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Nonna Mayer

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The Front national Vote in the Plural

The insoluble Front national equation

Between the French general election of 1981 and the 1995 presidential election, the number of Front national (FN) voters increased from less than 100,000 to more than 4.5 million. With the exception of Austria, France is the only country of the European Union in which a party of the extreme right, clearly recognized as such by more than three-quarters of the electorate,¹ has obtained such stunning success at the ballot box. The numerous theories which have been advanced over the past several years to explain the growth of FN support can be divided into four groups.

The first centres on the FN leader and what Edwy Plenel and Alain Rollat have called the 'Le Pen effect'.² Here, Le Pen's personality, his demagogic character and his talent for manipulating the media are crucial. For example, his first appearance on *Heure de vérité* (Hour of Truth) on 13 February 1984 increased voting intentions in his favour from 3.5 per cent to 7 per cent if the barometer used by one of the principal French polling organization, Société française d'enquête par sondages (SOFRES), is anything to go by. This first set of theories also includes some that examine the psychology of voters themselves, highlighting their authoritarian tendencies, both heterophobic and xenophobic, as well as the repressed Oedipal fantasies which leave them so easily susceptible to *lepéniste* rhetoric.³

A second group of explanations is based on social and economic factors. Certain theorists believe that immigration—particularly of North Africans and/or Muslims—triggered the FN vote among those living, against their

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1 Immediately following the 1995 presidential election, 76 per cent of the electorate, and 70 per cent of those who voted directly for Le Pen, placed the FN at the extreme right—indeed at the seventh and final cell—of the left-right political scale; see the analysis of the survey conducted following the 1995 presidential election by Centre d'étude de la vie politique française (CEVIPOF), *L'électeur a ses raisons* (Paris 1997).

2 Edwy Plenel and Alain Rollat, *L'effet Le Pen* (Paris 1984); see also Serge Dumont, *Le système Le Pen* (Antwerp 1985).

3 In particular, see Jean-Louis Maisonneuve, *L'extrême droite sur le divan, psychanalyse d'une famille politique* (Paris 1992); see also Pierre Jouve and Ali Magoudi, *Les dits et les non-dits de Jean-Marie Le Pen: enquêtes et psychanalyse* (Paris 1988); on voter psychology, see Hugues Lagrange and Pascal Perrineau, 'Le syndrome lepéniste', in Nonna Mayer and Pascal Perrineau (eds.), *Le Front National à découvert*, 2nd edn. (Paris 1996), 228–48.

will, next to communities with both different value systems and ways of life. This theory, which Pierre Martin has recently reiterated in a publication by the Saint-Simon Foundation,⁴ seems to be proved by the fact that, regardless of the type of election, the geographical map of the FN vote coincides with the local presence of foreigners (see maps 1-2). In addition, immigration is most regularly proclaimed as a primary motive by the FN electorate itself. The most radical formulation of this theory is given by Hervé Le Bras in his 'Le Pen equation': $FN\ vote\ (\%) = 6\% + (1.7 \times foreigners\ (\%)) + negligible\ residue$. He offers an anthropological interpretation of the equation based on a variety of combinations (depending on the locality) of three fundamental forces: family structures, local power structures and national power structures. According to him, a map of the FN vote coincides with the

map of suicides at the beginning of the century, the map of wealth and population migrations; it's basically the negative imprint of the map representing the distribution of the extended family structure.⁵ In those areas, which are entirely dominated by Paris and where autonomous organizational authority no longer exists, the national identity crisis is most crucially felt.⁶

Those are the places where the FN leader's xenophobic discourse—largely directed against foreigners whose distribution throughout French territory remains, in fact, unaltered since the middle of the nineteenth century—is most influential.

Other theorists focus on economic and social change, and their negative consequences: unemployment, crime and instability. The map of the FN vote represents an urban and industrial France crippled by the weight of its unemployment crisis. In his analysis, Pascal Perrineau describes the FN vote as 'the political echo of urban anomie', while Jérôme Jaffré sees it as a 'vote of despair by which the socially disadvantaged express their discontent'.⁷

The third category of explanations emphasizes cultural factors. Historians such as Pierre Milza have underlined the ideological relationship between the FN vote and the periodic revival of a 'protest temperament'. Milza, for example, considers the solutions offered by the *lepéniste* party to be

drawn from the old package of national-populism, a movement of which fascism à la française was, in fact, only ever one case in point, and which has been successively reincarnated in Bonapartism, Boulangism, anti-Dreyfusism, the 'revolutionary right' of the turn of the century, league nationalism and later Poujadism.⁸

4 Pierre Martin, *Le vote Le Pen: l'électorat du Front national* (Paris 1996).

5 The structure whereby several generations live together under one roof.

6 Hervé Le Bras, *Les trois France* (Paris 1986), 216, 219.

7 Pascal Perrineau, 'Front national: l'écho politique de l'anomie urbaine', *Espri*, nos. 3-4, March-April 1988, 22-38; Jérôme Jaffré, 'Front national: la relève protestataire', in Elisabeth Dupoirier and Gérard Grunberg (eds.), *Mars 1986: la drôle de défaite de la gauche* (Paris 1986), 223-4.

8 Pierre Milza, *Fascisme français passé et présent* (Paris 1987), 421; see also Michel Winock (ed.), *Histoire de l'extrême droite en France* (Paris 1993).

Other theorists, like Piero Ignazi, describe the upsurge of extreme right-wing parties in Europe as a 'silent counter-revolution', part and parcel of society's neo-conservative reaction against the permissive and hedonistic values of the 1960s.⁹ The FN allows for the expression of the authoritarian, xenophobic and security-seeking aspirations which developed in the mid-1970s and were never sufficiently acknowledged by the governments of the day. It was Pierre-André Taguieff who first devised the concept of 'national-populism'—the popular form of the national-liberalism of the élites—for the specific identity crisis provoked during the 1980s by the globalization of culture and the market, the construction of Europe and the collapse of Communism.¹⁰

The fourth and final category of analyses focuses on the political factors which have favoured the FN vote: the fears and deceptions aroused by the left's rise to power; the inability of elected political representatives to find a solution to unemployment; their increasing lack of credibility following a long series of affairs and scandals; the passage of the amnesty laws; and the general disorientation brought about by successive 'cohabitations' within the French government. The FN vote has developed, ultimately, into a 'protest phenomenon'. In this light, Jérôme Jaffré describes it as both 'refusal power' and 'a safety valve'—an alternative version, at the opposite end of the political playing-field, of the dissenting role once played by the Communist Party.¹¹ The election calendar at the beginning of the 1980s was to greatly facilitate the expression of this protest. As Piero Ignazi puts it: 'if the FN was able to come out from isolation it was due first to the institutional stimulus provided by the system of proportional representation, and, second, to the timing of elections, including a succession of local elections and by-elections followed by risk-free national elections.'¹² In addition, the European common market debate and the Maastricht Treaty referendum clearly sharpened the feeling that a gulf exists between the 'people' and the 'élite', a feeling that is to the FN's particular advantage.¹³

It is tempting to look for a single explanation for the FN phenomenon. But whilst its leader's charisma, the presence of immigrants, the persistence of unemployment and the crisis of political representation all play a role, none of them on their own constitutes an explanation. When Le Pen entered the political arena during the 1950s, it was the Poujadist movement which first

9 Piero Ignazi, 'The silent counter-revolution: hypotheses on the emergence of extreme right-wing parties in Europe', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1992, 3-34.

10 See, by Pierre-André Taguieff: 'La rhétorique du national-populisme', *Cahiers Bernard Lazare*, no. 109, June-July 1984, 19-38; 'La rhétorique du national-populisme: les règles élémentaires de la propagande xénophobe', *Mots*, no. 9, October 1984, 113-38; 'La tentation autoritaire en France', *Les Temps modernes*, no. 465, April 1985, 1773-903; see also 'Nationalisme, réactions identitaires et communauté imaginée', *Hommes et migrations*, no. 1154, May 1992, 31-41.

