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Course of Comparative history of political system

The evolution of the Front National in France, from its birth to the rise of Marine Le Pen

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Introduction

This master's thesis intends to study the evolution of the Front National in France, in light of the party's recent electoral successes and the transformation that FN has undergone over the years. This study wants to draw attention to the historical conditions that led to the birth of the FN, highlighting the social role that the party played in France. The focus of this thesis will also be placed on the ideological evolution of the party, analyzing the normalization process implemented by the governance of FN. The normalization of this political subject, which in French journalistic jargon has been defined as "*dédiabolisation*", is a topic of much debate inside the political science community and deserves a historical and ideological deepening. Some of the misconceptions derive from the fact that many of the studies on FN do not consider the ideological shift within the strategic process of normalization, but this perspective is not enough to understand the whole phenomenon. Following this idea, the first chapter of the thesis will analyze the history of the Front National, from the birth of the party to the presidency of Marine Le Pen. As stated earlier, understanding the historical and economic conditions that favored the birth of this movement will allow us to provide a clear picture of the political situation in France. The history of FN is intertwined with the history of France, external factors such as world wars or economic crises have played an important role in the genesis of extreme-right parties and these aspects will be analyzed within the first chapter. One of the most important authors in this field is Daniel

Stockemer who in 2017 published: *“The Front National in France”*¹. The book makes a historical and ideological analysis of the party, highlighting the differences between the presidencies of Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen. Stockemer also added to the book an analysis of the composition of the party, investigating the electorate, the governance, and the leadership. Another author who has studied the history of FN is Harvey G. Simmons in his book *“The French Front National the extremist challenge to Democracy”*². This volume, written in 2018, mainly analyzes the ideological aspect of the party over the years, setting turning points that have been fundamental for the evolution of the Front National.

The ideological universe and the cultural references of the party are the main topics of the second and third chapters of this thesis. Since its birth in 1972, the party has been basically controlled by Jean-Marie Le Pen. He held the position of president until 2011 and he basically controlled the decision-making process of the party. The ideology of the party was based on the cult of the personality of its president, a man symbol of an entire movement and considered the only possible alternative to the degradation of French politics. The ideological analysis of FN under the presidency of Jean-Marie Le Pen was carried out through the study of primary material; such as party propaganda books, interviews given by Le Pen or election programs. Within this chapter the relationship between Jean-Marie Le Pen and General De Gaulle will also be examined. The relationship between FN and General De Gaulle is tangible proof of the normalization process. Jean-Marie Le Pen, and consequently the Front

¹ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In *Springer eBooks*.

² SIMMONS, H. (2018), *The French National Front*, 1st edn. Taylor and Francis.

National, considered De Gaulle an enemy of the French nation, mainly because of the Algerian question. Throughout history, this assessment has changed, leading to a historical reappraisal of De Gaulle's role in French society. The recovery of the role of General De Gaulle was implemented by the presidency of Marine Le Pen, during the thesis it will investigate the causes and effects of this choice. The last paragraph of the second chapter deals with anti-system parties and their historical evolution. Through the studies of Giovanni Capoccia and Mattia Zulianello, I schematized the genesis and political transformation that parties born as anti-systems can accomplish. The Front National was born as a party of great protest against the political establishment and its transformation falls within the reconstruction of the two scholars. The last chapter will describe the ideology of FN under the presidency of Marine Le Pen. Following the 2011 internal elections and the change of power between father and daughter, a new course began for the Front National. Particularly from a strategic point of view, FN's governance has adopted new methods for seeking electoral consensus, achieving incredible successes. This ideological analysis was also carried out through the study of primary material, specifically through the comparison of the electoral programs of the presidential elections of 2012 and 2017.

Chapter 1

History of the Front National, from its birth to the rise of Marine Le Pen

This first chapter aims to reconstruct the historical and political evolution of the Front National, starting from the genesis of the extreme right up to Marine Le Pen's presidency. Inside an analysis of a political party, the reconstruction of the historical and social context in which it developed is essential. The collection of these data will be carried out through the use of the historical literature concerning the Front National, paying particular attention to the most recent studies.

The detailed analysis of the historical literature on the Front National allows us to understand the historical context in which the party was born and the social and political issues that have characterized its image. Each historical phase of the Front National is an expression of very specific political wills. Understanding the connection between political decisions and the historical context will be fundamental for framing the evolution of this political party.

1.1 The genesis of the extreme right in France

The history of the extreme right in France has always been characterized by profound ambiguities, in the context of this thesis I will take care of reconstructing the historical events that have allowed its development. The origins of the extreme right in France can be traced back to the events surrounding the French citizen Albert Dreyfus, this historical reconstruction will also allow us to understand the genesis of the antisemitic feelings inside the French population. Albert Dreyfus was a French Jew and in 1894 was an officer in training in the French Army. At that time, the French secret services suspected that there was a mole passing information to Germany, which had a contact at the German embassy in Paris to whom sensitive information was passed. After a brief internal investigation, the French services tightened the circle around Dreyfus, who was arrested on October 15, 1894. The period between his imprisonment and the court-martial trial effect was fraught with speculation and deep friction among the French population. He professed his innocence from the first time and up to that point his military career had also been impeccable. The main evidence that was supposed to link him to the crime consisted of a manuscript in which there was classified information directed to Germany. During the trial, which began in December 1894, five handwriting experts were called to provide an expert report and three of them did not identify Dreyfus's handwriting as the same as of the culprit. This expert report reduced the case, but it was not enough to exonerate the accused. At the end of the trial, Dreyfus was degraded and he was sent to prison on Devil's Island, a rocky outcrop off the coast of French Guyana. The media importance of the Dreyfus case was

enormous and is still considered one of the worst cases of bad justice. The birth of the mass media and the subsequent massification of politics helped to form real opposing formations, one lined up alongside Dreyfus's position and the other condemning him. In the context of this chapter, I will describe the groups in favor of condemning Dreyfus; their positions were characterized by harsh forms of anti-Semitism and they used the situation to increase their consensus. Jules Guérin, a French citizen already known in far-right circles, created the *ligue antisémite* (Anti-Semitic League), which paid thugs to bash Jews and intellectuals. This organization did not limit itself to perpetrating anti-Semitic messages but organized real riots to end Jewish hegemony within the French nation. At the end of December 1898, some anti-Dreyfusard intellectuals founded the *Ligue de la patrie française* (League of the French Fatherland), intended to be the intellectual counterpart to the thugs of the *Ligue antisémite*. These groups were able to channel the feeling of anger of the French population towards the Jewish community, organized violent protests throughout the nation and represent the ideological and cultural basin from which the post-war fascist movements were born. The course of events, following the outbreak of this diplomatic case, will mark the beginning of a new era in the political history of France. The advent of the First World War and the conflict itself were a time when domestic politics was overshadowed and the more conservative circles of the French right were more interested in the world conflict than in domestic vicissitudes. At the end of the 20s, the circles of the French extreme right took advantage of the climate that reigned in Europe and organized their own model of "fascism". The rise of the national fascist party and the Mussolini government were welcomed by French conservative groups,

who considered fascism the only possible barrier against the communist drift. The fear of the communist danger materialized in France at the end of 1924 when the victory of the “*Cartel*”³ caused great fear in extreme right environments and they decided to take action. The American historian Robert Soucy defines the period immediately following these elections as “the first wave of fascism”. The groups that were created in these periods never defined themselves as fascists, they were considered small conservative or proto-fascist groups who believed in an authoritarian nationalism that should be able to stop the communist advance.

