Racism, Xenophobia, and Distribution

Multi-Issue Politics in Advanced Democracies

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Russell Sage Foundation
New York

Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England
2007
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Immigration and the Political Institutionalization of Xenophobia in France

9.1 Introduction

Like most Western industrialized nations, France has taken in large numbers of immigrants over the last several decades. The influx of these foreign populations has left an indelible mark on various facets of French life. One of immigration's most visible impacts has been its transformation of the country's ethnic and religious character. Once predominantly white and Catholic, France has turned into a multicultural nation whose second religion is Islam. This demographic shift has not only transformed French society and culture; it has also reconfigured French politics.

A sizable portion of France's voters, fearing that immigration erodes their national identity, social status, and safety, has abandoned the traditional parties of the moderate Left and Right and turned to anti-immigrant, xenophobic political movements that promise to return France back to the French. The Front National (FN), headed by its notorious leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, has been most successful in stoking and collecting the anti-immigrant vote. Parties of the Left and Right have oscillated in their approach to the FN and its far-right platform, flirting with the Front's xenophobic slogans during some campaigns, only to marginalize the extremist movement when distance to its

This chapter was written by Rafaela Dancygier.
themes appeared to be more expedient politically. Regardless of the mainstream's behavior, after two decades of solid performances at the polls, the FN and its platform have secured a structural position in France's electoral space. This chapter charts the ascendancy of immigration as a salient issue in France's political landscape and traces the concomitant rise of the FN, whose xenophobic rhetoric tapped into and further fueled the growing racism of the French electorate. The chapter begins by briefly outlining France's long history with immigration and then turns to the political implications of immigrant settlement in France. While immigration policy of the first decades after World War II was a largely bureaucratic endeavor designed to meet the economic and demographic demands of the country, the establishment of immigrant communities in France gave rise to social and economic tensions that politicians at both the local and the national level soon seized upon for political purposes. This chapter maps out the prominent controversies and debates that helped politicize the issue of immigration, promoted the rise of Le Pen and his nationalistic party in the 1980s, and contributed to the FN's electoral endurance into the twenty-first century. As immigration started losing some of its political salience in the mid-1990s, the Front successfully transformed itself from a one-issue movement focused on closing French borders into a party that links a host of concerns—unemployment, law and order, cultural identity, national sovereignty, inter alia—to immigration and the multiculturalism it engenders. The following pages also trace the evolution of the FN voter. The Front's electorate defies the traditional Left-Right categorization and best fits the "ethnocentrism" label: a constituency that is more xenophobic, insecure, and prejudiced than the average French voter.

This chapter is not meant to give a comprehensive overview of France's political history with immigration. Instead, it focuses on the important political events, elections, and turning points that have propelled the issue of immigration into the political limelight and shows how the major parties have shaped—and been shaped by—the politicization of immigration. The chapter thus presents a rather stylized account of France's political treatment of immigration, and the reader is encouraged to turn to the reference texts for a more complete presentation of this topic.

9.2 Immigration in France: A Brief Sketch

France has a long and varied history of immigration. Beginning in earnest in the second half of the nineteenth century, immigration has since influenced the demographic, economic, and sociopolitical development of the French nation-state. Although the impact of immigration has been profound and wide-ranging, it has never quite occurred as planned. Instead, the inflow and settlement of foreign migrants, controlled and guided by ambitious state planners, has strayed from the envisioned course. Thus immigrants sometimes arrived in fewer numbers than expected, while overstaying their official welcome at other times (Verbunt 1985, 127). Official suspensions of immigration were routinely circumvented as immigrant families reunited in the host country. Waves of illegal immigration also seemed to escape the control of the French state.

In the late nineteenth century, the French government, prompted by employers, began official recruitment of immigrants to ease acute domestic labor shortages that were brought about by sharp declines in the country's birthrate. Until World War I, the immigrant population consisted mainly of European migrants, with the majority originating from Belgium and Italy and smaller numbers hailing from Germany, Switzerland, and Spain. Most of these foreign workers were employed in industries that required few or no skills, such as mining, construction, and textiles, as well as the agricultural sector (Tapinos 1975, 2; Verbunt 1985, 128). World War I initiated a new wave of immigration, as many previous economic migrants had returned to their homelands while a great number of young Frenchmen left for the battlefields. Large-scale labor recruitment from France's colonies in North Africa and Indo-China as well as from southern Europe and Poland filled wartime labor market needs for the duration of the hostilities (Lequin 1992, 334–335). While most of these foreigners were repatriated once the war ended, the French economy again confronted a severe scarcity of domestic labor in 1919, triggering renewed labor migration from neighboring countries as well as from Poland and North Africa.1 Between 1914 and the onset of the Depression, France saw a dramatic increase of its foreign population, which more than doubled, rising from 1.2 million to 2.66 million (corresponding to an increase of 3 to 6.59 percent of the population) during those years. In light of the deteriorating economy and rising unemployment levels of the early 1930s, France introduced its first laws restricting immigration in 1932, to be followed by further curbs in 1938 and 1940 (DeLey 1983, 198).

Following World War II, the confluence of high casualties, low birthrates, and economic reconstruction reversed previous trends and gave rise to a resumption of immigration. France embarked on an immigration project that would not end until 1974. During those thirty years, the so-called Trente...
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Glorieuses, France imported over two million foreign workers. A 1945 law created the Office National d’Immigration (ONI), which was put in charge of recruiting foreign labor to fill vacancies in the expanding sectors (mostly construction, public works, and heavy industry), to avoid the occupational and regional dislocation of French workers (especially in the traditional agricultural sector), and to stave off upward wage pressures and stimulate investment (DeLay 1983, 199; Holllifield 1992, 54). While the importation of migrant labor was no new undertaking, compared with previous periods of growth-motivated immigration there was “one major difference—the state was leading the effort to recruit foreign labor and modernize the economy, rather than following the lead of the private business sector” (Hollifield 1992, 54). Immigration thus became an integral component of France’s étatisme policy of economic recovery and industrial expansion. It is important to note that not only economic imperatives dictated the French immigration project. The organized inflow of foreigners was also part of a deliberate strategy to restore the country to its great power status through aggressive repopulation (Freeman 1979, 69). Populationnisses—a group consisting of academics and policymakers—pushed for higher birthrates but also influenced the nation’s immigration agenda. They motivated the government’s decision to promote the permanent settlement of European Catholics—immigrants who would be “culturally and ethnically compatible” with the French nation (ibid., 55).