11 Jaffré, 'Front national', 229 and Jérôme Jaffré, 'Le Pen ou le vote exutoire', *Le Monde*, 12 April 1988.

12 Piero Ignazi, 'Un nouvel acteur politique', in Mayer and Perrineau (eds.), 76.

13 See Gérard Grunberg, 'Les élections européennes en France', in SOFRES, *L'Etat de l'opinion 1995* (Paris 1995), 81-101.

benefitted from his skills as an orator and as a tribune of the people. However, despite these qualities which would later become his trademark, Le Pen was beaten during the 1962 general election and endured relative political anonymity until he was called to preside over the FN in 1972. While the party enjoyed no electoral success during the following decade, Le Pen began in those years to expound the very ideas which would later become so successful. His slogan for the 1973 general election, for example, was 'Defend the Frenchman'; his 1973 election platform promised to combat 'uncontrollable immigration' and the degeneration of traditional French values.

The effects of economic crisis were felt in 1974 during the first petrol shortage. At the same time France closed its borders, putting a sudden stop to the ongoing immigration which had developed throughout the 'Thirty Glorious Years', the years, since the mid-1940s, which had seen significant economic and social progress. François Mitterrand's electoral success in 1981 could hardly be expected to benefit, in the short run, an anaemic extreme right which had been unable to participate in the election, and which had received only 0.4 per cent of the vote during the first round of the general election in the same year.¹⁴

A chain of events led to the emergence and eventual electoral grounding of the *lepeniste* party. The victory of the 'socialist-communists' in 1981, in a country governed for twenty-three years by the right, was explosive. Their first social reforms triggered a radicalization of the right-wing electorate; at the same time their abrupt embrace of economic austerity marked the end of their honeymoon with the left-wing vote. It is only at this moment that the French seem to have become truly conscious of the economic crisis on their hands and the inability of their political representatives to solve it.¹⁵ And it is precisely at this moment that the rhetoric of the FN—making immigrants the scapegoat for French society's anxieties—finds a buyer on the floor of the electoral market.

The movement's political resources, in conjunction with both its adversary's strategic errors and a variety of favourable institutional factors, guaranteed the FN's longevity and provided it with room to manoeuvre unequalled in other European countries. In this respect, a comparison between the extreme right wings of various European countries (though paid scant attention in France) reveals that yesterday's rapid rise in the electoral success of the German Republikaner, and today's flourishing of the Austrian Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) or the Dutch Vlaams Blok are both fed by the same economic crises, the same political disillusionment, as well as the same fears caused by globalization, the opening of borders and migratory fluidity that

14 In 1983, Jean-Christian Petitfils would conclude his book, *L'extrême droite en France* (Paris 1983) as follows: 'Fragmented into a myriad of tiny islands, powerless coteries, phantom sects, the [extreme right] survives as no more than a historical relic' (123).

15 On the time-lag between the beginning of the crisis and its actual perception by the French, and on the 'collapse of belief' during 1982-3, see especially Elie Cohen, 'Les socialistes et l'économie: de l'âge des mythes au déminage', in Dupoirier and Grunberg (eds.), 81-101.

nourished the FN. These various manifestations of the phenomenon differ only in the rhythm of their waxings and wanings, and in their scale, and according to the particularities of each political system and its political agenda: including both the type of state and the type of electoral and party system, the specific resources of far-right parties (leadership, programme, organization, support network) and the strategies of their opponents (alliance or isolation, condemnation or appropriation).¹⁶

The myth of the typical voter

The variability of all these elements over time and place is another reason why any analysis of the FN vote *in the singular* is misleading. While electoral sociology has progressed considerably, thanks to polling, the face of the FN electorate still remains largely invisible, a fact due both to its low numbers and to its reluctance to expose itself. For example, in any standard 1,000-person sample representing the French electorate, the FN—even where its electoral presence is highest—accounts for less than 100 individuals.¹⁷ As far as possible, therefore, this account will rely on the unique and partially unedited data of two studies conducted by the Centre d'étude de la vie politique française (CEVIPOF) immediately following the presidential elections of 1988 and 1995 respectively.¹⁸ Representing national samples of more than 4,000 individuals, these surveys provide a detailed social, cultural and political profile of those who admitted to voting for Le Pen. They numbered 357 in 1988 and 435 in 1995. Among voters admitting to their choice in the first rounds, the FN force increased from 10.9 per cent in 1988 (thus underestimating the FN candidate's actual score by 3.5 points) to 13.5 per cent (a 1.5 point underestimation). This, in itself, is proof of the FN voter becoming a feature of everyday life.

16 On the need to recognize what he calls the 'structure of political opportunities', see notably Herbert Kitschelt and Anthony McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor 1995); see also the numerous comparative works on the extreme right in Europe, in both English and German: Klaus Von Beyme (ed.), *Right-wing Extremism in Western Europe* (London 1988); Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (New York 1994); Peter H. Merkl and Leonard Weinberg (eds.), *Encounters with the Contemporary Radical Right* (Boulder, CO 1993); Jürgen W. Falter, Hans-Gerd Jaschke and Jürgen R. Winkler (eds.), *Rechtsextremismus. Ergebnisse und Perspektiven der Forschung*, a special issue of *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, vol. 27, 1996. Little comparative research of this type has been conducted in France, with the exception of the now-dated study by Anne-Marie Duranton Crabol, *L'Europe de l'extrême droite: de 1945 à nos jours* (Brussels 1991). A useful inventory of the European far right is presented in Jean-Yves Camus and Centre européen de recherche et d'action sur le racisme et l'antisémitisme (eds.), *Extrémismes en Europe* (La Tour d'Aigues 1997).

17 Exit polls conducted at voting centres on election day represent several thousand electors. However, since only voting centres of a certain size are covered (thus under-representing farmers and people living in rural areas) and since the questionnaires themselves are self-completed (which poses a problem for the elderly and allows for imprecise replies to 'profession'), these surveys remain inherently biased.

18 Post-presidential election surveys conducted 9-20 May 1988 and 9-24 May 1995, using face-to-face interviews by SOFRES pollsters with national representative samples of the electorate (N=4032 and N=4078). See CEVIPOF, *L'électeur français en questions* (Paris 1990) and *L'électeur a ses raisons*.

Immediately following the European elections of 1984—which had seen Le Pen's ticket supported by 11.2 per cent of valid votes—*Le Nouvel Observateur* painted a mocking portrait of Jean-Marie Le Pen's prototypical supporter:

He's a man in his fifties, he runs a small shop in Paris or in a large city in the provinces. Unless, of course, he's executive manager of a small firm, or even a medium-sized one. He's a man who feels good about life; he's got his degree under his belt, in business or technology. And he's Catholic, though not excessively. He makes it to church for special occasions, and wouldn't miss Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve for anything in the world. He's put his kids into private schools, and calls it 'free choice'.¹⁹

In today's quite different portrait of the FN voter—embodying a 'France of popular despair'²⁰—the worker and the 'poor white trash' from the suburbs replace the shopkeeper. Neither of these depictions is satisfactory however. No electorate is homogeneous, and the FN electorate is no exception. As early as 1984, the *lepéniste* party received electoral support from all sectors of the population, across all age-groups and from every kind of social milieu (see table 1). Of course, certain categories are wont to be more supportive than others, although not necessarily the same ones at all times.

