parties perform better under a proportional system, where the number of votes is roughly translated into a number of seats. In contrast, majoritary formulas lead to a greater disproportion than proportional systems. Small and medium- sized parties have few chances to win seats because it is very unlikely for them to receive the plurality or majority of votes in districts.

Despite its 5 to 17 percent of the vote share in elections, the National Front continues to be a medium-sized competitor in politics. Consequently, the FN could benefit from a proportional system. Yet, Carter (2002, 2005) did not find evidence that right-wing extremist parties perform less well under a majoritarian than under a proportional system and found the share of the votes going to extremist parties to be unrelated to the type of electoral system (Carter

2002: 125). Whether the FN performs better under PR will be evaluated in this study.

Hypothesis 5: The FN will do better in regions and elections with low turnout rates than in regions and elections with high turnout rates.

A second institutional factor that few researchers emphasize is the turnout rate. In their model, Smirnov and Fowler (2003) state that extremist voters with preferences to the left and to the right are strongly motivated to vote regardless of the election and political circumstances. Consequently, extremist parties should have higher electoral results under low turnout rates. Whitley (1979) corroborated this hypothesis in a study about the causes of the right-wing party vote in the 1977 London local elections. In districts with low turnout rates, the British National Front won significantly more seats than it did in districts with high turnout rates. It is plausible that the same phenomenon applies to the right-wing extremist vote in France.

Hypothesis 6: The more votes the moderate right obtains, the worse the performance of the FN

Since moderate right-wing parties are the nearest on the ideological spectrum to extremist parties it is likely that many fringe voters vacillate between the moderate and the radical right. Even if the French moderate wing party, the UMP, categorically refuses any alliance with Le Pens party, its sympathizers have somehow valued the FN. An opinion poll conducted in 2006 by the Centre de Recherches Politiques de Sciences Po (CEVIPOF) underlines this tendency. In this poll 70 percent of the supporters of the moderate right find the presence of the FN in politics acceptable, and 55 percent would even accept FN ministers. The UMP has also moved closer to positions adopted by the radical right. The current French president and former Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy has toughened immigration and made naturalization more difficult (L'Assemblée Nationale, 2007). This might have attracted many FN voters in the 2007 races. Whether there is a correlation between moderate right support and radical right wing support will be evaluated in this analysis.

Data

The dependent variable for this study is the percentage of valid votes cast for the FN in each department. Data for this variable were collected from the website of the French *Ministère de l'Intérieur* (2007). In those cases (e.g., parliamentary elections) where the website only indicated the electoral results per electoral district, the authors computed the departmental results for each

department. In the case of two electoral rounds, the vote share the FN received in the first tier is analyzed. Electors normally vote more authentically when all parties present their slates. Many times the FN is also absent from the second round of the legislative and presidential elections held in a two-round plurality system. The same applies, albeit to a lesser extent, to the regional elections¹.

The first independent variable, the unemployment rate, is defined as the percentage, reported by the government, of the economically active population that was unemployed at the end of the December of the year prior to the election. The unemployment rate is based on the end of the year figure to control for seasonal effects. Official data for this variable were retrieved from the database *Taux de chômage en fin de trimestre, par département de France* which was collected by the *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques* (2006).

The second independent variable, the crime rate, is based on official statistics issued by the Ministry of the Interior and measures the number of criminal acts committed per 1,000 inhabitants. Data for this variable were collected from the website of the *Ministère de l'Intérieur* (2007b).

The third indicator, the degree of urbanization is gauged by the population density (the number of habitants per square kilometer). For this indicator there is data available only for the years 1999 and 2005. Yet, the numbers between the two measurement periods do not differ at all for some departments and only slightly for others (never more than 5 percent). To make the indicator as authentic as possible, this study uses the average between the 1999 and 2005 figures for the elections in 2002. For the 2007 elections the population density figures for the end of 2005 are taken, whereas for the 2004 elections the 2005 figures are averaged with the computed 2002 numbers. Data for the variable – the degree of urbanization – were collected from the database *Population des régions et départements de la France métropolitaine*, which was established by the *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques* (2007 b).

Concerning the electoral system type, all elections that are held under a purely proportional system (the European elections) and those that are held under a mixed system (the regional elections) are coded one. Because the proportional element is dominant in the regional elections, and due to the high likelihood that the FN would win seats, the regional elections are clustered with the European elections. The remaining elections (the presidential and legislative elections), which are held under a two-round plurality system, are coded zero.

¹ The regional elections are held under a two round mixed system. Those lists that gain more than 10 percent of the votes in the first round are eligible for the second round. The list with most votes in the first and/or second round is awarded an additional 25 percent of the vote. The remaining seats are distributed according to a proportional formula (*Ministère de l'Intérieur* 2006).