The analysis of Soucy focused on the birth of three far-right organizations after the 1924 elections: the *Légion*, the *Jeunesses patriotes* (the young patriots) and *Faisceau* (the Fasces, the symbol Mussolini had chosen for his movement). “In 1924 Antoine Rédier founded the *Légion*. By 1926 it had 20 000 members. Rédier called for a *chef* (leader) and ‘authority’: ‘no committees, no discussions, no elections’”⁴. The *Jeunesses patriotes* was also founded in 1924 by Pierre Taittinger. He was a very famous businessman in France which intended to defend his interests against socialism. The last movement, *Le Faisceau*, was founded by Georges Valois in 1925 and was the most radical of these organizations. The political thought of its founder was openly racist, exposed against the socialist drift and had expressed his contempt for the Jews, the Freemasons and those who went against the French Catholic values. This first wave of fascism in France did not meet the favors of the population and the

³ The cartel was a left-wing electoral coalition that ran in the 1924 elections. Within it the two most important parties were the French Socialist Party and the French Communist Party.

⁴ SOWERWINE, C. (2018), *France since 1870*, 3rd edn, Bloomsbury Publishing, Chapter 2.

decision of remain on their extremist positions caused the ostracization by the liberal ruling class.

The early 1930s and the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party gave new life to the French extreme right and there was a second wave of fascist groups. The Taittinger's *Jeunesses patriotes* survived into the 30's and there also was the birth of a new great proto-fascist movement: *Solidarité française*, founded in 1933 by François Coty. François Coty was one of the most influential men in all of France and owner of the conservative newspaper *Le Figaro*. His movement quickly became the largest of all far-right organizations in France and reached 180,000 members at the end of 1934. However, his political career was very short-lived and due to his financial disagreement, the movement was dissolved.

The opinion of scholars on the effective closeness between these movements and fascism is not very clear. Experts have defined these movements as essentially authoritarian, they used slogans and propaganda typical of fascism but in substance they did not propose a real revolution of French society. These organizations demanded the affirmation of a strong central power that could guarantee social order and the status quo, as opposed to the troubled governments of the French republic. These considerations lead us to think that there has been an instrumental use of the themes of Fascism and Nazism in order to advance specific requests, above all in the economic and political fields. From a historical point of view, with the Nazi occupation and the foundation of the Vichy Republic, the far-right parties accepted the birth of the new regime and plunged into the Vichy state apparatus.

At the end of the Second World War, the French extreme right presented itself as a jagged universe composed of micro organizations often in conflict with each other. The cause of this complexity is to be found in French history, specifically in the Vichy government and its collaboration with the Nazi regime. The commonality between the French far right and the Vichy regime has provoked a phenomenon called “*diabolization*”. The stigma of “*diabolization*” has accompanied the extreme right and particularly the Front National, throughout its historical evolution. During this thesis, I will deepen the concept of “*diabolization*” because it is essential to understand the relationship between French civil society and the Front National.

The collapse of the Vichy regime in 1944 and the subsequent Allied victory in World War II had left the French far-right without strong leadership, but it had also opened up a great opportunity for those movements that are seeking political viability. The birth and evolution of these movements were explained by Harvey G. Simmons in his book “*The French Front National the extremist challenge to Democracy*”⁵, Daniel Stockemer in “*The Front National in France*”⁶, Pascal Delwit in “*Les partis politiques en France*”⁷ and “*Le Front national: Mutations de l’extrême droite française*”⁸.

Following a purely chronological order, the first movement mentioned by Stockemer is the far-right organization “*Jeune Nation*”⁹ This movement was founded in 1950 by a group of officers from the French Army. The characteristics of this movement took direct inspiration from the Italian fascist

⁵ SIMMONS, H. (2018), *The French National Front*, 1st edn., Taylor and Francis.

⁶ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks.

⁷ DELWIT, P. (2013) *Les partis politiques en France*. Bruxelles: Editions de l’Université.

⁸ DELWIT, P. (2012), *Le Front national: Mutations de l’extrême droite française*, Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles.

⁹ Accueil. (s.d.) *Jeune Nation*. <https://jeune-nation.com/>.

party and gathered the most extreme souls of the French right. From a methodological point of view, Jeune Nation represents the first attempt of the French extreme right to restore their political credibility.

In the mid-50s, however, there was the birth of the movement considered the progenitor of the extreme right in France: The Poujadist movement. This movement, born after the protests against taxation in France, was the social basis of the “Union de Defense des Commerçants et Artisans” (UDCA) party, which achieved important results both in the electoral field and in civil society. Specifically, *« le mouvement poujadiste est une naissance spontanée à partir d’une révolte d’une trentaine d’artisans et de commerçants de Saint-Céré contre des contrôleurs fiscaux. Ce faisant, ils lancent un mouvement qui débouche sur la création de l’Union de défense de la création des artisans et commerçants (udca) contre une fiscalité jugée excessive »*.¹⁰ Given its historical significance, this thesis needs to analyze its characteristics and the political path. The Poujadist movement is defined by Simmons as *“a populist, single-issue movement founded on a narrow sociological and ideological base.”*¹¹ The ideology of the newborn UDCA can be summarized in three key points from which the whole ideological reference system descends:

1. Anti-modernist vision
2. Background anti-Semitism

¹⁰ DELWIT, P. (2012), *Le Front national: Mutations de l’extrême droite française*, Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, P.12 **Translation**: The Poujadist movement is a spontaneous birth from a revolt of a thirty craftsmen and traders of Saint-Céré against tax auditors. In doing so, they launched a movement that led to the creation of the Union of Defense of the creation of craftsmen and traders (UDCA) against a tax judged excessive.

¹¹ SIMMONS, H. (2018), *The French National Front*, 1st edn. Taylor and Francis, Chapter 2.

3. Anti-parliamentarism and distrust in Republican institutions

In the following section of this chapter, I will analyze these three characteristics as they are common inside the history of the Front National and a crucial component of the overall thesis. The anti-modernist vision of UDCA was the result of the strong process of industrialization of France in the 50s and the displacement of most of the rural masses from the countryside to the large industrial centers. The belief that the industrial development of France has brought benefits only to a small segment of the population, putting farmers and land workers in difficulty fueled that theory. The roots of this anti-modernist vision can be searched within the broad reactionary school of thought, which was also a relevant part of the ideological system of the Fascist party and the Nazi party. The second characteristic that allows us to reconstruct the ideological system of the UDCA is the widespread anti-Semitism among the ranks of the party and specifically in the figure of Poujade. The anti-Semitic attitude rather than being a programmatic point of the party was a basic thought that the leader of the UDCA made explicit during public occasions. Fundamental traces of Poujade's anti-Semitic thought can be found in his book "*J'ai choisi le combat*"¹² in which he expresses judgments on Pierre Mendès France¹³. Mendès France, one of the most important politicians in France, had Jewish origin and has been the target of strong criticism from Poujade. Poujade's criticisms, rather than placing on Mendes France's political abilities, were expressed through personal attacks that relied on stereotypes about the Jewish religion. Poujade

¹² POUJADE, P. (1955), *J'ai Choisi Le Combat*, Saint-Céré: Soc. Générale d'Eds et des Publications.

