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Original Article

The closing of the radical right gender gap in France?

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Abstract One of the earliest and best-established finding about electoral support for populist radical right-wing parties is that they attract more men than women. Yet this finding might no longer apply to France. In the 2012, presidential election, contrary to her father, Marine Le Pen, the new leader of the Front National (FN), realized almost the same score among female and male voters. After controlling for other sociodemographic and attitudinal variables that explain electoral support for the FN, there is no difference between male and female voters' support for the party. This article examines the closing of this gender gap in radical right-wing voting, drawing on post-electoral surveys conducted in 2002, 2012 and 2014. After a brief outline of the literature dealing with the emergence of the 'Radical Right Gender Gap (RRGG)', it ascertains the disappearance of a RRGG gender in 2012, tests possible explanations for this phenomenon and debates whether this is a temporary or a lasting one.
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Keywords: France; Front National; Marine Le Pen; gender; radical right gender gap

One of the earliest and best-established findings about electoral support for populist radical right-wing parties[1] is that they attract proportionately more men than women (Betz, 1994, p. 142). However, this finding might no longer apply to France. In the 2012 presidential election, contrary to her father, Marine Le Pen, the new leader of the Front National (FN), realized almost the same score among female and male voters (Figure 1). After controlling for other sociodemographic and attitudinal variables that explain electoral support for the FN, there is no gender gap in the radical right-wing vote any more (Mayer, 2013a, b). Explaining the closing of this gender gap is the aim of this article. The first section offers a brief outline of the literature dealing with the emergence of what has become known as the 'Radical Right Gender Gap' (RRGG) (Givens, 2004). The second part ascertains the disappearance of a RRGG gender in the 2012 French Presidential Election.

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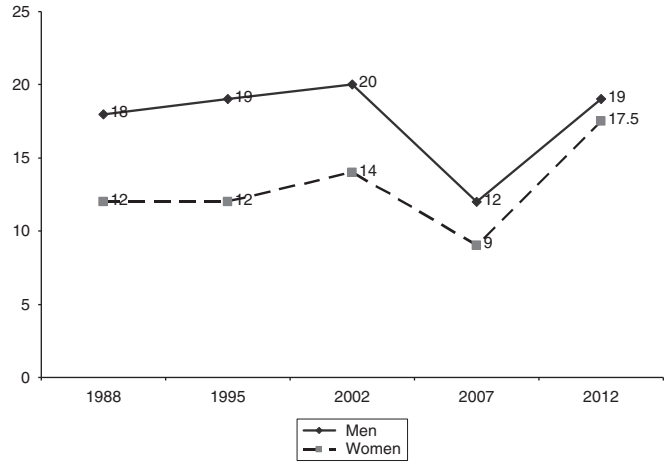

Figure 1: Votes for Le Pen in 1st rounds of presidential elections by gender.
Data: Cevipof electoral surveys 1988–2007, French Election Study 2012, weighted by official results

The third section outlines and tests possible explanations for this disappearance. A concluding section debates whether this is a temporary or a lasting phenomenon.

The Emergence of the 'Radical Right Gender Gap' (RRGG)

The term 'gender gap' was coined by the National Organization of Women at the time of the election of Ronald Reagan. For the first time since they gained the right to vote, women gave noticeably more support to the Democrats in the 1980 American presidential race. Since then this gap has persisted, and there is a robust relationship between gender and the party vote, still significant after controlling for age, class, race and religion (Manza and Brooks, 1998; Whitaker, 2008; Abendschön and Steinmetz, 2014). As shown by Inglehart and Norris (2003) in *The rising tide*, a similar divide has appeared in several post-industrial democracies, and notably in Europe (Giger, 2009; Mossuz-Lavau, 2009). It is an established finding that women move more to the left than men whatever the indicator used. It was called the 'modern' gender gap, in opposition to the previous 'traditional' gender gap.

Just after being granted the right to vote, women tended to be more conservative, and gave more support than men to right-wing parties with a traditional view of women's role (Mossuz-Lavau and Sineau, 1983). But their rising level of education and their massive entrance into the labour market on the one hand, the process of secularization and the emancipating influence of post-materialist values and feminist

movements on the other hand, encouraged autonomy and self-expression, which, in turn, brought women voters closer to left-wing parties. This phenomenon was particularly pronounced among the younger generations, leading Norris to coin the term 'generation gender gap' (Norris, 1996). Since the 1980's, the electoral boom of populist and anti-immigrant radical right parties, especially in Europe, has brought about a new cleavage, women appearing more reluctant than men to give their votes to these parties. Betz was the first to outline this phenomenon in his seminal study on the radical populist right in Europe (Betz, 1994, pp. 142–148). The difference seems to persist up to date (Givens, 2004; Norris, 2005; Immerzeel *et al*, 2015; de Bruijn and Veenbrink, 2012).

A first line of argument considers the different location of men and women in the labour market (Studlar *et al*, 1998; Mayer, 2002; Givens, 2004; Rippeyoung, 2007). Men are over-represented in manual occupations, particularly among blue-collar workers (*ouvriers*) and it is precisely among the working-class that the European radical right draws the most support (Betz, 1994; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Kriesi *et al,* 2008; Oesch, 2008).[2] With the lowest levels of education, income and status and the highest rates of unemployment, blue-collar workers appear as the 'globalization losers' by excellence (Betz, 1994; Kriesi *et al*, 2008; Bornschier and Kriesi, 2012). In competition with cheap labour in developing countries on the one side and immigrants inside the country on the other side, they should be more receptive to the xenophobic appeals of the radical right. In contrast, women are more often employed in non-manual clerical or services jobs, especially in the public sector. Therefore, they should be in more secure positions and less exposed to the threat of immigration.[3] In this perspective the RRGG would boil down to a composition effect (Rippeyoung, 2007, p. 383).

A second line of research stresses the protective influence of religion. Christian churches all over Europe have repeatedly condemned the anti-immigrant and inegalitarian message of the radical right in the name of the Evangels. The more a person is under the influence of these churches, the less she should be tempted to vote for such parties. Although a process of secularization is taking place in post-industrial European societies, women, especially the elderly, still attend religious services more often than men do.[4] Women should therefore be more likely to hear the warnings of the Church. Sineau has showed that in the case of France not only women are more often regular practicing Catholics, but more receptive to the Catholic message. At similar level of religious practice than men, they were in the Presidential election of 2002 far more inclined to reject Jean-Marie Le Pen and his ideas. And this gap reached a record among elderly women, Catholic and regular church-goers (Sineau, 2004, p. 220).