In the first two decades following the war, migrant labor from Spain, Italy, and Portugal, but also from North Africa, arrived in France, to be followed by a smaller influx of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa. Colonial obligations often interfered with the Populationnisses’ ethnic preferences. Up until Algeria’s independence in 1962, Algerians could travel and settle in the metropole without restrictions. After 1962, close to one million so-called pieds-noirs (Algerian-born Frenchmen) came to France, disproportionately locating in southern France, especially Marseilles. In addition, about one hundred thousand Algerian Muslims whose loyalty lay with the French government (so-called harkis) moved to the mother country. By 1970, 19.75 percent of France’s immigrant population hailed from Algeria (Fetzer 2000, 56; Freeman 1979, 23, 75; Tapinos 1975, 47–67).

In addition to the more organized migration flows that were channeled through ONI, large numbers of immigrants entered France illegally every year. Initially clandestine immigration took place with the tacit encouragement of the state, as most illegal immigrants soon became eligible for work permits (régularisation); by 1968, over 80 percent of France’s foreign workers had crossed the French border illegally, leading some to the conclusion that “the government had lost control over immigration” (DeLay 1983, 199). By the early 1970s, this lax official attitude toward immigration policy came to an end. The oil crisis, ensuing economic recession, and rising unemployment fueled the public’s growing discontent with immigration. As did other Western European countries at the time, the French government responded to the economic downturn by severely restricting legalizations in 1973 and by putting an abrupt stop to legal worker migration in 1974. In spite of successive governments’ efforts to reduce the number of foreigners living in France and to prevent further waves of immigrants entering the country since then, France’s immigrant population has increased ever since (see Table 9.1). Indeed, one unintended consequence of the categorical immigration ban was to encourage those migrant workers already living in France to settle permanently and to reunite with their families who, by and large, were allowed to immigrate. After the official suspension of immigration in 1974, over half a million spouses and children of immigrant workers entered the country (Fetzer 2000, 57). While the government attempted to discourage family reunifications through tight regulations, human and civil rights groups contested restrictive policies on the basis of humanitarian as well as constitutional grounds. Their lobbying efforts enabled many foreign families to reunite (Hollifield 1992, 84). Family reunification changed the immigration process from guest-worker immigration to settlement immigration, which significantly altered public perceptions of immigration. Moreover, since the early 1980s, the number of refugees seeking asylum in Western Europe has risen dramatically.3

From the immediate postwar period until the mid-1970s, France’s immigration regime can thus be characterized as very heterogeneous, both in the type of policies pursued and in the type of labor it attracted. Colonial obligations, bilateral accords, employer-based recruitment through ONI, illegal immigration, and claims for asylum combined to increase France’s immigrant population from 1.99 million in 1946 to 3.89 million in 1975. While earlier migration waves attracted familiar, white-skinned Europeans, the new immigrants also consisted of darker-skinned Africans. Questions of immigration thus became intertwined with questions of race. One steady undercurrent pervading French politics of immigration has been the concern—both among the public and among elites—that immigration would indelibly alter the racial makeup of the nation. While the Populationnisses’ plan to repopulate France succeeded insofar as the country received large shares of immigrants that showed higher fertility rates than the native population, it failed to


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Table 9.1 French population by country of birth and nationality, 1911-1999 (thousands)

9.3 The Politicization of Immigration

Parliamentary debates about immigration control polarized the country's political elites. Parties of the Right were anxious to tighten France's immigration laws, while leftist opposition leaders often saw themselves as defenders of immigrant interests. Led by President Giscard d'Estaing and neo-Gaullist prime minister Jacques Chirac, the center-right government introduced measures that would decrease the number of foreigners living in France, limit family reunification, and encourage repatriation (aide au retour), often through financial incentives tied to return migration. The Socialist and Communist opposition blocked the Conservatives' immigration bill, outraged in particular by their plan to facilitate the forcible expulsion of migrants, and condemned it as "immoral, unjust and racist." While the Left's opposition softened some of the bill's more stringent provisions, the government did manage to pass legislation that would considerably tighten residency regulations and impose tougher entry restrictions. In addition to official policy, political leaders put indirect pressure on immigrants residing in France to leave the country by deliberately stoking an already hostile political climate. Politicians "made sure that people understood that there was a connection between the presence of two million immigrant workers and the unemployment of one million French workers" and also instigated a link "between the presence of immigrants (i.e., young African males) and the insecurity in the cities" (Verhulst 1985, 154).

In the early 1980s, with the election of Socialist president François Mitterrand and a left-wing majority in parliament, official policy toward foreigners...
already residing in France softened. The right to family reunification was re-instituted and amnesty initiatives for undocumented migrant workers were reintroduced. One of Mitterrand's first acts in office was to grant legal residence status to 130,000 Algerian immigrants who had entered the country illegally. Consistent with the Socialists' campaign promises to respect ethnic pluralism in all spheres of public life, the Socialist government also passed a set of laws extending the right of free association to foreigners. Moreover, the Mitterrand administration undertook a series of reforms aiming at the social integration and economic advancement of France's foreign population (DeLey 1983, 202–209; Safra 1985, 54). Among the Socialists' more controversial campaign promises was the proposal to introduce local voting rights for foreigners who had been living in France for five years or longer. These generous proposals did not, however, coincide with the public's mood. While the Socialist government tried to integrate foreigners through national laws and initiatives, the accommodationist spirit of Mitterrand's policies fell on deaf ears at the local level, where years of mismanaged immigration policy and misguided integration policy had helped create a noxious social climate.

9.3.1 The Politics of Exclusion

Several factors contributed to the deterioration of social relations between the native French population and the local immigrant communities in the late 1970s, when intergroup relations grew increasingly hostile. Successive housing policies adopted by the French government contributed to the growing ghettoization and segregation of France's immigrant population. In the 1950s, faced with a critical housing shortage, the French state constructed provisional housing for immigrants that resembled the shantytowns and slums (bidonvilles) that many of these immigrants had escaped in the first place. Those foreign workers who did not live in bidonvilles tended to concentrate in poor, inner-city districts, occupying dilapidated dwellings that had been deserted by French tenants. By the late 1960s, as migrant families reunited and settled in France, the government recognized the need for additional, improved housing, destroyed the bidonvilles, and initiated several new housing policies, which generally exacerbated rather than remedied the problems they sought to solve. Judging African families as generally "unadjusted" to French society and customs, the government built housing complexes (cités de transit) where intensive education aimed at social integration would prepare these foreigners for life in French towns, among French neighbors. Transitional in theory, these shabbily built cités instead became long-term homes and deteriorated into the very ghettos that they were meant to eliminate. In a similar development, native residents began abandoning neighborhoods containing foyers (hostels originally built for Algerians during the war of independence), which came to be predominantly occupied by single male migrants in the 1970s and 1980s, causing further segregation. Finally, many immigrant families who had previously lived in bidonvilles or who could no longer afford inner-city housing moved to cheap public housing projects in the suburbs (called Habitats à Loyer Modéré, or HLMs), which were funded by the state and partly subsidized by employers (Hargreaves 1995, 69–70; Verbunt 1985, 147–149).