¹³ Pierre Mendès France was a French politician who served as prime minister of France for eight months from 1954 to 1955. As a member of the Radical Party, he headed a government supported by a coalition of Gaullists (RPF), moderate socialists (UDSR), Christian democrats (MRP) and liberal-conservatives (CNIP).

also declared: « *Si vous aviez une goutte de sang gaulois dans les veines, vous n'auriez jamais osé, vous représentant de notre France, producteur mondial de vins et de champagne, vous faire servir un verre de lait dans une réception internationale ! C'est une gifle, Monsieur Mendès, que tout Français a reçue ce jour-là, même s'il n'est pas un ivrogne* »¹⁴. The last peculiarity that will be examined is the anti-parliamentary sentiment of the UDCA and the hostility toward the republican institutions of the Fourth Republic. The feeling of disrespect for Republican institutions is made explicit through the numerous interviews given by Poujade during the 1955 election campaign. In this sense, the phrase concerning the aim of the UDCA is emblematic: “*The only mission is to paralyze the National Assembly as long as the Estates-General were not convened.*”¹⁵.

This first paragraph on the extreme right in France and the role of Poujadism is important for this thesis because it allows us to understand the ideological background that favored the birth of the National Front and the genesis of the figure of Jean-Marie Le Pen. Poujade and Le Pen had the opportunity to meet when the latter returned from Indochina in 1955, after the end of the war. From this date on, the two formed a political partnership that in 1956 led Jean-Marie to become the youngest elected to the National Assembly at only 27 years old. The general elections in 1956 were the starting point of Le Pen's political career, he “took advantage” of the electoral success of the UDCA and became one of the reference figures of the extreme right.

¹⁴ TOUCHARD, J. (1956), *Bibliographie et chronologie du poujadisme*, Revue française de science politique 1, P. 33.
Translation : If you had a drop of Gallic blood in your veins, you would never have dared, representing our France, a world producer of wines and champagne, to have a glass of milk served to you at an international reception! It's a slap, Monsieur Mendès, that every Frenchman received that day, even if he's not a drunk.

¹⁵ SIMMONS, H. (2018), *The French National Front*, 1st edn. Taylor and Francis, Chapter 4.

Despite the electoral triumph of those years, the Poujadist party had some characteristics that did not allow it to face the political challenges of France in the 50s. As stated by Simmons “*the spontaneous, unstructured, and personal nature of the Poujadist organization was a fatal weakness*”¹⁶ and favored the growth of spaces of dissent within the party. It is precisely in these spaces of dissent that is inserted the figure of Le Pen, he will exploit them to carry out his political project. The relationship between Le Pen and the poujadist party can essentially be summarized in two phases: first in the ability of the young Jean-Marie to assume the role of “national speaker” of UDCA and then to become a destabilizing element inside the party.

The internal conflict within the party intensified as a result of the difference of views between Le Pen and Poujade on the issue of the war in Algeria. While Le Pen pushed to support the war in Algeria and endorsed an insurrection against the *Front de Libération Nationale* (National Liberation Front, or FLN), Poujade warned against the beginnings of a mobilization that once more violates Constitutional principles. Performing a political analysis, it is possible to observe that Poujade's behavior is aimed at the implementation of a self-defense strategy. This strategy consists of not exposing the party to very divisive issues, such as the war in Algeria, to close ranks and avoid internal divisions. On the other hand, the behavior of Jean-Marie Le Pen was aimed at moving the party towards more radical positions, changing its internal balance, and finally controlling it. In 1956 in this political scenario, the troubles among these two important figures leads Le Pen to join the First Paratroops of the Foreign Legion in Algeria. After the end of the union with Le Pen, Poujade and

¹⁶ IBIDEM

his party disappeared from the Political spectrum, and the far right returned to being a conglomerate of small movements.

At the end of the 50s, with the establishment of the French fifth republic and the presidency led by Charles de Gaulle, the spaces for extreme-right parties had been considerably reduced. The last movement that is important to highlight before the foundation of the Front National is the activist organization called Ordre Nouveau (ON). As stated by Stockemer “*ON was different from its predecessors in that its intention was to become a large party representing a unified far-rightist alternative*”¹⁷. Ordre Nouveau was founded in 1969 by Alain Robert¹⁸, a leading figure of the extreme right French post-war period. Alain Robert in the mid-sixties was a mediocre orator but talented organizer, admirer of the anti-Semitic theorist Édouard Drumont, and in those years he became the reference point of nationalist students. Inspired by François Duprat, another old exponent of the extreme right, Robert used all his power of persuasion to lay the foundations for a new movement. The name Ordre Nouveau was not new inside the French history. Robert was aware that this name was used during the Vichy Republic to mean the new world order envisaged by Adolf Hitler and therefore the reference is immediate¹⁹. ON was born with the precise aim of emulating the political strategy of the “Movimento Sociale Italiano” (MSI), thus trying to distance itself from the imagery of the small far-right party to become a large representative party. The political mission of the party seemed to be incompatible with the cultural references with which ON was born and these

¹⁷ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.9.

¹⁸ Alain Robert is one of the most important far-right politicians of the post-war period. Founder of ON and co-founder of the Front National, of which he held the position of Secretary General.

¹⁹ LEBOURG N. and et PREDA J. (2012), *Ordre nouveau: fin des illusions droitières et matrice activiste du premier Front national*, Studia Historica. Historia Contemporânea, n° 30, P. 209.

contradictions came out. As stated by Grégoire Kauffmann in his studies on FN, « pour l'heure, ces contradictions pourtant bien réelles ne semblent guère devoir tempérer l'activisme agressif d'un mouvement dont la réputation se construit d'abord dans la rue, à coups de manches de pioche contre les gauchistes. Organisé en mai 1970 à la Mutualité, dans le Ve arrondissement de Paris, le premier grand meeting d'Ordre nouveau porte la marque de cet extrémisme décomplexé »²⁰

1.2 The foundation of the Front National

In the last part of the first paragraph, it was analysed a new political subject in the French extreme right: Ordre Nouveau. As will emerge in the continuation of the Thesis, this movement played a fundamental role for the birth of the Front National. The idea of a French National Front emerged from the political programs of ON in 1971 and almost its entire leading class will take part in the construction of this new party. Between the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s, ON presented itself essentially as a unitary extra-parliamentary force but with some internal contradiction. The idea of having to concentrate its forces also in the electoral field was developed within the movement apparatus. Following that possibility, ON decided to run candidates

²⁰ KAUFFMANN, G. (2016), *Les origines du front national* / *cairn.info*. Available at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-pouvoirs-2016-2-page-5>, P.8. **Translation** : For the time being, these very real contradictions hardly seem to seem. Having to temper the aggressive activism of a movement whose reputation is first built in the street, with pickaxe handles against the Leftists. Organized in May 1970 at the Mutualité, in the fifth arrondissement in Paris, the first major meeting of Ordre nouveau bears the mark of This uninhibited extremism.

in the 70's elections. In the 1971 municipal elections²¹, ON received 19,529 votes (2.6 %) in Paris and had isolated successes in other parts of France.