A third block of research puts forward the gradual diffusion of feminist ideas at all levels of society (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). This diffusion could prevent women, especially in the younger generations, to support far-right parties, which defend a very traditional ideology, and reducing them to their role of spouse and mothers.

Conversely, the very spread of feminist ideas, the claims for equality, the growing presence of women in the workforce could be seen as a threat for masculine supremacy, breeding insecurity and resentment, and feeding an authoritarian anti-feminist backlash in favour of the far right (Perrineau, 1997). This should apply all the more in working-class milieus, where norms of strong manhood and masculinity, based on physical strength, still predominate (Molinier, 2004; Frader, 2008).

Another explanation for the gender gap in radical right voting focuses on the unequal relationship between men and women in politics. For long relegated in the private sphere, women are latecomers on the electoral scene,[5] especially in France where they got the right to vote one century after men. On the whole, they still pay less interest to politics, and get lower grades on political knowledge scales (Chiche and Haegel, 2002), even when controlling for age, education and social status. They would therefore be more prone to support the mainstream and long established parties than newcomers and outsiders like the radical rights (Immerzeel *et al*, 2015).

A last line of research insists on the persistence of gender stereotypes learned from early socialization (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Lahire, 2001; Mossuz-Lavau, 2014). Girls are still trained differently than boys, expected to be less aggressive and not violent. Women in surveys still more often reject the idea of war and conflict than men.[6] The image of virility and violence associated to radical right parties could explain their greater reluctance to support them. In France, for instance, Jean-Marie Le Pen has made it a habit to spice up his speeches with verbal violence and sexist undertones (Alduy and Wahnich, 2015, p. 54). Moreover, he even physically assaulted the female socialist mayor of Mantes La Jolie, Annette Peulvast-Bergeal, during the campaign for the 1997 parliamentary elections. Women also appear more sensitive than men to social norms and cues. A study based on three waves of the CSES (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems) in 32 countries shows that men are politically more 'assertive'. For instance, they are systematically more likely to vote for stigmatised parties than women (Harteveld *et al*, 2013, p. 12).

Despite all these explanations, the debate on the magnitude of the gender gap in radical right voting is still open (for example, the results differ widely from one country to another and from one election to another).[7] This applies even more so, given that the above-mentioned studies do not attempt a systematic exploration of the RRGG. The earlier ones just acknowledge the gap, on the base of simple cross tabulations comparing the level of electoral support of these parties by gender and by country, sometimes only at one point of time, not controlling for the possible effect of other variables. When they do attempt to include systematic controls (for instance Norris, 2005; Rippeyoung, 2007; Immerzeel *et al*, 2015), it is usually on the base of large cross-national surveys (European Values Study, European Social Survey, World Values Survey). However, we should keep in mind that these surveys are not electoral surveys. When they ask for voting intentions or past votes, it is out of context, sometimes months away from the election itself, with the risk of giving a distorted image of the respondent's electoral behaviour. And the country subsamples

are usually small, giving in the end very small numbers of declared far right voters, (this trend is further reduced by the fact that moral reprobation is still attached to many of these parties). Even in specifically comparative electoral surveys like the EES (European Election Studies), the number of self-declared radical right voters is sometimes too small to allow for any serious statistical analysis. For instance they were only 58 declared FN voters in the 2014 wave, amounting to 16 per cent of the declared votes (instead of the real 25 per cent). Even if we switch to PTVs (Propensity to vote), these surveys offer a good proxy but not perfect equivalence to real votes (Barisione and Mayer, 2015).

The Turning Point of the 2012 French Presidential Election

Taking the existence of a RRGG for granted, it is with this literature in mind that I started working on the votes for the FN in the 2012 presidential election. The French context lends itself well to the study of the evolution of the RRGG. The electoral emergence of the French radical right led by Jean-Marie Le Pen goes back to the mid-1980s. Since January 2011, his own daughter, Marine Le Pen has been chairing the party. Since then the National Front has been electorally thriving, reaching unprecedented scores of nearly 18 per cent in the first round of the 2012 presidential election, and 25 per cent in the 2014 European Elections and in the first round of the 2015 local elections (*départementales*). The 2012 presidential race can be taken as a magnifying glass of changing gender effects. In France the Presidential election is by far the most mobilizing election, bringing almost 80 per cent of the voters to the polls (79.5 per cent in the first round of the 2012 election) while the European elections drew less than half of the voters (42. 4 per cent in 2014). In other words, Marine Le Pen attracted 6.4 million voters in the 2012 first presidential round (compared with 4.7 millions in the 2014 European elections), even though the score of the FN improved by 7 percentage points, from 17.9 in 2012 to 24.9 per cent in 2014.

To measure the gender gap, I draw data from three post electoral surveys, comparing gender effects in the 2012 election with its effects in the previous 2002 Presidential Election and in the following 2014 European Elections (Appendix A). The advantage of the two last surveys is that they were conducted on large samples (over 2000 for the 2012 Presidential survey and over 4000 for the 2014 European Elections survey). They are based on random sampling, which is unusual in France. In both cases the number of declared Le Pen voters is very close to the actual figures, a sign that less moral reprobation is attached to such a vote, showing the success of Marine Le Pen's normalization strategy.[8] The second wave of the French Electoral Panel 2002, conducted after the second round of the 2002 presidential election, provides us with a baseline model (Appendix A). The 2002 Presidential Election seemed a better choice than the 2007 election. The latter showed a sharp electoral decline of the FN, the score of Jean-Marie Le Pen dropping to

10.4 per cent of the valid votes. While the former took place in a context of electoral dynamic similar to the 2012 one, Le Pen father drawing then an exceptional 16.8 per cent of the valid votes and qualifying for the second round.

In line with most surveys at the time, our 2012 survey showed practically no difference in the electoral support of men and women for Marine Le Pen (−1.5 percentage points) (Table 1). The only noticeable gender gap was observed in the level of support for the incumbent President, Nicolas Sarkozy, whose score was 6 percentage points higher among women. While conversely women gave less votes to the Left (extreme left, Green and socialist candidates all together drew 41 per cent of their votes from women compared with 45.5 among men).