The second institutional variable, turnout, is defined as the percentage of the enfranchised population that cast its ballot in each department. Data were retrieved from official electoral statistics from the official website of the *Ministère de l'Intérieur* (2007). The last indicator – the vote share for the moderate right, which was also collected from the same website as the previous variable – is the percentage of votes cast for the UMP (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*) candidate, the UMP list, or UMP allied candidates and lists.

Methodology and results

This paper uses regression analysis to test the correlation between the independent variables – the unemployment rate, the crime rate, the degree of urbanization, the type of electoral system, the turnout rate, and electoral support for the moderate right – and the dependent variable, the proportion of votes for the National Front. This study yields 576 cases for analysis with the data organized in a pooled design. It covers the 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections, the 2004 regional and European elections, and the 2006 presidential and parliamentary elections.

A statistically accurate model through pooled time series analysis requires a battery of tests. It is essential to check for the order of co-integration of all the variables before regressing the variables. The Levin and Lin (LL) and Hadri tests for unit roots in all variables indicate that some series (e.g., the vote share of the FN) are stationary, while others (e.g. the population density) appear to be non-stationary. In the presence of stationary and non stationary-variables a regression on the levels, would be a source of bias and potentially spurious relationships and therefore cannot be applied in the present study. As the variables are in a different order of co-integration, differences of all variables should be first considered, which automatically eliminates autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity. Yet a model in first differences only focuses on short term effects (how an overall change in the independent variables affects an overall change in dependent variable), while removing all level variation. In the present example, this would indicate, for instance, that a change in the unemployment rate would be associated with a change in the vote share of the FN for the whole France. Unit specific effects cannot be gauged in a first difference equation.

The results of the first difference specification are presented in Table 1. A short-term effect of the socio-economic variables on the vote share of the FN is not present. However, the model indicates a highly significant impact of the institutional variable, the electoral system, on the success of Le Pen's party. Surprisingly, elections held under PR significantly decreased the vote share of the FN. This runs contrary to the common logic that small or medium sized parties gain more votes, when they have a chance of winning seats. However, in the French case this assumption seems inapplicable, since Le Pen normally had

its best results in the presidential election, which is operated under a two round plurality system. The second significant estimator is the vote share of the moderate right. Concerning this variable the expected relationship holds. It appears true that the more votes the moderate right accumulates, the less successful the performance of Le Pen's party. This indicates a fluctuation of voters from the moderate to the extreme right.

Table 1: Dynamic Specification in First Differences

	Coefficient	SE	Sig.
Constant	107.112	24.192	0.000
Socio-economic factors:			
Unemployment rate 1 st diff.	.334	.447	0.456
Crime rate 1 st diff.	.0874	.386	0.820
Population Density 1 st diff.	-.203	.850	0.811
Institutional factors:			
D_proportional system	-163.192	40.214	0.000
Turnout rate 1 st diff.	-.061	.040	0.135
Electoral factors:			
Vote share of the UMP 1 st diff	-.307	.102	0.003
R ² = .042		N= 473	

Since the different order of integration of the variables only allows for a model in first differences, the above-presented correlations are general and apply across all departments. The only way to reveal departmental differences is to run a regression on the between estimators. In this case, a regression on the between estimators is a pure cross-sectional regression on the departmental means, therefore autocorrelation cannot occur. The presence of heteroscedasticity is tested by the White Test (1980). This test does not indicate heteroscedasticity. Therefore, it is unnecessary to further specify the model. Finally, an F-test is employed to control for election specific fixed effects. The null of no fixed effects cannot be rejected and consequently, no replica variables are included into the equation.

The results of the between specification, which are presented in table 2, reveal the correlation between the independent and dependent variable across the departments. The FN performs better in those departments where, consistently, more people cast their votes in elections. This finding runs against the common logic that extremist right wing parties are better off when the turnout rate is low. The only other strong estimator is the population density. This indicator is very close to significance and hints at the tendency that the FN

might perform better in more urban than in more rural departments. All other indicators bear no salience in the between regression.

Table 2: Between Estimation (Regression on group means)

	Coefficient	SE	Sig.
Constant	-30.884	94.378	0.744
Socio-economic factors:			
Unemployment rate	.168	.340	0.622
Crime rate	-.0196	.0904	0.829
Population Density.	.00487	.003	0.056
Institutional factors:			
D_proportional system	285.932	194.044	0.144
Turnout rate	.542	.151	0.001
Electoral factors:			
Vote share of the UMP	.105	.108	0.333
R ² : between = .19		F: 3.55 (p=.0034)	N= 569

The dynamic specification in first differences and the between estimation on the group means reveal interesting findings. Most surprisingly, the two socio-economic factors, the crime rate and the unemployment, which are commonly associated with the success of radical parties by scholars and politicians alike, appear to be irrelevant in influencing the vote share of the French radical right. As the model in first differences shows, neither a decline nor an increase in either the crime or unemployment rate affects the vote of the FN. According to the between estimation, it also appears untrue that Le Pen's party is more successful in regions with high unemployment and/ or crime rates than in regions with low unemployment and crime rates. Thus, this study provides preliminary evidence that citizens do not tend to support the extremist right when the public insecurity and unemployment are considerable.