The positive results of the elections strengthened the idea that the movement should renew itself and become a full-fledged political party, “*chez les cadres d'on, l'idée d'un «front national», uniquement dédié à la lutte électorale, commence à faire son chemin*”²². In this constantly evolving context, a decisive figure for the birth of the new party fits in: François Duprat. François Duprat was an essayist and politician, a founding member of the Front National party and part of its governance. He is considered “*the man who invented the Front National*”²³ mostly because he wrote in 1971 an iconic manifesto: “*Pour un Front National*”²⁴.

The manifesto achieved the goal of summarizing the principal values of the French far right, becoming a real ideological program of the raising party. The ruling class of ON, supported by Duprat's ideological manifesto, decided to complete the transformation in June 1972, leading to the creation of the *Front National pour une Unite' Française*. At the beginning of its history, the newborn FNUF moved on the path traced by ON. The new party took the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* as its reference model, also copying the flame placed in the center of the symbol. The renewed ruling class found it necessary to identify a new leader that was able to provide credibility in the French national scene.

²¹ Contributeurs aux projets Wikimedia. (2022) Élections municipales de 1971 à Paris. *fr.wikipedia.org*. https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89lections_municipales_de_1971_%C3%A0_Paris.

²² KAUFFMANN, G. (2016) . *Les origines du front national | cairn.info*. Available at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-pouvoirs-2016-2-page-5>, P. 9 **Translation:** Among the ON cadres, the idea of a “National Front”, solely dedicated to the electoral struggle, is beginning to make its way.

²³ MONNOT, O. F. a. M. E. C. (2012, February 14) , “*François Duprat*”, *le livre référence sur l'homme qui inventa le Front national*, Le Monde.fr. https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2012/02/14/francois-duprat-le-livre-reference-sur-l-homme-qui-inventa-le-front-national_5981825_823448.html.

²⁴ DUPRAT, F. (2018), *Ars Magna: François Duprat Le prophète du nationalisme-révolutionnaire*, Ars Magna.

Given the experience gained during the Poujadist period, Jean-Marie Le Pen was named the first president of the party. After the appointment of Le Pen as president, on October 5 1972 the party changed its name and assumed the definitive name of *Front National*. “*Its central office was composed of six members: Alain Robert, a veteran of Occident and Ordre Nouveau; François Brigneau, an obsessively anti-Semitic journalist; Roger Holeindre, a journalist and extreme right activist; Pierre Bousquet, formerly a member of the Waffen-SS; and Le Pen and his friend Pierre Durand, director of Le Pen's public relations concern*”²⁵. At the beginning of the seventies, given the strong fragmentation of the French extreme right, the newborn *Front National* aggregated inside itself the Poujadist, neo-fascist and anti-Gaullist souls, also becoming the benchmark for the right-wing intellectuals.

The climate of renewal that had led to the birth of FN was only the beginning of the rebranding operation initiated by the French far right. The concept of *diabolization*, introduced at the beginning of the Thesis, had always relegated these political fringes to the margins of power. Le Pen, since his election in 1972, was convinced that the road to follow was the one of electoral competition and the new party's main objective was beating the Communists and the Gaullists in elections. The strategy of the old far-right parties had not led to considerable results, both from the electoral point of view and in terms of the number of members.

The path imagined by the new president Le Pen required the development of new policies and strategies, aimed to electoral victory and

²⁵ SIMMONS, H. (2018), *The French National Front*. 1st edn, Taylor and Francis, Chapter 2.

hopefully at the government of the French nation. This turnaround focused on the importance of defining oneself as right-wing and highlighted the necessity to provide an alternative vision of the world and nation to those proposed by the left. The FN's worldview could be summed up, according to Le Pen, as "*the feeling for the land, fidelity to the country, the feeling of sacrifice, love of family, esteem for work well done, a taste for order, authority, hierarchy, attachment to individual liberties, admiration for glory, tenderness for the weak and the oppressed.*"²⁶ These positions had the effect of cleansing the face of the extreme right French, but this change of façade could not hide the true face of FN. In fact, the new party carried out racist and very harsh policies on the issue of migration.

1.3 National issues and the rise of FN

The birth of the Front National was the direct consequence of the great vitality of far-right areas in France. The historical contingencies and the French economic growth in the 70s, however, have been a brake on its electoral development. The 70s were a period of relative economic prosperity for France. The democratic institutions seemed to respond well to the social demands of the French population and the Front National had troubles to attract consensus among the citizenship. The social climate in France began to change in the early

²⁶ LE PEN, J. (1972, December 26) , *M. Le Pen se présente à Paris et M. Brigneau dans les Hauts-de-Seine*. Le Monde.fr. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1972/12/27/m-le-pen-se-presente-a-paris-et-m-brigneau-dans-les-hauts-de-seine_2393442_1819218.html.

80s and the popular success of FN was directly linked to the political and social transformations that occurred during that period.

In this context, Daniel Stockemer examined three structural factors that allowed FN to implement its social basis and gain credibility. The first factor relate to the growing distrust of the citizens towards the Socialist Party: the decision of Mitterrand, President of the French Republic, to use his presidential prerogative to release 6200 prisoners caused dissent among the population. The theme of amnesty was a controversial issue in that historical period and Mitterrand's decision to go down this road was perceived by citizens as an improper use of presidential power. As stated by Stockemer another factor is represented by *“the policy reforms in the early 1980s included the revocation of the right of the police to conduct random security checks and two laws that circumscribed police powers”*²⁷. This second element is closely linked to the topic of security and fueled the already growing anti-migration feeling inside the French population. The last factor that has favored the growth of FN regards the dissatisfaction of citizens with the management of the economic crisis. Taking a step back in the 70s, it is possible to highlight that the two oil crises in 1973 and 1979 had left indelible marks on the Western economy and the European governments had to implement structural reforms. The government's economic program has had a strong Keynesian imprint, with ambiguous consequences for the French economy. The massive nationalization of French industry led to the growth of investment in the private sector with a relative increase in wages but was devastating for the unemployment rate. The increase in unemployment was a side effect of the policies implemented by the Mitterrand government and

²⁷ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.13.

consistently fueled the disappointment of a large segment of the French population.