However a simple cross tabulation is not conclusive to make causal claims. To evaluate the specific impact of gender it is necessary to control for the effects of other sociodemographic and attitudinal variables likely to influence support for the FN. When Jean-Marie Le Pen chaired the FN, gender was the second-best predictor of his electoral support, after education, in every presidential election where he was candidate from 1988 to 2007 (Mayer, 2002, p. 220).[9] I expected to find more or less the same pattern for his daughter in 2012, just attenuated. But all three different sets of data I checked showed, all things being equal, that there was practically no more difference between the level of support of men and women for the candidate of the FN.[10]

To measure change more precisely, I compare a series of logistic regression on the 2002 and the 2012 elections, taking as dependent variable the declared vote for Marine Le Pen in 2012, and for her father in 2002, opposed to all other expressed votes. The main independent variables are, besides gender, sociodemographic variables (age, level of education, occupation), religion (combining religious affiliation and practice), position on the left–right scale and sympathy for Marine Le Pen. In both surveys I have the same variables coded exactly the same way. When I enter the above-mentioned variables step by step, on a stacked data matrix, first gender alone (Model 1), then gender with age, education, occupation and religious

Table 1: Votes by gender in the 1st round of the 2012 presidential election (per cent)

Votes (Percentage of valid votes)	*Men*	*Women*	≠
Extreme-left candidates	14	12	−2
Eva Joly (Green)	2.5	2	−0.5
François Hollande (PS)	29	27	−2
François Bayrou (Modem)	9	9	0
Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP)	24	30	+6
Marine Le Pen	19	17.5	−1.5
Others	2 (798)	2 (884)	0
No declared vote (Percentage of registered voters)	—	—	—
Abstention, Blank vote, No Answer	17 (906)	16 (1108)	−1

Source: French Election Study 2012, data weighted according to the official results.

practice (Model 2), then adding location on the left–right scale (Model 3) and finally the score of sympathy for Marine Le Pen (Model 4), the results are very clear (Tables 2 and 3).

In 2002, there was a statistically significant impact of gender, at all steps of the model. Women voted less than men for Jean-Marie le Pen in the first round of the 2002 election, whatever their age, their level of education, their occupational group, their political orientation and their sympathy for the leader of the FN. In the first round of the 2012 Presidential Election, contrary to our expectations, it was exactly the opposite: gender had no impact whatsoever, either alone (Model 1) or controlling for the same sociodemographic (Model 2) or attitudinal variables (Models 3 and 4) than in 2002. Hence it is important to explain the disappearance of the RRGG.

Explaining the Closure of the RRGG

Our hypothesis is that the very factors that accounted for the emergence of the RRGG are less relevant today, because of changes on the supply side as well as on the demand side of French electoral politics, in a context of economic crisis and political disaffection.

Women are under-represented in manual occupations. According to French Census data, they count for less than 20 per cent of the manual blue-collar class (*ouvriers*) versus almost three quarters of the routine non-manual group (*employés*) (Guggemos and Vidalenc, 2014). But in both groups, women are over-represented in unskilled jobs, accounting for one-third of the unskilled blue collars and some 80 per cent of the unskilled employees. And if, in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, unemployment first hit men more than women, the latter are more often under-employed (Guedj, 2013), in non-wanted part-time and temporary positions. Thirty per cent of the working women (versus 6 per cent of working men) hold part-time jobs and the proportion is above 40 per cent among women without any degree, especially in the service sector.[11] Precariousness hits these women as much as, if not more than, male industrial blue-collar workers. Recent research on the dualization of the labour market in post-industrial societies confirms a growing divide between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' and the over-representation of women, as well as young people and immigrants, among the latter (Milewski *et al*, 2011; Haüsermann and Schwander, 2012). The deteriorating economic situation of women, especially in the service proletariat,[12] could fuel their support for the far right in 2012 and contribute to a reduction of the RRGG.

Women are still more religious than men and more integrated into the Catholic Community, the dominant religious group in France. And the Catholic Church repeatedly condemned the ideas of the FN. But the relationship of Catholics with immigrants and more specifically Islam is changing since 1990, as shown by the annual survey on racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia conducted for the National

Table 2: Logistic regression on votes for Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2002 by gender, sociodemographic and political variables

	Model 1 *B (es)*	*Model 2* *B(es)*	*Model 3* *B(es)*	*Model 4* *B(es)*
Gender				
Men	0.444(0.11)***	0.506(0.13)***	0.598 (0.14)***	0.628(0.18)**
Women	—	—	—	—
Age				
18–24	—	0.440(0.32)	0.215(0.33)	–,0.90(0.42)
25–34	—	0.680(0.23)**	0.602(0.24)*	0.009(0.31)
35–49	—	0.382(0.19)	0.366(0.20)	–0.163(0.26)
50–64	—	0.493(0.18)**	0.479(0.19)*	0.228(0.24)
65+	—	—	—	—
Degree				
None, primary school	—	1.664(0.31)***	1.561(0.32)***	1.186(0.40)**
Secondary	—	1.394(0.28)***	1.260(0.29)***	1.055(0.37)**
Bac	—	0.867(0.30)**	0.810(0.31)*	0.679(0.39)
Bac+2	—	0.779(0.31)*	0.747(0.32)*	1.070(0.40)**
University	—	—	—	—
Occupation				
Never worked	—	–0.439(0.33)	–0.278(0.34)	–0.196(0.44)
Self employed	—	0.246(0.29)	–0.066(0.30)	–0.033(0.39)
Lower-grade managers/ administrators/ professional	—	–0.363(0.25)	–0.204(0.26)	–0.395(0.33)
Office employees	—	0.157(0.25)	0.272(0.26)	0.193(0.34)
Sales/personal services employees	—	0.271(0.28)	0.415(0.30)	–0.086(0.40)
Skilled/unskilled blue collars	—	–0.057(0.25)	0.052(0.26)	–0.094(0.34)
Higher-grade managers/ administrators/ professional	—	—	—	—
Religion				
Regularly Practicing Catholic	—	–0.082(0.26)	–0.734(0.27)**	–0.851(0.35)*
Irregularly Practicing Catholic	—	0.356(0.19)	–0.223(0.20)	–0.312(0.26)
Non-practicing Catholic	—	0.294(0.15)	–0.008(0.17)	0.031(0.22)
Other religion	—	0.012(0.31)	–0.218(0.34)	–0.207(0.45)
No religion	—	—	—	—

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Table 2: (*Continued*)

	Model 1 *B (es)*	*Model 2* *B(es)*	*Model 3* *B(es)*	*Model 4* *B(es)*
Score left—right scale (0–10)	—	—	1.150 (0.78)***	0.502 (0.99)***
Score sympathy for M. Le Pen (0–10)	—	—	—	0.652(0.32)***
Constant	–2.406(0.88)***	–4.415 (0.34)***	–7.462 (0.44)***	–7.113 (0.55)***
N	3170	3170	3170	3170
Log Likelihood	2069.005	1 964 337	1 700 049	1 082 788
χ^2 (DF)	14.120(1)***	118.788(19)***	383.077 (20)***	1000.338 (21)***
R^2	0.009	0.076	0.236	0.562

*P<0.05; **P<0.010; ***P<0.001
Source: Data — French Election Study 2012, unweighted.