The structural variable, the population density, is unsurprisingly irrelevant in the first difference model. Changes in the population density for the past years have been marginal and could not affect preferences of voters. Yet, the between estimation hints that people tend to follow the FN to a greater extent in urban areas than in rural ones. It appears that in cities and urban areas traditions are no longer entrenched and citizens are feeling the negative effects of globalization. Religious diversity, a uniform pop culture, the loss of traditional family values, and the anonymity of life are features of the highly and semi-urbanized regions of France. The rural areas, such as the "centre", where there are no large agglomerations, do not seem susceptible to the same trends. Inhabited predominantly by older citizens, these parts of France seem to have

preserved their traditional outlook. The relative decline in values in urban centers, which manifests itself by few marriages, a high divorce rate, a decline in membership for cultural and sport association, and a lack of respect for the fellow members of society might drive people into the hands of the extreme right. However, the findings of this study are not robust enough to establish causal links. Surveys at the regional level should confirm or deny the hypotheses that the degradation of the French culture and individualization tendencies in cities lead to higher vote share of the FN.

Another interesting finding of the two models is that institutional factors influence the success of the French radical right. PR appears to be an impediment for the electoral success of the FN. Possible reasons for this tendency might be that the FN lacks the grass-roots structure to establish candidate lists with competent candidates. Seen in the long run, it is also likely that electoral proportionality enabled the FN to achieve its electoral breakthrough in the 1984 European elections. In later elections the effect of PR withered and currently the tendency has reversed. For the last 6 elections the FN has achieved better results under plurality as it has under PR. Yet, in order to establish more robust relationships, longer periods have to be examined.

The second institutional variable that seems to influence the success of the FN is the turnout rate. In those departments where the turnout rate was consistently higher over the past six elections, the FN achieved better results. It is difficult to determine why this has been the case. However, the present findings do not support the hypothesis that radical right-wing parties draw disproportionate success when the turnout rate is low.

The last factor, the vote for the moderate right, seems to be relevant. The results of the UMP are correlated with the results of the FN. The more votes the UMP accumulates, the less success is enjoyed by Le Pen's party. This effect is valid across all departments. It appears that voters that are disgruntled with the moderate right might drift up to the radical right. As a result, the moderate right faces the difficult task to attract fringe voters and at the same time maintain a sound democratic foundation.

Conclusion

This analysis has centered on socio-economic as well as intervening institutional and political conditions that might have favored the FN in elections from 2002 to 2007. The dynamic first difference model and the between estimation provide evidence that the two socio-economic factors – the crime and unemployment rate – that are frequently associated with the success of extremist right wing parties, are irrelevant in the French context. The third societal estimator – the population density – is quite strong in the between model and might provide one explanation for why the FN performs better in some parts of

France than in others. Contrary to the socio-economic factors, all institutional factors appear relevant. In the past six elections the FN has performed better under plurality and in regions with comparatively high turnout rates. The only political variable in the model - the vote for the moderate right - has also affected the electoral results of Le Pen's party. In elections where the UMP is strong, the FN normally loses electoral strength. However, this tendency does not apply to differences between departments.

This study covers a whole series of variables and provides some explanation for why the FN performs better in some areas of France than in others. However, the present evaluation could be further complemented. It would be interesting to see whether the percentage of foreigners and naturalized citizens affects the vote for the FN. Yet, reliable data on the composition of the population in each department are unavailable. The analysis could also be supplemented by regional survey research. Data should be collected to measure whether citizens in cities perceive more of a loss of their national identity than those in the countryside. Polls could also control whether French citizens feel threatened by Europeanization and globalization tendencies.

The article is one of the first evaluations, which assesses right-wing extremist electoral success on relatively small geographical entities over time and thus helps to account for intra-country variance. Similar studies could be undertaken in other countries (e.g., Austria, Italy) with a strong radical right. Analysis of this kind could further help to disentangle regularities for why people vote for extremist right-wing parties.

Currently, it is very difficult to predict the further development of support for Le Pen's party. The 2007 parliamentary and presidential election might indicate that the FN is on its way out. Yet, it is too early to make sound predictions. In the 1999 European election after the split with Bruno Megret, the FN also performed very poorly, but recovered quickly and was even more successful in the subsequent elections. If the society, politicians, and academics are not wary, a similar scenario might happen again. Another determining factor for the prospects of the extremist right in France is whether the transition of leadership from Jean Marie Le Pen to his successor (probably his daughter Marine Le Pen) will go smoothly. Because of these uncertainties it is difficult to draw viable hypotheses on how the FN will develop. Only the future will decide whether the right-wing danger in France will be reduced or not.

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