The Devil Within: The Rise of the Front National

by

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Note on Translations

While this project concerns a French topic and involves a content analysis of French-language content, it is written instead in English. In situations involving the direct quotation of French-language sources or content, the quotes were translated into English by the author. In each of these cases, the original French is reproduced in a footnote below for the use of Francophone readers. Words that are left in the original French in the body of text, most notably words used in the content analysis, are italicized and are defined when first used. Finally, in a small number of cases, English language sources are quoted that have translated primary source quotes from French without providing the original quotations. For lack of a better alternative, the English translations of these authors are relied upon and are reproduced in this paper.
Chapter 1: Introduction and Theory

Introduction

There is nothing quite so tempting as to paint the story of France’s Front National as black and white. It is a radical and extremist party, the thinking goes, fueled by nationalist and authoritarian viewpoints, whose chief concern is putting an end to the flow of immigrants into the country. Historically, this has never been all too far from the truth. The party under Jean-Marie Le Pen was often precisely that: a group that was a rallying point for diverse strands of far-right ideologues, united by shared authoritarian (and, not uncommonly, fascist) viewpoints. These viewpoints focalized on a shared belief that many of the ills the country faced in the tumultuous years after the trente glorieuses, from economic stagnation to rising crime, could be blamed squarely on the immigrants from North Africa and elsewhere in Europe that had flowed into the country. This perception of the FN is one that exists to this day, particularly in the political and media elites, and particularly among those based in cosmopolitan Paris, where the party has gained comparatively little traction (Willsher and Penketh 2014).

While it is a simple and even an attractive option to dismiss the FN as a “fringe” movement, destined to obscurity and ridicule in mainstream political debate, it is nonetheless proving to be a mistaken one. Under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the daughter of Jean-Marie, the party began a major transformation under the banner of a strategy known as dédiabolisation, or “undeviling,” that has not only brought the party into a position of real influence and
of real dialogue with the primary two parties for the first time in its history, but
has also attracted new supporters hailing from demographics heretofore
unimpressed by its policies, most notably women and the working class. In fact,
after its historic showing of 17.9% in the 2012 presidential elections, the party
went on to win 12 mayoralties in the Municipal elections of March 2014, and to
come in first place in the French election for European Parliament in May, ahead
of the two “traditional parties.”

Some of this success may be attributable to the party’s expansion of its
programmatic offerings from sporting a single-issue focus to espousing a
comprehensive platform. More notably however, and perhaps more troublingly
to some, there is even much evidence to suggest that the FN may not be all that
extreme of a party anymore, in that many of its stances lie not far from the
positions of so-called “mainstream” French voters. More and more, the image of
the FN as a fringe group is belied by a growing body of evidence that suggests
that French voters are increasingly open to its positions, borne out in vote totals,
public opinion polling, and a nascent literature. What is clear is that the Front
National has left the margins, reflecting a pan-European trend among far-right
parties, even in an electoral system that does not bode kindly for its chances at
achieving meaningful power. While the party may still have much in common
with its radical past, particularly in light of Almeida’s discussion (2014) of a
“selective de-radicalization” and even of radicalization in some spheres, Marine
Le Pen is decidedly not her father, and while her politics derive much inspiration
from his, they are neither identical, nor all that similarly framed.
The heart of the inspiration for this project lies in the recentness of this transition. While there exists a wealth of literature on the Front National, especially given its stance as the most successful of a crop of new extreme-right parties that sprung up in Europe in the 1980s and ‘90s, because of the sheer constraints of time, few of those studies have been able to grapple with the implications of Marine Le Pen’s rise to power and of her strategy of dédiabolisation. While there have been some limited attempts to analyze the effects of Le Pen’s ascension and of dédiabolisation, in the two short years since the 2012 election (let alone the several months since the latest of the party’s triumphs), there has been little time to fully analyze the scope of the FN’s rise and to attempt to identify the underlying causes of it.

Therein lies the core of this project’s importance, on both an academic and a popular level. As a contribution to the literature, this project might help political scientists not only better understand the complex interactions between a party hungry for mainstream respectability, a political system that finds some of its core principles threatened, and a French populace deeply dissatisfied and looking for alternative solutions. It might also represent a path towards a greater understanding of the FN’s peer parties across Europe, particularly in Switzerland and the Netherlands, especially as they pair newly adopted populist rhetoric and strategies with the vocabulary of authoritarianism. Most directly, this project consists of an in-depth investigation of the Front National itself: its leadership, its policies, and its supporters, a subject of intense interest giving its rising stature. For that matter, many of the questions posed by this paper are
equally pressing to French political and media institutions, and to everyday citizens shocked by the sudden rise of a party that had long been easily dismissed. Can the FN continue to attract mainstream voters? Can it play an influentially disruptive role to the two-party system moving forward? Can it shift the much-discussed “center of gravity” in French politics towards one that mirrors its isolationist, nativist policies? Can it attract enough success to play more of an independently powerful role on its own?

At the core of the surprising nature of the FN’s recent explosive success are two seeming contradictions or impossibilities. First, France is a country with a long history of liberal democracy, a general historical respect for human rights, and a political system that tends to promote moderation and decidedly centrist two-party rule rather than extremism. Second, while much about the party undeniably retains its extremist character, it has managed to reinvent itself in such a form as to be palatable to demographic groupings of French voters previously absolutely uninterested in its rhetoric. The task of understanding the FN’s rise and analyzing the causes behind it is consequently a difficult one. Indeed, over the last 5 years, the FN has challenged and shattered a wide range of assumptions, theories, and conclusions about what a “far-right” third party in Western democratic politics looks like. While in many ways the extant body of theory provides clues as to basic factors that contribute to the rise of such parties that match well with the French case, there are also numerous aspects of the theory that simply do not. This gap is accentuated by the fact that this “rise” of the FN has far surpassed the past flare-ups of the European far-right on which
the literature is largely based. In order to better address this unique case then, this introductory chapter combines an extensive consideration of the current suppositions of the literature with a thorough investigation of the French context in particular and the ways in which the undergirding ideals of the French polity, as well as the country’s electoral system and social fabric, impact the party’s success. Before directly discussing the French case explicitly, however, it is important to provide an overview of the current state of the literature on far-right parties and the factors that contribute to their success, in order to construct a theoretical framework in which to consider this unique case.

**Literature Review**

In the aftermath of the flare-up of radical right-wing parties across Europe in the 1980s, scholars produced a body of literature that aimed to identify the underlying causes behind the phenomenon and its implications for wider understandings of political parties and democratic systems. This literature is rich in diversity, with different authors and different studies trumpeting often wholly divergent empirical causes for the surprising success of these parties. Indeed, in attempting to discover causal links between socioeconomic conditions or other factors in a given country and the success of a radical right party specific to that context, it is extremely difficult to single out the most important variables. This difficulty is compounded in a field that seems to lend itself more easily to narrative case studies than to generalizable systematic explanations. However, despite the wealth of alternative hypotheses, there is broad consensus in the literature about the core “building blocks” of the theory, and many of the
differences from study to study are more a matter of different levels of emphasis being placed on a range of familiar factors than they are the result of individual scholars reinventing the wheel. In attempting to understand this current flare-up of the radical right and the FN in particular, it is useful to provide an overview of the theories that endeavor to explain the wide range of previous cases. The types of explanations can be roughly broken down into three blocks: variables having to do with the demand for these parties produced by public opinion, variables having to do with the supply of these parties to meet that demand, and structural variables that speak more broadly to the broader systems the parties are located in. While numerous authors have argued for the importance of including both demand and supply-side variables (Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Mudde 2007), or for the inclusion of all three components (Norris 2005), they nevertheless offer a good schematic for breaking down the dense literature.

**Voter Demand**

In attempting to determine the causes of gains in vote shares for radical right parties, the demographics, values, and issue stances of those voters that produce a demand for such parties is a commonsense place to start. Numerous scholars have utilized rational choice-based spatial models based on left-right ideological spectrums to determine the complex interactions of the ideological “layout” of the electorate and the subsequent demand for certain policies and rhetoric it produces (Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Norris 2005). At issue then, in the case of radical right success, is how shifts in the range of policies that are acceptable to mainstream voters have produced situations that are conducive to
the expansion of the far-right. Several explanations have been commonly cited. One is a shift in values brought about by the transition of advanced democracies to “post-industrial” societies. Drawing from Inglehart and Abramson’s theory (1994) of a shift away from the material concerns concentrated around fundamental issues of “economic and physical security” (351) towards post-material issues related to quality of life and personal freedoms, these scholars argue for the concomitant rise of “post-industrial parties (that)... are the byproduct of the post-industrial society” (Ignazi 2007, 33-34). In this conceptualization of a new stage of political conflict that “has values at its core, rather than material interests” (Ignazi, 34), class has ceased to be the primary cleavage around which political contrast is based (Kitschelt and McGann 1995).

Accordingly, new issues reflecting this altered location of the locus of political conflict have grown in importance. Driven, perhaps, by the “shock” of globalization (Norris 2005), by changes in the “market situations” of broad swaths of workers newly grouped by occupation rather than class (Kitschelt and McGann 1995), or simply by subjective feelings of mistrust and insecurity generated by perceived high rates of immigration (Mudde 2007), a demand has emerged for the type of “cultural protectionist” policies (to use Norris’ term) around which radical right parties have often centered their rhetoric and their appeal. This shift of what Norris calls the “zone of acquiescence,” or the range of policies acceptable to a broad swath of the electorate, towards the nativist and authoritarian programs proposed by these parties, often centering around issues linked to immigration, has helped to create demand for those parties (2005).
However, without any additional pieces of theory, this rightward shift on its own is far from sufficient to explain why far-right parties have gained such explosive success, as it seems to suggest that parties of the moderate right would likewise benefit.

There is widespread agreement in the literature that even on the demand side, voter interactions and relationships with preexisting “mainstream” parties, and with the political system in their country more broadly have a large effect on demand for extreme right parties. Indeed, for several authors, the “key to success and endurance” (Ignazi 2007, 212) for the party family in the 1980s was a pan-European crisis of confidence fueled by burgeoning distrust of voters in the political systems and institutions of their countries, in the mainstream or traditional political parties, and in the politicians and other actors that make up the political sphere. In this context of growing dissatisfaction with political systems and actors, increased electoral volatility often results in turn, as the dissatisfaction with the established political class weakens connections between voters and their customary party affiliation, loosening their “brand loyalty” (Norris 2005) and resulting in partisan dealignment (Betz 1994; Norris 2005). While some scholars have simply linked this dissatisfaction to poor political performance of mainstream parties and their failures to “keep up” with shifting trends in public opinion (Norris, for example), others like Ignazi and Betz have tied it explicitly to the shift away from class being the fundamental cleavage around which political conflict is based. In the context of a shift away from the fundamental cleavage on which the extant political parties were predicated, the
widespread erosion of partisan loyalties to those parties in favor of parties that address the issues newly at the heart of the political sphere is an unsurprising result. However, this explanation on its own, even with the addition of the shift in voter values described above, does little to explain why radical right parties, and not other minor parties and system “outsiders,” should be the beneficiaries; nor why disaffection with the political system has not simply led to greater amounts of abstention. Indeed, instead of treating the success of far-right parties as “a passive consequence of macro-level socioeconomic developments” (Mudde 2007, 4), an understanding of this phenomenon requires an investigation of the choices made by the parties themselves.

**Party Supply**

If this proposition to focus on the parties directly in attempting to analyze their success should rightfully seem a straightforward one, there remain a wide variety of ways in which to do so. Much of the literature’s analysis of supply-side variables is based upon the same spatial theory described above, which plots political parties and other actors at different places on the ideological spectrum and focuses on the choices of political entrepreneurs to alter the position of their party in that space to maximize vote share or electoral success. The basic groundwork of the theory on this point stems from Kitschelt and McGann’s identification (1995) of the necessity of convergence of the (generally two) mainstream parties in a political system as a requisite precondition for the success of a far-right party, a view shared by Mudde and Betz. According to the theory, the combination of this convergence freeing up space on the “right” of
the political spectrum with the aforementioned electoral volatility producing
partisan dealignment is a window of opportunity for far-right political
entrepreneurs to set up shop (Betz 1994; Kitschelt and McGann 1995). While
there are certainly alternate narratives in the literature on this point, with Ignazi
arguing instead for the importance of party polarization for the rise of a far-right
party, and Mudde noting that such polarization can actually increase the political
bargaining power of such parties in coalition-based systems, the convergence-
based explanation has proved dominant. However, one important additional
aspect complicates this otherwise simple explanation: the ways in which far-
right parties have “responded strategically and contributed toward these
changes in public opinion” in terms of the stances and values they articulate
(Norris 2005, 18), especially around “new issues” and the ways in which the
“mainstream” parties have reacted to these parties and the issues they raise.

Before considering the response of mainstream parties, it is important to
understand what programmatic alternatives nascent far-right parties offer on
issues they make central to their appeal. While the literature has largely moved
beyond the overly simplistic assumption that far-right parties are single-issue
responses to immigration¹ (Norris, for instance, offers a convincing rebuttal), it
is inarguable that this issue and its tendrils are at the heart of the cultural
protectionism propagated by the extreme right. There is enormous diversity in
the vocabulary used to describe the core ideology of far-right parties, beyond the
general agreement that they typically espouse liberal economics and

¹ In fact, Kitschlet and McGann offer evidence that parties concentrating too blindly on the single
issue of immigration perform much worse than parties that have expanded their platforms.
authoritarian social and cultural policies (Kitschelt and McGann 1995). However it is described, the stances and policy positions espoused by the far-right typically cluster around the three “tenets” described by Betz: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. In short, far-right parties have focused their appeals on the “new issues” that surround the specter of immigration and of multiculturalism: national identity, national security, and the integration (or lack thereof) of culturally diverse immigrants (Kitschelt and McGann 1995, Norris 2005). However, mainstream parties have also needed to formulate stances on these topics, provoked by the rising saliency of these issues in a climate of globalization and mass immigration (especially in the EU), and the same shift towards cultural protectionism present in the electorate (Mudde 2007).

In fact, it’s the ownership of these newly salient issues in the eyes of voters that seems to be central to the success of far-right parties. Though the proposed mechanism differs slightly from theorist to theorist, there is widespread agreement that following the “eruption and politicization of new issues such as immigration, national identity, and security” (Ignazi 2007, 203), the successful crop of radical right parties were able to position themselves in the eyes of the electorate as the best equipped to handle these issues that were being “ignored or ineptly handled by the established parties” (Mudde 2007, 300). Often, this ownership was reinforced and legitimized by ill-fated attempts by mainstream parties to claim the issues for their own. Ignazi notes that many of these issues were introduced and legitimized into the political mainstream by traditional center-right parties during a Europe-wide rightward shift at the end
of the 1970s and 1980s (2007, 209). Their subsequent inability or unwillingness\(^2\) to strongly confront these issues after returning to a more centrist mood (often after returning to power) left behind a constituency much concerned with such issues that therefore turned to newly formed extreme right parties who were better positioned (as new actors) to authoritatively adopt them and the specters that they raise (Ignazi 2007, Mudde 2007). Likewise, attempts by mainstream center-right parties to carve out electoral support on their rightward edge by addressing some of the culturally protectionist issues further legitimized and lent credence to the hardline positions of the far-right, who can truthfully claim a long and stable stance on the topics.\(^3\) In any case, the failure of the traditional parties to respond to a profound socioeconomic transformation by addressing the concomitant emerging issues opened the door for new competition.

Survey data from numerous scholars demonstrates not only that mainstream parties have largely embraced (or at least taken up) these issues, but also that the stances that far-right parties represent are present in the mainstream voting public (Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Mudde 2007; Norris 2007). Indeed, surveys have shown high levels of support for these attitudes outside of the “crisis” situations that early efforts in the literature had suggested

\(^2\) Perhaps, as Ignazi notes, because of “intrinsic ideological barriers” (2007, 202)

\(^3\) Kitschelt and McGann offer two great examples of issue ownership in the French context. First, the shift of Jacques Chirac’s economic policy from “statist” to “Reaganite free-marketinking,” making the issue one where the FN was able to project itself as more credible, with its unwavering history of support. More striking is the example of the Communist party’s ill-conceived attempts to campaign on the issue of immigration in the late 80’s. Their internal divisions and consequent poor strategizing led to ineffective messaging, but also precluded the moderate conservatives from claiming the issue as their own, opening the door for the FN (1995, 99).
were necessary for interest in far-right solutions to rise (Mudde 2007). If the stances espoused by the extreme right simply represent radicalized versions of stances taken by mainstream parties, then that would seem to better explain the rise and relative permanence of these parties as opposed to other more short-lived political phenomena. This is precisely why Mudde argues against the description in the literature of radical rightist success as a “normal pathology,” which is to say, “a pathology common to all (liberal) democracies” (Mudde 2007, 296). Instead, Mudde argues that that success must be seen as a “pathological normalcy;” a radicalization of positions already common in mainstream currents of thought. The issue then is not why people hold radical rightist values, but why they do or do not vote for such parties, a factor influenced in turn by the choices made by political entrepreneurs. “Intangible” factors like organization, personnel, and propaganda are enormously important for parties wishing to sustain themselves after initial explosive success (Mudde 2007), and scholars have likewise commented on the importance of “appealing, charismatic, and uncontested leadership” (Ignazi 2007). Institutionalization is likewise an enormously important process for new radical right parties, especially the development of “effective organizational structures” and continuity of stable leadership which both help to establish the party as a true political player in the country's system rather than a quirky one-time affair (Norris 2005, 29). Greater institutionalization and incorporation into the political legal system can also provide explicit benefits, like access to public campaign funding, media connections, and networks of volunteers (Norris 2005, 29). This focus on the
choices of political entrepreneurs comes with one major flaw, however: they are constrained by forces both internal and external to the party that keep them from optimizing their strategies for electoral success.