In this scenario of widespread distrust of government institutions, the Front National was able to ride this situation from the electoral point of view. The turning point in the electoral parable of FN is universally considered as the municipal elections in the town of Dreux in 1983. The secretary party Jean-Pierre Stirbois and three of his colleagues were elected to the city's municipal council, capturing the attention of part of the public opinion. Dreux, a small town in northern France, unexpectedly finds itself at the center of political attention. It was a town composed mostly of people of the working class and that over the years was affected by several waves of migration. The inhabitants of the city had been particularly hitten by both the migration policies and the economic policies implemented by socialist governments and found in FN an alternative to this vision of the world. The victory of the FN in a town like Dreux was the result of the long strategy implemented by the party leadership. As defined by Simmons *“despite the intense media coverage and the enormous controversy provoked by the election, Stirbois's 1983 election victory should have come as no surprise. The NF victory was the culmination of years of politicking, propagandizing, organizing, and intense self-criticalizing.”*²⁸ The municipal election season proved to be very positive for the Front National, which achieved several electoral successes added to remarkable media coverage.

The European elections of 1984 definitively sanctioned the transition of the FN from a marginalized party to a major player in the French partisan

²⁸ SIMMONS, H. (2018), *The French National Front*, 1st edn, Taylor and Francis, Chapter 2.

system. A segment of French society exhausted by unemployment, immigration and security invested their hopes in the new party.

1.4 A new big player in the French Scenario

The electoral growth of the early 80s was the decisive impulse that led the Front National to perform as one of the most relevant party in the French political scene. What emerges from the analysis just carried out is that the political strategy of the FN ruling class has adapted perfectly to the historical contingencies of France, allowing the party to take root inside all social classes. The enlargement of the FN social base forced the ruling class to implement a real work of professionalization of the political party. This process can be seen in the context of the bureaucratization of political parties, especially mass parties. The creation of a school to train political elites and the opening of operational offices of FN throughout the French territory is a notable examples of how this process works.

This process of professionalization of the political party was implemented by FN in the mid-80s and led to a series of significant electoral results. The National Front and Jean-Marie Le Pen entered in the “big guys” court in 1983 after a series of elections. On February 13, 1984 the President was a guest on the prestigious Sunday program *L'heure de Vérité* and Le Pen was particularly brilliant in the eyes of public opinion on that occasion. A few weeks later, the National Front had a significant national impact by winning ten seats in

the European elections of 1984, gaining the 10.95% of the vote. The PCF is only slightly in front of it (11.21%). These events are basically the first step that the movement has taken towards political consensus and from this moment FN will definitively exit the extra-parliamentary phase. In the European elections of 1984, the Front National achieves its most significant results in segments that traditionally vote mostly on the right: liberal professions, merchants and craftsmen, executives of small and medium-sized companies and even executives superiors. *«La dynamique est lancée. En perspective des élections législatives de 1986, le Front national se donne certains atours de respectabilité. Il s'ouvre à des personnalités historiquement non marquées par la droite extrême . Le FN bénéficie aussi à ce moment de l'arrivée d'un certain nombre de responsables en provenance du Club de l'Horloge : Jean-Yves Le Gallou, l'ancien directeur de cabinet du secrétaire général du rpr Yvon Blot, ou encore Bruno Mégret, candidat de la droite parlementaire dans la 2e circonscription des Yvelines à l'élection législative de 1981. »²⁹*

Two important elections took place in 1986: the legislative elections and the *nouveau scrutin*, following the introduction of the regional act in France. In terms of institutional constraint, the two elections are favorable to the FN insofar as where they are proportional, an exceptional fact at the legislative level under the institutions of Fifth republic.

²⁹ DELWIT, P. (2013), *Les partis politiques en France*, Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université, P.189. **Translation:** "The moment is on. In the run-up to the 1986 parliamentary elections, the National Front gave itself some respectability. It opens up to personalities historically not marked by the extreme right. The FN also benefited at this time from the arrival of a number of officials from the Club de l'Horloge: Jean-Yves Le Gallou the former chief of staff of the secretary general of the RPR Yvon Blot, or Bruno Mégret, candidate of the parliamentary right in the 2nd constituency of Yvelines in the legislative election of 1981.

The legislative elections of 1986 were the first test for the new Front National, which appeared on the French political scene as a very insidious outsider. The 1986 elections were a success for the Front National. *“The party ascended to the National Assembly under the slogan Rassemblement National. It garnered a respectable 9.65 % of the vote and won 35 (out of 577 seats)”*³⁰. On the regional side, the score is just as important and the frontist organization succeeds even to negotiate an agreement with the RPR (Rassemblement pour la République)³¹ and the UDF (Union pour Démocratie Française)³² in several regions, accessing for the first time to executive responsibilities. The FN won two vice presidencies in the Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur region and one in Haute-Normandie, in Picardy and Languedoc-Roussillon. The great result of the FN was also helped by the voters' feeling of distrust towards the Socialist Party and in particular towards the figure of Mitterrand. The ruling party tried to limit its losses by changing the French electoral law before the elections, causing great disappointment among the population. The new electoral law proposed by Mitterrand had another major effect: it electorally favoring the rise FN. The proportional system, as opposed to the majoritarian system, has the main effect of ensuring within an elected chamber that a party that takes a certain percentage of votes has the same representation within it. Mitterrand's strategy therefore favored smaller parties, which would have a marginal presence in a majoritarian system.

³⁰ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.17.

³¹ Rassemblement pour la République was a Gaullist and conservative political party in France. Originating from the Union of Democrats for the Republic (UDR), it was founded by Jacques Chirac in 1976 and presented itself as the heir of Gaullist politics.

³² Union pour Démocratie Française was a centre-right political party in France. The UDF was founded in 1978 as an electoral alliance to support President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in order to counterbalance the Gaullist preponderance over the political right in France.

The discontent of public opinion was also directed towards the management of the migration policies of the French government and the Front National became the voice of such discontent. At that time, the political program of the Front National had as its main theme the fight against immigration. The multi-ethnic society in French, in which conflicts between ethnic groups were increasingly frequent, was a perfect ground for the development of these issues.

In this climate of strong contestation against the French establishment, the populist discourse of the Front National became very popular among the French citizens. In the second chapter of this thesis, I will describe the ideology of the FN also analyzing the characteristics of its populism. In this context, however, it is important to underline the irreverent slogan with which Le Pen used to apostrophize French mainstream parties: “gang of four”. With this epithet Le Pen used to address French parties such as the RPR, the UDF, the PS (Parti Socialiste)³³, and the PCF (Parti Communiste Français)³⁴. These movements, according to Le Pen, were guilty of having created an oligarchic system of power in which any form of dissent was considered an offense to the Republican order.

The success of this political strategy was sealed during the presidential elections of 1988. *“Thanks to a well-planned campaign, under the slogan “Le Pen, Le Peuple” (Le Pen, the People), and a strong organizational capacity, the FN won 14.38 % of the vote in the presidential elections.”*³⁵ The strategic capacity of the Front National thus led to an incredible electoral result for the extreme right, somehow sanctioning a new phase for this political party.

³³ Parti Socialiste. (n.d.) Parti Socialiste. <https://www.parti-socialiste.fr/>.

³⁴ Ce pour quoi nous nous battons. (n.d.) Site Internet Du P.C.F. <https://www.pcf.fr/>.

³⁵ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.18.