There is only one characteristic which appears consistently throughout the FN electorate: namely, masculinity. Regardless of the election, far fewer women than men vote for the FN. Women are traditionally less inclined to support extremist movements of any kind; furthermore, they are suspicious of a party which both militantly opposes abortion rights and encourages the 'weaker' sex to return to the home. Other characteristics of the FN electorate have changed over time. In 1984 Le Pen's ticket was supported by the middle classes, by managers (14 per cent), owners of small businesses and white-collar workers (17 and 18 per cent of valid votes), and foremen (19 per cent). The FN leader obtained his best results, however, amongst the privileged and educated, including industrialists and large-scale shopowners (26 per cent), where his score was directly proportional to the size of the firm, liberal professionals (19 per cent) and practising Catholics: in other words, amongst social categories traditionally of the right.²¹ As such, the moderate right formed the very core of the 1984 FN electorate, with more than half of its members claiming to have voted for Giscard d'Éstaing during the second round of the 1981 presidential election, and comprising a majority of supporters of the mainstream right-wing parties, the Rassemblement pour la république (RPR) and the Union pour la démocratie française (UDF).

19 *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 22 June 1984.

20 Pascal Perrineau, 'La dynamique du vote Le Pen: le poids du gauchisme-lepénisme', in Pascal Perrineau and Colette Ysmal (eds.), *Le vote de crise* (Paris 1995), 244.

21 See Elisabeth Dupoirier, 'L'électorat français, le 17 juin 1984', in SOFRES, *Opinion publique 1985* (Paris 1985), 207–30 (exit poll by SOFRES in 1984 for the television channel TF1 and for *Le Nouvel Observateur*).

On the other hand, during the 1986 general elections, the FN was abandoned by one-third of the electorate that it had gained during the European elections. With 88 per cent of these defectors voting for UDF-RPR candidates, their places were filled by electors who had previously either voted for the left or abstained. These were younger individuals, working-class and without any attachment to religion.²² Consequently, the percentage of former Giscard supporters in the FN electorate fell to 43 per cent during these 1986 elections, and then, on the eve of the 1988 presidential elections, to 33 per cent of Le Pen's potential electorate. The percentage of UDF and RPR sympathizers similarly dropped from 39 per cent to 12 per cent in 1988. The representation of former François Mitterrand supporters stabilized at about one-third, whilst the recent influx of young, less-politicized voters—individuals who had not voted in 1981—increased their proportion of representation from 13 per cent to 34 per cent.²³ Le Pen's elevated score during the 1988 presidential election thus reflected the union of these two electorates, the one bourgeois, the other working-class; Le Pen was making headway not only amongst liberal professionals and executives, but also amongst blue-collar workers and, most importantly, proprietors of small businesses, of whom a record 27–30 per cent were polled as his supporters.

Between the 1988 and 1995 presidential elections, although the size of the FN's electorate remained practically unaltered, it underwent two important—and contradictory—changes. The FN's popularity has today diminished from 27 per cent to 14 per cent amongst small-scale business owners who are now more inclined to be attracted by the Chirac candidacy. On the other hand, the FN's current success among the working class has forced it into competition with the left on its own territory. This trend was reflected in the first round of the 1995 presidential election in which 18 per cent of white-collar workers, 25 per cent of the unemployed and 30 per cent of blue-collar workers voted for Le Pen, revealing a progression of 11 and 22 points respectively since the 1984 European elections among the unemployed and blue-collar workers (see table 1). As with any survey data, these results should be interpreted with caution, particularly since the findings of various institutes differ from 1 to 8 points with regard to the support of blue-collar workers. All findings, without exception, confirm the proletarianization of the FN electorate, however, discrepancies reflecting only a different reading of the *scope* of the phenomenon. The 1997 general elections reinforced this trend. While today's Front national may no longer be, as in 1995, France's 'First Workers' Party', it received its best result thanks to this social category which supported it with almost one-quarter of its total votes (see table 1).

22 Data from exit poll sponsored by Bull/Brulé Ville Associés, 16 March 1986 for Radio Monte Carlo, *Paris Match*, *Libération* and Antenne 2 (N=2837); see also Mayer and Perrineau (eds.), 266–7 (table).

23 Jérôme Jaffré, 'Trois postulats sur l'électorat d'extrême droite. Ne pas se tromper sur Monsieur Le Pen', *Le Monde*, 26 May 1987 (SOFRES post-election surveys 1984 and 1986, plus various pre-election surveys from April 1987 (N=3000)).

Table 1. Evolution of the FN electorate (1984-1997)

FN vote %	Europ. 84	Gen. 86	Pres. 88	Gen. 88	Europ. 89	Gen. 93	Europ. 94	Pres. 95	Gen. 97
Total	11	10	14.5	10	12	13	10.5	15.5	15
<i>Sex</i>									
Men	14	11	18	12	14	14	12	19	19
Women	8	9	11	7	10	13	9	12	12
<i>Age</i>									
18-24 years	10	14	16	15	9	18	10	18	16
25-34 years	11	10	17	9	8	10	15	18	19
35-49 years	12	11	17	8	12	13	10	15	15
50-64 years	12	9	11	10	15	13	12	17	16
64 years and older	10	6	12	10	12	13	7	9	12
<i>Profession</i>									
Farmer	10	17	13	3	3	13	4	16	2
Shopowner, craftsman, company manager	17	16	27	6	18	15	12	14	20
Executives, professionals	14	6	19	10	11	6	6	7	10
Managers, white-collar workers	15	11	13	8	9	13	9	16	15
Blue-collar workers	8	11	19	19	15	18	21	30	24
Unemployed, retired	9	8	12	9	13	12	9	11	15
<i>Status</i>									
Self-employed	13	13	21	7	10	12	6	11	12
Public sector	8	8	11	9	7	12	4	15	15
Private sector	15	14	17	13	14	16	17	21	17
Unemployed	—	—	12	—	—	—	28	25	15
Retired	—	—	12	9	13	12	9	11	15
<i>Educational level*</i>									
Primary	8	8	15	7	13	17	7	14	17
Secondary	12	15	13	12	14	16	16	17	14
Technical/commercial	17	12	18	12	11	14	16	21	19
Higher	11	7	12	10	9	8	5	9	10
<i>Religion</i>									
Regularly practising Catholic	14	7	7	5	15	12	8	10	7
Irregularly practising Catholic	6	8	16	10	12	12	6	12	13
Non-practising Catholic	13	12	17	11	12	13	13	18	19
No religion	5	7	9	9	10	15	11	14	17

Source: post-electoral SOFRES survey, N=2000, and SOFRES/*Libération*/CEVIPOF/CRAPS/CIDSP survey, 26-31 May 1997, N=3010 (see note 27)

* 'Educational level' is determined by the last institution attended, except in 1997 when this information is based on the highest-ranking diploma received.

The post-presidential election survey by CEVIPOF provides a profile of the *lepéniste* proletariat. The FN president seems most successful among male blue-collar workers aged 18-25 who are politically undecided and who live and work in urban surroundings where the themes of immigration and crime are most relevant. Representing the most underprivileged sector of society, both socially and culturally, they have not pursued higher education and are in possession of no more than a vocational qualification. These are individuals who do not own property and whose monthly salary does not exceed FF 7,500—if they're lucky enough to be employed. Notably, it is among unemployed workers that FN support approaches within a hair's breadth of 40 per cent.

The FN's electoral success in this area has essentially been achieved at the expense of the left, and specifically the socialist left.²⁴ In a survey of 100 blue-collar workers voting for Le Pen in 1995, almost 50 per cent declared having voted for Mitterrand in the second round of the 1988 presidential election, as opposed to 22 per cent for Chirac, with one-fifth either abstaining or having been too young to vote. The first signs of instability within the working-class electorate appeared between the 1981 and 1986 general elections when the left lost 12 points among blue-collar workers. A more brutal loss of 20 points then took place between the 1988 and 1993 general elections. This point decline testifies to general disarray within the French working class, a social category which has been particularly affected by industrial restructuring and the ongoing economic crisis, and which has lost faith in the ability of the left to find solutions. Its support amongst the working population decreased from 38 per cent to 31 per cent between the censuses of 1982 and 1990, while unemployment increased from 9.6 per cent to 14.2 per cent.