Certain projects, suburbs, and neighborhoods soon became dominated by immigrants, whose heavy concentration gave rise to strong resentment by the native French, many of whom perceived immigrants as illegitimate competitors for social welfare and scarce public services (Verbunt 1985, 155). These sentiments were confirmed in several opinion polls. In 1984, 53 percent of those polled thought that immigrants illegitimately benefited from social assistance; in the following year, the great majority (71 percent) were convinced that immigrants collected more money being unemployed in France than working in their country of origin (Casart 2000, 301). Politicians, in particular those of the Communist Party (PCF), were eager to exploit these resentments and prejudices for political gain. The poor neighborhoods where immigrants tended to concentrate were often located in districts that had traditionally been strongholds of the PCF. Despite their ideological commitment to international working-class solidarity, a number of Communist mayors chose to portray migrant workers as competitors that divided the laboring classes by keeping down wages and weakening the labor movement as a whole. As early as 1969, Communist mayors in the Paris region called for a more balanced distribution of immigrants among all Paris communes, since immigrant populations (who were disproportionately poorer) consumed more public services than their French neighbors. By the early 1980s, several local administrations had instituted official quota systems that limited the number of immigrants and their children in state institutions such as schools, summer camps, and, most notably, public housing (Schaik 1985, 174–179). Local election campaigns often centered on the question of which candidate would be toughest on immigration and immigrant demands.

These developments were exemplified and thrust into the national spotlight by one particular incident: l'affaire du bulldozer in the Paris suburb of Vitry.
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The town's Communist mayor refused to accept three hundred Africans from Mali who were relocated from a neighboring suburb and housed in a joyer in Vitry. To forcefully underscore his position, on Christmas Eve of 1980, the mayor evicted the African migrants and sent bulldozers to demolish the hostel.\(^1\) The bulldozer affair was only the latest and most bluntly brutal in a series of politically motivated offensives against immigrants at the local level. Heavily publicized, it ignited a national discussion about the so-called seuil de tolérance (threshold of tolerance), according to which intergroup conflict would be inevitable once the immigrant population reached some (pseudoscientifically specified) share of the population. Following the example of Vitry, local politicians of both the Left and the Right used this concept to justify their refusal to accommodate more immigrants in their communities (Gastaut 2000, 466–477). In the 1983 municipal elections, right-wing politicians made electoral gains as playing the anti-immigrant card had turned out to be a vote winner. In several cities, center-right politicians portrayed immigrant families as welfare scroungers, criminals, and as generally responsible for unemployment as well as for violence and unrest.\(^2\) It was in this heated climate of resentment and xenophobia that the racist Front National scored its first electoral victory and emerged as a viable political actor.

9.4 The Rise of Le Pen

Founded in 1972, the Front National operated in relative obscurity during its first decade of existence. It generally appealed to less than 1 percent of the French electorate in national elections, and Jean-Marie Le Pen, its founder and charismatic leader, failed to collect the five hundred signatures necessary to run in France's presidential election of 1981 (Davies 1999, 3).\(^3\) In the party's early years, its extremist platform pushed it to the fringes of France's political space. Campaigning on fiercely nationalistic, anti-immigrant programs, the FN called for the forcible repatriation of all non-European immigrants, for a ban on all further immigration, and for a wholesale reform of France's nationality laws. It warned of immigration's role in eroding French values, identity, and unity, and championed French sovereignty in all areas of national policy, which it considered under threat by globalization, in particular by international migration and European integration. The FN also campaigned on a law-and-order platform, calling for the restoration of the death penalty, among other harsh law enforcement measures. In the early 1980s, the FN's electoral fortunes began to turn when the extreme right-wing party scored 17 percent in parliamentary by-elections in Dreuze. Foreshadowing later successes, the Front registered its highest vote shares in working-class neighborhoods that had defected from the Left or abstained. The town also shared many of the characteristics of future FN strongholds: it was an industrial town fifty miles west of Paris, severely hit by the economic crisis and home to a sizable share of immigrants, many of whom occupied the publicly subsidized HLMs. The FN blamed the town's high unemployment and crime rates on the immigrant population and claimed that a restoration of the local economy and of public order could only be achieved once all immigrants were sent back to their home countries (Bréchon and Mitra 1992, 71–73). Following its first local victory, the FN experienced its first nationwide breakthrough in the 1984 European elections, where it attained over 11 percent of the vote and managed to elect ten representatives to the European Parliament. This was only the first in a series of electoral performances that would give the FN notoriety as well as long-sought prominence in France's electoral arena.

9.5 The Mainstreaming of Xenophobia

By the mid-1980s, immigration had established itself as a major issue on the nation's political agenda. Previously treated as a technical and bureaucratic policy domain, immigration policy had become heavily politicized and assumed a "political and mythical dimension" (Withol de Wenden 1991, 322) that it still has not shed.

9.5.1 "Will the French Ever Be French Again?"

The French media played its part in hyping the issue, publishing alarmist reports of immigrant-inspired crime and conveying an image of France being invaded and overrun by immigrants. In 1985, the conservative newspaper Le Figaro featured a cover provocatively asking, "Will the French ever be French again?" Below the headline, it showed Marianne, the symbol of the French Republic, wearing a chador (Simmons 1996, 159). In light of this sensationalist coverage, the Socialist government realized that its integrationist, immigrant-friendly policies could soon prove to be an electoral liability in the legislative elections of 1986. It thus backtracked on some of the more generous measures (notably extending local voting rights to immigrants), reintroduced repatriation assistance (renamed aide à la réinsertion, to denote the Socialists' recognition of integration—albeit not in France), restricted family reunification by
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making it conditional on rigid housing requirements, which many immigrants
could not meet, and emphasized its crackdown on illegal immigration and
tougher border controls (Hargreaves 1995, 191; Simmons 1996, 158; Wither de
Wenden 1991, 323–324). In spite of these efforts, in the public’s image, the So-
cialists would remain the party that was at best ambiguous and at worst “soft”
on immigration.

