

The Extreme Right's New Face:
A Study of the Front National's Influence on Xenophobic Discourse in France

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Introduction

In 2011, Marine Le Pen was chosen as the new president of the Front National, a far-right French political group, after her father, the only leader of the Front since its creation in the 1970s, stepped down from the position. A short period later the viewing public, including my French host mother and I, waited to hear the announcement on the 8 o'clock news that Marine Le Pen intended to run as a candidate in the 2012 French presidential elections. At first, I didn't understand why so much controversy surrounded this announcement. However, once I understood that the Front National is frequently considered a racist and xenophobic political party by scholars, the media, and the French public itself, I became interested by how this kind of party could have a strong enough following to receive this amount of media attention. France's national motto is "liberté, égalité, fraternité," so it seemed unusual to me that a party with such blatant xenophobic origins could rise in popularity, remain strong for over 40 years, and show no signs of disappearing today.

How is it that a party such as the Front National has risen in popularity in a country that promises to provide all of its citizens with equal civil rights? The French today are worried about issues such as unemployment, the economy, and crime. Throughout France's history, the solution to these sorts of worries has been to blame outsiders as the root of these problems. The Front National's rhetoric places the blame for the country's troubles on immigrants, and in polls as much as 38% of French people agree with the party's sentiments (Marcus 67). While the Front National was once seen as only a minor party and has yet to become one of the large mainstream parties, it has become more of a major player over the years. Even when the Front

National does not win elections, other parties have been forced to respond to its claims, which demonstrates the party's political influence.

Scholars have offered many answers to the question of how the Front National has gained a place in French politics and then managed to keep this position as populist parties in other countries have fallen out of favor. Jonathan Marcus argues in *The Front National and French Politics* that the rise of the Front National is based on more than simply good political timing. In this work published in 1995, he suggests that in order for the Front National to solidify its position in French politics, it will need a new leader and a new political strategy. Both of these conditions have occurred since 2011. In *Fascism, Populism, and the French Fifth Republic*, Catherine Fieschi has researched the role that the Front National has had on the French political system and vice versa. She found that the French political system actually increases the likelihood that parties like the Front National will develop while at the same time preventing them from having any significant political influence. Edward G. DeClair in *Politics on the Fringe: the People, Policies, and Organization of the French National Front* has explored the ways in which the Front National has evolved over the years to expand its voter base and gain more support. Because Marine Le Pen only became the party's leader in 2011, current literature has relatively little to offer on this new political phase.

My research question is how the Front National has changed the discussion of xenophobia in France. Through my research, I have found evidence to support the theory that the party has had three main influences on the discussion of xenophobia: 1) the party has used anti-immigration as a mask for xenophobia, 2) it has influenced similar rhetoric in mainstream political parties, and 3) the party has softened the terms in which it presents xenophobia in order to make it more acceptable to the public.

I have explored English language literature that analyzes the factors in the rise of the Front National and the relationship that the Front National has had with national politics and immigration issues. This literature includes scholarly monographs and articles published in academic journals. In addition, to gauge the reaction of the French public to the Front National and to examine the way that the party attempts to create its public image, I have examined many articles from the two widest reaching French newspapers *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*. These newspaper sources have been especially useful in creating a portrait of the current state of the Front National where older literature may be outdated.

Chapter One explains the state of immigration in France beginning with the increase of European immigrants brought about by the industrial revolution and traces the major changes in immigration up till the present time where the increasing trend is that of immigration from North African nations. Understanding the history of immigration in France makes it possible to gauge how the French public exhibited xenophobia sentiments before the Front National's creation. Chapter Two introduces the creation of the Front National and the role it has had in the French dialogue about xenophobia. Chapter Three discusses the recent changes that the Front National has made to soften the discourse of xenophobia and to gain more support from voters. This chapter emphasizes changes made since the beginning of 2011 due to the change of party president from Jean-Marie Le Pen to his daughter Marine Le Pen.

Chapter 1: Xenophobia and Immigrants in France

Traditional Immigrants in France

Xenophobia has had a long history in France that has been coupled with a history of immigration. France welcomed immigrants to reduce labor shortages at different periods within the past 160 years. These immigrants faced, however, the same discrimination and fear of foreigners that immigrants face today. The immigrants who came to France in the past have had an influential effect on the population of the country. Today between one-third and one-fifth of French citizens are descendants of those who emigrated from other countries within the last 160 years (Fysh 8). These numbers demonstrate that France has successfully integrated many immigrants into its cultural structure in the past. Since the Front National claims that these earlier immigrants were easier to assimilate into society than the current immigrants who are North African and/or Muslim in France today, it is necessary to look at the history of immigration in France within the last one hundred years in order to compare these patterns to more recent immigration patterns in France.

A major change in historical patterns of French immigration took place in the 1920s and 1930s. The substantial increase in numbers of immigrants allowed into France during this period resulted partially from the need to rebuild after World War I as well as the need for foreign workers to fill labor shortages and recover economically (Cross 610). Before the First World War, the number of immigrants was 1.18 million representing 2.9 percent of the French population at its highest in 1911. After the war the number rose to 2.98 million making up 6.6 percent of the French population in 1931 (610). These immigrant workers came mainly from

other European countries. In 1926, the top four nationalities of immigrant workers in France were Italians (32%), Belgians (14%), Spanish (13%), and Poles (12%) (Cross 632). Most of these workers were either single men or men whose families remained in their home country.

These immigrants who came as workers were not expected to remain in France permanently and were therefore not expected to integrate into French society. In the article “Immigration: Amnesia and Memory” Gerard Noiriel writes, “during each period of inflow over the past century, in a repetitive and symptomatic fashion, French public opinion has viewed immigrants as transient workers destined to return ‘to their country’” (370). In some cases these foreign workers were completely separated from French culture. Owners in the coal industry signed agreements allowing Polish communities to have native priests and teachers. As a result, these Polish communities retained both their language and religion (Fysh 17). Cases such as this stand in contrast to the argument that all European immigrants easily integrated in French culture in the past.

Besides filling the labor shortage in the early twentieth century, immigration was also used as a means of repopulating a French nation that was in a demographic decline. Pronatalists, who wanted to raise the native French birthrate, like Albert Troullier made arguments that “immigration should allow us to wait for the re-establishment of the French demographic power, without modifying the special characteristics of the race” (qtd. in Camiscioli 603). From the second part of this statement, it is clear that fear that foreigners might alter the traditional foundations of the French nation was present at this time as well.

A second major wave of immigration into France occurred in the twenty years following World War II. According to James R. McDonald in “Labor Immigration in France, 1946-1965,” there were three main types of immigrants during this time period: permanent immigrants,

seasonal immigrants, and Algerians who as French citizens were not subject to control by the Office National d'Immigration (118). The permanent group of immigrants included people, mainly Eastern European and German, who had been displaced by World War II as well as immigrants who came for work (169). Again, as in the period following World War I, the acceptance of these immigrant workers was based on a need for more laborers to fill the shortage due to wartime losses. This time the need for workers was especially great in the fields of metal work and construction (117). Many of the labor areas needing workers were considered "too menial, too poorly paid, or otherwise unrewarding" for more educated North Europeans to want these types of jobs. However, Southern Europeans and Africans took these jobs because there were few opportunities in their own countries (117).

Most of the immigrants who filled the labor shortages after World War II from 1946-1965 came from Italy, Spain, and Portugal. These nationalities are similar to those who came in the first wave following World War I. However, when immigration from Italy began to decline after 1958 and the numbers of immigrants from Spain and Portugal were not sufficient to fill the demand for workers, agreements were made in 1963 between the French and Moroccan governments to allow immigrant workers from Morocco into France (121). This agreement with the Moroccan government marked a beginning in the change of traditional immigrant nationalities in France. The number of immigrants from North African countries rose significantly during this period following World War II. For example in the case of Algerians who faced less regulation than other North African immigrants since Algeria was a French colony, the number of Algerian men looking for labor entering France in 1946 was about 10,000, but by 1965 this number had risen to 160,000 (118). Overall, the number of immigrants from

North African countries has risen as the number of immigrants from European countries has declined.

Conflicts with Traditional Immigration

The history of xenophobia in France is demonstrated through the reception that this European section of immigrants received in France. Even though immigration, and therefore the invitation of foreigners into France, was necessary to fill labor shortages, this was adopted with the expectation that foreigners who remained in France would assimilate into French society. Some have suggested that immigrants from European countries have a much easier time assimilating into French culture than African immigrants. McDonald suggests that the Italian and the Spanish had the easiest experience integrating into France because of “long-settled permanent colonies into which the new migrants may easily move” (134). However, this does not seem like true assimilation because these migrants do not actually integrate into French society if they are instead remaining concentrated in certain areas which retain many cultural aspects of their origins.