**Structural Concerns**

The concept that electoral systems can strongly influence the composition of party systems and the relative performance of marginal parties is nothing new. Indeed, structural explanations along these lines have long played an important role in the literature, often stemming from the work of Maurice Duverger. His articulation of a seemingly common-sense relationship - that while majoritarian systems would tend to limit the number of relevant parties to two main competitors, proportional representation (PR) systems would tend to increase electoral possibilities for a wider range of parties - has formed the basis of contemporary understanding of the relationships between these two aspects of a political system (Duverger 1954). At the core of this argument then, is the contention that one of the primary determining factors for the potential success of marginal parties (including far-right parties) in established democracies is the effective threshold they must meet to gain representation. It is rather straightforward to assert that systems that require parties to win 50% of the vote in order to win a given seat will tend to depress or even eliminate the numbers of seats won by a fringe party, even if the party is able to pull in a non-negligible percentage of the vote. By contrast, proportional systems tend to

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4 One important caveat to this rule is when parties have support that is geographically concentrated, which may allow them to win majorities in individual districts even while their national vote share is comparatively low (Norris 2005, 118).
closely mirror or even overrepresent the vote share of parties in transforming those percentages into a number of legislative seats. Norris aptly illustrates these two tendencies by showing that the ratio of the percentage of votes to the percentage of seats won by radical right parties in several rounds of elections at the start of the millennium was .52 in pure majoritarian systems, .64 in mixed systems, and 1.39 in proportional representation systems (2005, 114). Even if majoritarian systems do not directly depress the vote shares of radical right parties, which Norris marshals evidence to suggest in line with Kitschelt and McGann, they do tend to prevent those parties from gaining office. In this way, Katz argues, while PR is “associated with more small parties and with more extreme and ideological parties,” majoritarian systems “are associated with fewer parties and a tendency towards an abbreviated political spectrum” (1997, 154). This understanding, while an important baseline for comprehending the ways in which party systems are formed by electoral rules, is nevertheless not sufficient on its own, given the diversity among electoral systems that belong to one of these broad “types.”

While there exists widespread comprehension of the multitudes of constraints from inside party organizations that can prevent political entrepreneurs from optimizing their spatial positioning in relation to other parties, like internal party structures and regulations or past ideological stances the inhibit dynamic change, few have substantially addressed the complex constraints posed by the electoral system itself. In fact, much of the literature erroneously treats the electoral marketplace and the interaction between the
parties as a system of perfect competition in a Downsian ideal (see Downs 1957). As Pippa Norris argues, political systems ought instead to be considered “regulated electoral marketplaces,” given that laws and customs both formal and informal determine how percentages of the popular vote translate into parliamentary seats, how many parties the electoral system supports, and what form the structure of opportunities for ballot access and party finance takes (2005, 26). Given that there is enormous variation and complexity in these rules and customs from country to country, Norris, and Mudde as well, are right to consider them as potentially important variables in the specific context of the rise of the radical right.

One of the most interesting aspects of Norris’ theory is her articulation of the way in which the type of electoral system (broadly, proportional vs. majoritarian) has a large effect on the levels of success of different ideological vs. populist strategies (2005, 27). Norris argues that proportional systems, because of their low “effective thresholds” for representation, lend themselves to “‘bonding’ strategies emphasizing the ‘signature’ ideological appeals which distinguish them most clear from mainstream competitors” (2005, 27). Radical right parties in majoritarian systems, in contrast, are better served by “vaguer populist strategies” because of high effective electoral thresholds. Parties in these systems must provide broader policy platforms and rhetoric than a simple focus on cultural protectionism, and “dilute their ideology with populist appeals” if they hope to succeed (2005, 28). In light of what many scholars have identified as the distinctly populist character of this family of successful radical right
parties (Betz 1994; Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Mudde 2007; Norris 2005),
given their targeted appeal to the “anxiety and disenchantment” of the common
man (Betz 1994, 4), this analysis of the fundamental efficacy of differential
strategic choices is an important piece of the puzzle.

**Limitations to Existing Theories**

In beginning to consider the causes behind the current ascendency of the
Front National in France, the academic explanations of the last such pan-
European rise of a family of radical right parties are an excellent place to start. In
utilizing this body of literature in order to construct a theoretical framework for
understanding the present rise of the FN, however, several concerns stand out.
Chief among them is the fact that while, by and large, the theory presented in the
literature matches very well with the case of the present day FN, there are
numerous places in which aspects of what is predicted by the theory are
completely contradicted by the reality in the French context. While many
individual theories generally mesh extremely well with this specific case, and
many of the requisite preconditions they lay out are present in France today,
many of the theories also have necessary preconditions or other required factors
that are wholly absent in contemporary France.

**1. Missing Preconditions**

Kitschelt and McGann’s overriding emphasis on the occupational experiences of
voters, for example, has limitations in the French context as it completely
discards the possibility that other forms of socialization impact political
consciousness. While the claim of a connection between “market situations” and
political consciousness is a strong one, and is supported by the rising vote shares for the FN amongst working class populations, Kitschelt and McGann also completely reject the potential for far-right support among a range of demographics in the French case that have in fact seen growing FN support, most notably women (Camus 2012). In a context where polling shows that “few social categories remain uninterested by the FN”\(^5\) (503) this wholehearted concentration on economic-based demand-side explanations is severely limited. Some supply-side suppositions presented in the academy are similarly absent. Pierro Ignazi’s focus on anti-parliamentary and anti-system rhetoric as a touchstone of successful far-right parties, for instance, is belied by the FN’s recent success coinciding with the party’s moving away from such stances and instead positioning itself as the “defenders of the republic” (Almeida 2013; Betz 2013). Ultimately, however, the literature generally accomplishes its self-proclaimed task: to interpret and analyze a very specific phenomenon, namely the rise of a family of parties in a specific temporal and spatial context.

2. Uniqueness of the French case

The primary limitation of the literature is not a failure per se as much as a simple fact: the “new” FN must be considered a novel case because its explosive rise far outstrips anything under consideration by these authors. Indeed, while the literature does a good job of analyzing the causes behind the rise of the radical right from absolute obscurity and electoral irrelevance to the slightly higher (and ultimately, only slightly less irrelevant) average electoral position of

\(^5\) « Peu de catégories sociales restent insensibles au FN »
roughly 10%, there is no real framework for understanding why a party like the FN would skyrocket past that point and garner upwards of 20% or even 25% of the vote, even besting one or both of the established mainstream parties in “off-year” elections. While there was indeed a doubling of the average vote share of radical right parties in Western Europe from the 1980s to the 1990s from 4.75 to 9.73% (Ignazi 2007, 1), with the possible exception of the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs or FPO in Austria at 19.6%, none of the FN’s peer parties have approached the heightened vote shares it has been able to garner in the last 5 years (Norris 2005, 54-56). This exception may even prove the rule, as Austrian elections are based on proportional representation, which is widely agreed to facilitate the growth of “third” parties, drawing from the seminal work of Duverger (1954).

In fact, many of these authors are explicitly dismissive of the idea that the FN could achieve anything resembling today’s success. In his 1994 book on radical right parties, Hans-Georg Betz declares, almost as an aside, that after its successes of the mid to late 1980s, the FN “had reached its limits, beyond which it could hardly expect to grow in the future” (1994, 13). This pessimism is not unique to Betz. Instead, this is a gap between expectations and reality that persists throughout the work of the various theorists discussed above, suggesting that the literature is simply not fully equipped to explain success on the order of the FN’s present explosive rise. Much of this may simply be attributable to the basic reality that much in both the global community and the French case more specifically has changed over the last 25 years, creating a
whole new balance of the numerous factors that contribute to the success of the radical right and altering the intricate complexities in the national sociopolitical fabric of France that would augment or suppress support for the FN. What seems clear however, beyond this catchall explanation is that the extant literature, which developed after the first flare-up of the radical right in Europe sought to explain exactly that: a flare-up, a temporary “normal pathology” that would come and go with time. In order to explain the current success of the FN, then, the necessary task is to expand and transform this theory from the explanation of a temporary phenomenon to one that encapsulates the rise of a permanent fixture of the political system – from out of the margins and the ghetto of the extreme, into a new, third mainstream political party. Therefore, while the existing theory remains an excellent port of departure in the search for the underlying causal relationships behind this striking and unique case study, an openness to new explanations (or even just new combinations of the old) is necessary.

**Alternative Hypotheses**

Drawing from this theoretical framework, two possible broad groupings of causal factors suggest themselves as contributing to an understanding of the FN’s success. The first of these is an economically focused explanation that highlights the continuing trend of high unemployment in France following the global financial turndown of 2008 and subsequent (and continuing) Eurozone crisis, combined with the specters of globalization and greater European integration that are aggravated by high rates of immigration. The second is a spatial understanding of the current party system in France that sees electoral
opportunities being created for the FN because of the hugely unpopular presidency of socialist François Hollande and the resulting difficulties for his center-left Parti Socialiste and the chaos, scandal, and infighting in the upper echelons of the center-right Union pour un Mouvement Populaire. However, it is another pair of factors specific to France that is more persuasive in explaining the unusual nature of the French case. While the economic and party spatial factors mentioned above are necessary preconditions for the FN's success, a general shift towards cultural protectionist attitudes, evidenced primarily by survey data and reflective of a long and troubled history of the conceptualizations of French identity and citizenship is hugely important in determining the openness of the electorate to the party's message. This issue includes the place of laïcité, the French idea of secularism in the sociopolitical fabric of the country, concentrated most clearly in the debates over the wearing of the Islamic veil. Finally, the transition from the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen to that of his daughter Marine has had enormous effects on the demographic makeup of the FN's growing base. In fact, it is the strategy of dédiabolisation - as Marine's attempt to remake the party in an image more acceptable in the mainstream - that ultimately encapsulates the set of factors that are central to the party's success. These four factors are not the entirety of the story behind the FN's recent rise, but they nevertheless represent four major pieces of the puzzle that, considered as a whole, go a long way towards understanding the causes behind this “political earthquake.”
1. Economic Difficulty

In the aftermath of a global recession at the end of the last decade, France was not unique in experiencing lasting pains. While the country was among the more stable members of the Eurozone and played a role in calming fears of the collapse of the Euro (though perhaps largely by acquiescing to the monetary and fiscal policy preferences of Germany), it has struggled to emerge from a slow recovery process and high rates of unemployment have yet to begin to fall, let alone to return to pre-crisis levels. The Hollande government has failed to meet its promise to the EU to cut its public deficit to 3% of its GDP by 2015, instead projecting that the deficit will drop only marginally to 4.3% by that time (The Telegraph 2014). Furthermore, after several years of stagnation, policymakers are warning that the economy will likely only continue to grow at a rate of less than one percent per year (Cowell 2014). Meanwhile, the most recent figures, released by the government in October 2014, count 3,460,900 job seekers in the country, up 0.8% over the previous month and 5.5% over the previous year (Gay 2014). At 9.7%, the unemployment rate, while stabilized shows no sign of dropping, and the percentage of job seekers under 25 without employ, 22.8%, is likewise worryingly high (Gay 2014). Perhaps most troublingly, Eurostat reports that the percentage of job seekers who have been unsuccessfully looking for employment has rocketed to 43.8% (Cowell 2014). The list of failed labor reforms proposed by the Sarkozy and Hollande governments is long. Most notable among them are the continued insertion-wage measures aimed at reducing disastrous levels of unemployment among the youth of the banlieux of
Paris, Marseille, and Lyon which can be as high as 25%, which have been widely rejected and even protested for the ways in which they would allow employers to avoid minimum wage mandates; and Hollande’s “Responsibility Pact,” a combination of tax breaks for businesses combined with austerity measures and spending cuts which has failed to stem widespread protests from business owners against what they see as tax policy that is unfriendly to business (Cowell 2014; Rollot 2012). In many corners of French society, and among supporters of both the two major parties, the failure to reverse the trend of stagnation and of high unemployment has been seen as the key failing of the Hollande presidency and his Socialist government, and a major reason behind his consistently poor popularity. Even on this point alone, it is easy to draw a link between the poor economic performance under a center-left government and voters, especially those directly affected, seeking out drastic alternatives. This relationship is made all the more stronger, however, by the addition of the question of immigration to the situation, given the way in which the FN's economic policy seeks to cash in on resentment felt by French workers towards immigrant communities seen as taking valuable jobs, and the way in which public polling data supports the supposition that French voters seem to be highly responsive to this strategy.

High levels of unemployment and high rates of immigration have often made for a volatile combination, and a portion of the FN's recent success can certainly be explained as disillusioned voters responding favorably to the nativist rhetoric of the FN and their identification of immigrants as a ready scapegoat. The history of French immigration, and its complex interaction with
both conceptualizations and *de jure* definitions of national identity and
citizenship is a convoluted one, but suffice it to say that the present-day shift
towards cultural protectionism is not only well-documented but also historically
linked. More recently, a wide-ranging 2013 poll by Ipsos found that fully 70% of
survey respondents felt that there are “too many foreigners in France,” while
62% feel that “Today, one doesn’t feel at home like before” as a result (Ipsos/CGI
Business Consulting 2013). Likewise, rising anti-Muslim sentiment, spurred
along by controversies over public prayer, the wearing of veils, and the
construction of mosques and minarets, has contributed to the perception among
native Frenchmen and women that immigrants are uninterested in assimilating
into a society and a culture that demands the prioritization of Frenchness as the
core determinant of individual identity. The same Ipsos poll shows that 55% of
the French feel that immigrants “do not make an effort to integrate into French
society.” Despite this avowed hostility though, fifty-five percent (55%) also
believe that it is “easy for an immigrant to integrate into French society”
(Ipsos/CGI Business Consulting 2013).

This distrust of the non-French extends to strong skepticism of the
European Union and of the processes of European integration, which have led, in
the views of their critics, to a loss of national sovereignty. In a context of
continued and rapidly accelerating processes of European integration, many
French workers have seen many of the same changes in “market situations” that
Kitschelt and McGann identify as contributing to far-right support, like greater
exposure to global markets and rising trends of international cooperation and of
the outsourcing of blue-collar and production jobs change the opportunities available to French workers. Largely as a result, distrust of European integration has replaced educational attainment as the best predictor for FN support, with those who declare that they would be “relieved” if France were to leave the EU twice as likely to vote for Le Pen (Mayer 2013). In this environment of distrust and blame, it is no wonder that the FN’s shift towards a populist “integral nationalism, which extolled the virtues of French history cultural heritage, and a sense of a common destiny” (Betz 2013, 4) found resonance. By positioning itself as the voice for a portion of the native-born French population that feels “ignored and forgotten by the political establishment” (5), the FN has succeeded in translating this fear and dislike of the other into a meaningful vote share.

Indeed, much of the FN’s recent success may come down to their ability to prime the voting public as to the importance of these core issues. In the Ipsos poll, over 56% of the French declared unemployment to be one of the top three issues facing the country today, and the next three issues were also economic in character. Ninety percent (90%) of respondents likewise replied that French economic power has declined over the last decade, with fully 55% characterizing that decline as major. Furthermore, sixty-one percent (61%) find globalization to be a “menace” to the country, and 66% believe that division of society into identity-based communities is harmful and a dangerous trend. The statistics on the perceived impact of immigration on the economy are similarly clear. Seventy-three percent (73%) believe that there is enough manpower in France without “resorting to immigration.” Likewise, forty-six percent (46%) feel that
reducing unemployment in France is a matter of reducing the number of immigrants. Given the primacy of these subjects in the hearts and minds of voters, the FN’s “issue ownership” of them may be of even greater importance. Mudde and Ignazi’s discussion of far-right parties’ ownership of the emergent issues brought about by a shift in the focus of political conflict is a perfect match for the way in which the FN has championed the dark side of immigration as its central issue at a time where that sentiment was experiencing explosive growth. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the perception that the FN has held a consistent stance on a charged and complex issue that its competitors have later largely moved towards if not matched, is of great import to the FN strategy of painting itself as shifting the oft-discussed “center of gravity” of French politics. However, as Mudde discusses, the successes to be derived from issue ownership depend on a perception in the electorate that the established parties have mismanaged or ignored the issues in question (2007, 300). Indeed, the current poor performance by the socialist Hollande government and the disarray at the top of the UMP lend credence to the idea that the FN has its mainstream peers to thank for some of its more recent success.