Consultative Commission for Human Rights. Classically, religion had no statistically significant effect on the level of ethnocentrism and prejudice towards minorities, once controlled for age, gender, education and political orientation. Since the Muhammad's cartoon controversy in 2005, things have changed. In the survey conducted after these events, for the first time, all things being equal, Catholics were more ethnocentric than non-Catholics and their intolerance rose with the level of religious practice (Mayer and Michelat, 2007). The greater visibility of Islam in the public space (street prayers, headscarves, burqas) and the polarization of the political debate on the issues of immigration and national identity is bringing Catholics to assert more than before their own religious identity as different from Muslim identity, if not superior. Following reports confirmed the trend (see also Michelat and Dargent, 2015), although less pronounced once the emotional reaction to the 2005 Cartoons affair declined.[13] Nevertheless, fear of Islam and of immigration could counter-balance the tolerant message of the Evangels, among men and women alike.

Since the May 68 social movement, feminist and sexually permissive values have diffused in society,[14] making repulsive for many women, especially young and active ones, the traditional image of women as mothers and housewives defended by the FN at the time of Jean-Marie Le Pen. However, this traditional image of women should be less pronounced after his daughter has taken the reigns of the FN. Marine Le Pen is a woman, and she offers a 'modernized-traditional' image of women (Amesberger and Halbmayr, 2002, pp. 17–26; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2015, pp. 11–13), which is open to women's economic independence and their rights to a professional career. Marine Le Pen never misses an opportunity to remind her audience that she is a working woman, twice divorced, taking care of three children and living 'out of wedlock' with her present companion (Alduy and Wahnich, 2015, pp. 53–54).[15] She also appears more open on moral issues, saying she understands women who abort,

Table 3: Logistic regression on votes for Marine Le Pen in 2012 by gender, sociodemographic and political variables

	Model 1 B (es)	*Model 2 B(es)*	*Model 3 B(es)*	*Model 4 B(es)*
Gender				
Men	0.105(0.13)	0.191(0.15)	0.184(0.16)	0.155(0.20)
Women	—	—	—	—
Age				
18–24	—	0.880(0.36)*	0.860(0.39)*	0.706(0.47)
25–34	—	0.668(0.28)*	0.633(0.30)*	0.5532(0.37)
35–49	—	0.517(0.23)*	0.475(0.25)	0.220(0.30)
50–64	—	0.481(0.21)*	0.467(0.22)*	0.395(0.27)
65+	—	—	—	—
Degree				
None, primary school	—	1.007(0.38)**	0.839(0.40)*	0.214(49)
Secondary general	—	0.415(0.39)	0.382(0.41)	0.227(49)
Secondary vocational	—	1.180(0.32)***	1.103(0.34)**	0.669(41)
Bac	—	0.779(0.33)*	0.732(0.34)*	0.379(40)
Bac+2	—	0.466(0.34)	0.486(0.35)	0.595(41)
University	—	—	—	—
Occupation				
Never worked	—	0.802(0.39)*	0.800(0.40)*	0.214(40.9)
Self employed	—	0.683(0.42)	0.391(0.43)	0.227(0.52)
Lower-grade managers/ administrators/ professional	—	0.287(0.36)	0.376(0.37)	0.669(0.44)
Office employees	—	0.726(0.37)	0.691(0.38)	0.379(0.46)
Sales/personal services employees	—	1.415(.39)***	1.533(0.41)***	0.595(0.51)
Skilled /unskilled blue collars	—	1.024(0.36)**	1.143(0.38)**	0.214(0.46)
Higher-grade managers/ administrators/ professional	—	—	—	—
Religion				
Regularly Practicing Catholic	—	−0.239(0.34)	−0.867(0.36)*	−0.564(0.44)
Irregularly Practicing Catholic	—	0.083(0.26)	−0.538(0.28)	−0.450(0.35)
Non-practicing Catholic	—	0.103(0.17)	−0.147(0.19)	−0.324(0.25)
Other religion	—	−1.174(0.38)**	−1,356(0.40)**	−0.803(0.49)
No religion	—	—	—	—
Score left—right scale (0–10)	—	—	0.382(0.03)***	0.070(0.43)

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Table 3: (*Continued*)

	Model 1 *B (es)*	*Model 2* *B(es)*	*Model 3* *B(es)*	*Model 4* *B(es)*
Score sympathy for M.Le Pen (0–10)	—	—	—	0.652(0.43)***
Constant	−1.717(0.09)***	−3.671(0.40)***	−5.407(0.46)***	−6.032 (0.59)***
N	1652	1652	1652	1652
Log Likelihood	1444.350	1 330 194	268.427	775 314
χ^2 (DF)	0.601(1)	114 757(20)***	268.427(21)***	669 637(22)***
R^2	0.001	0.115	0.257	0.572

*P<0.05; **P<0.010; ***P<0.001

Source: Data — French Election Study 2012, unweighted.

even if she criticizes 'comfort abortion'. She is also taking the defence of women and gays against the intolerance of some Muslims: 'Nowadays, in certain neighbourhoods, it's not easy to be a woman, or homosexual, or Jew, or even French or white' (meeting in Lyon, 10 December 2010).

Finally, the strategy of normalization (*dédiabolisation*) implemented by Marine Le Pen after she took over the party, in January 2011, is progressing. The FN's ideas look less extreme, as shown by the annual Barometer on the image of the NF (www.tns-sofres.com/sites/default/files/2015.02.16-baro-fn.pdf). The proportion of the population seeing her party as a 'danger for democracy', was way above 65 per cent for decades. Yet, this number dropped to 47 per cent in January 2012. If in the same barometer the FN is still located more to the right than all parties on the left–right scale, the proportion of the sample seeing it as 'a patriot right defending traditional values' is equal to the proportion seeing it a as ' xenophobic extreme right'. Contrary to her father, Marine Le Pen does not cross the red line of anti-Semitism, saying repeatedly that the Holocaust was 'the summit of human barbarism'. Even the immigration issue is framed in a more subtle way, presenting the FN as a champion of democracy, fighting Islam portrayed as a threat for freedom and for the rights of women, gays and Jews as seen above.[16] As a result, opinion polls show that she has become far more popular than her father ever was (Mayer and Tiberj, 2015, pp. 28–29). All this could make it less difficult, less morally reprehensible and socially stigmatizing to vote for her, especially for women.