Ironically those categories most seriously affected by unemployment—and thus most likely to vote for Le Pen—include those previously regarded as the left's traditional stronghold: skilled traditional workers engaged by large firms in sectors such as automobile and arms manufacture, shipbuilding, mining or metallurgy. Furthermore, over time, white-collar workers have seen

24 The data from available surveys which polled the *lepéniste* electorate on their vote during the preceding election, as well as the results of detailed contextual analyses carried out at the cantonal and communal level, reveal that the influence on the Communist vote has always been marginal; see, notably, François Platone and Henri Rey, 'Le FN en terre communiste', in Mayer and Perrineau (eds.), 249-67; also Henri Rey, *Les évolutions du comportement électoral dans les quartiers de grands ensembles* (Paris 1990) and *La peur des banlieues* (Paris 1996). The decline of the Communist vote, which was principally to the socialists' advantage, began well before the FN's electoral breakthrough. If ever a transfer of vote from the Communists to the FN does occur, it will probably be, for example, after an intermediate stages of abstaining or supporting the non-Communist left. As Jérôme Jaffré notes: 'in the French political system, there is almost a phenomenon of functional substitution between the two forces' (Jaffré, 'Front national', 229). While they are not, particularly where the young are concerned, necessarily ex-Communist voters, those individuals who cast their votes in Le Pen's direction often have the same social and cultural profile as those who supported the Parti communiste français (PCF) when it accounted for 15-20 per cent of the electorate.

both their working conditions and the very nature of their professions change drastically. In today's world, two out of five workers are employed in the service sector as, for example, drivers, packers or warehouse workers; the same holds for service industry trades such as temping and cleaning. Those positions have become increasingly isolated and precarious, as the distinction between white- and blue-collar worker is eroded and they are without any tradition of trade unionism and collective action, making such workers all the more vulnerable to *lepéniste* rhetoric.²⁵

Electoral geography confirms the findings of the surveys. With each successive presidential election, the FN has increased its vote in areas such as Lorraine, Picardie, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Champagne and Ardennes—that is, in regions most scarred by the industrial restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s and where the gradual decline of the socialist vote has been most apparent. Between constituencies, a strong correlation (+.73) also exists between *lepéniste* gains and socialist losses between 1988 and 1995.²⁶

Blue-collar workers who vote for Le Pen thus issue a significant warning call to the left, even though they may remain, for the most part, still attached to it. According to the 1995 CEVIPOF survey, 50 per cent of them consider themselves on the left half of the left-right political scale, 60 per cent declare an affinity with a left-wing party, and 54 per cent voted for Jospin during the second round. However, while these supporters may respond to the rhetoric of security and xenophobia with the same enthusiasm as other *lepéniste* voters, they are distinct in their leftist leanings towards egalitarianism, and support for redistribution in the economic and social domains.

The reasons for the FN vote

An analysis of the forces motivating the FN electorate only confirms its diversity. While electors overwhelmingly categorize Jean-Marie Le Pen and his party as an extreme right-wing entity, they do not consider themselves to be likewise extremists. Asked to place themselves on a seven-point left-right political scale, Le Pen supporters spread themselves across the entire range, with 17 per cent in the three cells to the left, 28 per cent at the centre, and 54 per cent to the right. Only 15 per cent of *lepénistes*—in 1995 as well as in 1988—actually placed themselves on the extreme right of the scale, on the seventh and final cell (a rate which, while remaining a minority, is three times higher than in the sample as a whole). In addition, *lepénistes* do not identify with a political party which the majority (70 per cent) of them clas-

25 On transformations within the working class, see Alain Chenu, 'Une classe ouvrière en crise', in Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE), *Données sociales 1993* (Paris 1993).

26 On a departmental level, the correlation between the electoral evolution of the Parti socialiste (PS) and the FN, in successive presidential elections, is .78, with that of the PCF being .15; these relationships are confirmed on a cantonal level. See Perrineau, 'La dynamique du vote Le Pen', 254-6.

sify—as does their leader—as being far right. Asked to choose the party to which they felt ‘the closest or the least alienated’, only one-third of supporters selected the FN.²⁷ In fact, they seem relatively untouched by the ‘Le Pen effect’. When asked, in 1995 as well as in 1988, what had been the primary reason for their vote, *lepenistes* were the least inclined among all electors to cite their candidate’s personality (14 per cent against 23 per cent in the sample as a whole), with only slightly more than one-quarter of them actually wishing to see Le Pen one day elected president.²⁸ For the vast majority of electors in 1988, it was not the man, his party or any sense of belonging to a political family which counted. The reason given for their vote, at an overwhelming 78 per cent (as opposed to 65 per cent in 1995), was, in fact, ‘his views’.

These views are well known. Regardless of the election, immigration and crime head the list of reasons for voting FN, even though since 1995—as distinct from the trend observed in 1988—unemployment has become a primary preoccupation, coming five points ahead of immigration, and thus reflecting the FN’s progress amongst the working class (see table 2).²⁹ But while FN electors are most widely characterized by a pronounced rejection of all minorities—including Jews, Arabs and foreigners in general—they remain especially hostile to immigrants.³⁰ This predisposition is not, however, necessarily indicative of forced contact with immigrant communities. Regardless of the period of time under consideration, any correlation which might be found at a departmental level between the FN vote and the local presence of

27 This figure has, however, clearly risen, indicating the normalization and increasing stability of this electorate (post-electoral survey conducted on a representative national sample of the electorate, in conjunction with SOFRES/*Libération*/CEVIPOF/Centre de recherches administratives, politiques et sociales (CRAPS), Lille/Centre d’informatisation des données socio-politiques (CIDSP), Grenoble, 26–31 May 1997; see also *Libération*, 3 June 1997).

28 On the eve of the first round of the 1988 presidential election, only 28 per cent of those intending to vote for Le Pen thought that their candidate would win, a much smaller proportion than among all the other electorates, and almost the same number of Le Pen voters that expected Chirac, Barre or Mitterrand to win (26, 16 and 17 per cent, respectively) (SOFRES survey conducted for a group of regional newspapers, 1–2 April 1988; see Jaffré, ‘Le Pen ou le vote exutoire’). The same phenomenon was evident in 1995 when only 27 per cent of Le Pen’s electorate imagined that their candidate would be elected (exit poll conducted by Institut français d’opinion publique (IFOP)/*Libération*, 23 April 1995, N=5347).

29 Similarly, the two problems which counted most for FN electors during the first round of the 1997 general election were immigration and unemployment (the latter given by 67 per cent of supporters, as against 22 per cent of the general electorate), followed by crime (65 per cent, as against 25 per cent) (exit poll by Conseils, sondages, analyses (CSA)/France3/France Info/*Le Parisien Aujourd’hui*, 25 May 1997, on a nation-wide sample of 4,046 first-round voters).

30 Although Le Pen’s electorate was the one most inclined to think that the ‘Jews have too much power in France’ (37 per cent, as against 21 per cent in the total sample) during the 1988 presidential election, its antisemitism remains relatively mild in comparison with its anti-immigrant fixation (the proportion of those who ‘agree completely’ that there are too many immigrants reached 75 per cent, as against 35 per cent in the total sample, representing a divergence of 40 points). On the other hand, antisemitism is much more apparent amongst the movement’s leaders. This was illustrated by a survey of delegates to the 1990 FN congress in which 88 per cent declared that Jews ‘had too much power’ (see Colette Ysmal, ‘Les cadres du Front national: les habits neufs de l’extrême droit’, in SOFRES, *L’état de l’opinion 1991* (Paris 1991), 181–98).