Although xenophobic sentiments in France are currently aimed at immigrants from North African countries and focus on the supposedly vast cultural and religious differences between these immigrants and the French, there is much evidence to suggest that former European immigrants also faced the same prejudices as non-European immigrants today. Exactly who the French consider foreigners has changed over the past two centuries. Peter Fysh and Jim Wolfreys in their book *The Politics of Racism in France* suggest that “far from blending smoothly and painlessly with their French cousins, European immigrants were often greeted with indifference, rejection, or outright violence” (10). Troubles with immigration have historically

presented a problem in France especially during times of nationwide crisis. Following the failings of the harvest in 1847 and 1848, demonstrators with the cry “down with foreigners” made their sentiments known in Paris and five other departments (Fysh 11).

In some pamphlets circulated by the extreme Right in 1938, foreigners were referred to as “Italian dregs, Russian mould and German dung” (21). Certainly this wording is as hostile and insulting as some xenophobic propaganda today. Attacks like these cast doubt on the idea that parties like the Front National are any more extreme than previous campaigns against foreigners. The spirit of xenophobic sentiments that foreigners pollute the French nation remains in extreme Right propaganda today. The key change in current xenophobic sentiment is that instead of targeting other European immigrants, the extreme Right, and now even more mainstream parties, blame immigrants from North African and Muslim countries for social and economic problems in France. Although the Front National states that the problem is immigration, the real issue seems to be a fear that foreigners pose a threat to the purity of the French identity. Xenophobia historically has been an issue for France, and even though the subject today is presented as anti-immigration, it still remains a problem today.

Immigrants Today in France

Although the Front National presents today’s immigrants as being mainly from North African backgrounds, this is not the case. According to data available from the 2008 census through the INSEE, out of the total French population of 62 million, there were a total of 3,714,505 immigrants. Immigrants of African nationalities only outnumbered immigrants of European nationalities by 1.8%. Those of African nationality make up 41% of foreigners in France while those of European nationality make up 39.2% of foreigners in France. The largest

percentage of immigrants in France from a foreign nationality is the Portuguese who made up 13.2% of immigrants. Immigrants with an Algerian nationality made up 12.7% of immigrants, and immigrants from Morocco made up 11.9% of immigrants. This means that out of the 3,714,505 immigrants, 490,724 were Portuguese, 470,776 were Algerian, and 443,536 were Moroccan. The Front National portrays today's immigrants as mainly North African and Muslim, but this data shows that the percentages of immigrants from other European nations is only somewhat, but not dramatically, lower than the percentages of immigrants from African nations. These statistics call into question the Front National's claims that France is being overrun or invaded by immigrants from a North African background. It is true, however, that these numbers do represent a shift from earlier times when European immigrants made up most of the foreign population in France. In 1968, 72% of the immigrant population in France came from European origin, and the percentage has dropped dramatically to 39.2% today (Feldblum 127).

However, the percentage of immigrant nationalities on the census may not give the full picture of the national origin of French demographics. As Noiriel mentions, since ethnicity is not legally allowed as a question on the French census, those who are foreigners have "disappeared from the historical scene when they or their children became legally French" (374). This means that it is difficult to look at data such as how many French citizens today are descended from other European backgrounds or African nationalities. The reason this question is not on the census is that immigrants are assumed to have been fully integrated into French society once they become legal French citizens even though this is often not the reality.

Another problem that aggravates the difficulty of immigration issues is that those perceived as immigrants may not actually be true immigrants. Marcus writes that "in a field

where perceptions are often more important than facts, definitional problems abound. Many people regard the second-generation of North African immigrants born in France – the so-called ‘beurs’ – as immigrants, though for all legal purposes most of them are actually French” (75). In this case, the Front National’s solution of limiting immigration would do nothing to affect these legal French citizens of North African descent because these people are not actually immigrants. The perception that these people are still immigrants reveals how anti-immigration has become a cover for xenophobia.

A fundamental way that North African immigrants differ from European immigrants is that the Maghreb was formerly colonized by the French. The loss of these colonies represented a loss of French power in the world compounded by the fact that the conflict was a bitter, violent affair. Particularly in the case of Algeria, seeing these former French subjects living in France brings back reminders of the defeat that France suffered. The Algerian War lasted eight years from 1954-1961 and millions of French people alive today lived during the war. In the end, France lost the territory where it had been present for 130 years, and the loss of Algeria marked the end of the French Empire (McCormack 1131).

The leading figures involved with the Front National at the time of its creation in the 1970s, including Jean-Marie Le Pen, had been supporters of *Algérie Française* (Marcus 18). Although the Front National does not openly relate the loss of France’s colonies with their anti-immigration stance, according to Davies, “at root, the Front National view is that the French Empire should never have been dismantled” (31). In a country suffering from a crisis of national identity, this reminder of the loss of the French Empire not surprisingly heightens tensions.

Integration and Assimilation into Society

In the face of immigrant influences entering France, assimilation has become a way of maintaining the French identity. One of the main criticisms about today's non-traditional immigrants is that they are unable to integrate into society, which is particularly problematic because France follows a model of assimilation rather than multiculturalism. Sociologist Robert E. Park's definition of assimilation is "a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups, and by sharing their experience and history are incorporated with them in a common cultural life" (qtd. in Van Tubergen 8). This definition of assimilation is vague and seems impossible to achieve. The Front National's description of how it expects immigrants to assimilate into society is very vague as well. In France assimilation means that the immigrants should be incorporated into the larger French culture and completely renounce their ties to their previous culture and nation. To integrate into French society, the immigrant must be willing to make changes. Under the French ideal, the overall French culture is not altered by this assimilation.

An important concept in understanding the policy of integration and assimilation into French society is that "the French nation is seen as a state (State) and not an evolution" (Noiriel 372). This means that the French nation is understood to have a certain set of cultural definitions that have remained static over the course of the nation's history. While, in actuality, the French nation has changed over the course of time, the national identity is built on the myth of a core that has remained the same. This idealized complete assimilation of North African immigrants into the French culture is simply not possible because culture is not static.

The French model of integration has been perceived as failing since the 1980s with the beginnings of noticeable urban violence (Schain 222). However, the link between a lack of integration and violence may not be quite as strong as some claim it to be. Despite statements by

the Front National and other political groups that Muslims cannot successfully integrate into French society, evidence suggests that in many ways this category of immigrants is as capable of integrating as other immigrants. According to Fysh, North African immigrants' children "have adopted 'western' attitudes to dress, food and music, have little knowledge of or interest in Islam and little sympathy for traditional attitudes to family life and relations between the sexes" (144). In addition, French is the language of communication that more than half of Arab parents use with their children (Fysh 144). Since the majority of North African and Muslim immigrants have integrated well in significant ways into French culture, most of them seem neither unwilling nor unable to integrate into French society. Upon closer examination, therefore, the threat that these immigrants will cause a change in the national French identity seems to have little basis in fact, especially since national French identity is never clearly defined.

However, it is true that in some areas Muslim practices do conflict with French cultural norms. These conflicts are especially visible in areas such as the wearing of religious headscarves in places such as state schools which have a ban on the wearing of religious symbols. The French public first became aware of this issue in 1989 after three girls from a Maghreb background at a school in Creil were not allowed to attend class while wearing their headscarves. Yet despite the debate that this incident caused in the political arena and in the media, studies show that the majority of Muslims polled did not insist that Muslim girls be allowed to wear the headscarf in schools. A study done in 1993-1994, found that only 2000 girls, a small number of the total population, tried to wear the headscarf to class during the school year (177). Overall, this data suggests that most Muslims were content to follow French laws even when these laws may have intersected with religious practices. Therefore, the

assertion that religious differences make it impossible for Muslim immigrants to integrate into French society also seems to lack substance.

Instead, it appears that the perceived difficulties of this group to assimilate have been used mostly as a political tool. Besides this, while I have referred to these immigrants as a group, it is important to remember that the circumstances of each individual immigrant may differ. When political groups make blanket statements about all North African immigrants or all Muslim immigrants, they give the impression that these immigrants have collective group goals. Sectioning these immigrants into a group and stressing the cultural differences between French and non-European cultures turns the situation into an "us versus them" conflict. The perceived problems become not just dislike of individual immigrants who actively resist integration, but suspicion that all North African or Muslim immigrants have malicious intents towards the French people and their way of life. However, putting immigrants into these types of groups does not reflect the reality of immigration because as Fysh points out "not all Arabs are Muslim [and] not all Muslims are Arab" (143). If the problem were truly that religious differences prevent Muslims from living in French society, the Front National would have to be more specific in the target of blame because it does not cover the possibility of North Africans who are not Muslim or Europeans who are practicing the Muslim faith.