2. Mainstream Party Difficulty

Across the political spectrum, the presidency of François Hollande has been widely viewed as a failure. The 2012 election of Hollande, the first leftwing president since fellow socialist François Mitterand, was widely celebrated by French liberals and socialists hopeful that his electoral success marked an end to the rightward Gaullist shift that had marked the last 17 years of French politics
under the presidencies of Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy. Hollande, and a new socialist majority in the Assemblée Nationale, swept into office with a strong mandate and wide-ranging plans to ameliorate a shaky economy and implement social reforms like the legalization of gay marriage. While Hollande has utilized the presidency to enact wide-ranging economic and social reforms, with the exception of his push for gay marriage he has largely met with disappointing results. Indeed, over the last two years he has by and large failed to bear out the promises outlined in his campaign. Unemployment remains rampant, the economy remains stagnant, and relationships between majority and minority religious and ethnic communities are charged and tense. What’s more, his presidency has been rocked by a series of personal scandals, even in a country where the private lives of its politicians have typically been afforded comparatively little scrutiny. Chief among these was the January 2014 publication of photos revealing that he was having an affair with French actress Julie Gayet, leading to his split with longtime partner Valerie Trierweiler (Crocker 2014). Hollande was further damaged in November of the same year with the publication of Trierweiler’s memoir on the subject of their relationship which included claims that Hollande frequently derisively referred to the poor as “les sans dents” or “the toothless” (Crocker 2014). His approval ratings reflect these difficulties. Recent polling by TNS Sofres shows that just 13% of the French are confident that Hollande is capable of resolving the problems that the country faces while 85% are not, the lowest score it has ever registered on the measure (Sarkozy, by comparison, bottomed out at 20%) (TNS Sofres 2014). Even more
troublingly for the French left, these sentiments have been made very clear in the polls. In the municipal and European elections in March and May of 2014 respectively, the PS performed abysmally, being soundly defeated by the UMP in the municipal elections and coming in a distant third in the European. Only halfway into his first term, François Hollande’s tenure is largely seen as a failure and it is hard to imagine a full reversal over the next two years. However, difficulties at the upper levels of the center-right UMP have prevented the party from fully capitalizing.

After his defeat in his 2012 reelection campaign, former President Nicolas Sarkozy went into a self-imposed political retirement, humbled by a convincing defeat in the second round of the election (Gauthier-Villars 2012). In the intervening years however, the UMP has suffered a series of immensely challenging setbacks, including a fractious and divisive leadership struggle and a wide reaching corruption and campaign finance scandal, both of which have contributed to the party’s disappointing results in recent off-year elections. The roots of the power struggle lie in the 2012 party presidential election between former Prime Minister François Fillon and Sarkozy ally Jean-François Copé. In the immediate aftermath of the November 2014 vote by party members, both candidates claimed victory, but the party officially awarded the victory to Copé, the presiding party secretary general, with 50.03% of the vote (RTS Info 2012). Given Copé’s resistance to any sort of new election, or to modification of party statutes to reduce the conflicts of interest from those orchestrating the elections, Fillon formed a breakaway parliamentary group called the Rassemblement-UMP
(an homage to the Rassemblement Pour la République or RFR, the UMP’s predecessor) (Agence France Presse 2012; France 24 2012). Only after Copé’s agreement to substantial reforms of the election process, and to a new round of elections in October of the following year, did Fillon dissolve the breakaway faction (Geisler 2013). Copé would go on to win that election, running effectively unopposed (Lemarié 2013).

Copé only lasted one year in that office however, forced to resign in May of 2014 following the twin blows of the UMP’s poor performance in the European elections and a burgeoning scandal concerning mismanagement of UMP finances known popularly as the Bygmalion affair. The minute details of the scandal are outside the purview of this project, but it consists of the claim that UMP staffers improperly billed nearly 10 million Euros-worth of services rendered during the 2012 Sarkozy campaign by Bygmalion, a PR firm whose leaders have close personal ties to Copé himself, as expenses for party meetings rather than campaign spending in an attempt to skirt the country’s strict finance laws (Samuel 2014). The 10 million Euro sum represents an enormous amount in a campaign financing system capping spending at just €22.5 million (Samuel 2014). Jerome Lavrilleux, a former deputy campaign manager for Sarkozy has taken the fall, admitting on national television to the falsifications and denying any involvement in or knowledge of the wrongdoing by Sarkozy and Copé (Samuel 2014). This claim has been widely questioned in the French media however, as observers are skeptical that the two could be ignorant of the movement of such large sums of money (Koch 2014; L’Express 2014). In the
months since his resignation, the leadership picture for the UMP has remained murky. A trio of former Prime Ministers, Fillon, Alain Juppé, and Jean-Pierre Raffarin, led the party until a newly unretired Sarkozy was reelected President of the party in November 2012. Even the return of a formerly popular party leader was not able to stem the infighting, however, as critics decried Sarkozy's relatively small margin of victory against lesser known opponents as sign that he is unfit to stand as the party's presidential candidate in 2017 (BBC 2014). Sarkozy is likewise hobbled by his connection to the Bygmalion scandal and by a separate corruption investigation into his involvement in a Monegasque political appointment (Gauthier-Villars 2014). Recent polling also shows that only 16% believe the former President offers a “serious” response to the nation's problems and only 10% consider him “honest” (Lichfield 2014). Fillon, a likely challenger for the party nomination in 2017 had to fend off claims earlier in the election month that he pressured Hollande's Chief of Staff to speed up the pace of the Sarkozy corruption investigation (Penketh 2014). Juppé, for his part, is also widely seen as considering a 2017 run, meaning that discord at the top of UMP ranks is unlikely to stop anytime soon.

With the PS struggling with abysmal popularity ratings and the UMP reeling from scandal and infighting, it should come as little surprise that the FN was so successful in May of 2014. Its appeal broadened by poor political performance at the other end of the country's political spectrum and its ranks bolstered by UMP sympathizers disenchanted with their party's inability to present a united front, the FN was able to attract the kind of broad-based
support that has typically eluded it, branching out into previously uninterested demographics. Marine Le Pen’s probable delight at these circumstances can hardly be underestimated, and she and her spokespeople are constantly quoted lambasting the failures of politicians from what she has termed the “UMPS” (Penketh 2014). Indeed, this strategy is part of a boarder move of the focus of the FN’s anti-system rhetoric from the system itself to the players in it; painting themselves as the defenders of the common man against the active and malignant collusion of political and society elites who are “anti-national” and for the dissimilation of French national sovereignty (Almeida 2014, 223). Despite these positive trends for the party though, in its ability to capitalize both on a poor economy and fears over immigration, and on the weakened condition of its primary competitors, there remains a major limitation to the ability of these two factors to explain the FN’s explosive success. Simply put: while there are many countries where these conditions are present, many of those nations have seen no “flare-ups” at all, and even those that have experienced such outbreaks have seen ones that are substantially smaller. Something else must explain the separation of the French case then, from the divergent results in countries sharing the same set preconditions.

**Theory**

In seeking to discover what sets the case of the Front National apart from the rest, or what is unique to this specific context, it is important to consider not only the particularities of the party itself, but also the sociopolitical fabric of the French country and people which undeniably influence its very character. Given
that the poor state of the economy and the opportunities for political entrepreneurship presented to the FN by the dysfunction at the top of the PS and the UMP are mirrored in the economic and political situations of other countries, there has to be something specific to the French context that lends this success its explosive character. Given the inability of these simple preconditions to fully explain the extent of the FN’s rise, the task of understanding its origins shifts to examining the second order causes, and namely, what in the French conceptualization of national identity and citizenship predisposes the electorate to the kinds of sentiments, laid out in the polling data above, that the FN has been so successful in activating.

Specifically, there has been a longstanding demand at the center of the French concept of both identity and citizenship for a prioritization of francité or “Frenchness” over other identity aspects, most notably religion and race. Likewise, there is a longstanding history of the kind of nativist “France for the French” rhetoric espoused by the FN; expressed in both Pétainiste and Gauliste ideologies and never far from the surface even in the stances taken by the mainstream parties and their representatives, from Chirac and Sarkozy’s hardline positions during the veil controversies of the last 20 years, to Jean-François Copé’s campaigning against perceived anti-white racism in his 2012 UMP Presidential campaign. These issues are underscored in debates over conceptualizations of laïcité, and on the role that particular conceptualization of secularity plays in promoting cultural protectionist attitudes. A thorough investigation will show that the FN has taken great care so as to position itself as
a defender of French identity above all else, trumpeting French exceptionalism and playing on the fear of a loss of identity brought about by communitarianism and rising trends of globalization. This predisposition in the electorate towards cultural protectionism creates a space in which the party is able to diffuse its message without fear of straying too far from acceptable modes of discourse, a situation that is often not the case in peer countries in Western Europe with more tortured relationships with their understanding of the interaction of national identity and religion and race.

Of course, it is important to recognize that the choices made by the FN itself have much to do with its success. Of particular importance is the ascension of Marine Le Pen to power in 2011 and the new strategic direction that she would take the party. Firstly, while her father was an enormously divisive figure in and of himself, a charismatic but blunt lifelong outsider popularly known as the “Devil of the Republic” and sporting a history of charges of Holocaust denial and racial incitation, Marine has presented a more moderate figure. Even if her critics argue that her strategy of dédiabolisation represents a moderation of only some of the party’s stances, it seems to have been successful nonetheless in softening the image of the party and reducing and eliminating its ties to more radical stances unacceptable in the French mainstream, like explicit anti-Semitism or anti-republicanism. Marine has also not shied away from sparring with the continuously divisive figure of her father, even condemning a particularly anti-Semitic joke of his in June of 2014, though admittedly only as a “political gaffe” (Willsher 2014). In fact, numerous scholars have raised the idea
that Marine’s softer figure has been responsible for opening the FN up to new demographics of support, most notably among women, but also through the “proletarisation of the electoral base” (Camus 2012; Mayer 2013, 171). In a 2012 interview with Australian journalist Mark Davis, French author and journalist André Bercoff noted that only a decade ago it used to be “not only politically incorrect but completely shameful” to admit to agreeing with the FN, just a decade ago (Davis 2012). Now he says, in the same interview, that has changed. Marine “wants to be part of the next governing right,” and vocally supporting her is no longer a faux pas in polite society (Davis, 2012). This desire to frame the party as capable of government and not just a one-note protest party, a shift manifested in the party's articulation of a comprehensive platform in place of a single-issue position, may do much to explain why the party is attracting voters who would never have considered them a decade before. The party’s move towards populist rhetoric has even attracted former communists and other members of the extreme left attracted to the party's focus on local issues and a “populist anti-capitalism that appeals to their intellectual roots” (Kleinfeld and Kleinfeld 2014).

At the heart of any understanding of the party's recent successes however is the strategy that encapsulates all of its efforts to move into the political mainstream, or at least, to attract mainstream voters, that of dédiabolisation. In fact, this strategy has been at the very center of the most recent academic attempts to understand the trajectory of the “new” FN, and with good reason. It seems clear that this strategy, expressed as it has been as being born of a desire
to discard some of the baggage of the party’s extremist past, has been working; a fact evidenced by the party’s successful overtures to wider pools of voters. Understanding the exact nature of the strategy in a data-driven, empirical manner, then, as well as the shifts it has provoked, is the focus of the remainder of this thesis. Chapter 2 begins by discussing dédiabolisation in depth and presents possible models for conceptualizing it as the conscious endeavors of a set of political entrepreneurs. It then proceeds by arguing for the utility and importance of an empirical approach to this topic, and laying out the methodology behind a content analysis of the party’s rhetoric. Chapter 3 then presents the results of this analysis, followed by a discussion of their implications.

**Chapter 2: Dédiabolisation and Methods**

**Introduction**

Much of the literature’s nascent attempt to explain the success of Marine Le Pen’s Front National since her ascension to power focuses in on a single key variable: the strategy of dédiabolisation that Le Pen embarked upon during her campaign for the party’s presidency and has continued during her leadership over the past 4 years. This is a common sense approach, given the way in which the strategy, combined with her ascension to the leadership, represents all that is “new” to the party’s image, rhetoric, and strategy under the younger Le Pen. This program, both considered by observers external to the party to be a large shift in the party’s rhetoric and direction, and promoted by Le Pen and other
party officials as such, has been touted by observers both popular and academic as an attempt by Ms. Le Pen to remake the party in her own image, one less divisive and extreme than her father’s. Likewise, much has been made of the apparent attempt to present the party as representing more of a mainstream current of opinion than ever before, exiting the margins and representing a more moderate and diverse constituency, a shift evident in the party’s rhetorical choices (Alduy 2014). However, the widely propagated claim that the strategy represents a clear shift in programmatic offerings, and specifically a moderation—an idea that runs rampant both at the popular level in France and around the world, as well as in the literature—is far from clear-cut. In fact, while observational evidence can be marshaled to support this interpretation, there also exists much observational evidence that discounts this view and suggests divergent and distinct understandings of the strategy.

Indeed, there is much debate over the real content of dédiabolisation, and over the extent to which it represents real, deep-seated change in the party. Argument rages over the extent to which it represents a “true” moderation, and over whether its content has more to do with programmatic change or with rebranding or marketing. Before proceeding to an analysis of dédiabolisation, in particular then, it is important to gain a more general or abstract understanding of the ways in which so-called extreme parties on both sides of the political spectrum may seek to join the political mainstream. An analysis of the potential choices available to such parties in service of that goal serves as an introduction to the incentive structures that the FN may be facing, and is worth considering.
before diving into the confusion of conflicting observational evidence specific to
the French case that leaves more questions than answers.

Considering the various strategies embarked upon by extreme political
parties to move into the mainstream as the willful choices of political
entrepreneurs who seek to gain a greater share of the vote through a more
advantageous (and in this case, more moderate) positioning of the party on one
or multiple political spheres, three primary options present themselves. The first
is a true programmatic moderation, involving a shift of policy from a more
radical position to a more centrist position. These shifts have typically been
regarded in the literature as one-dimensional and unidirectional – in this view,
either a party moderates, radicalizes or stays the same (Almeida 2013; Sanchez-
Cuenca 2004). The second is a change of branding or what might be called
marketing without any policy changes. Changes in branding strategies that
encompass rhetoric and imagery used by the party, as well as shifts in the
makeup of the party’s corps of officers, elected officials and leadership can be
considered a “false” change. In this optic, a party desires a greater vote share but
doesn’t want to change its policy stances to acquire the necessary mainstream
respectability, so sets out to dupe voters. Finally, a third option is that parties
might engage in what Dmitri Almeida (2013) calls a “selective de-radicalization,”
a more nuanced program designed to respond to the complicated necessity of
simultaneously retaining the allegiance of an activist base that is far more
extreme than the mainstream median voter, while also making overtures to
those voters who have been previously uninterested in and/or scared away from
the fringe party. Under such a strategy, changes in the way core issues have been framed might mask the continued extremity of these parties’ stances.

This chapter proceeds in three parts. The first is an overview of these three divergent possibilities, presented, as above, in the abstract, and of their caveats and drawbacks. The second is a brief discussion of the observational evidence already extant in the literature that supports each of these three strategies as a conceptual framework for understanding dédiabolisation. Given the purely observational nature of this body of evidence however, no real conclusions can be drawn from this confused jumble of anecdotal evidence, which can easily be marshaled to support a wide variety of claims. Therefore, the chapter concludes with a statement of the compelling need for a more empirical approach to the understanding of dédiabolisation, here in the form of a content analysis, and with an overview of that analysis’ methods.

**Strategic Options for Extreme Parties Seeking Vote Gains**

I. **Programmatic Moderation:**

Perhaps the most straightforward of these options is that of simple moderation. Utilizing a basic proximity model of voting that imagines voters as entirely rational actors that seek to maximize utility by choosing to support the political party that positions itself closest to their location on a political spectrum (Downs 1957), programmatic moderation would bestow a larger vote share on extreme parties by moving its positioning closer to the center of the approximate bell curve that makes up the distribution of voters in most democracies. Therefore, parties who want to broaden their appeal might do so
by making such a moderating move and therefore attracting supporters of the
centrist party on their side of the proverbial aisle.

However, the deceptively simple appeal of this potential strategy belies
several important caveats that might limit its utility as a conceptual tool. First
among these is the fact that it employs a view of political conflict that is starkly
lacking in nuance. While the left-right spectrum may retain utility as a means of
simplifying and summarizing ideological differences, it is nowhere near
sufficient as a means of condensing and describing all political variation. Rather,
a wide body of scholars, many of whom are cited above as experts on the
extreme right, consider that parties instead must position themselves on a wide
array of spheres and spectra (see Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Ignazi 2007;
Inglehart 1994; etc.). The details of how they conceptualize this new spatial
theorization of political conflict differ (and are largely described in the preceding
chapter) and are of lesser import. What they have in common, however, is an
assertion that ideology cannot be reduced to a single spectrum, but must,
instead, be considered as an enormously complex, multifaceted affair. The main
unlikelihood of this policy of "simple moderation" lies directly in that
complexity: that common sense indicates that such change can only be
universally applied to the same extent across all issues with great difficulty.

Careful thought reveals several other obstacles to this option for moderation.
First, it is important to note that programmatic shifts can arise not only from
explicit and deliberate attempts by the party's leadership to alter the party's
positioning on the political spectrum(s), but also as responses to changes in the
sociopolitical context and other exogenous events (Kitschelt and McGann 1995). Shifts in the details on a specific policy, even seemingly sizable ones, may represent maintenance (whether deliberate or otherwise) of the same relative position on a given issue in relation to a shift in the spectrum of possible or politically acceptable stances. For example, it is difficult to determine, \textit{a priori}, whether the shift in the FN's stance on abortion that will be discussed below is the result of a concerted decision to moderate the party's offering in that area, or rather an absolute shift but not a relative change within the established political context. Equally lacking from simplified conceptualizations of programmatic change is the fact that political organisms, especially parties as controversial as groups on the outskirts of political respectability often are, are not easily able to shake off their past reputations, let alone their core programmatic stances. For parties that have been so deeply defined for the entirety of their existences by radicalized approaches to their core issues (often immigration, for parties on the extreme right, and communist economics for those on the extreme left), those stances may retain prominence in the minds of voters even in the face of otherwise evident moderation. Furthermore, even in a party as well centralized as the Front National, there necessarily exists a gap between the intended change as conceptualized and the relevant policy as articulated by the proverbial "boots on the ground." All of these complications point to a simple reality that the prevailing theorizations of programmatic change fail to capture: that programmatic and ideological changes are often enormously multifaceted and complex. In addition to these complexities, the biggest drawback to this strategy
from the eyes of parties is rather straightforward: in moving towards the middle of the political spectrum, they risk to dissuade longstanding supporters and lose their radicalized core constituencies.