Table 2. *Hierarchy of problems by electorate*

Problems (% of highest marks)	Laguiller	Hue	Jospin	Voynet	Chirac	Balladur	de Villiers	Le Pen	Total
International relations	13	12	14	5	20	17	19	17	15
Crime	20	28	23	13	28	32	29	44	27
The welfare state	46	56	41	31	30	32	29	34	35
Immigration	14	19	14	13	21	22	22	53	22
Salaries and purchasing power	41	55	34	26	28	23	27	39	32
Education of youth	42	55	45	37	42	38	36	38	41
Unemployment	69	69	60	60	59	54	56	58	57
Working hours	24	29	28	24	13	13	15	17	19
European union	10	11	21	17	13	14	8	8	14
The environment	16	20	21	48	15	16	14	15	18.5
AIDS	38	46	40	38	37	34	31	41	37
Corruption	37	42	32	26	32	35	35	43	33.5
Social disadvantage	44	51	42	43	34	28	27	36	36

Source: 1995 CEVIPOF survey; responses to question: 'Here are a selection of problems that currently face France. Using the scale below, please mark each problem 1-10 depending on the impact it had on your vote during the first round of the presidential election.'

foreigners disappears when considering geographic units which are smaller and, consequently, more homogeneous. Focusing on the canton, commune, *quartier* or block throws into relief other factors, both social (urbanization, the presence of employed or unemployed workers) and political (the absence of local leaders, the loss of community networks, the decline of local activism).³¹ Even at the departmental level, this correlation is in decline; it decreased from .79 at the European election to .61 at the general elections of 1986 and 1988. This was followed by a decline to .67 during the presidential election of 1988, and to .43 during that of 1995. In other words, the presence of foreigners, North Africans or others, is neither a prerequisite nor a justification for voting for Le Pen.

The same phenomenon can be observed with regard to crime. A study carried out in 1985 in the Grenoble region revealed that FN electors were actu-

31 See notably Pascal Perrineau, 'Le Front national: un electorat autoritaire', *Revue politique et parlementaire*, vol. 87, no. 918, August 1985, 24-31; Nonna Mayer, 'Le vote FN de Passy à Barbès', in Mayer and Perrineau (eds.), 249-67; Henri Rey and Jacques Roy, 'Quelques réflexions sur l'évolution d'un département de la banlieue parisienne', *Hérodote*, vol. 43, December 1986, 6-38.

ally the group least likely to have fallen victim during the preceding three months either to robbery (3 per cent, as against 4 per cent in the total sample), to mugging (3 per cent, as against 7 per cent) or to threats and insults (6 per cent, as against 8 per cent). It was, however, the members of this group, in greater numbers than any other, who felt themselves to be more exposed to danger than they had been in the past (90 per cent, as against 45 per cent in the total sample), including in their own homes (42 per cent, as against 29 per cent).³² A more recent study conducted by the Institut des hautes études de la sécurité intérieure (IHESI) found that individuals with an affinity for the FN exhibited feelings of insecurity not only with respect to crime and delinquency, but also, in a more general manner, with reference to all the risks of modern society, including pollution, drugs, fire accidents or AIDS. All of these fears seem to crystalize around the presence of immigrants, with the FN acting as catalyst.³³

To understand such fears, it is important to note that the *lepéniste* voters possess fewer social and political resources than others. Since the 1986 general elections, the educational level recorded of members of the FN has been systematically lower than that of other electorates. In 1995 three-quarters declared that they possessed certification of less status than the *baccalauréat* (equivalent to A-level), as opposed to two-thirds of the total sample. It is, nonetheless, well known that an individual's fears vary in inverse relation to his or her cultural level: the *lepénistes* seem both extremely isolated socially and cocooned inside close family relationships. In this way, they accurately mirror the phrase so often cited by Jean-Marie Le Pen: 'I like my daughters better than my cousins, my cousins better than my neighbours and my neighbours better than strangers' (*Heure de vérité*, 2 March 1984).

The 1995 electors felt the least likely to be able to count on their family, neighbours, associations or elected representatives in a sudden crisis. In addition, they were less disposed towards collective action in the name of solidarity and a common cause (*strikes, demonstrations, sit-ins* etc.), and least often declared having interests in common with members of the same neighbourhood, the same region, or even the same age, gender and profession. Overwhelmingly disassociated from religious practice (unlike electors of the

32 See the study conducted by Hugues Lagrange and Sébastien Roché on a sample of 1,293 individuals representing members of the Grenoble population aged eighteen and older, February-March 1986 (Hugues Lagrange and Sébastien Roché, *Baby Alone in Babylon* (Grenoble 1987) and Hugues Lagrange and Pascal Perrineau, 'Le syndrome lepéniste', in Mayer and Perrineau (eds.), 231.

33 See the survey of French attitudes to problems of security, carried out in October 1989 for the IHESI; under the direction of Annick Percheron, this study was conducted as part of a number of surveys for the Observatoire interrégional du politique, and included 17,400 individuals representative of the French population aged fifteen and older (national sample of 2,000 and 22 regional samples of 700). See Nonna Mayer, 'Le vote FN ou le syndrome de la peur', *Revue internationale d'action communautaire*, vol. 30, no. 70, autumn 1993, 117-22. In 13 of the 15 questions about fear-inducing situations, the FN sympathizers were more often afraid than the sample's average, scoring a record 42 points above the sample average with respect to 'immigrants'.

moderate right), the *lepénistes* denied themselves recourse even to religion as a last resort. Finally, they displayed the least confidence in politics, remaining convinced that political representatives were 'not at all' concerned with people like themselves (82 per cent, as against 68 per cent), that notions of left and right 'didn't mean anything any more' (80 per cent, as against 69 per cent) and that voting 'didn't make much of a difference' (25 per cent, still a minority, as against 13 per cent).

Apart from these general characteristics which distinguish the FN voters from others, a multiplicity of other reasons for the FN vote can be found at the very heart of this electorate. The gap separating *lepénistes* coming from the right or extreme right from those either coming from the left or without affiliation is crucial. These groups share neither the same social or cultural profile, nor the same value system. By deconstructing the electorate—that is, by taking the Le Pen electorate which participated in the first round of the 1995 presidential election and dissecting it according to its members' votes in the 1993 general elections—one can expose this complex internal composition.

Such a manoeuvre reveals that only about one-quarter of the electorate is composed of loyal supporters who voted for FN candidates in 1993 and subsequently for Le Pen in 1995. These individuals represent the hard-core nucleus of *lepénisme*: they are extremist (40 per cent place themselves on the extreme right of the left-right political scale), partisan (66 per cent describe the FN as the party most closely representing their ideals) and devoted to Le Pen (40 per cent rank him at the top of the scale measuring supporters' sympathy for their candidates). This is also the least working-class electorate.

Thirty-one per cent compose a second group of *lepénistes* who supported the party in 1995, but who voted for the UDF-RPR in 1993. This electorate is more bourgeois, more socially and economically privileged, more educated. It is also the most religiously-inclined group, with 71 per cent being either regularly or irregularly practising Catholics. For the most part, its members place themselves to the right of the left-right political scale (51 per cent on the fifth and sixth cells, only 9 per cent on the extreme right); instead of identifying most closely with the FN, they prefer less extremist right-wing parties, particularly the RPR (preferred by 48 per cent, as opposed to 15 per cent preferring the FN). Eighty-two per cent of those among this group who voted during the second round chose Chirac, their values remaining those of the moderate right: liberal *vis à vis* the economy, conformist *vis à vis* morality, conservative *vis à vis* society.