The center-right forces, well aware of the Socialists’ relative weakness in this
issue area, developed a platform for the upcoming parliamentary elections that
would push immigration, in particular nationality laws, front and center. In its
platform (Une Stratégie de Gouvernement), the neo-Gaullist party Rassemble-
ment pour la République (RPR) included an entire chapter entitled “Bring-
ing immigration under control” (Maîtriser l’immigration). The language and
policies developed in this chapter seemed to be taken right out of Le Pen’s play-
book. The party questioned the value of a multicultural society in which most
foreigners did not respect but rather undermined France’s culture and iden-
tity. It accused immigrants of abusing the welfare state, living on the dole, and
creating a climate of fear and crime. The survival of the French nation was
at stake and the best way to protect France’s economy, society, and cultural
heritage would be through stringent immigration controls, large-scale repatri-
ations, and a reform of the country’s nationality laws, which were deemed
too permissive. In short, in the mid-1980s, the Right unabashedly sought to
appeal to FN voters (Gastaut 2000, 210–211).

The proposal that attracted the most national attention was the reform of
France’s nationality laws. For over a century, France had granted citizenship
to children born in France to immigrant parents. This emphasis on jus soli
came under sharp attack from the Extreme Right, who insisted that the grow-
ing population of Franco-Maghrebins threatened French security and identity
and showed no loyalty to French ideals and values. In short, French citizenship
needed to be earned and deserved (summarized in the FN’s slogan and book:
Être Français, Cela se Merite). France’s nationality laws were said to grant the
privilege of French citizenship too easily, creating a whole generation who were
French on paper, but not in spirit (that is, creating Français de papier rather
than Français de coeur). In their joint 1986 platform, the center-right parties
co-opted Le Pen’s rhetoric and called for a repeal of the automatic acquisi-
tion of citizenship (Brubaker 1992, 138–145). While the debate surrounding
France’s citizenship regime featured several intellectual currents, it was the
nativist argument that was heard the loudest. The Right decried the Socialists’
policy on multicultural insertion and pleaded for a return to assimilation.13

Since the Right’s nationalistic arguments insisted that North African Muslim
immigrants were inherently unassimilable, exhibiting behavior and values that
were intrinsically incompatible with those espoused by French society, the nat-
ural conclusion would be to strip today’s immigrants of their entitlement to
French citizenship (Brubaker 1992, 149; Feldblum 1999, 69–70). The public
seemed to be more persuaded by the right-wing rhetoric of exclusion than by
the Left’s recognition of multiculturalism. Center-right parties narrowly re-
gained parliament in the 1986 legislative elections and the Front National,
polling close to 10 percent nationwide, sent thirty-five representatives to
parliament.14

The center-right government, however, found out that it was considerably
easier to spout anti-immigrant slogans as an opposition strategy than to in fact
pass and implement policies consistent with such rhetoric once in office. The
Chirac government not only was confronted with strong opposition in parlia-
ment, but also faced splits among its own. Some centrist coalition politicians
had become increasingly uncomfortable with the radicalization of the Nation-
ality Code debate and, fearing to be associated with the exclusionist Extreme
Right, withdrew their support from the initiative. At the same time, grassroots
antiracism campaigns, which had increasingly gained organizational strength
and nationwide prominence, opposed the reforms vigorously.15 To make mat-
ters worse for the government, the proposed reforms stalled due to unantici-
pated legal and technical implications of the proposals.16 The government,
unable to work out these difficulties, appointed a special commission to ex-
amine France’s Nationality Code as the public, unable to follow the legal
complexities, lost interest in the issue. When the commission returned with
the recommendation to leave the Nationality Code intact, the government
retreated from its initial position that citizenship could not be conferred au-
tomatically and instead endorsed the principle of jus soli (Brubaker 1992,
156–158; Wither de Wenden 1991, 327). As the center-right coalition retreated
from its attack on jus soli, the FN capitalized on the center-right’s apparent
inconsistency and made sure the issue retained its salience. According to one
observer, the government’s backtracking

induced Le Pen to give increasing play to the issue. It offered him the
chance to contrast the distinctiveness and consistency of his own position
with the government’s waffling retreat toward a position only marginally
different from that of the Socialists . . . As the proposal’s positional co-
ordinates changed—as it drifted toward the right and toward the extreme
regions of French political space—so too did the way the mainstream right parties and the government positioned themselves on the issue. (Brubaker 1992, 159–160)

While its performance on the Nationality Code reforms was unsatisfactory to most right-wing voters, the Chirac government attempted to please its more extremist electorate by enacting a series of restrictive immigration laws. The 1986 Pasqua laws severely restricted entry and residence requirements, facilitated deportations of illegal immigrants, and substantially increased police powers by excluding the judicial branch from expulsions—1,700 non-European Community immigrants were instantly deported because they were deemed to present a threat to public order. Trying to prevent desertions to the FN in the upcoming presidential elections, the Chirac government made sure that these deportations received heavy publicity and media coverage.17

9.6 The 1988 Presidential Election

In the run-up to the 1988 presidential elections, the mainstream parties thus tried to portray themselves as being tough on immigration. The two right-wing candidates, Raymond Barre and Jacques Chirac, appropriated Le Pen's nationalist and anti-immigrant language to appeal to their fringe constituencies. Chirac's interior minister, hardliner Charles Pasqua, underlined his party's proximity to many of the FN's themes, claiming that "the National Front has the same preoccupations, the same values as the majority. It merely expresses them in a more brutal and noisy way" (as quoted in Simmons 1996, 91). At the same time, Barre and Chirac—aware that extremist positions on immigration risked alienating crucial centrist voters—made sure to emphasize economic policies. They ran on traditional conservative economic platforms, such as cutting taxes, reducing employers' social security contributions, and offering low levels of income support for the poor and long-term unemployed. Economic issues were, however, generally overshadowed by a focus on law and order and immigration, since the stock market crash of 1987 did not allow the government to tout its economic achievements (Goldey and Johnson 1988, 198). President Mitterrand capitalized on the Right's positional dilemma. No longer constrained by the weakened Communists, Mitterrand moved to the center in the economic domain (campaigning for a "capitalism with a human face")20 while sticking to his previous election promise that immigrants would be granted local voting rights—once the public was prepared to accept such a move. Given that public opinion as well as Mitterrand's own party was at the time clearly not ready to extend the local franchise to immigrant residents,21 this tactical move served to galvanize the Front National and put pressure on Chirac to side with the extremists (Goldey and Johnson 1988, 201). Mitterrand further outmaneuvered his right-wing opponents by giving Le Pen access to the media, ensuring that the xenophobe's views got sufficient airtime to exacerbate the position of the Right (Thranhardt 1995, 330).