Four lines of explanation can thus be outlined to explain the reduction of the French RRGG:

Hypothesis 1 The deteriorating economic situation, exposing white-collar women in service jobs as much as blue-collar working class men to unemployment and low paid insecure jobs.

Hypothesis 2 Religion in a context of rising anti-Islam intolerance protects less than before against far right anti-immigrant ideas.

Hypothesis 3 As leader of the FN, Marine Le Pen appears more women-friendly than her father.

Hypothesis 4 Her strategy of normalization makes the party look less extreme, and more socially acceptable.

A comparison of the regression models for 2002 and 2012 indicates that the first hypothesis (H1) has some ground. In 2002, once controlled by sociodemographic and political variables, occupation has no significant impact on support patterns for Jean-Marie Le Pen. Education at the time is more important than class (Table 2). In 2012, and similar to all radical right-wing parties at the time, education still has a strong effect in explaining votes for Marine Le Pen, (Bornschier and Kriesi, 2012), but occupation has become a significant predictor, even when controlling by sociodemographic characteristics and left–right orientation (Table 3). The occupational variable, it should be noted, is operationalized in a different way than in most surveys. Instead of excluding the non-gainfully employed–retired, unemployed or temporarily non-working respondents, these groups are classified according to the last occupation they held, according to the idea that they were socialised in their previous job. On the base of the Census Bureau occupational classification (INSEE), it is possible to separate two groups of routine non-manual employees, office clerks, and sales and services employees. Model 2 (controlling for age and education and religious practice) and Model 3 (adding position on left–right scale) show that compared with the upper class taken as reference category (higher-grade managers and administrators, professionals), belonging to the sales and services employees group (predominantly female, or to the blue-collar workers group (mostly male), significantly increases the probability to vote for Marine le Pen, with coefficients even higher for the first white-collar group. There is also a significant, although lower, probability to vote FN in the group of respondents who never worked, mostly elderly women.[17]

The second hypothesis (H2) is that integration in the Catholic Community does not protect as much as before from the attraction by the radical right, among women as well as men. This is not confirmed. Our variable combines religious denomination (Catholic, other religion and no religion) and religious practice (for Catholics only, still the dominant religion in France). In 2002, regular church-goers are not less inclined to support Le Pen. But after controlling for left–right orientation, in order to isolate the specific effect of religion, and for sympathy for the leader of the FN, there is a significant impact of religion. Regular church-goers, men and women, are less inclined to support the far right. In 2012 the picture is slightly different. Once controlled for left–right orientation, Catholic integration has the same protective role than in 2002. But even more important is the protective effect of belonging to

the group 'other religions', in which today Muslims are the majority. In 2012, Muslim respondents tend to declare their faith in surveys far more than in 2002, in a society where religious identities are more easily expressed. And it is quite natural they would turn against Marine Le Pen who has made of Islam her main target.

Our last two hypotheses test, in different ways, a 'Marine Le Pen effect'. The first indicator is a scale of expressed sympathy for her ranging between 0 (strongly dislike) and 10 (strongly like). As expected, this scale is by far the best predictor of votes for Marine Le Pen (Table 3), surpassing the effect of all other variables except one. Her personality, all things being equal, seems to have even more impact than her father's. For in 2002, when he ran as candidate, education, religious practice and left–right orientation still had an impact, after controlling for sympathy for him (Table 2). The second more specific asset of Marine Le Pen is to appear less adverse to mainstream feminist equalitarian values, to project a less traditionalist image than her father. To check this hypothesis, I constructed a scale of cultural liberalism, combining opinions about the traditional role of women as mothers, as well as attitudes towards the right of gays and lesbians to adopt children (this was quite an issue in the 2012 election, as gay marriage was a proposal in the socialist programme). Whether I test it alone, or controlling for all the variables previously used, sociodemographic, religious, political and attitudinal (adding ethnocentrism and euro-scepticism), cultural liberalism has no significant impact on votes for Marine le Pen (Table 4). Feminism is not the issue that matters when comes the time to vote.

To get a better grasp of gender differences in support for the radical right, I ran the last regression (Model 4) separately for men and women (Table 4). In both populations, unsurprisingly, sympathy for Marine Le Pen conditions the votes in her favour. But the impact of political orientation and attitudes towards the European Union is different. The position on the left–right scale is just at the limit of significance for men (0.054 for men versus 0.669 for women), signalling a more ideological dimension to their vote choice, something that disappears entirely in the female population. For women, rejection of European integration is the primary motivation of their support for Marine Le Pen. They see the EU as a threat not only to the French national identity but also to the level of social protection in their country. The following figures show how gender interacts with these different attitudes (Figures 2–5).

For men and women, it is the same attitudes that increase the probability to support Marine Le Pen: a far right location on the left–right scale, a high level of ethnocentrism, a strong rejection of the European Union and a warm sympathy for Marine Le Pen. But these variables do not have the same impact in both populations. A strong RRGG (11 percentage points) persists among the voters who are the most intolerant towards immigrants and foreigners (Figure 5). An even larger gap (28 percentage points) exists among the far-right respondents, located in the extreme position of the left–right scale (Figure 2). In that extreme group, only half of the women voted for Marine Le Pen (versus practically 80 per cent of the men).