However, the National Front's ascendancy suffered a major setback due to the actions of Jean-Marie Le Pen. "During a September 1988 speech to the National Front's summer school, Le Pen rhymed the name of the Socialist government's Jewish minister of public services, Michel Durafour, with the word *crématoire*—"Durafour-crématoire." *Crématoire* means "oven," so Le Pen was playing on both the meaning and the sound of the two words."³⁶ Le Pen's words were condemned by all French political parties and much of the mass media. The principal outcome of this anti-Semitic expression was the demonstration of the existence of a racist component in FN that had been accurately covered up during the process of political institutionalization.

After the positive electoral results of the movement, the attention of the mass media towards FN grew exponentially and at the same time also grew the opposition to the party. The anti-Semitic remark of Jean-Marie Le Pen was just one of the episodes that saw the Front National at the center of media attention during this period. The main themes of FN were generally very divisive and for this reason, they generated great interest in the French public. The case of the three Muslim students expelled from their school was a situation of national resonance and the Front National did not fail to take sides. In 1989, three French students were expelled from their school for insisting on wearing their *chador* during school hours. This controversy had a national echo and all the main parties lined up for or against the school's decision. The main contraposition occurred between Danielle Mitterrand, wife of the president, and Jean-Marie Le Pen. The president's wife rejected the school's decision in the name of multiculturalism and religious freedom and on the other hand, Le Pen

³⁶ SIMMONS, H. (2018), *The French National Front*, 1st edn, Taylor and Francis, Chapter 3.

underlined the Islamic danger and the possible Islamization of France. The issue of female students inflamed public opinion for a different time, highlighting once again the great contradictions within French society and the difficulties of integration of some sections of the immigrant population.

The media's overexposure to FN did not have positive implications for the party. The voters had the opportunity to see all the shades of the Front National and some of them still caused great fear to the French population. Despite these difficulties, the party remained united and ran in the European elections of 1989³⁷ and also obtained the 11% of the vote.

The political path of the Front National analyzed so far allows us to understand how electoral victories are the result of a normalization strategy implemented by the leaders of the party. When the party focuses on its main issues, such as the fight against immigration or against the hegemony of the centrist parties, it brings home very important results. On the other hand, when it allowed itself to be overwhelmed by personalism, mainly in the figure of Le Pen, it suffered attacks from all sides.

In the late 80s and early 90s, this work of normalization was finalized by the new secretary general of the Front National: Bruno Mégret. In 1988 Bruno Mégret was appointed as *Delegué général* of the party, starting a new course for FN. The main goal of this new path was to recalibrate the focus of the Front National's political agenda, abandoning markedly xenophobic traits for a more conservative policy. By conservative policy, we must define a political proposal that is based on the most popular themes of the Front National, specifically

³⁷ *National results France | 1989 Outgoing Parliament | 2019 European election results | European Parliament.* (2019, July 4). 2019 European Election Results. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/national-results/france/1989-1994/outgoing-parliament/>

immigration and security. The work of normalization will allow the Front National to become a credible political subject in the eyes of the voters and no longer a dangerous movement that wants to weaken the Republican order.

The new political strategy essentially turned into a new shade of populism and led the political party to become the new reference point of the political French right. The 90s were very positive for the electoral experience of the Front National, its populist strategy was now a tried and tested mechanism that allowed it to obtain consensus in all sections of the population.

An event that would forever mark European history was an opportunity for FN to expand its political proposal: the Maastricht Treaty ³⁸. The introduction of the Maastricht Treaty was intended to strengthen European integration both at the horizontal and vertical levels, including variations of the dynamics between European bodies. The Treaty of Maastricht, or Treaty on European Union (TEU), is one of the treaties of the European Union, signed on 7 February 1992 in Maastricht in the Netherlands, by the twelve member countries of the then European Community, now the European Union, and entered into force on 1 November 1993. The treaty defines the so-called three pillars of the European Union, also establishing the political rules and the economic and social parameters necessary for the entry of the various member states into the aforementioned Union. The enormous scale of these changes did not meet with the favor of all European citizens, leaving room for the dissent of some political parties. The Front National translated this dissatisfaction into its populist discourse. *“As a result, the FN modified its divisive “us/them”*

³⁸ *EUR-Lex - xy0026 - EN - EUR-Lex.* (n.d.) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/treaty-of-maastricht-on-european-union.html>.

*discourse to include new political “enemies” such as elites from the European Union and international political institutions”.*³⁹ The National Front's extraordinary ability to adapt its populist message to the specific situation has guaranteed Le Pen's party enormous coverage by the media, followed by electoral successes one after another. In the context of this thesis, it is important to highlight the result of the European elections of 1994 and the referendum of 1992. In the European round, the first election after the introduction of the Maastricht Treaty, FN obtained 10.5% of the preferences and 11 seats at the European Parliament mainly thanks to the massive anti-European campaign of the party.

The electoral campaign for the presidential elections of 1995 was characterized by a bitter conflict between the candidates, the parties of the establishment were constantly attacked by Front National's discourse. Jean-Marie Le Pen gained 15% of the vote, the highest-ever result in presidential elections, and all the establishment side had to admit that FN was now a recognized reality in the French political panorama. Between the municipal elections in 1995 and the regional elections in 1998, the FN's capacity for coalition-building and blackmail definitely grown. The National Front made a significant performance in the 1995 local elections by winning 1,249 municipal councilors.⁴⁰ The elections of three significant town halls in Marignane (Daniel Simonpieri), Orange (Jacques Bompard), and most importantly Toulon (Jean-Marie Le Chevalier), a city of more than 100,000 people, was the confirm of this trend. The election of Bruno Mégret's wife in Vitrolles' town hall two years later

³⁹ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.20.

⁴⁰ IVALDI G.(2004), *Les formations d'extrême droite : Front national et Mouvement national républicain* , in Pierre Bréchon (éd.), *Les partis politiques français*, Paris, La Documentation française, P. 17.

completes the picture. The National Front at this time was no longer simply a form of political and social thermometer but imposes itself as an actor with which it is now necessary to count in a competition for power at certain levels or in a competition to win the elections. This potential for blackmail is expressed fully in the 1997 legislative elections.

1.5 Internal struggles and fortified leadership

The positive electoral trend and the great popular consensus received by FN in the late 90s had generated much interest in the party and those who had the merits of this success began to question the absolute leadership of Le Pen. Previously in this thesis, it was introduced the figure of Bruno Mégret, who, in those years, will play the role of the main competitor to the presidency of the party. At the end of the 80s Mégret was appointed as the *Delegué général* of FN, his role was to marginalize the xenophobic and racist nature within the party and try to make it suitable to the entire French population.

The ideological positioning of Mégret was therefore oriented towards the center-right, he believed that the party should increase the process of institutionalization already begun in the 80s and should assume as a reference point the strategy of Gianfranco Fini and his party "*Alleanza Nazionale*". *Alleanza Nazionale*, the successor party of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, thanks to the implementation of the institutionalization process had been part of the Italian government of 1994 led by Silvio Berlusconi and his political

coalition. The moderate position of Mégret created an alternative vision to Le Pen's unchallenged guide of the party. On the other hand, Le Pen's vision was to continue the path traced since its foundation, the Front National should remain on the fringe of the extreme right repudiating any kind of alliance with moderate parties.