The election results proved the effectiveness of Mitterrand's strategy. In the first ballot, the Right split its vote, almost evenly, among Chirac (19.8 percent), Barre (16.5), and Le Pen (14.6). Not only did this represent the worst showing of the orthodox Right since 1945, it was also the highest score ever received by a candidate of the Extreme Right (Goldey and Johnson 1988, 201). Over four million voters had turned out to support Le Pen, a result which the extremists rightly called an "earthquake" (Simmons 1996, 92). The majority of Le Pen voters (65 percent) gave Chirac their support in the second round, but this did not prove to be sufficient. Mitterrand, who obtained 33.5 percent of the votes in the first round, won the second ballot with 54 percent of the vote and his Socialist Party regained control of the legislature in the ensuing parliamentary elections. Despite the Right's efforts to present itself as tough on immigration, to the potential FN voter, it was probably the moderate Right's failure to stand firm on the Nationality Code reform that came to mind, tipping the balance in favor of Le Pen and his followers at the ballot box. The mainstream Right parties' flirtation with the Extreme Right thus appears to have been a gamble that did not pay off. It undermined their credibility both among centrist voters, who were alienated by their racist rhetoric, and among more extremist elements, who were dissatisfied with the parties' wavering on the Nationality Code reform and who, in any event, had the option of voting for a genuine xenophobe. Crucially, the Right's irresponsible manipulation of xenophobia helped Le Pen and his extremist themes secure a permanent position in France's political landscape.

After the shock of the 1988 election, pundits and academics alike were eager to explain the effet Le Pen—who were the four million voters who cast their ballot for the extremist leader? At first glance, the Le Pen electorate appears ecletic: Le Pen was more popular among males (18 percent) than among females (11 percent), and drew support among small businessmen, shopkeepers, and craftsmen (23 percent), manual workers (18 percent), the self-employed (21 percent), and those with vocational training (18 percent) (Perrineau 1997, 102). Some observers dismissed the Le Pen vote as a protest vote that
lacked political coherence. According to Mayer and Perrineau (1992, 130), the LePeniste electorate in 1988 had a "hybrid character." Le Pen voters generally had no consistent partisan attachment, crossed all age and occupational groups, and, judging from previous elections, were likely to switch to other candidates in the future as different issues motivated their vote choice in different elections (Mayer and Perrineau 1992). However, viewed from another perspective—one that does not focus on voters' socioeconomic profiles—a different conclusion emerges.

The fact that Le Pen supporters did not fall neatly along the orthodox Left-Right continuum indeed disguised the coherence of the Le Pen electorate. Introducing an additional dimension, Mayer (1993) finds that the more ethnocentrist voters are, the more likely they are to support Le Pen at the polls. Ethnocentrist voters are concentrated among the poorer, less educated, economically insecure sections of the electorate and tend to be more prejudiced and authoritarian in their social and political outlook. As sociocultural and class characteristics interact among Le Pen's constituency, ethnocentrism goes a long way in explaining the absence of the traditionally class-based partisan identification patterns seen in the Le Pen vote (N. Mayer 1993, 31). Thus the xenophobic candidate "succeeded in mobilizing in every social group most of those with an obsession about immigrants and foreigners, an attitudinal characteristic obviously in large measure independent of conventional social-structural situations" (Husbands 1991, 410). Well aware of the heterogeneous, cross-class character of his constituency, Le Pen embarked on an electoral strategy in the 1990s that capitalized on the wide-ranging nature of his party's appeal. In the meantime, the politics of racism and xenophobia remained popular.

9.7 Xenophobia Remains in the Headlines

Before the political mainstream could recuperate from the 1988 shock, several contentious events involving the country's immigrant community helped to keep xenophobia in the national headlines and consciousness. One of the most notorious incidents stoking anti-immigrant sentiments was the so-called headscarf affair (affaire du foulard). When, in the fall of 1989, three Muslim girls from the Paris suburb of Creil insisted on wearing their headscarves to school against the principal's objection that such a display of religiosity was an affront to the separation of church and state, a national debate on the compatibility between France's professed secularism on the one hand and multiculturalism's religious claims on the other ensued. The media jumped on this local dispute and forced the national leadership to take a stand. The French Left was split, divided between defenders of secular education (as well as feminists), who demanded banning the headscarf from the classroom, and those who argued that such a decision would violate personal liberties and undermine tolerance and respect for diverse value systems. The Right cautiously endorsed the ban, but was generally careful to prevent this issue from turning into a divisive national controversy (Bréchon and Mitra 1992, 66–68). The Front National did not harbor such reservations. The party, helped by the mainstream parties' ambiguity and by the torrent of media coverage, was able to exploit the incident for its own political purposes. The affair, rich in symbols and rhetoric, once again put the spotlight on the FN's major campaign themes and allowed Le Pen, who vigorously supported the ban, to present himself as the sole guardian of French identity and culture. As the debate wore on, the public's opinion on the matter became increasingly hostile, and previously latent xenophobia became more overt (Bréchon and Mitra 1992, 68). Invigorated by these developments, the FN scored significant successes in parliamentary by-elections in Dreux and Marseilles (Perrineau 1997, 63).