Table 4: Logistic regression on votes for Marine le Pen in 2012 by sociodemographic, political and attitudinal variables among female and male voters

	Total B(es)	*Men B (es)*	*Women B(es)*
Gender			
Men	0.264(0.21)	—	—
Women	—	—	—
Age			
18–24	0.776(0.49)	0.746(0.73)	1.210(0.71)
25–34	0.621(0.38)	0.908(0.59)	0.575(0.55)
35–49	0.307(0.31)	0.141(0.48)	0.641(0.46)
50–64	0.378(0.27)	0.692(0.40)	0.105(0.41)
65+	—	—	—
Level of education			
None, primary school	–0.028(0.51)	–0.193(0.69)	0.027(0.79)
Secondary general	0.146(0.50)	0.358(0.72)	–0.023(0.76)
Secondary vocational	0.408(0.43)	0.590(0.57)	0.358(0.68)
Bac	0.280(0.42)	0.260(0.58)	0.135(0.65)
Bac+2	0.513(0.43)	0.711(0.60)	0.293(0.66)
University	—	—	—
Occupation			
Never worked	0.327(0.50)	0.836(0.70)	–0.075(0.82)
Self employed	–0.006(0.53)	0.293(0.66)	–0.487(0.93)
Lower grade managers/ administrators/ professional	0.441(0.45)	0.673(0.58)	0.287(0.79)
Office employees	0.304(0.47)	0.918(0.64)	–0.187(0.78)
Sales/personal services employees	0.858(0.52)	0.577(0.93)	0.479(0.83)
Skilled/unskilled blue collars	0.583(0.47)	0.927(0.58)	0.041(0.85)
Higher-grade managers/administrators/ professional	—	—	—
Religion			
Regularly practicing Catholic	–0.541(0.45)	–0.407(0.67)	–0.422(0.65)
Irregularly practicing Catholic	–0.458(0.36)	–0.511(0.48)	–0.323(0.68)
Non-practicing Catholic	–0.322(0.25)	–0.425(0.35)	–0.093(0.41)
Other religion	–0.691(0.50)	–1.674(0.95)	–0.010(0.66)
No religion	—	—	—
Score left–right scale (0–10)	0.075(0.04)	0.127(0.06)	0.028(0.06)
Score sympathy for M.Le Pen (0–10)	0.604(0.04)***	0.528(0.06)***	0.692(0.07)***
Scale-cultural liberalism	–0.004(0.07)	0.096(0.10)	0.035(0.10)
Scale ethnocentrism	0.077(0.04)	–0.096(0.06)	0.058(0.06)
Scale anti-EU sentiment	0.407(0.11)***	0.136(0.15)	0.760(0.18)***
Constant	–8.623***	–7.053***	–10.465***
N	1652	752	900
Log Likelihood	756.076	359.370	373.458

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Table 4: (*Continued*)

	Total B(es)	*Men B (es)*	*Women B(es)*
χ^2(DF)	688.875(25)	316.600(24)	394.222(24)
R^2	0.58	0.57	0.61

*P<0.05; **P<0.010; ***P<0.001
Source: Data — French Election Study 2012, unweighted.

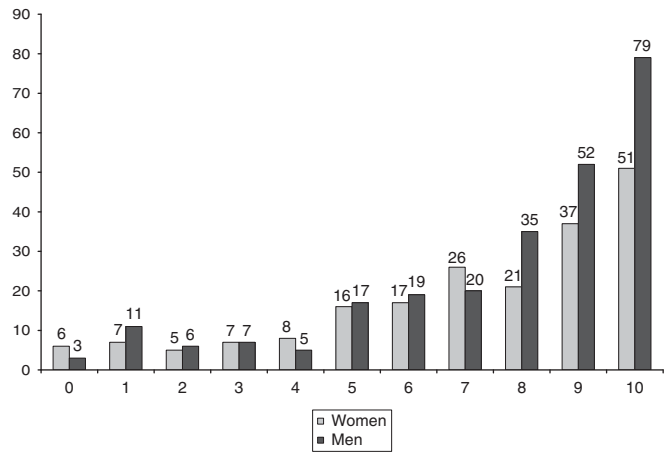

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of Marine Le Pen votes 2012 by gender and left–right position.

In spite of their affinity with the radical right and its ideas, half of the women did not dare go as far as voting for its candidate. But when a strong anti-UE sentiment is expressed, and even more so when a high level of sympathy for Marine Le Pen exists (indicated by a score 10 on the scale), the RRGG not only disappears, it reverses itself (Figures 3–4). It looks as if the personality of the new FN's leader made the difference, and helped some women take the plunge. The apparent closing of the RRGG in 2012 France is the result of these contrasted trends.[18]

A Temporary or a Lasting Trend?

The 2014 survey on the European elections offers the opportunity to check the disappearance of the gender gap in a far less mobilizing mid-term election context. Unfortunately, it allows for only a partial replication of the 2012 models, for it does not use the same occupational classification as the 2012 survey, it does not ask about

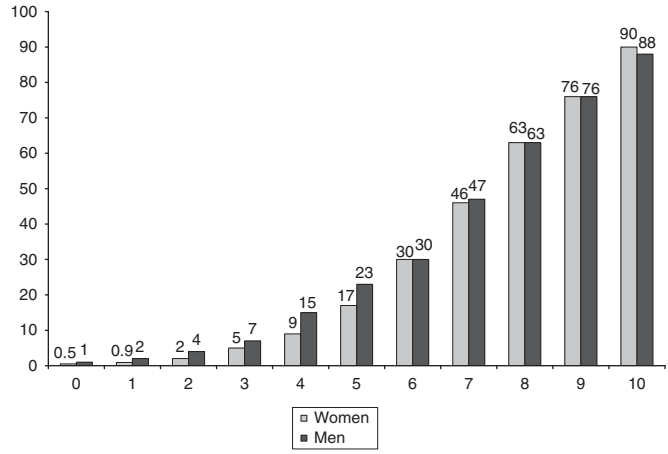

Figure 3: Predicted probabilities of Marine Le Pen votes 2012 by gender and sympathy for M Le Pen.

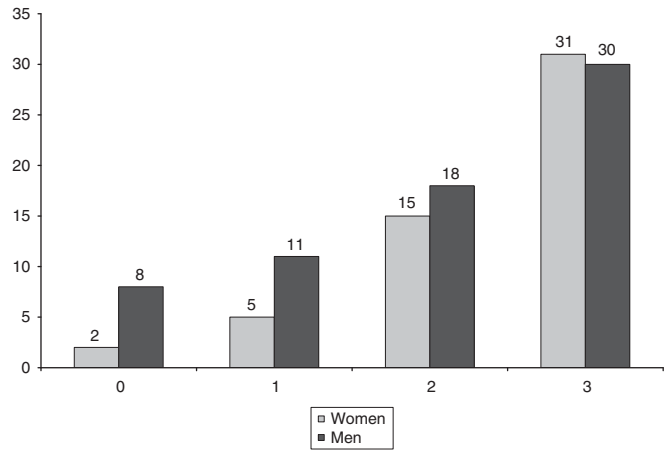

Figure 4: Predicted probabilities of Marine Le Pen votes 2012 by gender and anti-EU score.

the previous occupation of people out of work, there is no indicator of sympathy for Marine Le Pen, and so on. Therefore, I reduced the regression model to five variables (Table 5): gender, age, education, religious practice and location on the left–right scale. The analysis confirms the disappearance of the RRGG. It does not matter whether gender is entered alone (Model 1) or in conjunction with the control variables age, education, occupation and religious practice (Model 2). But if I enter the left–right dimension, the gender variable is just below the threshold of statistical relevance and a mild gender gap reappears if I add attitudes to the model (Model 4, not presented here).