This conflict brings up the question of what it means to be French. While the Front National offers many slogans about French identity, such as "France and French First," the party never fully describes the French identity in concrete terms (Marcus 53). In a time period of uncertainty and change, it seems that part of the French public fears that the French identity is indeed being lost. Responding to these fears and emotions, the Front National offers to define French identity not by stating what this identity is, but by stating what it is not. Identifying traits

that are not French serve as a unifying factor that is just as strong as a defined French national identity. The fear of immigration and culturally different foreigners represents a displaced fear of the loss of identity.

Fear of the “Other” or the Foreigner

While the failure of immigrants to integrate into French society is claimed as one of the reasons that immigrants, specifically North African or Muslim immigrants, should not be allowed into France, there is more to the political rhetoric urging the exclusion of these immigrants than simply this claim which seems unfounded in the majority of cases. The Front National has designated immigrants as the “other.” This group is excluded from inclusion in the national identity. Since the concept of the nation emerged, this kind of exclusion has occurred in order to create national identity and is not limited only to the French case.

However, this type of exclusion has had a long history in France. K. Steven Vincent in the article “National Consciousness, Nationalism, and Exclusion: Reflections on the French Case” points to the French Revolution as the time period where the idea of “the republic as composed of the immense majority of the nation, who must defend themselves and the republic against a small minority of adversaries” first emerged (445). In addition to this beginning, similar sentiments of hate and fear of those who are different were present in France during the Dreyfus affair, Vichy, and the Algerian war. Therefore, the affairs of today appear to be a continuation of a history of excluding groups considered as “others” with slight adaptations to today’s current condition in regard to the background of those excluded.

In the case of North African and Muslim immigration in France, the issue has been slanted sometimes further than just positing these immigrants as a threat to the French nation and

culture by stating that these immigrants are, in fact, an actual violent threat to the safety of France. According to Peter Davies in *The National Front in France: Ideology, Discourse, and Power*, the Front National claims “that Muslim immigrants in France, and the West in general, act not just as short-term invitees, but agents of Islam with a powerful mission to combat ‘infidels’” (146). What this suggests is that these immigrants have harmful intentions towards anyone who is not Muslim. By creating the idea of a common enemy, the Front National is also creating pressure for the French people to band together behind the political party.

The support for anti-immigration measures reflects anxiety about many of the problems that the French nation faces. According to Marcus “immigration has become a sort of shorthand for a complex pattern of concerns—the fear of unemployment, of housing problems, rising crime, AIDS, drug abuse, and uncertainties about France’s place in the world and the meaning of what it is to be French” (76). The problems are affected by many more factors other than just immigration. Although political parties like the Front National suggest that all of these problems have root in immigration issues, these parties have simply harnessed the anxiety about these problems and turned this anxiety into support for the party. Given the support that the Front National has gained over the years, it seems that the Front National has been successful at using this anti-immigration angle.

Chapter 2: Creation and Rise of the Front National

Creation of the Front National

As Chapter One demonstrated, xenophobia has been present in France long before the founding of the Front National. However, I argue that the party has been a factor in the change of the discussion of xenophobia today. The Front National was formed in 1972. Although Jean-Marie Le Pen is closely associated with the party, he is not the party's founder. The leaders of the Ordre Nouveau, a "post-war neo-fascist organization" created the party as a respectable front for far-right politics (Marcus 12). Leaders of far-right groups who banded together behind this front chose Le Pen as the leader because his reputation as a moderate, at least among the far-right, would give credibility to the front organization (18). When the Front National split from the control of other far-right parties, Le Pen retained his position in the party. His influence has been one major aspect in the differences between the Front National and other right-wing parties.

While the Front National is sometimes considered to fall under the category of "national populism," Fysh suggests that this label overstates similar surface characteristics like "propaganda techniques and style" without acknowledging that the Front National differs in "both doctrine and social and economic contexts" from national populism (76). Fysh suggests that the Front is much more than a continuation of far-right or national populism calling the party the "most successful attempt at rebuilding a fascist party since the war" (142). Fysh has come to his conclusion based on the misleading nature of the party's rhetoric, the actions of leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, and the reputations of many of the Front's members (142). According to Fieschi, the most common elements of fascism are "(ultra-)nationalism, a philosophy of rebirth, revolutionary values, a reliance on violence, extreme elitism, populism, collectivism, and the

importance of the strong leader” (105). The Front National has many of these characteristics, but regardless of whether the party is fascist or not, the fact that it can be so easily labeled this way shows why the party’s popularity makes some people in France and around the world concerned.

Although it can be difficult to define the Front National’s ideology, Davies argues that the Front National does have a “set of discernible ideas” (14). According to Davies, its two main ideologies concern the nation and identity (66). The Front National is highly concerned with French nationality and keeping France “French” with only a vague idea of what “French” means being offered by the party. The idea that foreigners might corrupt France contributes to the party’s xenophobia. For the Front National the nation is an entity that a citizen is a part of due to a mixture of blood and shared history (Davies 89). The party views many different areas as threats to the French nation including “uncontrollable immigration, Jewish influence, demographic decline, separatism, Euro-federalism, cosmopolitanism and Americanisation” (20). The concern about immigration, particularly of immigrants from North African or Muslim origin, stems from the desire to protect the nation.

Anti-immigration, which hides the party’s xenophobia, has always been a major issue within the party’s ideology. However, it is important to note that the party’s rhetoric in regard to immigration has changed dramatically. The discourse has altered to focus more “on the alleged problems of immigration, on what is viewed as the cultural chasm separating Islam and the West, and on the growing terroristic threat of Arabic groups” (21). In this way, the party is able to offer a logical-sounding basis for its support of anti-immigration policies. Using these terms to discuss immigration and therefore xenophobia prevents the group from appearing too overtly hostile.

Jean-Marie Le Pen has made it clear that the party does not oppose all immigration. Instead, the Front National feels that immigrants should integrate into French society and that those who do not want to integrate or cannot successfully integrate should not be allowed to remain in France (Fysh 8-9). For this reason, Muslim or North African immigrants tend to be the targets for xenophobic sentiments because these immigrants visibly and culturally stand out as different from the French. Religious symbols such as headscarves Muslim women sometimes choose to wear or the prayers of Muslims in the streets are two visual reminders of this cultural difference.

The Front stresses the idea that France is “an entity in need of constant protection from external elements” (Davies 67). The external elements are anything that threatens French tradition which includes, as expected, immigration, but also the European Union. While the Front National is not opposed to a ‘Europe of nations,’ it is not in favor of a European Union that has the potential to separate nations from their individual unique identities (96). This issue is one that gets less media exposure than the immigration issue, but the Front National’s stance on the European Union is important because it demonstrates the central theme of loyalty to the traditions of the French nation and the need to protect French identity.

Davies points out that the Front National’s “loyalty to ‘Europe’ only exists so long and so far as the national integrity of France is unaffected” (22). Marine Le Pen’s 2012 presidential campaign called for “une Europe des nations libres” (a Europe of free nations) (Marine Le Pen, *Mon Projet* 15). This category includes taking back control of France’s borders to more strictly control the entrance of foreigners, leaving the euro currency and returning to French currency, and replacing the European Union with a pan European union that guards the sovereignty of each

individual nation (15). The interest surrounding the changes to the European Union suggests that the fear of foreign influence also includes influence that comes from other European nations.

Party Issues

Although I will discuss a few areas other than immigration, the immigration issue is the one that most exemplifies the way in which the Front National's xenophobic ideologies are masked. Some question exists about how much immigration issues were stressed in the party's early campaigns. Simmons states that "Le Pen uttered hardly a word about immigrants in his 1974 election campaign" (Davies 20). However, others suggest that the immigration issue has played a role in the party's discourse from the beginning. Marcus writes that the party's slogan for the 1973 elections "Defending the French" illustrates clear anti-immigration sentiments (20). While the Front National does focus on issues other than immigration in certain campaigns, these other issues do not receive as much media or voter attention.