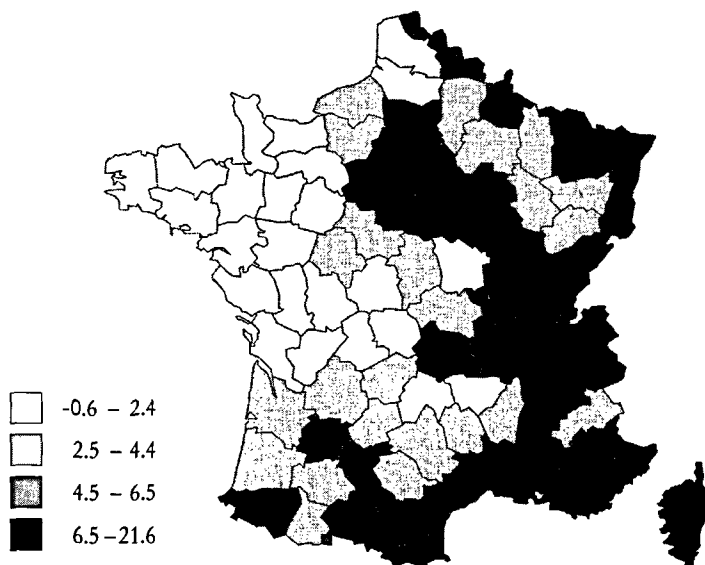
The third group of *lepénistes*, a minority of 14 per cent, represents those who in 1993 voted for either a left-wing or Green party candidate. Forty-nine per cent of its members place themselves on the left of the political scale, and 36 per cent at its centre. They identify most strongly with left-wing parties—particularly the Parti socialiste (PS)—and voted most often for Jospin during the second round. In keeping with the characteristics traditionally demonstrated by left-wing electors, they are largely low-income white- and blue-collar workers who are rarely property owners. Other features include a low

level of education, a high rate of unemployment and a general detachment from religious practice. This group's value system is diametrically opposed to the previous two groups, with great weight being given to social support and wage-earners' rights. They are also egalitarian, in favour of state intervention in the economy and morally less conservative. Half of these left *lepénistes* (as against one-third of right *lepénistes*) are opposed to privatization; two-thirds condemn profit (as against one-third); and four out of five (as against half) believe that priority should be given to wage increases.

The final group, comprising 31 per cent of the total FN electorate, is composed of *lepénistes* who did not vote in 1993. It shares the same underprivileged social and cultural profile as the third group, the same indifference to religion and the same concern over wage-earners' rights. It is distinguished, however, by its youth (71 per cent are aged under forty, as against 48 per cent of the left *lepénistes*), its lack of political integration and its relative feminization (48 per cent are women, as against 35 per cent). This electorate contains the greatest number of individuals who feel no particular affinity for any one party (one-quarter, as against 3 per cent of left *lepénistes*) and who believe that voting doesn't make a difference (34 per cent, as against 26 per cent). Judging by their position on the left-right political scale (60 per cent place themselves at the centre or just to the right of it) and by their pronounced support for Chirac (chosen by 69 per cent of those who voted during the second round), this group as a whole is more right-wing than the preceding one.

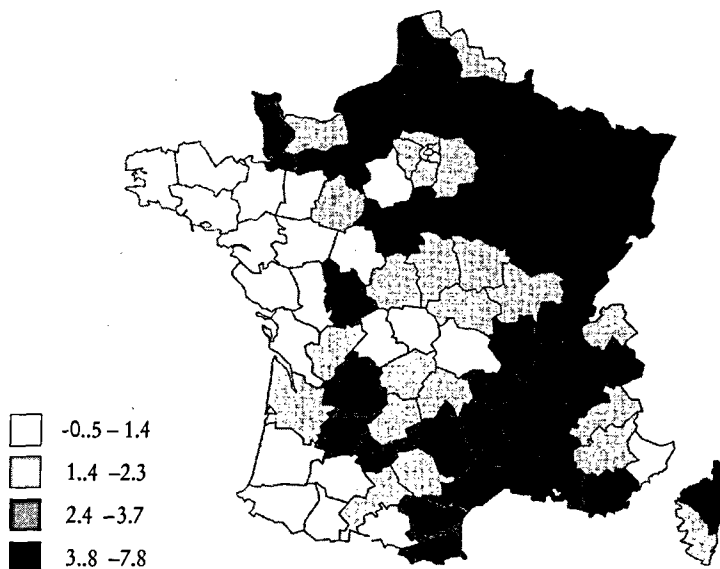
Despite Pierre Martin's opinion (cited above), the phenomenon which Pascal Perrineau describes as 'left-*lepénisme*' does indeed exist if one understands it to mean those electors who have switched from voting for the left to voting for Le Pen. Accordingly, 14 per cent of those who supported Le Pen during the first round of the 1995 presidential election had previously voted for a left-wing or Green candidate at the 1993 general elections. And 35 per cent had voted for Mitterrand during the second round of the 1988 presidential election. These 'left-*lepénistes*' display a certain left-wing sensibility as far as social and economic policy is concerned. Their numerical presence—and that, more generally, of the working class—among the *lepéniste* electorate explains why its attitudes as regards economic and social issues appear more closely affiliated with the left than the right. Accordingly, the 'left-*lepénistes*' of 1995 were just as likely as loyal left-wing supporters to believe that the state interfered too much in economic and social affairs (48 per cent and 49 per cent, as against 59 per cent of right-wing electors), or to claim that their concern over salaries and purchasing power greatly influenced their vote (50 per cent and 51 per cent, as against 40 per cent among right-wingers). While 'left-*lepénistes*' were more likely to criticize profits and privatization and to defend wage-earners' purchasing power, these 'turncoats' have, however, managed to part company with a large chunk of the left's message, particularly where the values of universalism and tolerance are concerned. As a result, when the death penalty or immigration is at issue, 'left-*lepénistes*' no longer differ from *lepénistes* coming from the right.

Map 1. Proportion of foreigners (%) among the total population in 1990 (by department)



Sample: total population aged 18 and older
Source: EDEN/1990 census

Map 2. Rate of change (%) between the FN vote in the 1993 and in the 1997 general elections (first round, by department)



This socio-cultural diversity within the FN electorate combines with a number of local circumstances (see map 2). From the North to Bouches-du-Rhône, from Vendée through Alsace and up towards the region of Paris, the size of the Le Pen vote and its *raisons d'être* vary greatly. In some areas, the 'protest phenomenon' explains its success,³⁴ in others, the presence of a local political leader partial to the FN, and elsewhere, from the Garonne valley to the Mediterranean Midi, the confrontation between immigrants and repatriated colonials from North Africa still nostalgic for French Algeria. And occasionally, the arrival of a mobile garrison unit in an area is enough to inflate the FN vote to record size.³⁵

Let us consider a few of these local situations. Vitrolles, a recently-built city which stretches along ten kilometres of motorway, is both overwhelmed by anarchic urbanization and exhausted by an unemployment rate which affects one out of five employable residents. These factors no doubt contributed to its being the last town to date to be conquered by the FN. However, the decisive reason for the FN victory was probably the unpopularity of Vitrolles's previous mayor. The campaign of the incoming Mégret and his wife focused on the weaknesses of the incumbent's management and on the theme of his 'total corruption'.

At Dreux, the FN's laboratory, first Jean-Pierre Stirbois, and then his wife, systematically played on people's fear of immigrants. Not insignificantly, three-quarters of the entire department's foreign population is concentrated within three *quartiers* of this city. The 'scarf affair' at Creil College provided Madame Stirbois with the slogans, 'No to chador at school!' and 'No to mosques!', which greatly facilitated her being elected deputy during the 1989 by-election.