II. Rebranding

Faced with this unsavory prospect, some extreme political parties might seek to project the image of having moderated without any accompanying programmatic shifts. To accomplish this goal, such parties might effectuate what might be called a “rebranding” or a marketing shift, with the goal of changing the façade of the party, and the way it is perceived by the public and the media and experienced by voters, without changing any of what lies behind. This broad tactic might take a variety of forms. At its heart is a rhetorical shift that masks underlying programmatic stability. These rhetorical changes might take the form of modifications of the frames used to present certain issues or certain aspects of the party’s history or culture, especially those that have been considered radical or extreme in the past. It might also involve an explicit rejection of and departure from past patterns of rhetoric that included what liberal society considers to be hate speech, an important shift especially given the extreme right’s historical affiliation with anti-Semitism and hatred based on race and creed. Finally, it might equally extend to a renunciation of past activities, especially those associated with violence or anti-system rhetoric and undertakings. All these rhetorical changes are accomplished with the goal of presenting a new face of the party to the public, one that respects established
political norms and desires to function within the system and not attack it from without.

It is tempting to view these changes cynically, as expressive of a desire to dupe voters into believing that the party has changed, a particularly galling con if they come without any alteration of policy proposals. However, these sorts of shifts can also play a helpful role for a party that genuinely wants to change its culture if not its stances, seeing the necessity of delineating its “new” self from the excess of the radical “old” if it is to gain the political respectability it craves. Rebranding may sometimes arise as the result of internal struggles between factions with different visions for the party, especially when those struggles take the form of a “new guard” fighting against the old. When younger generations take control of parties with established identities, they may feel it important to articulate a new identity for “their” party in order to assert control and begin the process of reputational change.

Similarly, while introduction of new demographics, particularly historically excluded ones, to the pool of party staff, officials, and candidates may have the results-oriented goal of attracting those same demographics at the polls, it also may reflect a commitment to a diversified membership, and signal that commitment to those both external and internal to the party structure. Finally, changes in the vocabulary of references in speeches and policy documents, from persons considered extreme to more mainstream politicians, historians, economists, etc. might help to emphasize this rupture with the past. It is important to remember that all these changes are made not only for the eyes
of the public more broadly (and perhaps for internal party stakeholders as well), but also very specifically for the media. Given the vital importance of media exposure and coverage for parties seeking to leave the fringe (Norris 2005, 29), this drive to cast off damaging legacies of the past may be extremely beneficial to the process of recreating the party in the public eye as a viable electoral option. Given the extent to which these parties tend to be villainized in the mainstream media and by members of the mainstream political elite, beginning to shake off those damaging reputations is an important precursor to political success.

III. Selective De-Radicalization

At the core of the two strategic options described above is a pair of incentives that seem to be intrinsically opposed. While the larger numbers of voters to be found at the center of the political spectrum is a clear attraction, extreme parties that pursue those voters too directly may do so at the cost of their longtime core supporters. For parties that rely on the work of radicalized unpaid activists for many of their core functions, as many extreme parties tend to do given their lack of longstanding organizational structures (Almeida 2013), such losses are potentially devastating. Though both of the above strategies are likewise attempts to respond to this incentive structure, it is important to recognize the existence of a third strategic option born of this seeming opposition. Acknowledging both the difficulty of changing a party’s perceived location on political spectra without any sort of policy innovation and the consequences that extreme parties face if they too directly abandon their ideological cores pushes parties to consider strategies of enacting programmatic
change that give the appearance of innovation and moderation while remaining loyal to key ideological stances. This strategy, which borrows some of the reasoning behind the previously discussed options but is nevertheless a unique, distinct alternative in its own right, is little discussed in the literature, but regrettably so. On the contrary, in the words of Dmitri Almeida, a nuanced understanding of programmatic change requires acceptance of the fact that “moderation on one or more dimensions of political conflict may coexist with the absence of change or even with radicalization on other dimensions” (2013, 168).

This “selective de-radicalization” comprises shifts in policy, framing, and prioritization, and seeks to give political entrepreneurs seeking both moderation and ideological continuity the best of both worlds.

Almeida’s article on the subject notes two important considerations in conceptualizing such a strategy. First, he notes that certain policy spheres can hold much greater importance than others as “heuristic cues” that signal shifts (or the lack thereof) in the party’s general stances (2013, 169). Savvy political entrepreneurs can then use changes on those spheres to signal to their dedicated core supporters that despite changes on the surface, their commitment to certain stances has not truly budged.

Second, Almeida posits that parties may obscure continuity on core ideological stances through deliberate changes in framing and focus.⁶ Reframing more extreme stances as protective rather than destructive, or in positive rather

⁶ The immense potential impact of changes in framing on the cognitive processing of those issues by the voting public is well established in the literature. See Zaller, 1992.
than negative terms can reshape the way the public approaches and experiences a given issue. Likewise, by altering the priority given to certain issues over others, and the extent to which they are discussed in order to emphasize areas of moderation, political entrepreneurs can draw attention to the ways in which the party is “making nice” while diverting attention from fundamental continuities.

In short, while the actual programmatic shifts of a program of selective de-radicalization are hugely important, more important is the extent to which these changes succeed at accomplishing the dual goals attendant on the moderation of extreme parties. If the party can simultaneously project through a careful combination of moderation on certain policy spheres with stasis or even recalcitration on others, that it is working to cast off its radical past for a new era of mainstream respectability and that it remains true to the ideological core that has long defined it, then it has much to gain. Of course, as another strategy aimed at manipulation or trickery, selective de-radicalization may also pose some risks, but “changer un peu pour que pas grande chose ne change”—changing a little so that nothing changes (Crépon 2012, 17) —represents another clear option for fringe parties looking towards center.

**The Content of Dédiabolisation**

Having laid out these three broad strokes options, we can now turn to the question of which of the three categories *dédiabolisation* falls most neatly into. This is by no means an easy determination. In attempting to analyze and identify its true content, problems of access and ambiguity abound, the results of trying to typify a perhaps nebulous or uncoordinated series of choices whose architects
have much to gain in keeping its precise details and the discussions around them under wraps. Likewise, the short amount of time that has passed since the strategy might be imagined to have come into effect (given that Ms. Le Pen’s ascension to the leadership happened only four years ago) also limits the extent to which any sorts of exact determinations have been able to be made. All the same, some scholars have taken up the task deciphering its nature, though in a purely observational mode. The next few pages then lay out some of this accumulated evidence, which offers a grounding of each of the abstract choices described above in the context of the FN, an exercise that shows the extent to which observational evidence on its own is insufficient to arrive at any lasting conclusion.

I – Dédiabolisation as Programmatic Moderation

In the wider context of a shifting sociopolitical climate both internal and external to France, it is only commonsensical to imagine that the ascension of Ms. Le Pen and her cadre to power has coincided with deliberate adjustments in programmatic offerings in accordance with and in response to that macro-context. Indeed, evidence suggests that there have indeed been changes in the policy positions taken by the party since Ms. Le Pen’s assumption of power, and certainly since the days of the elder Le Pen’s classic party. Those who have argued for viewing dédiabolisation as a simple “moderation” of the party’s stances have focused on discernable shifts in the stances espoused by the two Le Pen’s on a range of issues, most notably those relating to a so-called “traditional way of life.”
Without questioning, for the moment, the validity of these claims, this focus on social issues is nonetheless notable. The claim that Ms. Le Pen’s Front National has been substantially softer on issues of abortion and gay marriage is especially striking given the vitriolic nature of Mr. Le Pen’s rhetoric on those topics and the continued fervent opposition of large portions of the party’s base (Evans and Ivaldi 2012). The younger Le Pen declined to participate in the anti-gay marriage rallies in 2013, in sharp contrast to her father’s repeated claims that homosexuality poses clear threats to children (Almeida 2014) and softened the party’s stance on abortion from her father’s reference to it as “anti-French genocide” (Durham 2006) to a simple opposition to its provision by public health officials (Alduy 2014). These changes may also be reflective of a larger shift away from the Catholic Church as a central tenet of the party’s identity. While the elder Le Pen’s party had often encompassed streams of radicalized Catholic thought, with Ms. Le Pen’s newfound emphasis on laïcité, the religiously tinged arguments of the past have given way to a purer focus on secular republicanism (Betz 2013).

A diversification of the party’s platform is also evident, with observers noting the newfound focus that the younger Le Pen has placed on economic issues, and the way in which she has helped to transform the party’s platform from a single-note, single-issue affair to a broadly based package of policy proposals, a shift that mirrors her desire to prove the party is more than a protest party, and is ready and able to govern (Betz 2013). Finally, even on the party’s core issue of immigration, while the vast majority of the policy has
remained mostly constant, Ms. Le Pen’s stance has, all the same, evolved in clear ways from that of her father’s. While the elder Le Pen historically called for a complete stop to all immigration and the expulsion of “all immigrants from the third world”7 (Front National 1997), his daughter’s party has slightly softened this stance, allowing for an immigration of 10,000 persons per year, particularly professionals in targeted sectors, and expelling only illegal immigrants while not threatening directly explicit action against legal immigrants already in the country (Front National 2012). Of course, three small examples does not a wider trend prove, and there is reason to expect that the reality is substantially more nuanced than these instances suggest.

II. Dédiabolisation as Rebranding

Given that these moderating policy shifts have been identified as clustering on only a few issues and not representing changes to the core ideology, some scholars have deemphasized the programmatic aspect of dédiabolisation. For these writers, dédiabolisation represents less of a transformation of the party and its stances and more of purposeful rebranding put forward by Ms. Le Pen, as a way of distinguishing both the party she would begin to lead from its long history under her father, and her person, inner circle and leadership, from that of her divisive father and his longtime allies (and from some of the more extreme factions of the party that he had tolerated). This viewpoint notes that the development of dédiabolisation and its articulation as a comprehensive strategy coincided not with Ms. Le Pen’s actual governance of the

7 « L’expulsion des immigrés du tiers monde. »
party or her acting in a policymaking role, but rather with her campaign against Bruno Gollnisch for the party’s presidency, implicitly tying Gollnisch, a member of the party’s “old guard,” to the more extreme, odious aspects of the party’s past. In this view, dédiabolisation consists in a rebranding of both the party and the familial brand in an attempt to bring both within the contours of the French mainstream.

This separation from her father’s persona and legacy is reflected in a larger shift in the party’s candidates and staffers, and in their rhetoric. Gone, for the most part, are the members of the entrenched old guard that had surrounded her father; ideologues with uncompromising stances and frequent links to the more extreme strands of the party’s past activities and rhetoric, including the virulently racist, anti-systematic, and anti-Republican. In their place is a younger, more professional cadre, a group of disciplined and on-message advisors and elected officials that Cecile Alduy has described as “neat and tidy twenty-and thirty-somethings with clean hands and unambiguous pasts” (2014). Much of this shift took place in the immediate aftermath of the younger Le Pen’s convincing victory over Gollnisch at the party’s convention in January 2011 in the city of Tours. Later that day, as the party’s officials met to reorganize the Comité Central and Bureau Politique, the desire in the Le Pen camp to surround their leader with likeminded supporters was clear. Though supporters of Gollnisch were given the token prize of 42 of the 100 seats on the Comité Central, the more important Bureau Politique was outfitted with almost entirely

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8 The same place, perhaps ironically, as where the Communist Party had first organized in 1920 (Crépon 2012).
supporters of the younger Le Pen, even at the expense of several longtime
confidants of her father. In the last several years, this shift in the makeup of the
FN’s upper ranks has continued to widen. Gollnisch himself, while continuing to
serve in the Bureau Politique, rejected Le Pen’s conciliatory offer of a position as
a Vice President (Gros de Larquier 2011) and no longer plays at least an
externally visible leadership role in party, consigned along with old party
stalwarts like Bruno and Catherine Mégret to the outside of the party’s new
vision.

The younger Le Pen’s ascension has instead promoted the fortunes of a
leadership group that, much like her, marks a sharp divide from the past. Her
second in command, Vice President Louis Ailot, is an affable and intellectual
lawyer by trade, and at 45, lacks the ties to collaborationism, extremist actions
during the Algerian War, or other less savory actions that had largely defined the
pasts of Jean-Marie Le Pen’s inner circle. Another close confidant, Vice President
and spokesman Florian Philippot is even younger, at 33, and was outed as gay by
French tabloid Closer in late 2014 (Lichfield 2014). In fact, opponents of Le Pen’s
within the party (most notably Gollnisch and her own niece Marion Maréchal-Le
Pen) have decried what they see as a growing “gay lobby” around Marine,

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9 One notable example of this was the case of Farid Smahi, a longstanding
member of the Bureau Politique and Gollnischien who found himself left out of
the remade BP after the election of Ms. Le Pen. Furious, he caused a scene at the
party’s congress, shouting in front of the assembled press that Le Pen had
“thrown him away” (lui viré). Smahi, a Muslim and pro-Palestinian who had long
influenced Le Pen’s father on his negative stance towards Israel also publically
accused Ms. Le Pen of being a racist hypocrite and of discarding him like a
“bougnoul de service” employing a highly pejorative slur for immigrants from
North Africa and the rest of the Muslim world.
pointing to the recent appointment of gay activist Sébastian Chenu as her cultural advisor, and the recent outing of the party’s secretary general, Steeve Briois as proof (Lichfield 2014). While this is a startling development in a party that has historically linked homosexuality with pedophilia, pornography and other perceived dangers to children (Almeida 2014), the addition of Chenu is also representative of perhaps an even more startling trend, that of the “capture” of former officials and functionaries of the two mainstream parties and from various other groups on both the left and the right. Drawn by the prospect of joining a party in the midst of a grand evolution, and one that more and more samples from policy stances typically associated not only with the far-right but also with the far-left, newcomers at both the level of party officials and of simple adherents have swelled the ranks of the party, mirroring its gains in new demographics in the voting public.

It is important to note also that while the precise effects of her leadership are somewhat difficult to quantify, Ms. Le Pen is a drastically different figure on both a personal and political level than her divisive father, a fact that is inextricably tied in with questions of the “façade” that the party presents to the world. Where her father is notoriously difficult and thorny and prone to outrageous declarations (notably those of the anti-Semitic variety) in search of media attention, Marine is calmer, polite, and at times charming. She is known to

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10 The ultra-right French magazine *Minute* has gone as far as to claim that fully 60% of high-level party officials promoted by Marine are gay (Lichfield 2014).
11 And in particular, the role her person may play in attracting new demographics of voters, and particularly in helping to close the “radical right gender gap” (Mayer 2013, 171) that has often limited the electoral success of far-right parties.
be a good interview, is personable and familiar with supporters, and is at home in a crowd. Whereas her father railed against the decay of traditional values and traditional ways of life, backed by a large radicalized Catholic segment of the party, Marine is a twice-divorced working mother of three who has presided over the above-discussed softening of stances on issues typically associated with being contrary to Catholic morality. Furthermore, Le Pen hasn’t shied away from criticizing the more outrageous outbursts of her father, calling an anti-Semitic joke he made this summer a “political gaffe” and declaring that the party no longer needs such outbursts in order to receive attention, given that it is now has a voice in the country’s political dialogue.

Of course, this rebranding has extended beyond simple changes in the leadership to encompass pointed shifts in rhetoric, even without taking into consideration any explicit changes in policy content. For a party as keenly attuned to the necessity of media coverage for continued expansion into the mainstream, as the FN has shown itself to be, a close attention to word choice is hardly surprising. Indeed, beyond the expulsion of the more explicitly racist elements of the party (and the banning of anti-Semitic language and symbols), Cécile Alduy notes that the FN has “launched a semantic takeover of democratic, even leftist, keywords” (Alduy 2014). A leak of internal strategy documents in the 1990s showed a desire to frame anti-racism groups like SOS Racisme as the “pro-immigration lobby,” to discuss mondialisme rather than mondialisation (the true word for globalization) in an effort to link the term semantically to scary politicized words like fascism and communism, and to reject the term “extreme
right” in favor of *vraie droite*, or “true right” (Alduy 2014). In fact, Le Pen has taken recently to threatening to sue anyone who labels the party “extreme right,” seeing the term as only applicable to anti-democratic movements and dismissing those who seek to classify the FN as such as attempting to link it to neo-Nazism (The Economist 2013).

Furthermore, in acknowledging that the FN has adopted certain policies typically associated with the political left (notably in the economic sphere where the party calls for a program of social protectionism and nationalization that Ivaldi and Evans call “statist (and) quasi-Colbertist” (2012, 49; Front National 2012)), Le Pen has argued that the usefulness of the left-right distinction may be fading, in favor of a spectrum between nationalism and globalism (The Economist 2013). Le Pen’s recent reclamation of republican ideals and symbols has also involved a shift towards utilization of words like “democracy,” “liberty,” and “justice,” as well as an over abiding emphasis on republicanism, *laïcité*, and “the people,” both new focuses in the party’s lexicon (Aludy 2014; Crépon 2012). Finally, the rhetoric of the party, once full of allusions to classic figures of the far-right like Charles Maurras and Pierre Poujade, now include references to economists like Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz, and to mainstream French figures like Charles de Gaulle (whom the elder Le Pen has accused, ironically, of racism (Valerio 2012)), and even Jean Jaurès, one of the foundational figures of the French socialist Left, of whom Ailot included a portrait on his 2009 campaign posters, claiming that he would have been a *frontiste* (Henry 2011). In the words of Hans-Georg Betz, the party has shifted from an abnegation of “republican
ideals in favor of integral nationalism, which extol(s) the virtues of French history, cultural heritage, and a sense of common destiny” (2013, 4).