Anxiety about current increasing immigrant populations is present in many countries other than just France, but what sets apart the Front National's discussion of immigration is that the party has portrayed France's immigration today as a continuation of past invasions. In an interview published in book form aimed at the youth, Le Pen describes immigration as follows, "Toute l'histoire de notre continent est liée aux invasions aussi bien des Huns, des Arabo-Berbères que des Mongols ou des Turcs" (All the history of our continent is linked as much to invasions of Huns and Arabs as to Mongols or Turks) (Jean-Marie Le Pen, *L'Espoir*.) In evoking past invasions of France, Le Pen suggests that current immigrants have intentions of conquering France in some manner, and the link to the past gives the idea that the party is following in the footsteps of a heroic past by preventing invaders from taking over France. He

suggests that the party should oppose immigration in order to protect France from a kind of invasion. This metaphor of immigration as an invasion invites the French public to see immigrants as numerous faceless enemies who must be kept out at all costs justifying the Front National's call for extreme immigration restrictions.

Early Campaigns

The rhetoric and propaganda used by the Front National in its early years is described by scholars as "crude and unrefined" (Davies 20). The focus on race as part of the immigration issue is clearly displayed by the use of such phrases as "the survival of the white nations" in 1978 and discussions of the "biological and historical specificity of the French people" (21). This early party rhetoric focused on the racial aspect of immigration rather than the cultural aspect.

In the early 1980s, the Front National used the message that "Two million unemployed is two million immigrants too many. France and the French first" to capture the attention of unhappy voters (Marcus 53). These kinds of statements illustrate the two most common tendencies of the party's public discourse. First, it blames immigration as the root of problems such as unemployment in France. Second, it stresses the Front National's commitment to protecting the French nation. This slogan is simple, straightforward, and easy to remember. However, it is too simple to address what the party truly means by immigration. As Marcus points out, "the tone of the immigration debate in France derives more from fear and emotions, rather than from facts and reasoned argument" (94). Many political entities in France have used this technique of appealing to fear and emotion, but in the past the Front National seemed to be one of the most prominent users of this kind of rhetoric.

Since its early years, the Front National has made an attempt to change its image to keep from driving away voters and to add an appearance of respectability. As Davies points out, one way that the party has made this change has been through the language it uses when explaining its platform to the French public. Davies writes:

The “new” language employed by the FN put a heavy emphasis on concepts like “difference”, “identity” and “exclusion”, and referred to the foreigner, simply and subtly as “the other”. The FN’s hostility to immigration is now expressed in political, cultural and economic terms, and the references to race and colour are now far less blunt. (21)

Although the Front National has a reputation of being overly radical, the party has made many attempts to change this image. Given the not inconsiderable success the party has enjoyed even as a minor party over the years, it seems that either a section of the French public is extremely radical or the party has succeeded in convincing a portion of the voters that it is not too extreme. At most times within the Front National’s history since it caught the public’s attention ten years after its creation, between one-fourth and one-third of the French public has not been opposed to its ideas (Marcus 67).

The Front National has tried to appeal specifically to the French public using the idea of French culture and France as a nation. Since the early 1980s, the Front National has adopted Joan of Arc as one of its symbols. As the familiar story of Joan of Arc goes, Joan was a girl of 17, the daughter of a French farmer, who under guidance from God led the French army to defeat the English at Orléans during the Hundred Years’ War. As perhaps the most famous part of the history goes, she was captured by the English and

burned at the stake. She was named a saint in 1920 and is widely regarded as one of the most important heroines in French history (“Saint Joan of Arc”). Although the use of Joan as a symbol has been controversial, the Front National specifically chose Joan of Arc to represent its idea of the French identity. According to Davies, the Front National sees the nation as united by “shared memories, suffering and the notion of sacrifice” (19). As an important historical figure in France, Joan of Arc represents both victory and martyrdom.

However, the party’s appropriation of a national hero has created concern because a religious symbol has been turned into a tool for political promotion. In addition to this unease, the supposed correlation between Joan’s successful repulsion of the English and Le Pen’s campaign against North African immigrants has little basis for comparison (Davies 112). According to Michel Rocard, Joan herself would have had no concept of France as a nation because today’s concept of the French nation did not arise until its creation during the French Revolution (115). The Front National’s campaigns were good at catching the attention of the public; however, with a closer look, it becomes apparent that these campaigns had little real substance. Although the Front National has compared the current immigrant population to an invasion, this conflict has no resemblance to the military struggles during the Hundred Years’ War.

As the cultural appeal of Joan of Arc as a symbol suggests, the Front National has tried to associate itself with the French public. Campaign posters in 1994 declared “Le Pen, la France” and “Le Pen, le peuple” (Chombeau “Trois Français”). These slogans offer one of two choices—a person is either fully part of France and part of the French culture, or a person is not. This creates an exclusive sense of what it means to be French.

The Front National suggests that it represents the French public's views. In some ways this is true because the Front National has certainly gained more voter support than one might expect from an extreme Right party. However, despite this voter support and the image that the Front National tries to portray of being the people's party of choice, a large majority of the French public has felt no connection to the Front National at all. A survey done in conjunction with *Le Monde* found that three of four French people surveyed viewed the Front National as a danger to democracy (Gerard, "Trois français"). Although, of course, *Le Monde* is a left-leaning media source while the Front National is a right-wing party, when considering the results of the survey, it still seems that the Front National's radical image in the minds of the French public means that it was not at all the party closest to the people as it tried to portray itself.

Appeal to Voters

The public perception of the Front National plays a role in the amount of voter support that it receives. Although Le Pen has been in the run-off for the presidential election, the Front National has never been able to garner enough voter support to have a serious chance of winning the presidency. The Front National has been more successful in the regional councils of France, but the number of seats that the Front National holds in this area has been in a decline. In order to gain enough public support to become a mainstream party, the Front National must change its radical image that currently alienates it from the majority of the voting public.

The Front National has in the past tried to distance itself from overly radical or extreme groups to evade labels of Nazism or fascism. In 1992, the Front National brought a newspaper to court for referring to it as "antisémite" and "raciste" ("Dans les attendus"). Ultimately, the

damages awarded to the Front National were extremely small. The real purpose of this charge appears to have been publicity, and it was not successful in changing the French public's views.

The party has had difficulty in avoiding association with Nazis and fascism partly because the party itself is an extreme Right party but also partly because its leaders, particularly Le Pen senior, make public remarks that suggest anti-Semitic tendencies linking the party with Nazis in the public's minds. One of the troublesome statements made by Le Pen is that "les chambres à gaz n'ont été qu'un détail de l'Histoire" (the gas chambers were just a detail of History) (Gerard, "M. Le Pen"). Regardless of how the French public may feel about current immigration trends or the perceived loss of national identity, the majority do not want to be associated with a party leader like Le Pen.

Rise in Popularity

The Front National would never have been able to affect the discourse of xenophobia had it not become widely recognized by the public. Although existing xenophobic sentiments have aided the party's popularity, its rise is also based on its leader and its foundation at an opportune moment in France's history. In the beginning years of the Front National, the party had difficulty gathering public support. In the 1974 presidential election, Jean-Marie Le Pen only received .76 percent of the vote, a tiny figure for a leader later to become a candidate in the 2002 presidential election runoff (Marcus 52). While it seemed at first as if the Front National would not play a large role in mainstream politics, the Front National finally had its first breakthrough in the 1983 Municipal elections more than 10 years after its creation when discontentment with the Left in national power caused voters to express their unhappiness in local elections.

Today, the Front National is France's third largest party according to votes cast in elections. Mark Neocleous and Nick Startin demonstrate in their article "'Protest' and Fail to Survive: Le Pen and the Great Moving right Show" how the vote for Le Pen has increased even since 1995 in 90 of France's 94 *départements*. They suggest that their data based on 2002 elections indicates that a "core electorate of the far right voters in France" supports the party and that this core electorate has been constantly growing since the 1995 presidential election (148). This indicates that the Front National's voter support has yet to reach its peak and seems likely to continue to increase in the future.

There are several possible explanations for the success and continued presence of the Front National in mainstream French politics. According to scholars, there seem to be three reoccurring reasons that populist parties gain ground in countries: charismatic leaders, unemployment problems, and nationalism, all of which can be seen in the Front National's case. In addition, the media has played a large role in helping the Front National receive the public's recognition and helped it remain in the public's view. Since I will discuss the role of the media later in this chapter, I will now look at the first three reasons mentioned.

Charismatic Leaders

The Front National can almost be regarded as a cult of personality revolving around Jean-Marie Le Pen even if he is no longer the party's president. The party's literature has been carefully constructed over the years to make Le Pen appeal to target voters. He is styled as "Le Pen, the son of a Breton fisherman; Le Pen, the paratrooper in Indo-China and Algeria; Le Pen, the youthful Poujadist Deputy; and Le Pen...the potential saviour of the nation" (Marcus 28).