The rise of the FN in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, a region characterized by its longstanding working-class traditions, illustrates the increasing proletarianization of the FN's supporters from one presidential election to the next. Taking advantage of the collapse of the PS, the FN fares best in the old industrial heartlands where large metallurgy, mineral and textile firms have closed down.³⁶

The situation is quite different in Alsace however. This rich region which has been relatively free of unemployment looks out, geographically, on to Europe. Although its foreign population is only slightly more numerous than in the rest of France (8 per cent of the regional population, as against 6.7 per cent elsewhere), *lepéniste* supporters are on the upsurge, even in rural areas which contain no foreigners at all. In this case, the Le Pen vote would seem to reflect a certain retreat into a regional identity, in an area with particularly

34 See notably Jean-Philippe Roy, *Le Front national en région Centre: 1984-1992* (Paris 1993).

35 In the Beauvert *quartier* of Grenoble where barracks were set up in 1981 for the *gendarmérie* (who consequently accounted for one-third of the local electorate), the FN consistently has its best results.

36 See Valérie Lafont, *Un Nouvel Electorat populaire pour Jean-Marie Le Pen: étude du vote FN dans le Nord-Pas-de-Calais, 1988-1995*, doctoral dissertation, Institut d'études politiques, Paris, 1996.

strong cultural and linguistic traditions and, by virtue of its proximity to the French border, more exposed to globalization and to Europe.³⁷

Finally, Brittany is exemplary of those regions where the FN has difficulty winning more than 9 per cent of the votes. Its 'resistance' can be accounted for by the virtual non-existence of immigrants, by Catholicism's moderating influence and, in this region of migrants, by the Breton identity itself. The FN is nonetheless able to make some electoral progress in those parts of the region most marked by unemployment and where cultural traditions have lost their footing, such as the seaside communes of Finistère and Morbihan, as well as the rural communes of l'Ille-et-Vilaine where a protest vote supports the extreme right.³⁸

The *lepénisation* of hearts and minds

There are various ways to evaluate the FN's electoral potential. One method is to add up all the individuals who have already voted for it at least once: about one-quarter of the French population.³⁹ This figure, however, reflects past electoral behaviour which will not necessarily be repeated. Neither does it account for individuals who have never voted for Le Pen but could be tempted to do so in the future. Another possible means of evaluation is provided by the responses of members of the population to the question: 'Is there a party in the following list whom you would not vote for under any circumstances?' In the 1988 CEVIPOF survey, 67 per cent of the sample answered that the FN was such a party, revealing, on the other hand, that one-third of the French electorate are potential supporters. In 1993, this number of respondents rose to 73 per cent, leaving 27 per cent of electors thus susceptible to voting FN.⁴⁰ An electoral potential of as much as one-quarter of the total French electorate could thus be at the FN's disposal if, at the same time, the party was capable of uniting its diverse extremist, bourgeois and working-class factions.

Furthermore, a relationship exists between the above figures and data measuring the sphere of influence of the FN's views. Bearing in mind that this influence stretches well beyond the confines of the FN electorate, SOFRES has regularly posed the following survey question over the past ten years: 'Would you describe yourself as agreeing completely, partially agreeing, partially disagreeing, or totally disagreeing with the views put forward by the FN?' Since 1984, the proportion of voting-aged individuals who describe themselves 'in agreement' has oscillated around the one-quarter mark (see graph 1). One should note, however, that the popularity of FN views dropped by six points

37 See the report on the FN in this region in *Saisons d'Alsace*, no. 129, autumn 1995.

38 Jean-Luc Richard, 'L'"extrême Ouest" loin de l'extrême droite: le vote Front national dans le Finistère', *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 46, no. 5, October 1996, 792-816.

39 This figure, the one most often cited by the press, is Jérôme Jaffré's estimate, based on the crossovers between electorates from one election to the next, calculated using data from the SOFRES post-electoral surveys (1984-95).

40 See the survey by SOFRES/*Libération*, 23-5 February 1993, using a nation-wide sample of 1,000 individuals of voting age.

between 1996 and 1997, reaching an even lower level than in 1984. This declining popularity is, significantly, discernible in regard to the FN's favourite themes of immigration and security: the proportion of those 'in agreement' dropped from 33 per cent and 35 per cent to 25 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively. These examples show that one can overstate the so-called '*lepénisation* of hearts and minds'.

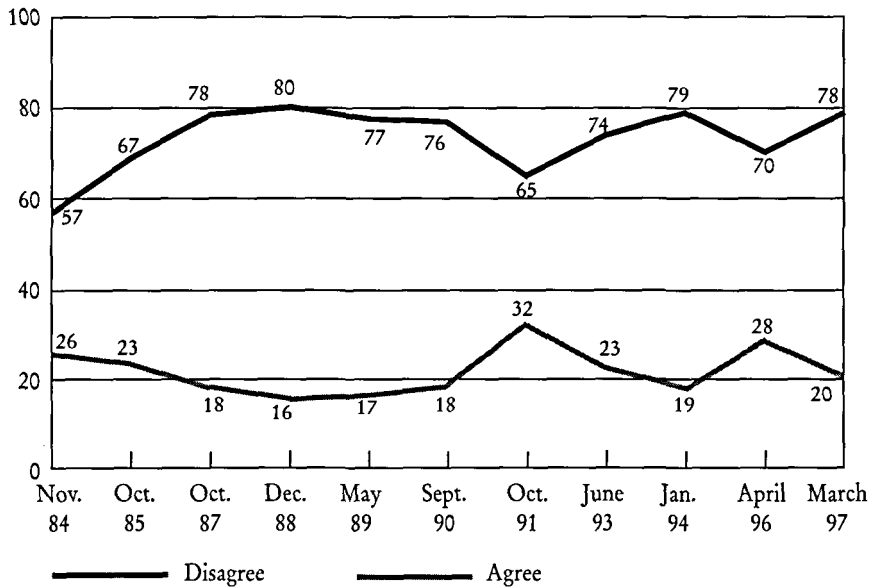
The FN's electoral and ideological progress is not without limits, and the Le Pen vote still undeniably contains a 'protest dimension', a sign of instability. For example, this was the only 1995 presidential electorate (apart from that of Arlette Laguiller) in which a majority admitted 'voting against other candidates' rather than specifically 'expressing support' for a chosen candidate (47 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively, as against 32 per cent and 61 per cent of the total sample). Whereas the FN electorate principally owes its existence to the popularity of the party's views, its members are not necessarily convinced that Le Pen or his party will put these views into action, at least not on a national level.⁴¹ Locally, however, the FN's conquest of cities such as Toulon, Orange, Marignane and Vitrolles has begun to raise the prestige of party representatives, a fact which could well modify its future image. Significantly, the above proportions were reversed during the 1997 general elections when 46 per cent of FN electors declared that they voted 'to support the candidate of their choice' during the first round, and only 38 per cent 'to oppose other candidates' (as against 58 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively, of the total sample).⁴²

Le Pen is neither credible nor endearing. The public's increasing fear of him is reflected by responses to the SOFRES survey question posed since 1983: 'Do you think that Jean-Marie Le Pen and his party represent a danger for democracy in France?' Just before the 1984 European elections, the proportion of the public who foresaw danger equalled those who did not. By autumn 1995, however, and following the FN's success in the European and cantonal elections, the danger-spotters had become the majority. The dissemination of the FN leader's speech on the radio programme *Grand jury* (RTL/*Le Monde*, September 1987)—the speech which managed to render the extermination of six million Jews commonplace by calling it 'a detail'—increased the proportion of danger-spotters by ten points, to two-thirds of the potential electorate. This score has not decreased since that time. After the partial election in Vitrolles, it increased to a record 75 per cent (see graph 2).