III – Dédiabolisation as Selective De-Radicalization

While it seems likely that at least some cultivation of a new “brand identity” for the FN has taken place in recent years, a closer examination of the realities of dédiabolisation seems to suggest that the strategy represents neither simply a “catchword related to Marine Le Pen’s brand management strategy,” as Almeida argues (2013, 168), nor a all-encompassing moderation designed to eliminate the distinctions between the FN and the moderate, often Christian-Democratic, center-right parties that dominate across Europe. Several factors might contribute to the complexity of the changes. First, any sort of moderation of the traditionally divisive party must grapple with its ideological history, which has encompassed or been connected with anti-Dreyfusism, collaborationism, radical activities to propagate the existence of French Algeria (including terroristic activities performed by the OAS), and perhaps most importantly, with “the racist and anti-Semitic conceptions of a battery of intellectuals who never accepted Republican principles” (Crépon 2012, 17). Second, in practice, while the potential gains to be had from moderation are enormous, those rewards come at the cost (or at least with the risk) of alienating the party’s longstanding ideological core. For an upstart party that depends on unpaid activist support for many of its core functions, particularly in the rural parts of the country (Almeida 2013; Crépon 2012), such a loss would be devastating to electoral prospects.

12 “Les conceptions racistes et antisémites de toute une batterie d’intellectuels n’ayant jamais accepté les principes républicains”
Indeed, just as there is observational evidence to suggest that *dédiabolisation* represents “only” a rebranding or “only” a moderation, there is likewise evidence that suggests that it has instead represented a very concerted effort by Ms. Le Pen and company to effect a selective de-radicalization meant to retain that radicalized core while attracting new, more mainstream demographics.

Indeed, viewing even some of the apparently “moderating” programmatic shifts of the last decade discussed above through the lens of the competing imperatives of drawing in new more centrist voters while retaining the support of the more ideologically rigid activist corps (as well as with an eye to the way heuristic cues and framing decisions can function) draws into question whether these changes are quite as straightforward as that. On abortion, for instance, while the call for a complete ban has indeed been replaced by an opposition to public funding for such procedures and a commitment to the free choice of women not to abort, elements of this change suggest that it represents less than the moderation it appears to be on the surface. First, by framing her opposition to public money financing abortions in terms of her preference that such funds should be instead used for necessary health care for seniors (Front National 2012), Le Pen places the issue of abortion in the same frame as that utilized with many of the issues connected to immigration: that of scarce resources producing social resentment (Almeida 2013). Secondly, during the 2012 campaign, Marine Le Pen discussed the issue of abortion significantly less than her father had in previous elections, an imbalance that may point to a decision to deemphasize an
issue on which the FN’s traditional (and traditionalist) history conflicts with the
strategy of dédiabolisation (Almeida 2013, 174).

Likewise, while onlookers have trumpeted Marine Le Pen’s decision to
not participate in the 2013 anti-marriage equality marches as a sign of a softer
approach to the issue, a seemingly innocent pledge to protect children from
“moral violence via the internet”13 (Front National 2012, 11) may serve as a
heuristic cue of the party’s continued opposition to what they see as deviant
behavior. Given the presence of this vague term of “moral violence” in a section
on pornography, pedophilia and other dangers to children, and given that the
term has simply replaced an explicit condemnation of the danger of
homosexuality that had historically been present in the same section of the
manifesto (see Front National 2002, for instance), this can be seen as a coded
clue to observers that the undergirding ideological stance remains constant.

While these two issues have long been important to a party that has consistently
been socially conservative in orientation, they pale in importance to the issues
surrounding immigration, on which the party made its name, and on which it is
now proceeding to remake it.

Since the party’s origins nearly a half-century ago, immigration and the
issues it raises have been the Front National’s central focus. Even in its modern
form as a party with a full range of programmatic offerings, the anxiety
surrounding the effects of high levels of immigration affects an enormous range
of issues in the party’s platform, from the fear of a loss of national identity, to

13 “Violence morale via internet”
economic concerns related to unemployment and welfare, to social issues concerning religion, race, and language, to national security, law and order, education, and culture. An easier time might be had, it’s worth noting, listing the issues on which this nativist orientation does not have a discernable effect. Given the central and overarching nature of this influence, it is perhaps common sense that it might likewise make up one of the core elements of dédiabolisation, albeit in a less than straightforward way. Rather, first and foremost, the strategy seems to have involved the shift towards populist rhetoric described at length in the previous chapter, and extensively documented in the literature as a wider trend among European parties of the far-right (Mudde 2007 has a nice discussion), as well as a reclamation of democratic (and in the case of the FN, republican) ideals (Betz 2013). In the case of the FN, this shift may also have involved a concordant reconceptualization of the party’s more xenophobic (and racialized) stances as being explicitly protective of those republican values. Specifically, the party has reconceptualized its rejection of Islam and of Muslims in general “in the name of defending liberal values” given their stance that Islam is “by essence opposed to values of laïcité and secularization” (Crépon 2012, 16).

This articulation of the danger posed to France and its national identity and culture by creeping trends of Islamization (with, for instance Le Pen comparing the presence of praying Muslims in the streets of France to the country’s occupation during World War Two, and (falsely) asserting that residents of l’Île de France were unknowingly consuming ritually slaughtered

14 “Au nom de la défense des valeurs libérales;” “par essence opposé aux valeurs de laïcité et de sécularisation »
halal meat) represents an entirely new (and enormous) prioritization of laïcité as central to preserving French identity (Almeida 2013, 172-173). In fact, this idea of laïcité, as promoted by Ms. Le Pen’s FN, is perhaps not only a new focus of the party’s but really a new concept. In using it as a “frame to define the policy preferences that were already present in the FN’s profile” (Almeida 2013, 172), the term is deprived of its original meaning as a simple determiner of the proper relation between church and state, and instead becomes a catchall term for a conceptualization of French identity and citizenship that rejects the possibility of sub-national communities. The nativism and xenophobia of the FN are not new, and its opposition to multiculturalism is deeply engrained in its history. However, its transition from an openly anti-Semitic protest party to a respectable member of the political mainstream seems to be amply helped along by this drive to recast its image as a defender and not a critic of what it means to be French in a modern world. As recent vote totals bear out, the rewards to be gained from such a shift seem to be quite large. However, observational evidence seems to suggest that in this “version Frontiste” of the battle between the old guard and the new, “everything is relative” (Crépon 2012, 18).

Need for Empirical Study

While all these indications seem to point to a view of dédiabolisation that is substantially more nuanced and perhaps more bleak than the prevailing wisdom, their observational nature holds back their utility. While some scholars have already performed important work on this admittedly emerging and

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15 “Toute est relative”
evolving topic, that work has tended to either rest at a observational level, if one that is meticulously researched, like Almeida, or to rely primarily on survey and public polling data, like Mayer (2013). The novelty of the topic also means that there are few, if any attempts to engage in larger-scale projects of the issue.

Overcoming both the limited nature of many of the current academic conceptualizations of dédiabolisation, while pivoting to a more empirical focus than those who have already begun to grasp its nuance is one of the key focuses of this work. This goal is accomplished through an objective content analysis of primary sources produced by the party itself, namely by comparing the changes over time in party rhetoric over the last decade. In doing so, this project aims to identify the true nature of the shifts brought about by the ascension of Marine Le Pen by systematically analyzing her rhetoric (and that of her party), as opposed to that of her father.

**Methods**

**Project Focus**

Of course, such an analysis could take any number of directions, especially given the fact that there exists an enormity of rhetorical content produced by the Front National that could potentially be analyzed. Given this project’s goal of closely analyzing rhetorical shifts and changes in framing, a narrow focus is all the more important. Such a focus serves not only to limit the amount of content involved in the analysis (especially important given the constraints of time and budget that this project faces), but more importantly to allow careful analysis of a small set of variables over time. This is a continuation
of the argument in favor of taking an empirical approach to this puzzle: while impressionistic clues about the general nature of rhetorical change embarked upon by the party are helpful, in order to reach genuine conclusions about the specific choices the party’s leadership has made concerning its strategy of dédiabolisation, it is necessary to approach that question from up close, utilizing coherently linked pools of data to identify clear changes at the micro level.

Which words are being chosen at the expense of which others? Which aspects of a given topic are prioritized and which are hidden? How are the descriptors attached to certain terms changing over time? These questions boil down to one central focus: how are the ways in which certain important terms are being rhetorically conceptualized and constructed changing over time?

In order to answer this question, this project employed a set of procedures partially inspired by the work of Landauer, Foltz and Laham on “latent semantic analysis” or LSA (1998). Arguing that the statistical computations applied to large bodies of text can help to identify the “contextual-usage meaning of words” (2), these authors demonstrate several ways in which such analysis can outperform human subjects on vocabulary and subject tests, and aptly mimic certain word categorization tasks (1998). While the applications of this approach have remained largely in psychology, its utility in this project, and in similar work in political science, is promising. In this study, an analysis of how the words that have surrounded a single key term have changed over time forms the basis of its investigation into the FN’s rhetoric. Identifying the rise and fall of the frequency of certain words over time, and of
different constructions of the same concept, can help to shed light on the choices made by the party to alter the way they talk about certain issues. By examining the way in which the “semantic space” that is constructed around this term (which is to say the choices of framing, tone, and simple word choice that go into it) has changed over time, trends in the rhetoric can be identified and analyzed in depth.

**Choice of Subjects**

Having made this determination to focus in on the semantic spaces in which single key term is conceptualized, the first task was to decide which word to investigate. Ultimately, given both its primacy in the party’s rhetoric, and the requirements of the methodology, the choice of “immigration” is an easy one. First, at discussed at length above, it has long been rightfully considered to be the central theme around which most all of the Front National’s platform is based. While the party has presented a more broad platform in recent elections that moves beyond its reputation as a single-issue concern, immigration remains a core focus that ties together many of the party’s signature issues, from its opposition to globalization and the European project, to its promotion of policies of preference for native French persons in housing and welfare, to its concerns over crime and insecurity. In attempting to determine the presence or absence of any programmatic shift, immigration is a sensible place to focus because of this centrality. As the issue with which it is most identified by the media and public, any differences in the way it is framed or conceptualized, even subtle ones, would be likely to have an effect.
Content Gathering

Having justified the selection of this topic then, it remains to detail the method in which content was gathered. To do so, the author utilized the Internet Wayback Machine, a free web-based database managed by The Internet Archive, a non-profit organization that seeks to facilitate scholastic research that requires access to past versions of web pages. The Wayback Machine accomplishes this task by preserving and archiving versions of web pages that it captures in certain intervals of time – less visited sites might be archived only once every 6 months, top sites as many as 30 or 40 times a day. In doing so, the machine allows a user to see a web page as it existed at a specific moment in time, and generally, to interact with it as a visitor at that time would have as well. While this is not a perfect tool - the archiving is not perfect and sometimes requires elaborate workarounds to reach certain pieces of content, and sometimes includes unrecoverable gaps – it is still an excellent means of gathering content produced by the party over the 13 years that it has maintained a web presence at frontnational.com.

With the aid of this tool, the author was able to access past versions of the “communiqués” or “press releases” section of the FN’s website from the start of 2002, when the party first started to post such releases, up to the present day. The choice of communiqués was an easy one. While a project of an even more ambitious scale might seek to collect every little bit of content that the party had ever produced, the communiqués represent a constant stream of official written rhetoric that the party has created and designed for external consumption. In
that way, they represent the core of the party’s engagement with the issues on its own terms, outside of infrequently produced manifestos. Furthermore, the communiqués take nearly every possible form of political communication. Included in the tens of thousands of communiqués archived by the Wayback Machine are nitty-gritty programmatic statements, reactions to events in France and around the world, and personal sniping from FN figures at mainstream politicians and media personnel. So too are the more personal aspects of politics, like commemorations of the deaths of former FN supporters and officials, or the details of ever-present legal proceedings involving various FN officials both as plaintiffs and defendants. However, collecting and analyzing every single communiqué was outside the scope of this project, especially given the imbalance in the overall numbers of communiqués issued per year between the beginning of the analyzed period and the end.¹⁶

In order to collect for analysis only communiqués related to immigration, a system was necessary for deciding which communiqués were relevant (and therefore to be collected), and which were not. This process was facilitated through the development of a list of “keywords” which were used as the basis for determining the relevance of specific pieces of content. In reading through thousands of pages of communiqués, the author used these lists, as well as his knowledge of the references to certain figures and events to determine which

¹⁶ This imbalance gives rise to an interesting question of causality – is the rise in the rate at which the FN is posting communiqués a result of French political parties (and France more broadly) gradually adapting to the Internet age? Or is it instead evidence of the FN’s growing professionalization as a party, and its desire to work within established structures for diffusing its message. This question is further discussed in the next chapter.
communiqués concerned the targeted issue. The actual process for collecting
the selected pieces of content was rather simple. Communiqués that were
selected were transferred into Microsoft Word™ documents pertaining to the
year in which they were written, as those temporal divisions formed the units
for the subsequent analysis. There was therefore an file for each year that
contained all of the party's press releases on the topic of immigration. While the
actual procedure that was followed for moving through the communiqués in
each year differed from year to year because of the uneven nature with which
the Wayback Machine archives content\(^\text{17}\) (e.g. some years could be completely
accessed simply by moving through the “snapshots” that the machine captured
and some required finding ways to move back through specific versions of the
site itself to reach content the machine didn’t preserve), the rules guiding
selection did not.

Indeed maintaining these rules was an important emphasis for a project
that relies on the true comparability of different units in its sample. Care was
taken to make sure that communiqués that simply mentioned a keyword
without immigration being (one of) the topic(s) of the document were not
included. Similarly, sometimes communiqués concerned the topic of interest
without actually using any of the keywords, either through using synonyms, or
through the inclusion of words and/or references that are lesser but still
important indicators of certain subjects. For instance, discussions of assimilation

\(^{17}\) Especially, that it fluctuates with the amount of traffic a given site receives
over time. So it will have many more archival “snapshots” in times of high traffic
than in times of low, even if, in our example, those fluctuations don't correspond
with how much content the party is producing.
or of France’s relationship with the countries of the Maghreb often concerned issues of immigration, even if they didn’t refer to it explicitly. It was likewise important to avoid conflation of subjects that the FN often relates to the targeted topic with that topic directly. While the FN often discussed immigration in the context of the loss of sovereignty that they see in the European project, that does not mean that every story that mentions the European Union or even the party’s fears about the loss of national identity and sovereignty that it represents is a story about immigration. Holding these kinds of rules constant was essential for ensuring that the analysis did not compare apples and oranges, a necessity that justifies in turn the manual approach to data collection.

Data Collection

Once the content documents were collected and organized, qualitative analysis software NVivo (10th Edition for Macintosh) was used to perform the analyses. NVivo’s text search function was used to gather the 10 words in either direction around each usage of the word immigration. Then, once all of these “mini-contexts” for a specific term in a specific year were gathered, a word frequency query was run in NVivo to determine the words that tended to make up the semantic space around the term in question during that period of the party’s rhetoric. NVivo automatically filters out the presence of small “filler” words from these results, namely conjunctions, articles, and pronouns that are syntactical in nature and not typically contributive to meaning. This is a list automatically generated by NVivo for each language it supports, but it was verified for compatibility with this study’s needs. It is important to note that
these words were also skipped over during the process, by which the program
determines the 10 closest words to the key term, meaning that the 10 words
catalogued by the program are not truly the closest to the word but the closest
non-filler words. The results of the frequency queries were then exported and
stored in spreadsheet form, where they were combined with the tallies from
other years’ usages of the same key term so as to allow easy comparability over
time.

In addition to the analysis of word frequencies forming the immediate
closest context around “immigration”, an understanding of the evolving context that
topics related to immigration are placed in requires a wider analysis of the terms
used by the party when discussing those issues more broadly. Additionally,
while the immediate vicinity around a word is a good way to track the way in
which that specific word is used over time, understanding how the subject that
word represents has been variably presented requires zooming out to look at
how the party has talked about the subject on the whole. The close analysis of
semantic spaces might conceivably miss some of this larger context if the
individual “key term” used by this project is not repeated all the way through
certain pieces of content. In order to accomplish this, word frequency queries
were also run on the entire corpuses of press releases in a given year, the results
of which were exported and compiled as described above. The presence of this
data allowed comparison between two scales of analyses, an extremely useful
tool given the fact that usage of the specific word “immigration” was more
variable over time than was discussion of the larger topic of immigration, writ large.

Both these pools of data were also utilized for a final grouping of analyses. While this project aimed mostly at analyzing the way changes in the specific words used in the semantic spaces around “immigration” changed over time, broader changes in the tone used around the word were also highly of interest. To accomplish this, words found to be among the 10 most-used in word frequency counts were coded as positive, negative or neutral by the author. These determinations were made by a single coder, an approach necessitated by limitations of time and budget on this project, and marginal cases were assigned a “neutral” value in order to focus on more strongly charged words. This three part coding system lacks the nuance of more complicated analyses, and this is indeed an area ripe with potential for research, it nonetheless allows analysis of broad trends in the way certain words are assigned value, and specifically constructed with positive or negative connotations.