Each of these constructions reveals a different aspect of what is important to the party and the type of voters that it wants to attract.

The first of these descriptions, Le Pen as the son of a Breton fisherman, is important because it positions Le Pen as having a similar background as his target working class voters. The second, his military service, attracts voters because Le Pen is portrayed as committed to fighting for his country. Le Pen's association with Pierre Poujade who led a protest of small shopkeepers and artisans against tax laws in 1953, the third point, is less helpful in attracting voters since Le Pen split from the movement after six months due to disenchantment with the movement's ability to transition into an actual political group rather than a protest. This association is useful to Le Pen, however, in that it places him as representing the interest of common people. In the final representation, Le Pen can be viewed as the "potential savior of the nation" as long as one's definition of the French nation matches the Front National's definition.

However, these portrayals of Le Pen aimed to capture the attention of certain groups of voters are only one reason why voters fall under the sway of Le Pen's influence. Le Pen has what Marcus calls an "undisputed rhetoric ability—a freestyle form of speaking reminiscent of American charismatic evangelist—[which] has done much to consolidate his hold over the party faithful" (28). The power of speaking and drawing an audience is important in drawing voters to the party. Not only does he convince voters when he speaks, but he also is interesting enough to frequently attract the media's eye thus exposing the Front National to greater recognition from the French public. While this media exposure is not always positive, it spreads publicity of the party more quickly than would be the case otherwise. Due to these reasons French voters disenchanted with other political figures find Le Pen attractive as a strong, charismatic figure.

Unemployment

Unhappiness about levels of unemployment may also be a factor in the reception of the party. According to the INSEE, unemployment rates were at 3.4% in 1975, a year after the Front National was founded. In 1982 when the party had its first breakthrough, unemployment was at 6.9%, and as of 2010 the unemployment rate had risen to 9.4%. Clearly, increasing unemployment is a worry that the French public faces.

Studies on people in undesirable socio-economic situations suggest that they feel frustration at being unable to fulfill material desires (Lubbers 124). In order to deal with these frustrations, people in this situation are “more likely to submit themselves to a psychological need, i.e. to submit to strong leaders or to strong traditional norms, as well as to submit supposedly powerless and deviant people to themselves” (124). The Front National is particularly appealing to those in this psychological condition because it has both a strong leader and a devotion to traditional norms as well as a platform that focuses on the disenfranchisement of a less powerful group of people, immigrants. While it is not easy to say exactly how much direct effect unemployment has had in increasing support for the Front National, Marcel Lubbers and Peer Scheepers conducted studies published in the article “French Front National Voting: A Micro and Macro Perspective” which found that there is a small effect of the unemployment level in a region on the attitudes towards “ethnic out-groups, on an authoritarian attitude and on French identification” (135). These attitudes match those supported by the Front National.

Another way in which unemployment has encouraged voters to turn to the Front National is that the working class, the class most affected by unemployment, sees itself as abandoned by the French Left parties. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the French Left changed its target voters from working class voters to more mainstream voters. Neocleous and Startin point out the correlation between this time frame and the beginning of the Front National’s rise in popularity

(151). Abandoned by their traditional Left parties, the working class voters have turned to another party willing to respond to their concerns.

French Nationalism

As might be expected from the name of the party, the Front National places emphasis on nationalism and national identity. The Front National plays on the French public's fears about national identity in order to gain support for itself. The party warns that the "'genuine' or 'authentic' French population could soon become a minority in its own country, thus losing its own unique culture" (Davies 121). The real problem in the question of national identity is that it is difficult to define the "genuine" or "authentic" French identity. The Front National uses the slogan "France for the French," but who is considered French and who is not is never explained.

The uncertainty related to national identity runs deeper than troubles with illegal immigrants entering the country. The ethnic make-up of all European countries has been changing, not just recently, but for many years. There are many considered "foreigners" who are legally European citizens. DeClair writes, "Europe's borders could slam shut tomorrow and all clandestine immigration be immediately halted, but Europe will still need to address its national identity crisis through a prism of emerging multicultural society" (206). A larger trend of the re-evaluation of the each country's national identity is taking place throughout Europe. Conflicts over immigration will arise until the question of identity is solved, and in France the Front National has been able to use this unease to its advantage.

The Front National's Voters

There are conflicting perceptions of who exactly the voters supporting the Front National are. Although the vote for the Front National is sometimes referred to as a "protest" vote by

media, meaning that people who vote for the Front National do not fully support the ideology of the its candidates but want to signal that they disagree with the paths of mainstream parties, this dismissal of the Front National seems too simple.

Some suggest that the voters for the Front National have little in common with each other except a “common hostility toward immigrants but are otherwise an extremely diverse group” (Neocleous 150). According to Etienne Schweisguth, there are two main categories of voters drawn to the Front National. The first of these is a “traditionalist” block of voters who are older, linked with the Right, Catholic, and middle-class. The second is a “populist” block of younger voters who are non-Christian and working class. Since the 2002 election the support of this “populist” block has increased in importance and size and now rivals the first block as the largest number of supporters for the Front National (Neocleous 150). This increase suggests that the voter demographic for the Front National in France is growing to include more of the public.

The Front National is unusual among Right political parties in France in that its supporters are more likely to be male than female because masculine support typically falls more to the French Left (Fysh 67). The party’s voters are also more likely to be young, and it has experienced a decline in support from those over 65 (67). Data collected and analyzed by Lubbers and Scheepers suggests that those who live in areas with high immigrant populations are not more likely to have unfavorable attitudes towards immigrants but are more likely to vote for the Front National (140).

Success of Right-Wing Parties in Other Countries

France is not the only country to have experienced a revival of the far-right. In Austria Jorg Haider’s Freedom Party had similarities to Le Pen’s Front National. Haider, like Le Pen,

was a charismatic leader who made provocative and shocking statements (DeClair 195). In addition, the Freedom Party has similarly used voters' unhappiness with current political leaders to move the party from obscurity to mainstream politics (195). Similar to Le Pen, Haider was able to utilize his country's xenophobia to gain support (195). The case of this far-right party in Austria differs somewhat from that in France because Austria did not have the "severe economic crisis and unemployment levels that other European members did" (DeAngelis 77). However, the Freedom Party still received 30% of the vote in elections in 1999. The party collapsed in 2005, but its offshoot the Alliance for Austria's Future still remains (Duncan 338). Like the Front National, the party's influence on mainstream parties has been more important than its own political power (339).

In some other countries, far-right parties enjoyed a brief period of popularity during the 1980s and 1990s before disappearing into the background for mainstream voters. Some of these parties included the New Democracy in Sweden, the Political Spring in Greece, and the Danish People's Party. Germany's Republikaner Partei, the most successful German far-right party in terms of media attention during the time period, illustrates one such plight. In the 1989 elections, the party received 7.5% of the vote for seats in the Berlin parliament and 7.1% of the vote for the European parliament (DeClair 199). However, the party has not been able to repeat these successful results, collapsing as rapidly as it had come into power. While the party still exists, it has once again become a minor party lacking influence. DeClair suggests that the main hindrance to the Republikaner Partei's success has been its lack of party organization—an area in which the Front National has done much better (199). Similar to the Front National, the party claims that it intends to defend the nation from foreign influences and uses the idea that it is protecting the nation (William 114).

The Front National's rhetoric differs from that of other populist parties. M. H. Williams did an analysis of the presence of xenophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric in the 2002-2008 manifestos of European populist parties. The study included "the French National Front," "the Austrian Freedom Party," "the Austrian Alliance for the Future of Austria," "the German Republicans," "the British National Party," "the Belgian Vlaams Blok," and "the Belgian National Front" (116-117). In the years 1990-2003 preceding the period of manifestos studied, only the Front National showed intense anti-immigration platforms. For all of the other parties, data either was unavailable or showed a decline (118). The only two parties to show "direct anti-immigration language" in their manifestos were the Front National and the Austria Freedom Party (119). This information suggests that until 2008, the Front National's anti-immigration rhetoric remained much harsher than rhetoric in similar populist parties. Although the Front National has begun to soften its xenophobic rhetoric, it seems that its rhetoric has generally been more extreme, especially towards immigrants, than in other similar European parties.

In the article "A Rising Tide for Jean-Marie, Jörg, and Pauline? Xenophobic Populism in Comparative Perspective" Richard A. DeAngelis calls the Front National the "grandfather of the current crop of European populist parties" because it has maintained support throughout multiple elections and plays a role in influencing mainstream political issues (78). As this comparison with other populist political parties reveals, the main reasons for the party's continued electoral success and influence comes from a combination of conditions in France, the organization of the party structure, and the leadership of Le Pen himself. Although the trend of rising populist parties took place throughout Europe, the longevity of the Front National is due to factors that are a unique combination of the Front National's attributes and the conditions in France. This is not to say that other countries are not experiencing the same political problems but that the

solution of the Front National arose at an opportune time in France and has been able to organize itself as an answer.