The affaire du foulard came to a (provisional) conclusion when the Conseil d'État (the highest administrative court) decided to allow the wearing of religious insignia in public schools, provided they did not represent religious propaganda or interfere with educational aims. Other confrontations between the Islamic minority and members of France's white population were not always solved through bureaucratic means. The early 1990s were marked by an outbreak of racist violence. A series of racially inspired clashes occurred in France's impoverished, heavily immigrant suburbs. Delinquent immigrants were generally portrayed to be the culprits in these heavily publicized incidents; the youths were perceived to cause particular violent disturbances as well as being responsible for a climate of insecurity and fear more generally. The 1991 Gulf War also served to fuel xenophobia when the conservative media seized the opportunity to question Franco-Maghribins' loyalty to the French state. Several violent outbreaks were linked to the war, as recurrent alarmist newspaper editorials warned that Arab immigrants had been turned into "a pro-Iraq Fifth Column," and would soon unleash a war of their own on French soil (Gastaut 2000, 438). In this hostile climate, 71 percent of French believed that there were "too many Arabs" in their country and 42 percent confessed that they disliked Maghribins."
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Xenophobic press coverage certainly exacerbated these tensions, but the political mainstream did not try to alleviate them. While Mitterrand had been working to implement the Socialists’ integrationist agenda (repealing the restrictive Pasqua laws, creating the Haut Conseil à l’Intégration, and allocating additional funding for poor neighborhoods), some Socialist politicians, most notably Prime Minister Edith Cresson, did not shy away from playing the anti-immigrant card. Cresson’s suggestion to forcibly expel illegal immigrants by the plane load and launch a media firestorm and earn a critical statement about her prime minister’s statement as a vacuous media stunt, designed to distract from the Socialists’ lax record on immigration. The center-right parties seemed to agree with Le Pen’s assessment and continually criticized the Socialist government’s immigration record as dangerously permissive. Chirac went further and, despite the lesson of 1988, once again courted extremist voters by lamenting the “overdose of immigrants” whose “noise and smell” were a great burden on French society. As Bréhon and Mitra put it, “the availability of the National Front and the cooptation of parts of its language by its adversaries help[ed] create a normal issue out of racism, which has to compete with the more established issues of class, material welfare, and partisanship” (1992, 80). In short, racism had become mainstream.

9.8 Conventional Politics Return as a New Cleavage Is Born

The late 1980s and early 1990s were thus a time when immigration and the integration of France’s large Maghribi minority had turned into traditional campaign issues, albeit treated in a more populist and less technocratic fashion than the more orthodox topics. In the years that followed, however, immigration lost some of its electoral cache. Moreover, an altered political environment seemed to undermine the FN’s electoral viability. Notwithstanding these challenges, the FN and its leader were able to fortify their position in the French political system.

By the mid-1990s, France’s flagging economy had become the country’s number one concern. Unemployment hovered around the 12 percent mark, putting over three million Frenchmen out of work. In the run-up to the 1993 legislative elections, the French voter, increasingly frustrated with the country’s gloomy economic outlook, was no longer persuaded by the Front’s simplistic equation between immigration and unemployment. The economic slowdown and high and rising unemployment levels thus caused the electorate to shift its attention back to the more traditional political dimension, prompting some to conclude that Le Pen’s days as an influential wildcard had been numbered. To be sure, anti-immigrant sentiment did not abate. In 1995, fully 73 percent agreed with the statement that too many immigrants were living in France (Mayer and Roux 2004, 106). But in an effort to woo the FN’s electorate, the moderate Right had taken an increasingly tough line on immigration policy. The RPR promised that, if elected, it would put a stop to family reunifications, tighten the laws governing asylum-based immigration, and restrict immigrants’ access to social welfare entitlements. It even took up the contentious issue of Nationality Code reforms, which had proved so politically costly in the 1980s. The center-right coalition did indeed win the 1993 parliamentary elections (the FN obtained 12.4 percent of the vote but did not manage to win any seats in parliament) and, headed by Prime Minister Edouard Balladur of the center-right Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF), pursued its ambitious reform project rapidly. One of its first acts in office was to tighten the requirements regulating access to French citizenship; the Pasqua-Méhaignerie law for the first time annulled the automatic acquisition of French nationality and instead required most children born in France to immigrant parents to request French citizenship. In light of the government’s tough record on immigration, the 1995 presidential campaign did not feature the usual calls for harsher reforms in this area and candidates generally shied away from the issue altogether.

9.8.1 From Protest to Pariah to Programmatic Party

In addition to the moderate Right’s hard line on immigration, the FN had to fight its growing isolation. Mainstream parties, including Chirac’s RPR, had come to the conclusion that their own electoral fortunes were best served by marginalizing, rather than courting, Le Penist ideas and by ending the practice of expedient alliances with the FN at the local level. The growing salience of economic issues and the concomitant decline (and cooptation) of the immigration issue perhaps decreased the political dividends Le Pen could reap by capitalizing on his standing as the nation’s prime xenophobe. But together with FN strategists, Le Pen still managed to broaden his appeal by developing a more comprehensive—but no less xenophobic—program. In solidifying its base while reaching out to new constituencies, the FN turned immigration into “an omnibus issue”, a matrix through which most other issues could be channeled: unemployment, education, law and order, the economy, culture,
social expenditure, housing policy and so on" (Hainsworth and Mitchell 2000, 444). The party thus consciously sought to cast off its image as a protest party. Proclaiming "a new cleavage is born" (un nouveau clivage est né), the FN recognized that a new cleavage structure had been emerging and molded itself accordingly (Perrineau 1997, 81). In addition, the center-right parties' refusal to enter into alliances with the FN, as well as recurrent revelations of government scandals, prompted Le Pen to sharpen his attacks against the corrupt political ruling class and allowed him to run as an anti-establishment candidate.

The Front's 1993 manifesto, 300 mesures pour la renaissance de la France, testifies to the party's expanded scope. Five broad headings—l'identité, la prospérité, la francophonie, la sécurité, and la souveraineté—laid out the FN's policy proposals, which ranged from protecting the socially excluded, cutting taxes and public expenditures, improving the health system, supporting small domestic businesses, restoring law and order, and ending immigration, to containing globalization through protectionism and unilateralism. While the party took moderate positions on the size of the public sector more generally, one of its most prominent economic policy proposals, the idea of "national preference" for state services, was rather radical. Developed in the 1980s by FN member Jean-Yves Le Gallou, this concept envisions a profound transformation of the country's administrative, judicial, and social procedures based on a distinction between French nationals and foreigners. This distinction would serve as the guiding principle in the distribution of state services (Le Gallou 1985, 13, 61). The FN bemoaned the bureaucratic, anonymous, and dehumanized allocation of state benefits and insisted that the distribution of these services should instead reflect the communal brotherhood and solidarity of the French people. It thus urged the abolition of the RMI (the state's main welfare program), which had in any case been "invalidated" by the Socialists, who the FN claimed had allowed and promoted its rampant abuse by immigrants, and called for the creation of "an allocation of national solidarity... based on national preference" (Front National 1993, 223–225). In other words, in all areas of public services, French nationals would receive priority over their immigrant neighbors.