41 Post-electoral SOFRES survey, 20-23 May 1995, N=2000. This lack of confidence is further confirmed by an IFOP/*Le Figaro Magazine* survey (14-19 March 1997) which studied a sub-sample of 403 people who declared that they voted for Le Pen at least once in the preceding ten years: 84 per cent said that when they did vote FN it was 'to reject other parties' rather than 'to support the FN' (as against 13 per cent); only 30 per cent hoped that Jean-Marie Le Pen would actually become president of the Republic, and a mere 47 per cent hoped that an FN leader would become prime minister (see *Le Figaro Magazine*, 28 March 1997).

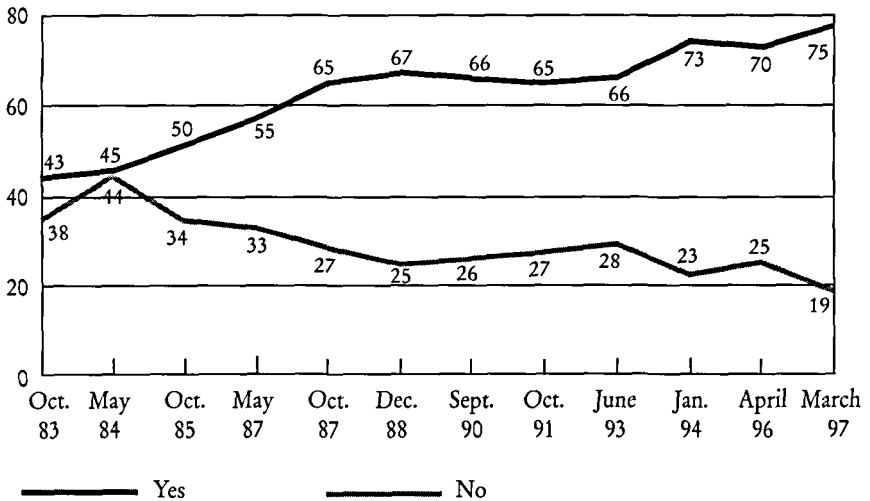
42 CSA/France3/France Info/*Le Parisien Aujourd'hui* exit poll (see note 29).

Graph 1: Would you describe yourself as agreeing completely/partially agreeing/disagreeing with the views of Jean-Marie Le Pen?



Source: SOFRES/RTL/Le Monde surveys 1983-97

Graph 2: Do you think that Jean-Marie Le Pen and his party represent a danger for democracy in France?



Source: SOFRES/RTL/Le Monde surveys 1983-97

A parallel evolution can be seen in the proportion of electors who categorically refuse to vote for the FN and who reject an electoral union between this party and the UDF and RPR.⁴³ This pronounced disapproval of the FN and of its leader varies according to the electoral category. It is expressed most frequently by young people, by women, by the most educated and most politicized members of the electorate (executive managers, professionals) and by left-wing sympathizers and voters. However, across all age-groups and all socio-professional categories, amongst men as well as women, and taking in the entire political spectrum from the Parti communiste français (PCF) to the RPR, the majority of individuals refuse both to vote for the FN and to ally themselves with it, and are opposed to its possible seizure of state power.

The *lepeniste* party's success has provoked a backlash, as evidenced by the increased number of anti-FN street demonstrations as well as by the proliferation of specialized organizations determined to fight the FN and what it stands for. In addition to SCALP (Sections carrément anti-Le Pen, Completely Anti-Le Pen Sections, created in 1984), Ras l'Front ('Nuff of the Front) and Manifeste contre le FN (Anti-FN Manifesto, 1990), numerous associations have sprung up in the towns which the FN won in 1995. Examples include Alerte Orange (Orange Alert), Observatoire méditerranéen des libertés (Mediterranean Watchtower of Freedom), Coordination toulonnaise pour la défense des valeurs républicaines (Toulon Association for the Defence of Republican Values) and Toulon Debout (Toulon, Arise). The *lepeniste* party's behaviour during their congress in Strasbourg (29-31 March 1997) provoked a new rash of resistance organizations, such as Front citoyen (Citizen Front), Justice et liberté (Justice and Liberty) and Culture et liberté (Culture and Liberty).

Several hundred such collective organizations exist today, accounting for thousands of activists. In Grenoble, 25,000 of them protested the FN leader's visit by marching the streets of the city on 9 December 1996. And this figure was doubled by demonstrators in Strasbourg where the rally against Le Pen's 1997 congress was both national and European thanks to the participation of English, German, Belgian and Swiss organizations.⁴⁴ The population which supports these anti-FN organizations is, significantly, in no way confined to the left. Fifty-four per cent would support 'a large protest movement against the Front national's views', even if only 18 per cent of them would be 'prepared to participate in it'.⁴⁵

43 On the evolution of this perspective since 1983, see Nonna Mayer and Pascal Perrineau, 'Le lepénisme dans l'opinion: la puissance et le rejet', in SOFRES, *L'état de l'opinion 1993* (Paris 1993), 63-78.

44 On anti-FN organizations, see especially *Le Cahier du CEVIPOF*, no. 13, September 1995, and also *Alternatives non violentes*, no. 98, spring 1996, and 'Le local fait front', a special edition of *Territoires*, no. 376, March 1997.

45 Telephone survey by the polling institute IPSOS for *Le Figaro* and France 2, 21-2 February 1997 (N=956): 18 per cent would be prepared to participate, 36 per cent would be supportive without participating, 20 per cent were indifferent to the problem, 21 per cent opposed the protest, and 5 per cent had no answer.

In the end, however, the FN's future will be played out on electoral and political terrain. Its fate will depend on the successes of its opponents: in fielding irreproachable candidates and devising credible programmes, in reviving local activism and remobilizing local voters, and in taking advantage of the FN's weaknesses, particularly the left-right split which characterizes its electorate. Instead of bridging the gap between these factions by moral indignation and hyperbolic rhetoric on the themes of immigration and insecurity, the FN's adversaries should focus on—and expose—the contradictions represented by this left-right split, with a view to prompting the party's collapse.

The use of hyperbole regarding immigration and instability has actually created a justification for Le Pen's arguments. The views of the FN achieved their highest recorded popularity (32 per cent) in the period following Jacques Chirac's evocation of the 'noise and smell' of the foreign family living next to the French worker (Orléans, 19 June 1991). That, in conjunction, three months later, with Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's description of the immigrant 'invasion' in *Le Figaro Magazine* (September 1991) (see graph 1). The focus on immigration and insecurity has thus leavened political debate with the FN's choice themes, despite the fact that the general electorate's real preoccupation remains unemployment (see table 2).⁴⁶

The 1997 general election confirms this. The economic and political hopes of the voters—expectations which the right has failed to meet—were reinvested in the left which was accordingly returned to power. Eighty-one per cent of electors were in favour of increasing the minimum wage by FF 1,000 per month; 71 per cent hoped that 350,000 jobs would be created for youth; and 64 per cent wanted the working week reduced to thirty-five hours without a drop in salary.⁴⁷ By virtue of its focus on these leftist *desiderata*, the PS managed in part to reappropriate the working-class support which had previously been usurped by the FN. But, *to keep it*, it will need to keep its promises.

NONNA MAYER is director of research at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), and attached to the Centre d'étude de la vie politique française (CEVIPOF). She is the co-editor (with Pascal Perrineau) of *Le Front national à découvert* (1989; 2nd edn. 1996).

Translated from the French by Sophie Read.

46 This is clearly evident, given that unemployment came top of the list of problems which counted for electors in 1997, while immigration came seventh.

47 See survey by SOFRES/*Libération*/CEVIPOF/CRAPS/CIDSP, 26-31 May 1997 (see note 27).