Influence in Mainstream Politics

Although the Front National has yet to and probably never will have a candidate elected as president and is still not considered a mainstream party, it has had an undeniable effect on the French political arena. The party's influence has sparked similar rhetoric in other parties and in this way has increased these parties' use of xenophobic discourse. The party represents the views of only about 15 percent of French voters (Fysh 69). However, even when the Front National does not win elections, other parties have been forced to respond to its claims and in many cases mimic its rhetoric demonstrating the party's political influence.

Parties on the Left have had difficulty challenging the Front National on immigration because the Left cannot make its rhetoric match the intensity of the Front National's anti-immigration rhetoric (Marcus 74). For example, while the Socialist Party has a strict immigration policy, it does not blame immigrants for France's social problems and places an emphasis on integrating immigrants into society rather than suggesting that immigration be halted (Marcus 74). The Socialist Party appears to have a more viable solution than the Front National, but publicity-wise, the Socialist Party has a disadvantage because it cannot inflame the public's fear in order to generate support as the Front National is able to do. The failings of the Left to win back votes lost to the Front National seem due to its inability to respond to public sentiments and to demonstrate to the public how it has done so.

The Left is not the only side having to respond to the effects of the Front National. The mainstream Right made an attempt to draw back voters who had switched loyalty from the mainstream Right to the far-right Front National. Marcus suggests that the mainstream Right

parties “see the immigration issue as one they can use to win back voters from the National Front” (74). The Right made an attempt to mimic the Front National’s rhetoric to convince voters that the Right was equally concerned with immigration issues. Those in positions of power such as President Jacques Chirac “openly discussed the ‘noises and odors’ of immigrant neighborhoods.” Another major figure on the Right, former President of France Giscard d’Estaing wrote an article published in *Figaro Magazine* that discussed the “immigrant invasion” (DeClair 93). Through statements like these, the Front National’s ideological concerns spread throughout French politics. Immigration became an issue that had to be dealt with because of the Front National. The need to draw voters back from the Front National is one reason that it is able to influence politics even though it is not one of the mainstream parties, but it seems to have an influence on the ways in which immigration is discussed as well.

In addition, the willingness of other parties to state that the Front National’s major issue, that of immigration, is a valid issue may further add to the voter support of the Front National. Marcus suggests that the Right’s policy of trying to “outbid the National Front leader” has only managed to “legitimise his position and increase his support” (157). Marcus suggests that as early as 1986, the Chirac government attempted to put a stop to Le Pen by taking up the issue of “national identity.” The government did so by reforming the French Nationality Law, one of Le Pen’s own demands. The proposed reforms would have made the process of gaining citizenship more strict (82). When the reform eventually passed, it was less strict than proposed, but still stricter than the previous law. Although Jean-Marie Le Pen felt that the reform did not make adequate changes, the direction of the reform was still influenced by the need to react to his party.

As shown in Chapter One, the perception of immigration issues differs from the reality, and both the Front National and parties that have mimicked the Front National's rhetoric are responsible for this divide. When leaders on the Right discuss immigration, they use terms and ideas that sound much like those of the Front National. This strategy of adding strict immigration laws to platforms has not managed to recapture all the votes lost to the Front National.

One main reaction of mainstream parties after seeing that other methods have failed is to state that the solutions the Front National proposes for immigration and other problems are "too extreme" (Marcus 143). The Left attempted to change public sentiment regarding racism with a campaign called SOS-Racism which argued for immigrants' rights and spread a message with the intent to reduce racism against both Arabs and Jews. This organization founded in October 1984 and supported by President Mitterrand "spread the anti-racist message, especially among the youth, through marches, pop concerts, and other local events" (80). While this campaign gathered some support, it was never successful in completely erasing the Front National. Those in other parties opposing the Front National attacked this plan. Opponents of the Front National seemed unable to organize themselves fully, and both Left and Right suffered from this lack of political unity. The Left and Right seemed frequently to hamper each other's efforts to fight the Front National due to what Marcus calls "mutual suspicion" (157). Part of the Front National's success, ideologically if not necessarily in terms of votes, can be attributed to the reactions of other parties.

Even in the 2012 presidential election, the Front National's influence can be seen in the Right's rhetoric and responses particularly that used by Nicholas Sarkozy. In the first televised debate of the 2012 campaign, Sarkozy made the remark that there are "trop d'étrangers sur notre

territoire” (too many foreigners in our country), a remark that echoes the sentiments the Front National has expressed for years (E. Vincent). Besides suggesting that immigration should be limited, throughout the campaign, he has also focused on the theme of guarding the French identity in the face of outside cultural influences. One of the Front National’s most evident influences can be seen in Sarkozy’s position on marking halal or meat slaughtered in the traditional Muslim way. Marine Le Pen has said that this meat needed to be clearly marked. While Sarkozy first dismissed the idea that the meat should be marked, he later changed his position to match the Front National’s. Polls measured an increase in his favor after he began to increase and stress these anti-foreigner aspects of his campaign (Erlanger, “Toulouse”).

Media Portrayal of the Front National

Another factor that has played a role in the Front National’s success is the media. The Front National has official propaganda such as pamphlets and books created by party heads, and it also has unofficial propaganda distributed in weekly magazines (Fysh 127). All forms of publicity both official and unofficial are carefully constructed to promote the image that officials in the party would like the French public to receive. However, the Front National is not always able to control the image of the party that the media presents. Throughout the Front National’s history, the media has been both a negative and a positive method of exposure.

The Front National’s leaders claim that the media’s reluctance to give exposure was one of its main hindrances to rising in popularity (DeClair 54). Once the media began covering the party, the Front National began its upward rise in the political world. Before 1984, the media did not cover the Front National, not because of bias, but simply because the party did nothing that

would interest audiences since it had few voters and little political importance (56). This means that the media was not the initial factor that sparked the rise of the Front National.

Despite this, the media has played an important role for the Front National for two main reasons. First, the media is crucial for new political parties because it allows these parties to gain exposure to more of the public than they could have reached otherwise. Second, the way in which the media portrays a party, in the Front National's case usually in a negative way, influences how the public views the party.

The media has been extremely helpful for the Front National in certain instances. Before the 1984 election, Le Pen appeared on a French political talk show called *L'Heure de Verité*. Many, including Le Pen himself think that this exposure represented a pivotal point in the party's success. Le Pen said in 1984:

Just like that, I must have changed. Just like that, I became an acceptable politician. Just like that, I must have changed my "look," just as they are saying today. And yet, I had changed neither my look, nor my message, nor my language, nor my behavior. What had changed, was that a television network, Antenna 2, granted me an "Hour of Truth." Sixty minutes, after a battle that has been going on for 28 years. An hour is nothing, but it was enough for me to get rid of the monstrous and carnival-like mask that all my opponents have so generously applied to me. (qtd. in DeClair 76).

This quotation suggests that Le Pen thought that the opportunity for the public to get his depiction of the Front National rather than what he considers misrepresentations from other sources completely changed the way the public viewed the party. This breakthrough was so important because more people than could ever have been reached before

came into contact with the Front National through this program. When the media finally viewed the party as important enough to include in a television program, the party gained a new status of legitimacy with the French public.

At other times the media has been less helpful to the Front National. In the above quote where Le Pen speaks of the “monstrous and carnival-like mask” “applied” to himself and therefore to the Front National, he says that his opponents are the ones who gave the party a negative image, but the French media also contributed to the spread of this image. In an ethnographical account of the Front National’s Fête Bleu Blanc Rouge in 2005, Mabel Berezin discusses briefly the reaction of the French reporters at the fête. According to her observations, “the energy and focus that struck me so forcibly was completely absent from the French media. Perhaps they did not want to see it. The French press continually underreports the National Front—in the hope (shared by many) that they will go away” (144). Berezin suggests that the French media does not report the Front National’s full potential. She also suggests that the French media makes an effort not to provide coverage for the Front National. From the Front National’s point of view, while the media can play a positive role in the way the public views it, the media can just as easily be either indifferent or even give the public a negative image.

Now, of course, how the French press chooses to portray the Front National is less important than in the past because of changing media forms. Today, the Front National is able to spread its message through new forms of media such as the internet instead of having to rely on television stations or radio to broadcast messages. While traditional reporting can still shape the way that the public views the Front National, the public is

also able to go directly to websites like the Front National's official website to get details about the party's platforms and actions easily.