9.8.2 The 1995 Presidential Election

This platform served as the FN's programmatic basis for the 1995 presidential campaign. In an attempt to link up its policy of "national preference" to the election's major themes, the FN portrayed this scheme as not only morally superior to the current system but also more fiscally responsible: excluding immigrants from most state services would cut public expenditures drastically. The other candidates also emphasized economic and social themes. The campaigns of Jacques Chirac and his rival Prime Minister Balladur recognized unemployment as the nation's main concern and proposed measures to assist the long-term unemployed. Both demanded a reduction in employers' social security contributions and vowed to cut back France's ballooning public-sector deficits. Chirac, with little room to differentiate himself from Balladur, recast himself as a "compassionate conservative," focusing on the importance of family values and offering "salaries" for mothers. The campaign of the Socialist candidate, Lionel Jospin, echoed similar economic and social themes, but offered slightly different proposals. Jospin also endorsed cuts in employers' contributions, but added a call for a reduced workweek to help create jobs. Like the other candidates, he reached out to the poor and the long-term unemployed, albeit in more concrete terms, promising additional resources for poor suburbs, the creation of social housing, and increased support for the elderly, infirm, and disabled.

After a somewhat sluggish campaign, those who voted for the moderate Right split their vote in the first round, with 20.8 and 18.6 percent voting for Chirac and Balladur, respectively. Jospin was the surprise winner in the first round, obtaining 23.3 percent of the vote, but was later beaten by Chirac in a 52.6–47.4 runoff. Le Pen received a respectable 15 percent of the vote in the first round. The 1995 presidential campaign was thus a rather conventional one. It responded to the public's concern over bread-and-butter issues and put the divisive issues related to immigration temporarily on hold. While the campaign's focus on traditional mainstream issues, together with the media's weariness of covering the extremist leader, did not provide Le Pen with the massive exposure of earlier years, he nevertheless succeeded in mobilizing a considerable 15 percent of the electorate to come out and vote for him on election day. This result is especially impressive given that some of the votes obtained by Philippe de Villiers (4.7 percent), a far-right, fiercely anti-European Community candidate, may have originally been destined to go to Le Pen's cause.

Le Pen's strategy of broadening his appeal to reach new and hold on to old constituencies seemed to have worked. His base stayed remarkably loyal—fully 91 percent of voters sympathizing with Le Pen supported him in the first round, far outstripping partisan loyalty among other candidates. Moreover, Le Pen's success among the French working class stands out as a particular
achievement of the 1995 election. While estimates vary somewhat, members of the working class turned out in greater numbers than ever before to support a candidate of the Far Right. In contrast, the Socialists hemorrhaged votes among this bloc; the first-round working-class vote share in the presidential elections dropped from 42 percent in 1988 to only 25 percent in 1995. Perrineau aptly calls this phenomenon “the Left–Le Pen dynamic” (1997, 80) and considers it one of the most important aspects of the FN’s development. Among the unemployed and those who considered themselves underprivileged (désavoirs), Le Pen turned out to be the most popular candidate (Marcus 1996, 308). These electors also tend to be the ones who were most disaffected, generally displaying an apathetic, undifferentiated attitude toward politics. N. Mayer (2002) reports that 23 percent of those who considered themselves to be “neither left nor right” voted for Le Pen in 1995, leading her to conclude that the Lepeniste electorate absorbs two contrasting camps: those of the ideologically committed Extreme Right and those of the politically apathetic “ninisme” (N. Mayer 2002, 46).

Le Pen also succeeded in transforming himself from a one-issue candidate into a genuine alternative to the mainstream, at least as far as his electorate was concerned. Immigration certainly motivated many of Le Pen’s supporters, but according to poll results, almost half of his constituents did not consider immigration among the top two issues deciding their vote (Shields 1995, 30). According to Shields,

The overriding impression is of a vote which channels fears and frustrations on a whole range of issues, from immigration and criminality to unemployment, social deprivation, and the effects of economic recession, within a wider constellation of anxieties over European integration, Islamic fundamentalism, political corruption, national identity, and ‘traditional values,’ inter alia. While the FN continues to prosper in and around areas . . . with large immigrant communities . . . the Le Pen vote in 1995 extends far beyond these parameters. (Ibid.)

In geographic terms, Le Pen’s electoral forays were also extensive. Le Pen had his best results in traditional strongholds (northern France, the greater Paris region, Lyons, the east and the Mediterranean littoral), and on a nationwide basis, his vote showed an upward trend. Over two-thirds of France’s départements showed a net increase in the Lepeniste vote, and Le Pen supporters numbered over 20 percent in eleven départements, up from eight in

the previous election (Marcus 1996, 308; Shields 1995, 28). Given this solid performance, the Front leader felt cheated by Villiers—Le Pen was convinced that without the latter’s interference, he would have qualified for the second round runoff. The 2002 presidential elections would provide a more opportune environment.

9.8.3 On the Road to 2002

In many ways, the run-up to the 2002 presidential election appeared to be a repeat of the period leading up to the 1995 election. The FN proved its endurance at both the national and the local level. It scored important victories in the 1995 and 2001 municipal elections and also performed well in the 1997 legislative elections, where it polled over 15 percent. Similar to the early 1990s, however, several developments conspired to make the FN appear less of an electoral threat to the political mainstream than it in fact was. The crucial difference was that this time around, Le Pen’s strong performance in the presidential election was hard to ignore.