This dualism characterized FN throughout the end of the 90s until there was the rise of a new strong new leadership. This conflict, briefly resumed as isolationism versus alliances, reached its peak immediately before the European election of 1999. As stated by Stockemer, "*Le Pen physically assaulted socialist candidate Aline Paulevast during a campaign event in Mantes la-Jolie in May 1997, a French court suspended his civic rights for 2 years. Consequently, he could not run in the 1999 European elections.*"⁴¹ Due to the impossibility of standing in the European elections, Le Pen decided to nominate his wife Jany as the chief candidate for the European elections, marginalizing Mégret and its political faction. This decision further exacerbated the relations between the two political leaders, so a head-on clash was inevitable. The clash took place during the national congress of the party in 1998, in this situation Mégret directly attacked Le Pen defining him as a real weakness for the future of the Front National. The statement of Mégret had immediate consequences both for him and for the side of the party that supported him. At the moment in which the rupture was created, Le Pen had direct control of the executive bureau of FN, the body responsible for resolving disputes, and therefore the expulsion of Mégret was inevitable.

⁴¹ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.22.

Despite the expulsion of different party leaders, the growth of the Front National did not stop and reached results never seen before. In particular, during the presidential elections of 2002 the candidate of FN, obviously Jean-Marie Le Pen access to the second round of presidential elections. This result was historic because Le Pen was the first candidate of a French nationalist party to achieve this success. Despite the historic significance of this result, the National Front does not derive any benefit from Le Pen's result in the first turn in the legislative elections placed some weeks after the presidential elections. The FN is very below its performance of 1997 and can only present thirty-six candidates in the second round. His power of blackmail is incomparably lower than in 1997, even if Le Pen has (perhaps) shown that the first round of the presidential election could not become an internal proportional election for the parliamentary right and for the left. *« Cette érosion de l'influence électorale et politique est corroborée aux élections régionales de 2004, pour lesquelles la contrainte institutionnelle a été modifiée. Dans la philosophie du scrutin municipal et pour éviter le chantage de l'extrême droite, l'UMP a introduit une prime majoritaire de 25% des sièges pour la liste en tête au second tour »*⁴².

This dynamic is exemplified and amplified in an unprecedented level by the 2007 presidential election. On this time, even though loyalty had captured people's imagination in the second part of the 1990s, we are witnessing a true movement of e “*défidélisation*”⁴³ of the Frontist electorate. In the election of

⁴² DELWIT, P. (2013), *Les partis politiques en France*, Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université, P.194 **Translation :** This erosion of electoral and political influence is corroborated by the regional elections of 2004, for which the institutional constraint was modified. In the philosophy of the municipal election and to avoid blackmail from the far right, the UMP introduced a majority bonus of 25% of the seats for the list leading in the second round.

⁴³ DELWIT, P. (2012), *Le Front national: Mutations de l'extrême droite française*, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, P.31.

2007, only 40% of Lepenist electors of 2002 choose again Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round. Of course, it is possible to argue that Nicolas Sarkozy's campaign had enough to appeal to a notorious segment of Frontist voters. The claim is true, and this trend got stronger over time. In the eyes of the general public and his supporters, Jean-Marie Le Pen's and the FN's reputation has declined. The image of Jean-Marie Le Pen and the FN has deteriorated in public opinion and inside its electorate. In this context, the party also suffered a severe defeat in the legislative elections that followed the election of Nicolas Sarkozy. The loss of the Frontist electorate was massive and only the 22% of Lepenist voters in 2002 voted for an FN candidate on this occasion.⁴⁴ The National Front retains an electoral base less involved in the political and media game. The astonishment for the FN's goal was immediately followed by a huge anti-Le Pen campaign, organized by the big centrist parties and its subscribers. This decline in electoral support triggered a series of mechanisms internal to France and the establishment system tried to oust FN from the party scenery. The great campaign against the FN aimed to discredit the democratic legitimacy of Le Pen's party, highlighting that despite participating in democratic elections it remained a strongly anti-system party. The electoral successes had somewhat mitigated the strong marginalization that the Front National had suffered since its birth, but the *diabolization* emerged whenever the party approached to occupy positions of power. The efforts of the FN leadership were not enough to democratically legitimize the party, but precisely in this condition of profound

⁴⁴ PERRINEAU P. (2009), *La « défidélisation » des électeurs de Jean-Marie Le Pen*, in B. Cautrès, A. Muxel (éd.), *Comment les électeurs font leur choix ? Le panel électoral français 2007*, Paris, Les Presses de SciencesPo, P. 213.

uncertainty there was the arrival of a key figure for the final evolution of the Front National: Marine Le Pen.

1.6 The new course of the Front National

The genesis of the figure of Marine Le Pen is crucial to understand the process of “*dediabolization*” and will allow us to comprehend the importance that she has had in the current history of FN. Marine Le Pen, daughter of the party leader Jean-Marie, started her political career at the beginning of the new millennium and her ideas resonated throughout France. Despite the cumbersome surname she had, her political path began from the basis of the party. Her main ability, since the early 2000s, was to include inside her political project new and young faces. As stated by Stockmeier: “*with the support of Louis Aliot and FNJ leader Samuel Maréchal, she endeavored to revitalize the FN’s image for a new generation of supporters, the “Génération Le Pen”, which was founded by Jean Marie Le Pen’s son-in-law, Samuel Maréchal, in 1998.*”⁴⁵

The main goal of these new forms of aggregation was to bring new faces into the ranks of FN, in order to clean up the party image. In her strategy, the process of *dediabolization* could only be completed by removing the most radical elements from the party, to begin a new course. The exclusion of the most radical elements meant cutting relations with a large part of the old FN ruling class, which for the most part had contributed to the foundation of the party, and among these characters, there was certainly Jean-Marie Le Pen. The

⁴⁵ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.23.

old president of the party was the main architect of the birth of the Front National, but he now belonged to another political era and his daughter was ready to take up the legacy. The handover came with the 2011 internal elections, in which Marine Le Pen faced Bruno Gollnisch for the role of president. In the context of this thesis, it is important to deepen the figure of Gollnisch. Bruno Gollnisch, a former professor of Japanese law and culture at the University of Lyon III, joined the National Front in 1983 and immediately became its key figure in the *Rhône*. He succeeded to Bruno Mégret as general delegate in 1998, remaining faithful to Le Pen, and serves as a potential successor before Marine Le Pen's rapid rise. Gollnisch, who adheres to traditional Catholicism, stands for the historical French extreme right and is unafraid to support an almost negationist stance. In 2004, mocking the historian Henri Rousso, author of a report on Holocaust denial at the University of Lyon, Bruno declared: « *Je ne remets pas en cause l'existence des camps de concentration mais, sur le nombre de morts, les historiens pourraient en discuter. Quant à l'existence des chambres à gaz, il appartient aux historiens de se déterminer* ». ⁴⁶ The competition for the presidency of FN was therefore between an old representative of the FN ruling class and a new figure on the rise. As examined by Delwit within his book: « *le départ de Bompard et de ses proches, par le décès de Marie Françoise Stirbois et par la prise de distance de Bernard Antony, Gollnisch faisait figure d'outsider dans cette compétition. Pour sa part, Marine Le Pen déboule dans le leadership politique et médiatique du Front national lors des élections présidentielles de*

⁴⁶ Libération, 12 October 2004. **Translation:** I do not question the existence of the concentration camps but, on the number of dead, historians could argue. As for the existence gas chambers, it is up to historians to decide.