Chapter 3: Changes in the Front National's Image

The Front National has changed the way that it delivers its intrinsically xenophobic message in an attempt to draw more mainstream voters. The way that the Front National chooses to portray itself reflects both on the French public and the party itself. Over the years, the party has tried several times to change the way that the French public views it. During each of these changes, the party has attempted to present an image that is less radical and extreme. The French public's radical image of the Front National is, of course, based partly on the party's ideology and public rhetoric but is also influenced by the media portrayal of the Front National and the leaders of the party.

Since the Front National has been unable to repeat the level of success present in the 2002 presidential election when Le Pen was a candidate in the run-off, it might seem that the party has reached its peak and is on the decline. However, Marine Le Pen, the new leader of the Front National and Jean Marie Le Pen's daughter, has worked to change the public face of the party and to bring the party from the outskirts of politics to the center. For purposes of my analysis of the way the Front National portrays xenophobia, I will consider the party's discourse to include rhetoric and tactics used in print and media campaigns as well as the statements of its prominent leaders. The statements made by those with political power usually reflect its policies as a whole since members who do not conform to the party line tend to be quickly expelled (Marcus 48).

Marine Le Pen has been head of the Front National only since she was elected on January 18, 2011 after Jean-Marie Le Pen stepped down. She has had relatively little time to make major changes to the party, but it is evident that she intends to change the negative way that the

majority of French voters view it. However, she does not seem likely to change the party's xenophobic core. Rather, she has worked to change simply the party's terms used to discuss its xenophobic ideas. In order to push the party from a minor party to a mainstream party, she will have to change its radical image. Marine Le Pen decided to run as a candidate representing the Front National in the April 2012 presidential election.

The Front National under Marine Le Pen

Since the public perception of the Front National is closely linked to the perception of its long time leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marine Le Pen has had to present an image of herself as differing greatly from her father. Visually, as a younger, attractive woman she is a dramatic change from the older man who has been leading the party for the past few decades. Her father has long stated that his party represents the French public. However, Marine Le Pen has gone further by making efforts to link herself with the French public by describing herself as just an ordinary woman. She has stated, "I do my own shopping, I take my kids to school. I don't go around with a chauffeur and a bodyguard; I live in the real world, and that's what counts" (qtd. in "The Le Pens"). Jean-Marie Le Pen could only appeal to a limited portion of the French public, but, it seems to me, Marine Le Pen has created an image as an independent, normal woman with whom more of the French public can identify. Because the Front National focuses heavily on the French identity, having a leader who it can represent a typical French citizen is important.

The attempt to distance herself and the party from the unfavorable image that some French have of her father has not been made easier by her father remaining as the honorary president of the Front National. When he makes politically questionable statements as he did

following the two July 2011 terrorists attacks in Oslo by criticizing the way that the Norwegian government handles immigration, calling the government naïve and ineffective, Marine Le Pen has had to make it clear that her father's thoughts do not reflect those of the Front National while not appearing to criticize her father (Monnot). In this case, she found fault with those on the Left who made statements similar to her father's. She said that these parties should not have used the events in Oslo to advance their own political view while not commenting that her father had essentially done the same (Monnot). In this way, she prevented negative associations with the Front National based on her father's statements by demonstrating that the Front National shared a different view, but at the same time, she did not bring attention to remarks her father had made.

Softening the Front National's Image

Marine Le Pen has needed to make three major changes to alter the French public's view of the Front National. These three changes are 1) to remove the possibilities of frequent labels of the Front National as Nazis or fascists, 2) to soften the terms that the Front National uses when referring to immigrants so that while the party's anti-immigration policies remain in place, the rhetoric does not sound overly xenophobic or extreme, and 3) to increase the credibility and reputation of the Front National into a party that can be taken seriously.

The first change is one that the Front National has attempted to make in the past. As the party has unsuccessfully attempted to do before, under the direction of Marine Le Pen the Front National has tried to distance itself from radical labels of fascism or Nazism. This label has remained with the Front National because a number of its first members had involvements with the collaboration during World War II and also because party leaders like Jean-Marie Le Pen have frequently made public remarks in the past that suggested the party supported Nazi or

fascist ideas. However, anti-Semitism is not a sentiment that many of the French public can identify with today. Instead, it is more effective at turning most people away from the party with the exception of a small portion of the population.

While her father made remarks that seemed to belittle the horrors that occurred in the Nazi camps, Marine Le Pen has made remarks that acknowledge this part of history. In a statement made in *Le Point* in February 2011, Marine Le Pen said, “Ce qui s’est passé dans le camps...est le summum de la barbarie” (What occurred in the camps...is the height of barbarity) (qtd. in Mestre “Le FN”). Being the leader of the Front National and making this kind of statement is a new step within the party and may help to soften its radical image.

Even before Marine Le Pen became the Front National’s president in the 2006 version of her memoir *Á contre flots*, she wrote portions that suggested the public’s image Front National was incorrect. Here, she blamed the SOS Racisme group for creating an idea of the Front National as “raciste et xenophobe” in 1984 (Marine Le Pen, *Á contre flots* 248). A standard party line seems to be that the Front National is a victim of negative portrayals rather than that its ideologies are actually too extreme for the public.

In her memoir, Marine Le Pen also laments the fact that supporters of the Front National might be asked, “Comment toi, si sympa, si ouvert, si correct...en un mot si ‘normale’ peux-tu être au FN?” (How can you, so nice, so open, so reasonable...in one word so ‘normal’ be for the Front National) (254). This part of her memoir makes it clear that she and the rest of the party have long been aware of the Front National’s alienation of the majority of “normal” voters. These voters are the reason that the party is attempting to hide its xenophobia behind a softer discourse.

The Front National's attempt at creating a more acceptable image has taken several forms. Besides stepping away from obvious anti-Semitism, the Front National has also taken other steps to appear less xenophobic by softening the rhetoric that the party uses. The second change is that instead of pointing to problems with North African immigrants as based on race, the Front National has begun to claim religious differences as a reason that these immigrants cannot fit into society. Marine Le Pen has tried to soften the Front National's image by focusing more on the issue of *laïcité* when discussing immigration. She uses phrases that suggest the "islamisation" of France is occurring, and she also focuses on the subject of "l'identité nationale" (Mestre, "Marine Le Pen"). The change of terms is by far one of the greatest changes to the Front National's rhetoric. It is evident that the Front National has tried to mold its discourse to fit the French public.

Sometimes, this rhetoric focused on religions has caused the same kind of backlash as previous forms when it appears too obviously xenophobic. For example in 2010, Marine Le Pen was criticized for comparing the number of Muslims who pray in the streets to the German occupation. This caused people to declare that Marine Le Pen is not at all different from her father, a problematic situation for a woman who is trying to assure the public that her leadership is taking the party in a new direction than her father's leadership. Because Marine Le Pen is trying to broaden voter appeal, she is faced with the need to keep the party's core while trying to offend as few people as possible.

While the immigration policies proposed by Marine Le Pen's Front National are equally as strict as those proposed by her father's Front National, the party now tries to deflect the more obvious xenophobic associations. Marine Le Pen has been quoted saying, "When I talk about

the immigration problem, I don't talk out of hate, or xenophobia, or Islamophobia, or fear," instead she simply says that as a country "we cannot afford to let everybody in" (qtd. in "Le Pen, Mightier"). If Marine Le Pen is successful in convincing the French public that the Front National is motivated by concern for what is best for France rather than a xenophobic intolerance for others, the public may view the party as more socially acceptable.

Besides this, the way that Marine Le Pen refers to immigrants including Muslim immigrants does not sound harsh or as if the party has malicious intentions. When she called for an end to the option of French citizens who have emigrated from other countries to have a dual-citizenship, she did not present this as an attack on those immigrants, but rather as a chance for immigrants who really wish to remain French citizens to choose a French citizenship over their native citizenship. She used the phrase that these French with a dual-citizenship should "choisir (leur) allégeance" (choose their allegiance) (Perrault). By doing so, she suggests that immigrants who truly wish to become French citizens will not be discouraged. Because a choice is involved, it seems that the party expects those who choose to be legal French citizens to be French citizens culturally as well.

Despite the changing and softening of previously harsh rhetoric, it seems that the party's ideologies remain the same under Marine Le Pen's leadership. Even as the Front National warns of the dangers of "islamisation," the party does not attack Islam as a whole. Instead, the party protests only the noticeable presence of Islamic influences in France. This echoes statements of the party under Le Pen that it has no problem with other cultures provided that these other cultures remain in the countries in which they originated.