Chapter 3: Results and Discussion

Results

Data Description

The content collection process resulted in a large corpus of data, making up 108,806 words spread across 458 communiqués. Immigration was an extremely popular topic for the party even just based on these raw numbers. This is hardly a surprising finding, given the extent to which the party's focus on
immigration as a core issue has been documented. Additionally, there were differences in the patterns with which immigration-related stories appeared compared to those for less central topics. Specifically, stories on other topics tended to be more temporally clustered than those about immigration, reflecting perhaps the fact that the press releases on those topics tended to be more in response to events and happenings surrounding those subjects than did releases on immigration, which came in more of a constant stream, often unprompted by specific events.

It is important to note however, that while there were large numbers of immigration stories practically across the board during the time period investigated, there were still very large levels in variation and evolution over time in terms of the frequency, style, and length of the press releases. An overview of the number of words and stories collected in the immigration category for each year is contained in Figure 3.1 on the following page. Two general trends are immediately noticeable. The first is a gradual increase over time in the number of stories concerning immigration per year, from a three-year average at the beginning of the time period (i.e. 2002-2004) of 24.33 stories per year, to an average of 33 during the last three years examined, 2012-2014. Even more striking is the rise in the average length of the stories, from 168.01 words in the first three years, to 271.97 in the last three. Interestingly however, while there is a general positive trend across the whole timespan of the study, both of these variables peak not at the very end of the period but in 2010 and 2011. 2010 in particular was by far the biggest year, with double the words of
almost any other year, a fact not easily explained away given the absence of any especially large events related to immigration in that year.

A pair of more straightforward reasons presents itself as potentially being behind these two trends of higher numbers of longer stories.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, two forces would be expected to contribute to these increases, although to unclear extents. The first is a wider trend of Internet adoption by French political parties and by the French (and global) public more broadly. It is only common sense that as parties began to focus more attention on their online presences, and to conceptualize their websites less as placeholder posters and more as means of directly engaging with the voter public, they would feel incentivized to produce more content for that website (or at least, to publish more of the content they were already producing). The

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Words per Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3734</td>
<td>149.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3206</td>
<td>139.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5382</td>
<td>215.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7208</td>
<td>200.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9482</td>
<td>166.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11612</td>
<td>276.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>9123</td>
<td>182.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>21401</td>
<td>324.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10683</td>
<td>305.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10037</td>
<td>278.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7194</td>
<td>266.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9744</td>
<td>270.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1
*For reasons described below, 2009’s sample could not be completed, and was thus excluded from the analysis*
second is a growing professionalization of the Front National, and its own
desires to join the political mainstream in acting more like a “normal” political
party and less like a radical protest group. Norris notes that this kind of
transition, from ragtag bunches of ideological activists to institutions with stable
organizational structures, is an important component of institutionalization for
radical parties seeking to claim the benefits of mainstream standing (2005, 29).
A brief comparison of the archives of the FN and the Parti Socialiste suggests
that this professionalization theory is closer to the truth. While the PS had 53
communiqués (on all subjects) in January of 2002 compared to only 27 for the
FN, in January of 2014, it was the FN that was substantially more prolific while
the PS stayed constant – with Marine Le Pen’s party publishing 76 communiqués
and the socialists only 54.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that the sometimes-unreliable nature
of the archiving program of the WayBack Machine may contribute to certain
levels of uncertainty about these raw numbers. While many years were perfectly
catalogued, and were done so in ways where it was easy to capture any and all
relevant releases, other stretches of time posed more problems. Some years had
periods without archived content, almost never more than a week or two, but
sometimes a little longer. These gaps are concentrated in the middle of the
investigated time period, mainly from 2009-2011, with 2009 particularly
problematic to a point where content from only roughly a third of the year could
be gathered, rendering that year unusable in the analysis. Variation in the way
stories were archived and in the number of total stories also impacted the
content collection. In later years, the sheer volume of all the content on the site required a narrower approach to capturing relevant content, often through making use of content “tags” placed on stories by the party itself. While these tags were enormously helpful in identifying relevant stories, they may have caused the neglect of stories that dealt with immigration as more of an aside. These difficulties might have been alleviated with the addition of more time or manpower, but they nonetheless do not grossly impinge upon the soundness of this research or the persuasiveness of the findings. While it is possible that some relevant stories were missed in the collection, each of the years still has a wide range of content that provides ample example of the rhetoric employed around certain terms and concepts by the party in that time, the true goal of this research. Ultimately, the content may represent a sample rather than a perfectly full population, but it was a sample that was consistently applied, and one that is large enough in each year for meaningful analysis to be performed.

**Semantic Space Results**

In beginning to analyze the results produced by the word frequency queries, it is interesting first and foremost to observe what words have been mainstays of the party's rhetoric on immigration, all the way through the observed time period. Among these words, which appeared consistently in the top 10 words used yearly in the semantic space surrounding “immigration,” are a range of both substantive and general terms. Many of these words are more functional than significant: words like *France* and *français, politique, national,*
gouvernement, and loi\textsuperscript{18} appeared frequently, hardly surprising as terms that helped to frame the context of the communiqués. The frequent appearance of the names of the two Le Pens is another straightforward finding, a sign of how often the communiqués promoted them as the only candidates determined to stop the excesses of immigration. More interesting than these bland terms, however, were the true object of this research; the words that shed light on the way the party articulates its conceptualization of immigration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>‘02-’05</th>
<th>‘06-’10</th>
<th>‘11-’14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clandestins</td>
<td>1.03%</td>
<td>1.09%</td>
<td>1.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>européenne</td>
<td>0.96%</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>0.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>massive</td>
<td>0.19%</td>
<td>0.34%</td>
<td>0.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insécurité</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
<td>0.48%</td>
<td>0.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>droit</td>
<td>0.64%</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>0.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asile</td>
<td>0.19%</td>
<td>0.12%</td>
<td>0.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assimilation</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.04%</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laïcité</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.06%</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>musulman</td>
<td>0.06%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identité</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>0.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sécularité</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multiculturel</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamique</td>
<td>0.13%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antisémitisme</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>souverainété</td>
<td>0.13%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>préférence</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communautarisme</td>
<td>0.12%</td>
<td>0.24%</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2

Word frequencies for a wide range of such terms are presented in Figure 3.2 at left. These words were chosen for analysis based on both the high frequency with which they tended to appear in the content, and their charged nature as positive (or, more commonly) negative terms.\textsuperscript{19} In Figure 3.2, at left, these words are presented with the

\textsuperscript{18} France, French, political or policy, national, government, and law, respectively.

\textsuperscript{19} The words in the table, in order, translate as illegal immigrants, European, massive, insecurity, law, asylum, assimilation, secularism, Muslim, identity, secularity, multicultural, Islamic, anti-Semitism, sovereignty, preference, communitarianism.
percentages they made up of the semantic spaces in four year blocks, 2002-2005, 2006-2010 (discarding 2009, as described above), and 2011-2014. This temporal division is also a practical one in this specific context, as it reflects 3 distinct periods in the party’s history: the aftermath of Jean-Marie Le Pen’s advancement to the second round in the 2002 presidential elections, perhaps the peak of his FN’s success, the mid-decade downturn that included a weaker performance in the 2007 election, and the party’s revitalization and renewal under Marine Le Pen from 2011 on.

This wide-lens approach serves the useful purpose of hinting at trends to be further investigated at the year-by-year level. Several interesting findings are immediately noticeable. One is a substantial increase in usage of the term “clandestin,” the French term for illegal immigrant. Another is a substantial decrease in usage of the word européen(ne), or European. Finally, though perhaps seemingly an innocuous development, the word massive (massive) appears over three times as much in the last four years than it does in the first. Many of the terms investigated did not show similar trends, however. Certain words, like insécurité (insecurity) effectively remained stable across the whole time period (from .32% to .48% and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>clandestin</th>
<th>Européen</th>
<th>massive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'02</td>
<td>1.84%</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'03</td>
<td>.38%</td>
<td>.38%</td>
<td>.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'04</td>
<td>.44%</td>
<td>.88%</td>
<td>.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'05</td>
<td>.86%</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
<td>.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'06</td>
<td>1.55%</td>
<td>.17%</td>
<td>.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'07</td>
<td>.72%</td>
<td>.83%</td>
<td>.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'08</td>
<td>1.24%</td>
<td>.80%</td>
<td>.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'10</td>
<td>.90%</td>
<td>.62%</td>
<td>.45%</td>
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<td>'11</td>
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<td>.16%</td>
<td>.37%</td>
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<td>2.31%</td>
<td>.14%</td>
<td>.49%</td>
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<td>'13</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
<td>.86%</td>
<td>1.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'14</td>
<td>1.81%</td>
<td>1.05%</td>
<td>1.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORREL</td>
<td>.54*</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.3
*This figure jumps to .74 with the exclusion of the 2002 outlier.
back down to .39%), often demonstrating that kind of variation in the middle. Other words, like *préférence* (preference) despite their apparent presence in stories on immigration more broadly, did not tend to appear in the word’s immediate context.

The usage of these types of words will be further investigated below through analysis of frequency queries from the full text of the content. However, before passing to those results, it is important first to break down the three promising trends noted above on a year-by-year basis. The yearly frequencies of each of the three words in question are provided at right in Figure 3.3, above. This year-by-year approach nuances the interpretation of the broader trends identified above. For one thing, while the block data had suggested a gradual increase over time in usage of the word *clandestin*, and that increase is indeed born out by the data, the trend is not a smooth, continuous increase but instead full of variation. After a surprisingly high frequency of 1.84% in 2002, a figure perhaps attributable to the fact that a small number of stories explicitly about *clandestins* would have a large effect given that year's...
relatively small sample size, low frequencies in the beginning of the time period lead to huge percentages in the last 3 years. In fact, the 2.86% frequency of clandestin in 2013 is the highest frequency of any word in the semantic spaces investigated. Figure 3.4 shows this trend directly above.

The frequency of the word européen presents a similarly nuanced story. In this case, a general trend downwards over time is interrupted by higher frequencies in 2013 and especially in 2014. This deviation, too, would seem to have a clear explanation, namely the presence in May 2014 of the elections for European Parliament in which the FN received one of their best results to date. One can postulate that the specter of these elections may have provoked an increased focus on European issues, as well as a reframing of common subjects and tropes in a European lens. Another possible explanation is the way in which NVivo counts different variants of the same word as identical for the purposes of frequency tests. This is normally a good thing in a language where agreement with gender or number complicates orthography. However, in this case, potential conflation of the noun européennes (referring to the 2014 election for European Parliament) with the
adjective *européen(ne)* might have been expected to contribute to the deviation. Manual checks of the frequency of these two forms in 2013 and 2014 failed to support that theory, however. Figure 3.5, above, illustrates these data.

Finally, the word *massive* likewise shows an interesting development. From minimal usage in the first part of the decade, and an even lower dip from 2005-2007, it skyrockets in the last two years of the study, jumping from .49% in 2012, to 1.43% in 2013 and 1.11% in 2014. While this growth is likewise nuanced, it all the same presents the most compelling of these three trends in the semantic space, with a correlation coefficient of .74. Figure 3.6, at right shows the *massive* frequency data with the linear trend line superimposed.

Each of these trends undeniably looks stronger and more compelling at the 4-year block level than looking at the individual years. However, this fact does not render them null and void. Far to the contrary, it is important to affirm that wider trends, even ones that include variation on a year-to-year basis, are notable in and of themselves, and are exactly the kind of tendencies this study is
designed to detect. Gradual prioritization of the word *clandestin* likely speaks to deliberate rhetorical choices on the part of the party, even if its usage did not follow a neat upward curve. In addition, the small sample size of the individual year samples, particularly in the earlier years of the decade, mean that the block figures may actually be a more accurate capturing of rhetorical trends, especially for the way in which they correspond to periods in the party’s recent history, as described above. In certain years where gaps in archival coverage caused smaller sample sizes, individual communiqués, or a set of stories around a particular event could have outsized effects in the data. Finally, given the way in which the 4-year blocks match up with distinct phases in the party’s history, trends at that level is exactly what this project is interested in discovering. These trends paint the picture of the evolution of the party without getting bogged down in the variances of individual years.

Additionally, it is important to remember the effects of the semantic space approach on the data presented above. In determining the content of the semantic space around *immigration*, only the immediate context around the word was queried, and only the 10 words on either side of *immigration* gathered. While this is an enormously useful approach for showing changes in the words the party explicitly uses in conjunction with the all-important term of *immigration*, it nonetheless does not capture the whole story. As an example, consider a story about *clandestins* that only uses the word “immigration” once in a 200-word communiqué. Or better yet, a story about *clandestins* that neglects to use the word *immigration* at all. The existence of both of these types of stories
would tend to under-sample the word *clandestin*; even though the stories are clearly *about* immigration, the semantic space approach won’t identify their full text as relevant and catalogue it as such. This is why it is important to combine analysis of the semantic space word frequency data with word frequency analysis of the whole text of the press releases that were collected as relevant. In order to fully understand rhetorical decisions and shifts in the party’s treatment of immigration, it is important not only to analyze the terms the party chooses to directly associate the subject with, but also what types of things appear in the press releases in general. Taken together, these two approaches combine to paint a fuller picture of the party’s conceptualization of immigration.

**Full Text Results**

The composition of the word frequency results for the full text documents is similar in certain respects to those from the semantic space texts. Many of the same contextual words are again present in force, with *France* or *français* for instance appearing as the most frequent word in seven of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>‘02-‘05</th>
<th>‘06-‘10</th>
<th>‘11-‘14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clandestins</td>
<td>0.29%</td>
<td>0.49%</td>
<td>0.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>européenne</td>
<td>0.86%</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>massive</td>
<td>0.07%</td>
<td>0.09%</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insécurité</td>
<td>0.09%</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
<td>0.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>droit</td>
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<td>0.44%</td>
<td>0.44%</td>
</tr>
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<td>asile</td>
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<td>0.05%</td>
<td>0.34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>assimilation</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
<td>0.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laïcité</td>
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<td>0.06%</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>musulman</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identité</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sécularité</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamique</td>
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<td>0.09%</td>
<td>0.07%</td>
</tr>
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<td>antisémitisme</td>
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<td>0.01%</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>souveraineté</td>
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<td>0.08%</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>préférence</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
<td>0.06%</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communautarisme</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
<td>0.17%</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.7
the 12 years. As with the semantic space data above, the first round of analysis was done at the 4-year block level, before proceeding to a narrower analysis.

Figure 3.7, above, shows the frequency figures by 4-year blocks for the same words as previously investigated. A similar set of trends is identifiable at the full text level. Firstly, increasing usage of *clandestins* is likewise reflected in these figures, again rising from only .29% across the first four years, or roughly one in every 340 words, to .76% in the last period, or roughly one in every 130 words. *Européen* does not seem to have followed the downwards trend identified in the semantic space data, falling precipitously from the first two the second period, but then substantially increasing again. *Massive*, on the other hand, again seems to have increased over the course of the decade, nearly quadrupling in usage from the first set of years to the third. Smaller trends, like an increase in use of *insécurité* and a decrease in *préférence* are also apparent.

A narrower lens helps to better investigate these supposed trends. As before, the year-by-year frequency data for these three main words is presented in table form in Figure 3.8 at left. Similarly to the semantic space data, these results seem to confirm the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>clandestin</th>
<th>Européen</th>
<th>massive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'02</td>
<td>1.81% #</td>
<td>1.05%</td>
<td>1.11% #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'03</td>
<td>.06%</td>
<td>.97%</td>
<td>.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'04</td>
<td>.04%</td>
<td>1.14%</td>
<td>.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'05</td>
<td>.18%</td>
<td>.60%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'06</td>
<td>.77%</td>
<td>.20%</td>
<td>.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'07</td>
<td>.28%</td>
<td>.26%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
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<td>'08</td>
<td>.65%</td>
<td>.59%</td>
<td>.22%</td>
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<td>'10</td>
<td>.44%</td>
<td>.41%</td>
<td>.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'11</td>
<td>.41%</td>
<td>.44%</td>
<td>.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'12</td>
<td>.85%</td>
<td>.34%</td>
<td>.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'13</td>
<td>.71%</td>
<td>.50%</td>
<td>.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'14</td>
<td>1.09%</td>
<td>1.36% #</td>
<td>.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORREL</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. COR*</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>-.57</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These figures represent the correlation coefficient with the outliers (indicated by #) removed.
year-by-year presence of trends identified at the wider block level, though in each of the three cases, an outlier serves to skew any statistical confirmation. In the case of clandestins, the astronomically high frequency of 1.81% in 2002 is especially out of keeping with the wider results, especially since the next two years come in at .06% and .04% respectively. As alluded to above, this result might stem from the small sample size of the 2002 press releases, and/or the presence of a specific event that tended to promote discussion of clandestins.

Drastic outliers similarly mar the other two trends. While européen shows consistent downward movement all the way through decade, 2014 sees a huge jump back up to 1.36%, the highest figure throughout the time period. Massive also sees a start that is out of the flow of the rest of the data, with a frequency of 1.11% in 2002,\(^{20}\) enormously higher than the 5-year average of .056 that follows. The influence of these deviations is apparent in the relatively low correlation coefficients for the whole sets of data, which are .11 for clandestins, -.20 for européen, and -.18 for massive (notable, in particular, because it shows a relationship in the opposite direction of what the trend suggests). Eliminating the single outlier from each pool of data drastically changes these figures however, raising them to the far more compelling .79, -.57, and .68 respectively.