The most significant development concerned the Front National itself. Over the years, two factions had developed and coexisted within the party, but by the late 1990s, their visions about the FN’s future role in French politics had become too incompatible to be contained in one party. The internal battle was one over strategy, not ideology. Frustrated with the Front’s increasing marginalization by the country’s political establishment, Bruno Mégret, intellectual father of many FN programs and strategies, spearheaded a faction that wanted to take the FN out of political isolation and into a governing alliance with the country’s moderate Right. Le Pen and his followers, however, stood firm in their rejection of the country’s ruling political class and insisted on presenting the FN as a genuine alternative to the political status quo. As Mégret’s strategic vision gained popularity among growing sections of the FN’s rank and file, he and his followers broke away to found a splinter party (Mouvement National Républicain, or MNR) in January 1999, in time for the year’s European Parliament election (Adler 2001, 38). This first electoral test came as a major setback for Le Pen—the split had fragmented the Lepeniste vote. His Front National only received 5.8 percent of the votes as the MNR managed to siphon off 3.3 percent. But even the combined vote share of just over 9 percent came as a disappointment; in all previous elections of the 1990s, the FN had scored in the double digits. In light of this electoral performance, the
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notion that the FN was finally facing its "inexorable decline" took hold among the media as well as among the French political establishment. The absence of immigration as a prominent political issue in the years leading up to the 2002 presidential election further buttressed this view. According to some, "to the degree that the saliency of immigration was associated with the ascendency and implantation of the FN from 1984 to 1998, so too is the decline of immigration as an issue associated with the precipitous decline, isolation and marginalization of the parties of the far right" (Adler 2001, 35). Indeed, immigration was not an overt issue in the upcoming campaigns. However, the major themes dominating political life in 2001—2002 were insecurity, unemployment, and law and order—issues that were at least implicitly linked to immigration in the public's mind. In the 2001 municipal elections, fought in the shadow of rising crime rates and numerous reports of urban unrest, fear of crime and violence had replaced fear of unemployment as the number one issue concerning the French electorate. The presidential candidates took their cues from their nervous constituents. President Chirac and Socialist prime minister Jospin, the two frontrunners, each tried to convince the French voter that they would be the more aggressive in enforcing law and order. Chirac adopted the New York slogan of "zero tolerance" while Jospin insisted he would be "tough on crime, and tough on the causes of crime." Both also stressed the importance of the French community in restoring public order. Chirac countered Jospin's catchphrase, "Life together, with his motto "Together, a great France" (Ysmal 2003, 944). All other issues—the economy, reform of the welfare state, European integration, to name but a few—took a backseat in the 2002 campaign, and were either evaded or equivocated on by Jospin and Chirac (Bell and Criddle 2002, 650). Consequently, polls showed that the majority of the French electorate discerned no difference between the two candidates and grew increasingly dissatisfied and uninterested in the campaign. In January 2002, a poll revealed that only 29 percent of French in fact wanted them to be candidates; 59 percent wished for new personalities (Ysmal 2003, 944–951).

9.8.4 The 2002 Presidential Election

With the benefit of hindsight, it appears that the political configuration was a very opportune one for Le Pen to make a historic impact. While immigration was not explicitly mentioned by the mainstream, the ascendency of insecurity and fear as central campaign themes fit well with Le Pen's ethno-
competition, Jospin was only able to mobilize 16.2 percent of the voters. On the Right, there was no credible challenger to Chirac, whose vote share was thus not threatened to be split in half as had been the case previously. Nevertheless, his result—19.9 percent—was disappointing; it made him the president reelected with the lowest vote share in the Fifth Republic (Bell and Cridle 2002, 646–652). On the extreme right, things looked favorable for Le Pen. Pasqua and Villiers did not make the cut, which probably freed up some votes for the Front's leader. Le Pen's major rival, Mégrit, however, did manage to collect the necessary five hundred signatures and ran on a platform very similar to that of Le Pen. But in 2002, Mégrit did not turn out to be a threat to the former, winning only 2.3 percent of the vote. The division of the Left and the weakness of the Right thus contributed to Le Pen's electoral fortunes: winning 16.9 percent of the first presidential ballot, Le Pen came in second, beating Jospin by 0.7 points, and entering the second-round runoff. Chirac won the second ballot with 82 percent of the vote—but the shock of the first ballot lingered.

As Le Pen's triumphant performance sent shock waves throughout the country and the rest of the world, a period of soul-searching began. In an attempt to explain Le Pen's electoral upset, commentators offered various answers, ranging from a generalized culture of indifference to a working class that was not treated with the dignity it deserved. An analysis of Le Pen's supporters, however, simply reaffirms previous trends. In 2002, Le Pen's electorate drew primarily on males (21 percent of males compared with 13 percent of females voted for Le Pen) and again represented all age groups. The Front leader scored his best results among the unemployed (fully 38 percent of whom supported Le Pen), manual workers (30 percent), those employed in agriculture (20 percent), and small businessmen, shopkeepers, and craftsmen (20 percent). With regard to issues, insecurity was the highest priority among Le Pen voters; 68 percent mentioned that this major campaign theme motivated their decision to vote for Le Pen (immigration and employment were mentioned by 57 and 27 percent, respectively) (Martin 2003, 16).

As in earlier years, Le Pen was able to appeal to a diverse, cross-class electorate that can best be subsumed under the ethnocentrist label. According to N. Mayer's analysis, in the 2002 election, a voter's attitudes toward immigrants proved to exert an equal influence on his vote choice as on his position on economic issues. This result, which had been in the making for the past two decades, leads Mayer to conclude that "ethnocentrism is on its way to becoming a structural issue in France's electoral scene" (Mayer and Roux 2004, 117; author's translation). Some generational trends may, however, work against the Front. Surveys have shown that a large and growing generational gap cuts through the French electorate, with young voters exhibiting much lower levels of intolerance and ethnocentrism than their older counterparts (Mayer and Roux 2004, 108–109). Marine Le Pen, daughter of the party boss, will certainly attempt to rally the young French electorate to the Front's cause. While an aging Jean-Marie Le Pen may soon step down from political life, the xenophobic Front leader has helped give rise to a transformation of the French political field which may be here to stay—at least until a new generation of French citizens becomes of voting age.

9.9 Conclusion

The politics of immigration and integration in France have occupied an important place in France's political landscape for over two decades. Although the salience of these issues has varied from election to election, they and the related concerns and anxieties they trigger among the French electorate will most likely not disappear in the near future. Indeed, the rise of international Islamic terrorism has focused renewed attention on France's Muslim population.

Today, debates about immigration and immigrant integration into French society do not only conjure up fears about unemployment and urban unrest. Rather, fear of an Islamic fundamentalism flourishing within French borders pervades these discussions, providing the Front's major theme of insecurity with an additional, more terrifying quality. A more recent debate surrounding the wearing of the Islamic headscarf illustrates how this added dimension of fear has permeated public thinking and discussion about the presence of immigrants in France. In this controversy, which began in the fall of 2003, it was not only the assertion of French secular identity that was at stake. The debate, and the ultimate banning of the Islamic headscarf from public schools in March 2004, invoked the potential horrors of Islamic terrorism. Some proponents of the ban viewed the headscarf as a dangerous form of religious expression, if not a symbol of allegiance to Islamic fundamentalism; they consequently understood its banning as an attempt to curb the radicalization of French Islam.
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In sharp contrast with the resolution of the *affaire du foulard* fifteen years earlier, the proposed ban was passed with an overwhelming parliamentary majority that crossed party lines. If nothing else, this rare show of partisan unity is a sign that politicians are taking their electorate’s uneasiness with immigration and multiculturalism seriously. Thirty years after the “official” end of immigration, French politics and society are still walking the tightrope between exclusion and integration. Until a lasting, national consensus on immigrant integration has been found, xenophobic political leaders will try their best to pull the country in the exclusionary direction.