As much as Marine Le Pen has tried to distance herself from her father's public image, she follows a platform that is nearly identical to the platform of Le Pen senior. As journalists for

Le Monde have stated, “un changement de discours n’induit pas automatiquement un changement de la nature politique profonde d’un parti” (a change in discourse does not automatically indicate a change in the profound political nature of a party) (Mestre, “Le FN”). *Le Monde* is considered a left-leaning newspaper while the Front National is a right-wing party, so it makes sense that *Le Monde* is likely to question the motives of the party. However, since it is also one of the largest French newspapers, much of the French public comes into contact with the articles in this paper. Obviously, the French public is aware that the Front National has changed its rhetoric but not its fundamental forms. The fact that the public can see that the party is trying to adapt to attract voters suggests that this attempt is not successful. On the other hand though, since the Front National’s rhetoric is noticeably toned down, it is not inconceivable that voters will eventually begin to accept the party’s new dialogue without recognizing the xenophobia that influences it.

The success of the final change and Marine Le Pen’s ultimate goal, increasing the Front National’s credibility and reputation so that the public views it as a serious political party, leans heavily on the success of the first two changes. However, the Front National has other strategies for convincing the French public that it can be trusted. While rhetoric calling for support of the Front National in the past has mostly been based on catchy slogans and emotions rather than facts, Marine Le Pen’s Front National has made an attempt to include figures to back up the claims that the party makes.

However, this strategy has backfired as others find fault with the numbers regarding the *titres de séjour* and the *demandes d’asile* that the party claims are correct. Notably, the French Minister of the Interior responded to Marine Le Pen’s press conference at Nanterre in February

2011 by saying that “Les chiffres donnés par le Front National sont soit connus, soit tronqués, soit incomplets” (The figures given by the Front National are either already known, abridged, or incomplete) (qtd in Négroni). If the facts given out by the Front National can be disproved easily multiple times, then this strategy will hurt, rather than help, the Front National’s attempt to gain credibility with the French public.

Even though the party has made changes to its image under Marine Le Pen, the changes that it has made seem to echo the ongoing goal of convincing the French public that the Front National is not too extreme to be supported. The ideologies of the party remain the same while all that changes is the image of the party.

Reaction to Toulouse Attacks

Although the party has tried to soften the way it portrays its xenophobic ideas because not enough of the mainstream public has been receptive to these ideas, recent events have occurred in France that may have increased some French citizens’ fears of foreigners. A recent event, the killings in Toulouse, has occurred that may strengthen the public’s response to the Front National, and this event has played a role in the way that candidates campaigned in the last few weeks before the presidential election. The killer made attacks in Toulouse, killing three French soldiers who were either Arab or black and four people at a Jewish school (Sayare). The wave of killings caused fear in Toulouse and horrified the rest of France. Because the suspect who claimed responsibility for the attacks was Muslim and from an Algerian family who immigrated to France, this event brings the discussion of the immigration issue into the political field as the election quickly approaches.

Although the Front National has used the event to support anti-immigration, the problem that it reveals is much deeper. The suspect was a French born citizen, yet at the same time he is being regarded as a foreigner because, culturally and ethnically, he is not French. Even though the killer in no way represented the Muslims in France, he is presented as confirmation that the differences between Muslims and the French pose a real threat to the safety of France physically in addition to culturally.

The Front National is adept at capitalizing on public fear and is using this event to demonstrate that their anti-immigration policies are not unwarranted. Even though the killer did attack other Muslims as well, the Front National has manipulated the ethnic identity of the killer as a confirmation of the dangers they had been warning about for years. Yet at the same time, Marine Le Pen has still followed the new form of rhetoric. Although the party targets extremist Muslims as dangerous, she has also called on “les français musulmans” to come to the side of the French to combat this kind of behavior (Mestre, “Apres Toulouse”). In this way, she demonstrates that the Front National is willing to differentiate between extremist Muslims and those who are not, an example of how the Front National’s rhetoric has evolved from its early crude form of xenophobia. However, despite this, Marine Le Pen has capitalized on the identity of the killer in order to call for a stop to immigration, which the Front National has recommended over the years, and is helping to feed xenophobia in France by suggesting that foreigners pose a danger to the French public.

Conclusion

Because immigration into Europe from non-European sources has already occurred, discourse regarding the changing ethnic make-up of European countries is not going to go away soon. The reaction to the change in the origins of immigrant nationalities can be viewed in the Front National's switch of focus from anti-Semitic to anti-Muslim that reflects the larger society's changing views of which groups are considered undesirable. Highly publicized conflicts like those of the ongoing headscarf affair or even more violent conflicts like the Toulouse killings raise the level of public anxiety over foreign influences. While events like the Toulouse killings do not happen on a frequent basis, they help inflame already existing xenophobic fears. The Front National simply heightens the already existing tensions when events like this occur. As the history of xenophobia in France demonstrates, the Front National is not responsible for the roots of xenophobia in France, but it has played a role in changing the way with which xenophobia is dealt.

As I have shown, the Front National is quite adept at capitalizing on the fear of the threat that immigrants pose to the French identity and at suggesting that other problems like unemployment and urban violence stem from the rising immigrant population. While some have suggested that the Front National's rise has more to do with circumstances in France rather than any special attribute of the Front National itself, the party has shown that it is good at capturing the attention of the public.

My question of how the Front Nation has changed the discussion of xenophobia in France has a three part answer. The Front National has used anti-immigration as a mask for xenophobia, influenced similar rhetoric among mainstream parties, and softened the terms in which

xenophobia is presented. That anti-immigration is a mask for xenophobia is apparent because the real problem is a fear of the loss of French identity due to foreign influences. Although Marine Le Pen's 2012 presidential campaign included the harsh solution of limiting immigration from 200,000 entries per year to 10,000 entries per year, this would do nothing to address the already existing ethnic and cultural difficulties (Marine Le Pen, *Mon Projet* 6). The way that the Front National has presented immigration from North African countries makes the conflict that sometimes arises between the French and these immigrants seem much worse than it is in actuality. France has had a long history of xenophobia as illustrated by the French reaction to foreigners in the past 160 years. These foreigners, including ones from other European nations in the past, have faced hostility during times of economic difficulties or uncertainties. The party suggests that rather than being anti-foreigners, it instead is more focused on protecting the French identity. Since the Toulouse shootings, it can now also claim that it wants to protect from actual violence as well. Still, the party's core stems from xenophobia.

In addition, it can be seen that Front National has influenced similar rhetoric especially through the Right's past reactions and through Sarkozy's rhetoric in the most recent election. Because the mainstream Right needs to draw voters back from the Front National, it sometimes adopts harsh rhetoric that mimics the Front National's discourse. This mimicking gives credibility to the Front National's xenophobic claims. The Right also sometimes adopts the Front National's platforms as well. As a result on some occasions, the mainstream Right carries out the measures proposed by the Front National.

Finally, that the Front National has softened the terms in which xenophobia is presented is evident through the evolution of its rhetoric from its crude beginnings to its increasingly subtle presentation. This occurred first under Jean-Marie Le Pen, but most noticeably under Marine Le

Pen in the 2012 presidential election. Unlike rhetoric used when the Front National was first created, the phrasing that party leaders use today is not designed to shock the public. Individual words and phrases have been replaced by those that seem more acceptable to the public. The purpose of this change has been to attract voters who might have been discouraged by strong xenophobic rhetoric. The party has softened the way it discusses its views of immigration in order to deflect accusations of xenophobia or racism. One flaw in this strategy is that the French media and, therefore, the public are aware that the change in the discourse is not matched by a change in the actual platform of the party.

Despite the changes, Marine Le Pen did not make it past the first round of the 2012 presidential elections. In the April 22nd election, François Hollande had 28.5 percent of the vote, Nicolas Sarkozy had 27.1 percent of the vote, and Marine Le Pen had 18.2 percent (Erlanger, “Hollande”). Only the two candidates with the highest percentage will continue to the second round on May 6th. Hollande represents the major French Left party, the Parti Socialiste, and Sarkozy, represents the major French Right party, the UMP. Although Marine Le Pen will not continue to this round, 18.2 percent represents a significant percentage of the vote meaning that the Front National has not, as some scholars have suggested, begun a decline. This is the Front National’s highest percentage of the vote in a presidential election, and a possible cause is that Marine Le Pen’s changes to the party have been successful in drawing more voters. It is difficult to say how the party will fair politically in the future. However, regardless of the Front National’s path in the future, it has already clearly had an effect on xenophobic discourse in France.

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