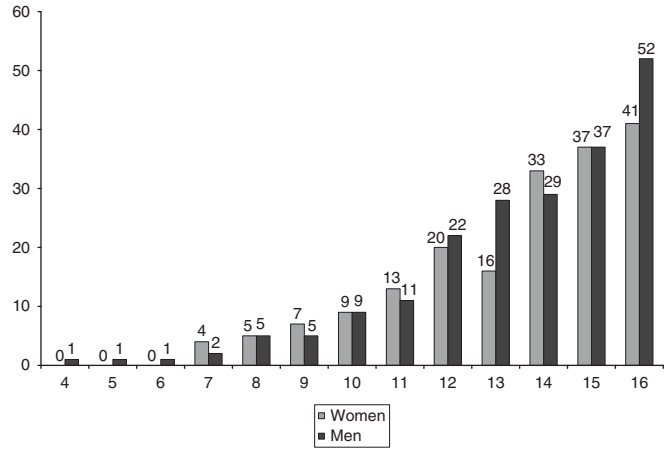

Figure 5: Predicted probabilities of Marine Le Pen votes 2012 by gender and ethnocentrism.

Therefore, it is premature to conclude that the RRGG is definitely closed in France. The process is not stabilized.[19] Voting behaviour depends heavily on the electoral context and the political supply side. The 2014 European elections mobilized less than half of the French electorate (42 per cent), and it seems that this time women went even less often than men to the polls. The issue of turnout was probed at length in the 2014 European Election Survey. Sixty-one per cent of the women (versus 69 per cent of men) chose the first answer: 'I'm sure I voted in the European elections'. Conversely, adding the answers 'I did not vote', 'I thought about voting but didn't', 'I usually vote but didn't this time' and refusal to answer, the proportion of citizens that did not express a vote rose from 31 per cent among men to 39 among women. This could in itself explain the return of the RRGG if part of the young, unskilled women in insecure jobs who turned to Marine Le Pen in higher number in 2012 were not mobilized enough to vote in 2014. The real test will be the 2017 Presidential Election.

Conclusion

The present analysis shows that the RRGG is context dependent, sensitive to social and political change, as well as not written in marble once and for all. Nevertheless, I find that women do not appear so different from men in their support for the French Radical Right. Their votes for the Radical Right in 2012 are explained by the same factors: intolerance to immigrants, euro-scepticism, right-wing positioning, low education and economic insecurity. It just seems, all things being equal, that women

Table 5: Logistic regression on votes for the National Front in 2014 by gender, sociodemographic and political variables

	Model 1 *B(es)*	*Model 2* *B(es)*	*Model 3* *B(es)*
Gender			
Men	0.109(0.10)	0.155(0.10)	0.206(0.11)
Women	—	—	—
Age			
18–24	—	0.365(0.25)	0.461(0.26)
25–34	—	0.712(0.21)**	0.783(0.23)**
35–49	—	0.552(0.16)**	0.667(0.17)***
50–64	—	0.248(0.15)	0.355(0.16)*
65+	—	—	—
Level of education			
None, primary school	—	2.019(.39)***	2.016(0.42)***
Secondary	—	1.496(0.21)***	1.618(0.22)***
Bac	—	0.965(0.21)***	0.998(0.22)***
Bac+2	—	0.826(0.23)***	0.876(0.24)***
University	—	0.878(0.21)***	0.982(0.22)***
Bachelor	—	0.435(0.21)*	0.513(0.22)*
Master degree	—	—	—
Religion			
Regularly practicing Catholic	—	−0.40(0.26)	−0.618(0.28)*
Irregularly practicing Catholic	—	0.583(0.13)***	0.178(0.14)
Non-practicing Catholic	—	0.556(0.14)***	0.330(0.15)*
Other religion	—	−0.10(0.28)	−0.045(0.30).
No religion	—	—	—
Score left–right scale (0–10)	—	—	0.325(0/02)***
Constant	−1.242(0.76)***	−2.740 (0.23)***	−4.676(0.30)***
N	3170	3170	3170
Log Likelihood	2262.333	2145.888	1903.489
χ^2 (DF)	1.106(1)	117.551(15)***	359.950(16)***
R^2	0.001	0.083	0.24

*P<0.05; **P<0.010; ***P<0.001

Source: Data — French European Election Study 2014, unweighted.

are politically less 'assertive' (Harteveld *et al* (2013). But in the politicized and mobilizing context of the 2012 Presidential Election, the first post-recession election, dominated by the rejection of Sarkozy, 'president of the rich', Marine le Pen made the difference. This shows women represent a large potential reservoir of support for her and her party that could still increase her electoral base in the future.