**Tone**

The final piece of analysis that remains to be presented before proceeding to a discussion is that of potential variations in tone. Utilizing the method

\(^{20}\) The fact that content from 2002 produced several outliers is hardly surprising. As the year in which the FN shocked the country and world by advancing to the second round of the Presidential election, it was certainly not “business as usual” for the party.
detailed in the preceding chapter, the lists of word frequencies were analyzed to identify possible shifts in the way the party used positively and negatively-coded words to construct the meaning of immigration. Because of large differences in the sample sizes of the different years in the semantic space data, as well as time limitations on the project, it was unfeasible to simply code every single word in the results. A simple “raw number” cutoff (e.g. the 40 most common words of each year) presented its own set of problems however, namely that differences in the sample sizes from year to year make the years difficult to equate - the 40th most frequent word in 2002 for instance, was used twice, or .41% of the time. The equivalent word in 2010 was used 5 times, which made up only .28% of the sample. In order to remedy this, a percentage-based cutoff was instead utilized in order to better compare like and like. In the event, this consisted of including all words with a frequency above .25%, which amounts to one in every 400 words. The one caveat was that words only used a single time in the sample

![Figure 3.9](image-url)

**Figure 3.9**

*Frequency of Positively and Negatively Charged Words in the Semantic Space around "Immigration"*
were excluded even if they met the frequency requirement. This exclusion was done to eliminate the possibility that single words, included haphazardly and effectively randomly in a much wider body of text, could have an outsized effect on tonal analysis.

This frequency-based approach continued in analysis of the results of the coding, as the frequencies of both negatively- and positively-charged words in a given year were summed. The trends in these figures are presented in Figure 3.9 on the preceding page. An interesting set of insights emerges from a quick glance at this graph. Usage of negative words seems to increase over the 12-year period, peaking especially high in the last several years of the data. Conversely, usage of positive terms seems to have gradually but consistently fallen. These trends are borne out by closer investigation. Again, breaking down the data into 4-year block averages proves useful, showing that usage of negatively charged words nearly doubled from 3.67% from 2002-2005 to 6.26% from 2011-2014. These averages are presented in Figure 3.10 at right. The trends evident in the chart above are all the more clear in this table. The first four-year period sees moderately high negative word use, as well as more than double the positive word use of any other period, making it a rather charged stretch. 2006 to 2010 saw lower usage of charged words across the boards, with the lowest rate of both negative and positive terms. Finally, as alluded to above, the final four years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Neg.</th>
<th>Pos.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'02-'05</td>
<td>3.67%</td>
<td>2.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'06-'10</td>
<td>3.02%</td>
<td>.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'11-14</td>
<td>6.26%</td>
<td>.94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.10
of the study saw an explosion of negative word use, rising explosively to 6.26%, buoyed by 2013, where negative words amounted to fully 10%.

Both similarities with and divergences from these results were to be found in the parallel analysis of tone in the full text documents. The four-year averages produced by this analysis are presented in Figure 3.11, at left. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the same trend of increased negativity over time is present to roughly the same extent as in the semantic space data, with the frequency of negative words again nearly doubling from .64% in the first period to 1.25% in the last. This result is accompanied however by the finding that positivity also increased over the course of the 12 years, increasing steadily from a .57% average to one of .81%. Even more telling is that 5 years (2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, and 2011) had a higher positive frequency than negative. Indeed,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Neg.</th>
<th>Pos.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>’02-’05</td>
<td>.64%</td>
<td>.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>’06-’10</td>
<td>.73%</td>
<td>.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>’11-14</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td>.81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.11

![Figure 3.12](image-url)
even the 4-year average in the middle block of 2006-2010 shows only barely more negativity than positivity. Another deviation from the semantic space findings is the gradual increase in total usage of charged words, with each period representing a higher utilization of valence words than the previous. The frequencies of negatively- and positively-charged words are shown in Figure 3.12 above.

**Discussion**

Before considering the broader themes that tie these results together, it is first important to consider each individual finding on its own terms, in view of working to understanding the specific implications that they promote. Attempting to understand the way in which individual trends tie together then helps to develop answers to the overarching questions that this project raises. In order to do this then, first the implications of identified trends in word usage in the semantic space and full text data are considered. Then, the surprising trends of the tone results are added to this picture, in order to finally combine these two groups of results together for the purpose of discussing the wider insinuations and repercussions that they raise.

**Word Trends**

*Clandestins*

The soaring popularity of the word *clandestins* in both the semantic space and the full text data marks an excellent point of departure. Its clear upward trend certainly seems to suggest a desire on the part of the party to emphasize this aspect of the immigration debate and this word in place of more traditional
terms like *immigré* and *étranger* (immigrant and stranger respectively). Less immediately clear, however, are the motivations behind this shift. What seems likely is that the drive to focus on the illegality of these immigrants may be born of a desire to reframe many of the party’s traditional pieces of immigration policy and rhetoric in a more socially acceptable light by insisting on the ways in which illegal immigrants draw resources from French taxpayers. By talking about illegal border crossings, squatters, and welfare payments, the party draws attention to issues of fairness, security, and legitimacy that go hand in hand with its attitude of “France for the French” and its promotion of *préférence française*. This framing that positions the specter of immigration as directly threatening the livelihoods of the true French, particularly by costing the state high amounts of money in housing, medical care, and even education, is a fear that is constant in the party’s discussions of all of these policy areas. There is a connection to be made as well with empirical changes that have been noted in the party’s stances on abortion, and particularly in the newfound argument that it wastes public resources that could otherwise be spent on senior care (Almeida 2013). In both of these cases, reducing a complex issue to a simple matter of an “us vs. them” mentality prompted by a scarcity of resources serves to prompt the personal nature of these issues, and perhaps produce an emotional charge in voters who might otherwise consider themselves to be not impacted directly.

While the strains placed on national welfare systems and the exacerbation of longstanding issues of insufficient affordable housing, particularly around Paris, are clearly prime concerns of the FN vis-à-vis
clandestins, both of these problems pale in comparison to the connections the party seeks to draw between such immigrants and violence, crime, and insecurity. While the FN has long sought to tie rising crime and immigration rates together, the insistence on the connection between young illegal immigrants, often of North African descent and Muslim confession (and often referred to simply as “jeunes,” or youth, in ever-present scare quotes), and the alleged failures of the urban policies of Presidents Sarkozy and Hollande. In this optic, clandestins, already illegal by nature, are cognitively tied to incidents of violence in the banlieues of Paris and Marseille. By constructing a conception of the immigrant as not only an outsider but also as a burden on collective resources and a threat to social stability – a conception that clandestins prompts in a way that immigrés does not to the same extent – the FN may well be repositioning its rhetoric on immigration to garner more mainstream acceptance and support of the same types of policies. In the absence of wide-ranging changes in its immigration platform, prioritizing discussion of a more commonly vilified type of immigrant may well help the party to contribute the growing view expressed by French voters in public opinion polls – that there are too many immigrants in France and that they use up resources (like jobs, affordable housing, or even scholarships) that rightfully belong to français de souche, the native-born French (Ipsos/CGI Business Consulting, 2013).

Massive

Similar incentives seem to be at work in the case of the rising utilization of the word massive. Just as with clandestins, massive ports a negative
connotation that likewise speaks to the FN’s perception of immigration as an immense force that negatively affects French society and economics in myriad ways. The sharp increase in usage of *massive* coincides with Marine Le Pen’s ascension to the leadership and therefore with the alleged moderation and “softening” that has been associated with *dédiabolisation*. The explosive nature of this change, specifically in the last two years of the investigated time period when it jumps in the semantic space data from .49% in 2012, to 1.43% in 2013 and 1.11% in 2014, also seems to be quite telling, suggesting that it is part of a deliberate change, seeing as this figure of 1.43% is at least 3 times higher (if not far more) than each of the previous years.

In the context of this clear shift towards substantial utilization of what had previously been an unimportant term, it is useful to ask what purpose this increased use may have been designed to serve. Given the way that it suggests that immigration is a problem on an enormous scale, prompting the vision of immigrants (and *clandestins* in particular) simply streaming into the country, *massive* is certainly a negatively charged word, and one that is in keeping with the party’s vision of immigration as a wide-ranging and overwhelming evil. Indeed, *massive* may well serve as the type of heuristic cue that Almeida (2013, 169) discusses: a rhetorical technique used by the party as a means of suggesting programmatic movement or the lack thereof. In this case, as with *clandestins* above, the turn towards *massive* seems designed to present a vision of immigration that is concerned with the effects it has, as a colossal and uncontrolled force, on the lives and wellbeing of everyday French men and
women. Usage of massive is also aligned with a favorite trope of FN communiqués: that the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (or INSEE), the French governmental agency concerned with statistics with a particular focus on economic issues, is a politically driven organization that regularly manipulates statistics, particularly those regarding immigration and unemployment in order to propagate the myths perpetuated by the dominant political elite. These complaints, like the claim on March 7th, 2007 that “the figures (on unemployment and immigration) are shamefully manipulated...” and that “it couldn't be any other way in the approach to the elections,”21 are part and parcel of the party’s view that the dangers of immigration have been systematically deemphasized, disguised, and ignored by mainstream politicians, either through sheer ignorance, or more often in the party’s view, from a deliberate will to break down the country’s borders in view of integrating it into the European project.

Européen

This intrusion of the issue of European integration is a telling one. Indeed, the principal obsession of the FN over the last 12 years, at least as far as quantities of press releases is concerned, would seem to be Europe and the European Union – not immigration.22 Admittedly, European issues have often been associated with immigration by the FN, concerned with the disappearance of border controls brought about by the Schengen Agreement, by the accession

21 « Les chiffres (du chômage et de l’immigration) sont honteusement manipulées... » « il ne pouvait en être autrement, à l’approche des élections. »
22 While this is admittedly an observational claim in nature, the disparity is large enough so as to make it a reasonable one.
of poorer countries into the Union with populations that might stream into France seeking work and welfare, and ultimately with what the party identifies as broader trends of a diminishing of national sovereignty and identity in favor of a homogenized, indistinguishable "Euroland." However, the obsession with European issues in the first part of the decade, clustered around the proposed European Constitution and France's rejection of the document via referendum, goes beyond any single issue and pervades the party's rhetoric in this period. Indeed, this fact would seem to promote the finding of Nonna Mayer that distrust and hostility to the European project is the biggest predictor of FN support (Mayer 2013).

The meaning of the diminishing use of européen is less immediately ascertainable than that of the trends in either clandestins or massive, a difficulty that is added to by the fact that it is the weakest trend of the three. However, given the immense importance of the European issue in the party's platform, it is a significant one all the same. Firstly, it is important to make the distinction that the data presented above do not represent a finding that the party spent less time talking about Europe and European issues over the time period (which, indeed, observationally would seem to be quite far from the case), but instead a drop in the extent to which Europe is discussed in the context of immigration. With this clarification made, it is perhaps easier to conceptualize the way in which the fall in usage of européen represents a reconceptualization of the party's attitude towards immigration, and of which relevant considerations and tropes it is highlighting in its rhetoric.
Specifically, the move away from tying immigration so explicitly to Europe would seem to align with a relocation of fears and emotions surrounding immigration from a more general geographical space concentrated in Europe (and matching historical patterns of immigration) to a more specific grounding in North Africa and the Middle East, and in the specter of radical Islam. This is a shift that has already been widely observed, especially in the way in which the party has taken strong stances against the wearing of hijabs and niqābs, against the service of halal food in both public and private institutions, and against the construction of mosques and minarets, stances that critics of the party have labeled Islamophobic. Indeed, among Marine Le Pen’s most controversial moments in the party’s presidency was her comparison of Muslim prayer in public in Paris to the occupation of the city by Nazis during the Second World War, a remark that saw her stripped of parliamentary immunity by a committee of MEPs (BBC News, 2013). The fall-off in usage of européen then, can be understood to represent a broader shift in the focus of a party that has found a willing formula with voters concerned about radical Islam and its seemingly stark cultural differences with French values of secularism and laïcité. Perhaps the best representation of this shift is the abundance of FN campaign posters about the dangers of Islam, which have often in recent years shown symbols of the religion superimposed on maps of France or pictures of French landmarks with slogans like “No! To Islamism,” or “The immigrants will vote, and you, you’re abstaining?!?”23 Perhaps the best example of the posters is included here,

23 « Non à l’Islamisme » and « Les immigrants vont voter, et vous, vous
at right, as Figure 3.10 and shows a crumpled French flag in front of a Mosque and a woman wearing a hijab. The text is clear enough: “Stop or More? It’s up to you to choose. Go Vote!”

**Tone**

While the above identified trends in word offer insight into specific rhetorical choices being made by the Front National in its discussion of immigration, even more interesting and telling are the tone results, which represent a significant deviation from expectations and from the prevailing interpretation of *dédiabolisation*. Namely, while the common understanding of *dédiabolisation* as a programmatic moderation would seem to suggest that the transition to the “new” Front National under Marine Le Pen would involve the use of less negatively charged language in its discussion of an issue such as immigration, the tone data at both the semantic space and full text levels seems to clearly show the opposite result: that the FN’s rhetoric on immigration has instead become more negative with time, and specifically, with the ascension of the younger Le Pen to power. This is a finding that is bolstered by the strength of the trend at both levels of analysis – in both cases, the frequency of negatively charged words in the last set of four years (which corresponds, it is important to remember, to the ascension of Ms. Le Pen) is only

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abstenez ?!!»
24 « Stop ou encore ? À vous de choisir. Votez ! »
slightly under double that of the first four years, when her father was in his prime.

Before attempting to integrate this finding with the analysis of word trends above, it is useful to consider what this result suggests in isolation. If this shift is considered as intentional (which the size of the relationship in this case seems to make clear), there are three ways the change can be considered, depending on the way in which the policy in question is changed. If the policy on immigration were to have moved in a negative direction (i.e. more stringent, more extreme stances), the shift towards negative tone could be understood as concomitant with wider programmatic change. If policies have remained constant or even moderated, on the other hand, this set of rhetorical decisions is indicative of a desire to project a tone or an attitude that differs from the programmatic shift. As discussed in the preceding chapter, this second case is closer to the truth. While many of the core tenets of the party's immigration policy have remained constant over the last 12 years, what change has occurred has been clearly and solidly in the direction of more moderate and mainstream stances. In this context then, it is clear that the heightened negativity of language surrounding concepts of immigration over the last four years represents another heuristic cue, and likely an intentional one aimed at longstanding supporters who make up the party’s ideological core, that even in the face of slight moderation and widespread media coverage of the party’s new, softer face, it remains committed to its role of fierce, unyielding opposition to immigration.
Synthesis

Uniting the distinct trends described above are a set of common themes that hint at a cohesive set of choices made by the party that offer in turn a great deal of insight into the nature of dédiabolisation. Specifically, the choices to highlight words like massive and clandestins and the vision of immigration that they represent, and the deep-seated motivations that those choices reveal, go hand in hand with the increased negativity identified in the tone results. A return to the three possible methods for an extreme party to enter the political mainstream, discussed in the preceding chapter, helps to illustrate the connection between these results. What seems clear from the start is that dédiabolisation cannot be understood as a simple programmatic moderation. Conscious choices to promote a conceptualization of immigration as an immense consistently negative force that burdens native French taxpayers rule out the possibility that dédiabolisation is truly an across-the-board good faith effort to bring the party to a new more moderate direction, especially given the fact that these rhetorical choices contrast with some moderation on a programmatic level. Equally unsupported by the data is the theorization of a rebranding, with the party employing rhetorical and marketing strategies to present the party as more moderate and mainstream than it truly is at the programmatic level. To the contrary, the trends seem to suggest the opposite: slight programmatic moderation combined with a recalcitration at the rhetorical level on the more extreme aspects of the party’s ideology.
This finding is in keeping with the final possibility for mainstream movement discussed in Chapter 2, that of selective de-radicalization. In fact, the trends identified above seem to neatly fit this theory. While the party has undergone documented policy moderation on some issue areas and has likewise moderated its language on certain others, most notably abortion, these findings suggest that on what has traditionally been considered the party’s bread and butter issue – immigration – that image has been undercut by a sort of entrenchment at the level of word choice and language. With the regularity that they are used, *clandestins* and *massive* become heuristic cues for longtime FN supporters eager to know that their party’s orientation towards immigration has not substantively changed. Likewise, subtle increases in the frequency with which the party used negatively charged words both in the immediate context of the word immigration and in the whole text of press releases on that topic, help to signal an underlying ideological opposition to and distrust of immigrants and the problems they bring.

Ultimately, these changes combine to allow the party to successfully navigate the competing set of incentives discussed so many times throughout this paper. In trying to maximize its electoral success, the FN must successfully calibrate its policies, language, and tone so as to broaden its appeal to previously uninterested demographics and individual voters as much as possible, while simultaneously maintaining its grip on the affections of its ideologically rigid core that is wary of any sign that their party is acquiescing to dominant currents of political thought. It is important to note in this context then, that this shift in
attitude, as identified in the results above, is not one that is perceptible to the average consumer of these communiqués (or even a close follower of the party’s), let alone to an average member of the voting public. The shifts in word choice and tone that compose this attitude are by no means apparent in manually reading even a large number of communiqués. Indeed, these are the types of trends that are only truly discoverable through this sort of systematic analysis.