To go further though, as I started doing in a comparative study of the 2014 European elections (Barisione and Mayer, 2015), it is necessary to go beyond the fixation on the 'Radical Right Gender Gap' and take into account the heterogeneity of the female electorate. The votes of some women – the elderly, the church-goers – can still be explained by the 'traditional' gender gap. Even if they approve of the FN's ideas about immigration and locate themselves on the far right, they will prefer voting for old established right-wing parties. Others – young, educated, culturally liberal – will turn to the left even more than their male counterparts, along the lines of the 'modern' gender gap. To get the whole picture it is necessary to articulate the three gender gaps in the plural and see how they appear, disappear or overlap.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 I refer in this article to the definition of the Populist Radical Right given by Mudde, based on nativism, authoritarianism and populism (Mudde, 2007, p. 19).
2 'Ouvriers' are skilled and unskilled manual workers, not only in manufacturing and production but also in transportation, construction, services and crafts, as defined by the French Census Office, Group 6 in the INSEE (National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies, the Census Bureau) Classification of Professions and Socio-professional Categories updated in 2003.
3 According to the French Census Office, 2010 survey on employment the percentage of foreigners among the gainfully employed is 9.6 per cent among blue collars versus 5 per cent among routine non-manual employees (the average among wage earners is 5.2 per cent).
4 According to the EVS (European Values Studies), in 2008 the predicted probabilities in Western Europe that men 'never' attend any religious service is 8 per cent, while the predicted probabilities that women 'attend very often'is 6 per cent (François and Magni-Berton, 2014, p. 178).
5 Women were given voting rights long after men in most countries, especially in France where it took almost a century: men gained universal franchise in 1848, women in 1947.
6 For an interesting approach of the contrasted reaction of women to the use of torture in the post 9/11 context, because of the conflicting impact of feminism and motherhood see Wemlinger, 2013.
7 For a recent assessment see the 2015 special issue of Patterns of Prejudice on 'Gender and Populist radical Rights Politics' and more specifically the two contributions on the electoral RRGG (Harteveld *et al*, 2015; Spierings and Zaslove, 2015).
8 In 2012, the difference was 2.5 percentage points ($N = 266$) and 1,9 per cent ($N = 500$) in 2014. In both cases the numbers allow for detailed statistical analyses.
9 Drawing from the data of the 1988 and 1995 Presidential Elections Surveys and the 1997 Parliamentary Elections Survey, a series of logistic regression taking the vote for Le Pen as the dependant variable, showed a robust gender effect throughout the period, during which Le Pen's party reached an electoral threshold of around 15 per cent of the valid vote whatever the type of election, before the split of 1998–1999. The first model controled the effect of gender, age, education, number of links with the working class (being working class, having a father and /or a spouse-working class) and religion

(affiliation+practice), a second one added ideological and political factors (party proximity, attitudes towards immigrants, satisfaction with the way democracy functions (Mayer, 2002, p. 220). In the 2007 election one also found a clear gender gap (Mayer, 2007).

10 The TNS-Sofres Election Day Survey on telephone (Mayer, 2013a), the face to face post-electoral French Election Study 2012 (Mayer 2013b) and also the Cevipof/Opinion Way 2012 telephone post-electoral survey.

11 In 2011 over 40 per cent of gainfully employed women with no degree work part time (5 times the proportion found among men) and one-third of the women with a vocational degree (CAP, brevet professionnel) versus 5 per cent of men.

12 See the in depth study of the everyday lives of sales women and cashiers in supermarkets described by Benquet (2011, 2013).

13 Confirmed by all our annual reports ever since, available on the Website of the CNCDH http://www.cncdh.fr/.

14 The 2012 election was before the massive right wing and Catholic mobilization against the legalization of gay marriage, and adoption for same-sex couples, finally voted in 23 April 2013. But the general trend of increasing acceptance of sexual minorities and women's right has not stopped (Gault, 2013). In the 2012 French Election Study, only 14 per cent of voters believe women are 'above all made to have and raise children' and there is almost no difference between men and women (respectively 16 and 13 per cent believe so). While 41 per cent of the men but 53 per cent of the women consider 'homosexuals should have the right to adopt children'.

15 In her autobiography Marine Le Pen presents herself as a 'quasi-feminist' strenghtened by her divorce and her struggle to work and raise her children alone (quoted in Meret and Siim, 2015, p. 19, from Marine Le Pen's book *A contre-flots*, 2006, Paris, Grancher, p. 188).

16 Several Radical Right parties such as the Dutch LPF (Pim Fortuyn List) yesterday, Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom today, or the Norwegian Progress Party, or the Danish People's party (DF), are 'gendering' immigration (Meret and Siim, 2012 and Meret and Siim, 2015). They present Islam as a religion of fanaticism and intolerance threatening the rights of women, beaten up, mutilated and ill-treated by Muslim men (Akkerman and Hagelund, 2007; de Lange and Mügge, 2015). In France, Marine Le Pen is taking a similar turn.

17 We left in that category respondents still at school. It has no effect on the results of the regression owing to their small number ($N = 36$). The series of regressions separating them from the other inactive are available on demand.

18 One finds the same result, a disappearance of the RRGG in the presidential election of 2012 on the base of other surveys (see Mayer 2013a, b).

19 An ongoing comparative research with Mauro Barisione in six countries including France, based on the 2014 European Election Studies, using PTVs instead of actual votes, also shows the resilience of the RRGG (Barisione and Mayer, 2015).

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Appendix A

The 2012 and 2014 electoral surveys

1. The 2002 French Electoral Panel 2002 is a three wave panel, based on quota sampling, conducted by TNS-Sofres for Cevipof (funded by the French Home Office). Here we use the post-election wave 2, conducted on a sample of 4017 people people representative of the French metropolitan population registered on the electoral lists (quotas sampling), between 15 and 31 May 2002, by CATI. The declared proportion of Le Pen voters in the first round was 11.4 per cent ($N = 362$) 5.5 percentage point below his real score. Available at cdsp.sciences-po.fr/enquetes.php?lang=ANG&idRubrique=enquetesFR&idTheme
2. The French Electoral Study 2012 is a face to face survey coordinated by Nicolas Sauger at the Centre for Political Studies of Sciences Po (CEE) focused on ' Political Economy of Voting'. Conducted between 9 May and 9 June 2012 on a random sample of 2014 people representative of the French metropolitan population registered on the electoral lists. Available at www.cee.sciences-po.fr/fr/.
3. The 2014 European Elections Study was designed by Nicolas Sauger at the Centre for European Studies of Sciences Po (CEE) and conducted in seven Northern and Southern European countries (France, Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece), with contrasted economic situations and party systems. The French fieldwork was done by TNS-Sofres between 28 May and 12 June , online, on random samples of 4000 people representative of country's citizens of age to vote (See Sauger *et al,* 2015 for details).

Appendix B

The attitudinal scales in the French election study 2012

Cultural liberalism (2–8)
Homosexual couples have the right to adopt children/women are primarily meant to have and raise children (reversed): *somewhat agree, strongly agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.*

Euroscepticism (2–6)

- All things considered, do you think that France has benefited or has not benefited from its membership in the European Union: *has benefited/has not*.
- Some people may have some fears about the European construction. For each of the following, please tell me if you personally are afraid or not: that there is less social protection in France/that we lose our national identity and culture: *it does not scare you/it scares you.*

Ethnocentrism (4–16):
There are too many immigrants in France/many immigrants come to France to only enjoy social security/immigration threatens our jobs/all foreigners who have lived in France for several years should have the right to vote in municipal elections (reversed): *somewhat agree, strongly agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.*