It is worth interjecting for a moment to consider the intentionality of all these changes. Ultimately, without access to the internal deliberations of party leaders, it is impossible to know exactly to what extent these changes are the result of deliberate, considered policy. Two alternative prospects present themselves. First, it is possible that these changes have happened at an unintentional and subconscious level. While the data show clear trends, it is not outside the realm of possibility that these rhetorical shifts are the result of subconscious changes in the way that party officials conceptualize the concepts at hand. Second, it is likewise within reason to imagine that these changes are mere coincidence, or are prompted by external events in a way that this analysis was unable to detect. Two things point to the opposite conclusion, however, one that sees the FN as deliberately altering its rhetoric. First, it is established knowledge that under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the FN has become hyper aware of the power and effect of word choice, as demonstrated by its commitment to words like mondialisme and vraie droite (Alduy 2014). Second, the trends evidenced by the data are strong to a point where it is somewhat hard

25 Globalization and “true right”
to imagine a complete lack of awareness on the part of party leadership, and
nearly impossible to imagine the changes as complete coincidence. In addition,
the temporal siting of the trends adds further credence to the idea that the
changes represent deliberate strategy.

Indeed, while these trends are promising on their own, diverging as
clearly as they do from the dominant narrative on the evolution of Marine Le
Pen’s Front National, in order for them to hold worthwhile meaning in the
context of this study, it must be clear that they result from not just gradual
changes in tendencies or a randomly timed decision at some point in the last 12
years, but from a change embarked upon as part of the strategy of
dédiabolisation embarked upon by the party after Marine Le Pen was elected to
the presidency. As previously discussed, numerous other changes in the party’s
public-facing comportment and persona date to that time and are generally
understood to be directly tied to Marine Le Pen, including what other changes in
language have been observationally identified, like her rejection of anti-Semitic
invective and even the term far-right. Tying the changes identified in this study
to her would then go a long way as to justifying a direct link between the
strategy of dédiabolisation and these specific shifts, rather than a simple
correlation.

In the event, this connection is very clear in the data. Firstly, in the word
frequency data, the explosive jumps or falls that make the trends notable are
between the 2nd and 3rd sets of 4 years in each of the cases, a compelling
concurrence given that the this point marks the transition between Jean-Marie
and Marine Le Pen’s presidencies. While each of these cases presents different sorts of variation on a year-by-year level, clear jumps can be seen in the semantic space data for instance between 2011 and 2012 in the clandestins data, or between 2012 and 2013 for massive. Similarly, the tone data jumps enormously in negativity at both the semantic space and full text levels between 2011 and 2012. The concomitance of these trends, which point towards the same desire on the part of the party to have its cake and eat it too by paying lip service to moderation while subtly hinting to its supporters that not much has changed, and their common location in and around the ascendance of Marine Le Pen to the party presidency and her first nationwide election, strongly suggests that they form part of the strategy of dédiabolisation that Ms. Le Pen has embarked her party on, albeit a part of it that does not mesh well with the image she has liked to present of a modernizing party.

It is exactly that dissonance, between the will on the part of Ms. Le Pen and her fresh-faced leadership cadre to present the Front National as having turned the page and the empirical fact that the party has taken a negative turn in recent years on its core issue, and has continued to find ways of assuring its more extreme factions in the face of media coverage of its moderation that makes these results so interesting. Running directly contrary to unequivocal portrayals of dédiabolisation as a simple moderation, this set of findings challenges and complicates that idea by showing that the party seems to be moving in opposite directions at the same time – changing the face it actively shows to the world while offering more of the same beneath the surface. This
gap between what the party says and what the party means was always going to be the heart of this research, and the Front National is not unique in the world of politics, within France and the world beyond, at paying careful attention to its language to give different audiences what they want to hear. All the same, given its surging importance in this political moment, seemingly on the precipice of true mainstream political success and acceptance, the finding that its centrist shift in policy is undercut by a set of clear trends of language and tone that point in the opposite direction is extremely notable.

Limitations

Of course, while this project has produced exciting results, it is not without its limitations. Chief among these are the previously discussed variances in the content gathering process. Disparity in the way that press releases were catalogued in the Internet Archive, along with infrequent gaps where no content was accessible, meant that the samples that were ultimately collected are not all perfectly complete. However, this does not threaten the legitimacy of the results, given that adequate content was gathered for each year in consideration (with the exception of 2009 which was therefore excluded), and that the kinds of analyses this project utilized involved broader patterns of tone and word choice, not the variation among individual press releases. Future work that is able to systematically collect content directly from the party would be able to remedy this difficulty, but the difficulties imposed by poor cataloguing are indeed inherent to this kind of work.
Secondly, this project is limited in that it concentrated only on a single specific topic, that of immigration. While early versions of the study aimed at likewise analyzing content related to the family and gender (for the way in which those issues have been a focus of observational studies of the party's change) and agriculture (as a relatively emotionally and politically uncharged issue), limitations of time and resources forced a narrowing of the work. The advantages of expanding this sort of careful systematic analysis to a wider body of content are obvious. While insights into the way in which the party has discussed immigration are interesting and telling, given the in which the issue has long been the chief concern of the party, the ability to generalize these findings would be greatly augmented if similar results were to be found looking at other issues. Furthermore, our understanding of the party’s rhetorical strategies more broadly and of the intricacies of dédiabolisation in particular can only stand to gain from empirical analysis being performed on a more diverse set of the content it produces.

It is also important to note that it is possible that the same kinds of variations in cataloguing that contributed to the variations in yearly samples described above may have also caused slight differences in what content actually was gathered over the course of the time period. While in years where there was less content overall, particularly at the beginning of the decade, it was simple enough to just read through communiqués to determine whether or not they pertained to immigration, later years proved more difficult and sometimes required different strategies. Two issues were at play. Firstly, while stories in the
early years tended to be relatively short and to be fully contained on the
*communiqués* page directly, releases in later years tended to be longer. Secondly,
because the later years contained far more press releases overall, it was simply
unfeasible to read every word of every single press release. As a result, while
each release was certainly scrutinized and gathering content remained by all
means a painstaking process, in later years titles, summaries, and key words
attached to the posts by the party were utilized in order to be able to quickly
identify releases that concerned immigration. While the use of such ancillary
cues assuredly did not result in the false inclusion of non-relevant content, it is
possible that press releases that concerned immigration in a minor way (a fact
that was, as such, not reflected in titles or key words) would not have been
included as they may have been in earlier years. However, if such unintentional
exclusions were made, they would have been so on an extremely small scale in
relation to the dozens of stories per year. In addition, none of the later years saw
troublingly low numbers of press releases, as would be expected to be the case if
this concern were to truly skew the composition of samples.

Finally, while not necessarily a limitation of the study, it is important to
consider the effect of the choice to use only press releases, rather than other
forms of rhetorical content. As content that is deliberately designed for
consumption by the press and general public, press releases are staged by
nature: a carefully constructed narrative of the way that the party would like to
present itself. While this is in many respects a strength of the project, for the way
in which it allows contrasts between this presentation and subtle nuances
beneath the surface, other types of content would provide other advantages. Including speeches or interviews for example could help to reveal the ideology of the party with polish removed, given the way that oral communication is less easily controllable than carefully timed and edited communiqués, and the fact that there are therefore more possibilities for revealing gaffes and misstatements. Indeed, the most outrageous and heated rhetoric of the Front National is likely not found in its press releases but in the speeches given by Marine Le Pen and other officials and candidates of the party, and in their off-the-cuff responses to questions from members of the voting public and from members of the press.

**Conclusion**

On April 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2015, merely a week before the completion of this thesis, Marine Le Pen loudly and publically sanctioned her father for having referred to gas chambers in Nazi concentration camps as “a detail of the history of the Second World War”\textsuperscript{26} (Mestre 2015). Declaring herself to be “in profound disagreement [with Jean-Marie], on the style and the substance” (Mestre 2015)\textsuperscript{27} of this remark, Marine blasted what is only the latest of the President of Honor’s provocations, confessing that she has “abandoned the idea” of understanding the motivations of her father, and decrying the way in which such remarks “complicate the task” for the party, and “parasitize” its chances (Gailero 26 « Détail de l’histoire de la seconde guerre mondiale ». 27 « En profond désaccord sur la forme et le fond ».
Jean-Marie’s response to this scolding was clear and revealing: “One is only ever betrayed,” he said in an interview in far-right newspaper *Rivarol*, “by ones own” (Faye 2015). While this seemingly simple *tête-à-tête* seems to be a somewhat isolated affair, it is enormously revealing of the current state of a party that is grappling with its identity at a time where it appears to many like its only path forward involves leaving some part of the past behind. The complaint of an unnamed party official following this latest outburst of Mr. Le Pen’s is particularly telling: “[Mr. Le Pen] doesn’t want power, he doesn’t want to win, he just wants to amuse the crowd” (Mestre 2015). This attitude raises a clear set of questions: must the Front National compromise on hardline ideals in order to win? Is Marine Le Pen’s “new” Front National necessarily different from the party of her father? Does she want it to be?

Over the course of the preceding three chapters, this project has attempted to answer these questions, which are essential to understanding the surprising success of a party that has long been treated as little more than a pesky group of provocateurs. The importance of such an understanding cannot be overstated. As the “political earthquake” (Fressoz and Bonnefous 2014) that the FN’s recent successes have provoked continues to rumble, a whole set of assumptions about the party have been brought into question, none more so than the idea that the Le Pens and company are far too extreme to ever make any mark in the political mainstream. With a series of encouraging electoral results

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28 « Abandonné l’idée », « compliquent la tâche », « parasitent ».
29 « On n’est jamais trahi que par les siens ».
30 « Il ne veut pas du pouvoir, il ne veut pas gagner, mais seulement amuser la galerie ». 
in hand and poll numbers reflecting wider appreciation of the brand of nativist
cultural protectionism touted by the party, the FN is undeniably threatening to
shake the status quo of two-party dominance. Understanding what is different
and “new” about the FN under Marine Le Pen then, is of paramount interest to
scholars both narrowly and broadly interested in the topics at hand. While
scholars of French politics have an obvious connection to the subject, it is
likewise of interest to scholars concerned with the functioning of political
parties and electoral systems, and in the way in which extreme parties attempt
to secure electoral success. Furthermore, the FN’s rise is of enormous import at a
popular level as well, both inside France where it is the current obsession of the
political-media class; and in the world beyond, where it is perhaps the most
striking example of wider trends of success of the far-right in Europe and around
the globe.

While there exists a body of theory that attempts to explain “flare-ups” of
the far-right, almost all of this literature focuses on events of 30 years ago and is
also insufficient to explain success on the scale that the FN has experienced in
the last few years. What research has already been performed on the this topic
directly, however, has tended to focus on a variety of apparent factors, that while
undoubtedly contributing to the party’s success, are not sufficiently unique to
the French case so as to explain the extent to which the FN’s experience has
outpaced those of similar parties in similar circumstances. Furthermore, this
research has almost exclusively employed an observational mode, which while
providing important insights into the way in which changes in the party have
contributed to its victories, is unable to draw the kind of causal links that require more systematic, empirical analysis. In order to embark on this kind of empirical, data-driven study, this project first identifies the strategy of *dédiabolisation* that the party embarked upon in the wake of Marine Le Pen’s ascension to power as the key factor in beginning to change public opinion and media coverage of the party and, in prompting a reconceptualization on the behalf of these actors, of the FN’s identity and potential role in mainstream political debate.

In particular, this study worked towards determining the true nature of *dédiabolisation*, and specifically, whether it actually represents as much of a pure programmatic moderation as has been portrayed. More precisely, it aimed at investigating how the FN constructed its strategy in order to respond to the dueling incentives to attract new, more mainstream voters while simultaneously holding on to its ideologically rigid core. Three possibilities were presented: that *dédiabolisation* truly represented a wholesale programmatic moderation; that it instead was effectively a rebranding or marketing campaign; or, finally, that it instead exemplified a selective de-radicalization, with programmatic moderation in some spheres accompanied by maintenance of the status quo or even rightward movement in others. Selective de-radicalization is also theorized to include intentional rhetorical choices designed to project different messages to potential new converts and to old supporters. In order to determine which of these competing possibilities more accurately represented *dédiabolisation*, a content analysis of the party’s rhetoric surrounding the issue of immigration was
performed, with a specific focus on analyzing the way in which word choice and tone in the semantic space surrounding immigration and in discussion of the topic more broadly has changed from 2002-2014.

Several highly promising trends were identified. First were a set of clear changes in word usage that were present both in the semantic space and full text data. Utilization of both clandestins (illegal immigrants) and massive (massive) skyrocketed in the years after Marine Le Pen came into the party presidency. Similarly, usage of européen (European) fell in those years, before rebounding (likely due to the presence of European elections in 2014). Additionally, in direct contradiction of expectations, the tone data showed that usage of negatively charged words likewise rose steeply under the younger Le Pen. Given that what programmatic change has occurred on the issue has been moderating in nature, the combination of these results paints a picture of a party that is trying to paint a contrasting picture in the language that it uses. By insisting on the illegal and overwhelming nature of the immigration problem, the party has shifted the focus of its rhetoric to an emphasis of the societal costs and burdens placed on French taxpayers by unwelcome outsiders. Likewise, the fall in usage of européen goes in line with an increased focus on immigrants from the Maghreb and the Middle East, a scare tactic in line with the party’s increasing fear-mongering on issues related to Islamic presence and influence in France.

More importantly, given the scale of the jump in negative words, it seems clear that the subtle decisions to emphasize certain words and certain frames of immigration have resulted in a clearly discernable shift in the overarching tone
in a negative or more extreme direction. This finding supports the conceptualization of dédiabolisation as not a simplistic programmatic moderation, but a more nuanced and carefully calibrated attempt to attract new demographics without scaring off longstanding supporters. While it is impossible to perfectly know the minds of FN decision makers, the data suggest a sort of deliberate double messaging. Specifically, with programmatic changes moving in a more centrist or mainstream direction, the data indicate that these changes must be understood as an attempt to undercut that change by projecting a message of stability on an issue that is key to the party’s identity. This being the case, the characterization of dédiabolisation as a selective de-radicalization seems to be highly accurate. While observational studies have succeeded in identifying some issue areas in which the party has softened its stances, and such changes are identifiable even on the key issue of immigration, this set of findings, derived from the very words party officials are choosing the use suggests that while some policies may be changing, the attitudes and ideals behind them are not.

While this research is a promising foray into this sort of close analysis of a highly topical and constantly evolving issue, it is by no means conclusive or sufficient. Rather, this is a topic rich for further exploration from all manner of directions. Future researchers would do well to expand the pool of content under investigation to determine whether the trends identified in press releases concerning immigration continue across the party’s communiqués. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, a similar analysis of oral rhetoric such as
speeches and interviews would also lend a more nuanced touch to this analysis. Finally, expanding the temporal setting of the study would be a strong way of seeing the historical roots of these trends, and whether such kinds of variation in rhetoric are commonplace for a party that has often needed to provoke to garner attention. The study would also benefit from such a historical perspective for the ways in which it might lend insight into changes in the way the party itself has conceptualized immigration.

Ultimately however, this project stands on its own as an insight into the nature of a party in the midst of a grand transition. No longer languishing in the margins, far from media or popular attention, the Front National has shaken up the French political system unlike any other third party ever has. No longer the pest throwing rocks from without, the FN has succeeded in building a strong base of voters from across many demographics, attracting voters from across the country with a vision of a France that is truly for the French and channeling the anger and frustration of ordinary French men and women who are fed up with high unemployment, a flagging economy, and infighting among “traditional” politicians. How able the party will be to continue to build on these gains remains to be seen, especially facing the opposition of the established political and media elites in France, and indeed, the criticism of those groups in other countries across Europe and the world. In fact, this uncertainty is precisely what makes this such a fascinating and important topic. What is clear is that the prevailing interpretation of just what is different and new about Marine Le Pen’s FN doesn’t quite have it right. The results of this study show that the party may
not fully mean what it’s saying, or at least, may not truly feel what it’s doing. Ultimately, this is perhaps the most startling aspect of these findings, or possibly even the most troubling: that a party that is holding on to many of the same radical ideals and morals that it has held for the last 50 years has recognized that it can have success just by covering them up, or altering the window dressing, without truly changing them. This then, is the story of dédiabolisation, and of the Front National’s rise, to rejoin the words of Sylvain Crépon: “changer un peu pour que pas grande chose ne change” – “change a little so that nothing changes” (Crépon 2012, 17).

**Afterword**

As this thesis was going to press, another development in the spat between Marine and Jean-Marie Le Pen garnered an enormous amount of worldwide media attention. Blasting her father as plunging into a “downward spiral between burnt-earth strategy and political suicide”\(^{31}\) and for attempting to “take the party hostage,”\(^{32}\) Ms. Le Pen announced that she would seek to exclude him from running as an FN candidate in future elections (Front National 2015). While this information came too late to integrate into the body of text, it is nonetheless a fascinating development, and perhaps a confirmation of the extent to which Ms. Le Pen is determined to reconstruct a “new” Front National that is free of the burdensome weight of it and her father’s extremist past. With the next Presidential elections in France approaching in just two years time, this is a

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\(^{31}\) «Spirale entre stratégie de la terre brûlée et suicide politique».  
\(^{32}\) «Prendre le Front National en otage». 
moment of immense import for the party. Can it follow through on the kind of success it has been hinting at? Will Ms. Le Pen and her colleagues garner true representation in the national level government? Or is this just yet another flare-up, drawing the world’s attention and alarm before the inevitable crash and burn. As is the way with such things, only time will tell.
Bibliography


RTS Info. "La victoire de Copé à l'UMP confirmée par la commission de recours." 