2002 »⁴⁷. Marine's victory was overwhelming and popular legitimacy marked the beginning of a new course for the Front National. She gained the 67,5% of the preferences and became the new president of the Front National. The new era of the Front National did not differ much in the messages and themes addressed, but in the organization that perpetrated these messages. Populism is based on the credibility of the political subject and the old leaders of FN were now delegitimized after years of racist and anti-republican utterances. The first test for the new president of FN was the presidential elections of 2012, “*she emerged as a strong candidate and rallied supporters under the slogan Rassemblement Bleu Marine in the 2012 presidential election*”⁴⁸. The result was significant and Marine Le Pen obtained 18.03% of the vote, improving on the result obtained by her father in the last presidential elections. The rebranding operation carried out by Marine Le Pen achieved extraordinary success among the French population. The themes of the Front National remained largely unchanged, but a new ruling class, young and without any involvement with the old extreme right French no longer frightened the electorate.

In the context of the historical reconstruction of the Front National, it is important to mention a historic event for the party: the 2014 European elections. These elections were the highest point ever reached in its own history. In that period the European institutions had to face the consequences of the economic crisis of 2008 and the FN election campaign was focused on the inefficiency of the union system. The economic crisis had left deep grooves in the French

⁴⁷ DELWIT, P. (2012), *Le Front national: Mutations de l'extrême droite française*, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, P.33 **Translation** : the departure of Bompard and his relatives, by the death of Marie Françoise Stirbois and by the distancing of Bernard Antony, Gollnisch was an outsider in this competition. For her part, Marine Le Pen entered the political and media leadership of the National Front during the 2002 presidential elections.

⁴⁸ Stockemer, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.24.

economy and the European Union's insufficient ability to manage this situation led the population to embrace Marine Le Pen's program. Thanks to all these conditions, FN obtained 25% of the vote in the 2014 European elections, becoming for the first time the most-voted party in France. These elections were certainly the highest point in the history of FN, which was born as a deeply anti-system movement and became the first party in France. In the second chapter of this thesis, I will analyze the ideology of the party, investigating if the transformation made by Marine Le Pen's strategy was only a façade or there are profound ideological differences between the two political phases.

Chapter 2

The ideology of the Front National under the presidency of Jean-Marie Le Pen

This second chapter aims to analyze the ideology of the Front National under the presidency of Jean-Marie Le Pen. The historical path started in 1973 ,and examined inside the first chapter of this thesis, have outlined a very precise scheme: the Front National was born from a vision of a man, who had imagined a new kind of nation. In the continuation of this thesis, I will take care of reconstructing what this thought was and how it fit into French republican history. Within this analysis, the functioning of anti-system parties and their historical role will be examined, to understand the possible commonality with Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National. Another very important factor, that is essential to comprehend the ideology of FN concerns the relationship between Jean-Marie Le Pen and the political figure of Charles De Gaulle. His figure has accompanied France for a very long period of history and understanding Gaullism will allow us to have a complete picture of the political situation in France.

This investigation of the ideology of the Front National will be conducted through the study of primary sources such as cultural magazines, ideological material of the party, and electoral programs in order to understand the universe of reference.

2.1 The ideology of the Front National with Jean-Marie Le Pen

For extreme-right parties in Europe that have grown since the 80s, the French National Front (FN) represents “the reference”. The parties that emerged in this period supplanted an exhausted neo-fascist tradition, which occupied the far-right space during the interwar period. The Front National acquired this prominent role primarily due to his electoral performance since then first success in the European elections of 1984 where it obtained 9.8%. In all subsequent elections until the presidential and legislative elections of 2007, has never fallen below this threshold. No far-right party has acquired the centrality achieved by the FN in the media internationally and in public discourse. The impact of the National Front goes beyond its own electoral scores, showing a lasting resilience in the French system of left. However, it lacks any parliamentary representation during the term and is absent from almost any form of power, even at the local level, , “*en raison d’un strict cordon sanitaire (malgré quelques hésitations dans les rangs gaullistes à la fin des années quatre-vingt et au début des années quatre-vingt-dix)*”⁴⁹. This *cordon sanitaire* defined by Delwit is a metaphor to define the phenomenon of diabolization that represents the greatest obstacle to the coming to power of FN.

The ideology of the Front National under the presidency of Jean Marie Le Pen has always been characterized by a great deal of coherence. The political proposal of the Frontist party continuously contested the legitimacy of the French institutional system in a very harsh way. The markedly reactionary

⁴⁹ DELWIT, P. (2012), *Le Front national: Mutations de l’extrême droite française*, Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, P.33 **Translation:** Caused by a strict sanitary cordon (despite some hesitation in the Gaullist ranks to late 1980s and early 1990s).

policy of the Front National has become the mouthpiece of a good segment of the population, inaugurating the season of French populism. The beliefs of the Front National are based on the concept of nation and identity; consequently, their governance affirms the necessity to open a new nationalist phase of French history. These two ideas are inextricably linked, and they substantially influence the main theme of FN discourse. The FN's opposition to socialist "cosmopolitanism" is likely the clearest example of the party's nationalist viewpoint, and it leads to a strident criticism of present nationality code laws and (what is called) "anti-French racism." Along with this 'negative' language, there is a more upbeat picture of a strong France, defending its people, its land, and its national symbols from external threats like regional autonomy and European federalism. The Front National's emphasis on the concept of nation is highlighted in the electoral booklet "*Passeport pour la Victoire*", written under the supervision of Bruno Mégret: "*Jean-Marie Le Pen is one of the rare French politicians who speaks of the nation, the people and the country. He is also one of the rare people who actually knows the meaning of these words*"⁵⁰

Nationalism is the basis of FN's populism and by analyzing its characteristics we can define the ideology of the party. The populism of the Front National had, as its predominant theme, the fight against immigration. From this topic, the FN governance articulated various proposals of the party's propaganda, connecting it to the issue of security and multicultural society. Another central theme in FN's populist discourse is the feeling of deep criticism against the French centrist parties, considered corrupt and primarily responsible for the malfunctioning of French democracy. The sense of contempt for the political

⁵⁰ FRONT NATIONAL (1988), *Passeport pour la victoire*, Chapter 1.

establishment and specifically for the figure of De Gaulle will be one of the clearest differences between the presidency of Jean-Marie Le Pen and the one of Marine Le Pen.

The evolution and change of the conception of nationalism for FN have been analyzed by Peter Davies in his book *“The National Front in France”*⁵¹ and his studies will be fundamental for this thesis. According to Davies's reconstruction, it is possible to identify a set of core beliefs that have prevailed since the foundation of 1972. Despite the central ideological apparatus of the party, we must take into account that each populist party does not present itself as an inflexible and homogeneous bloc. The great capacity of the Front National has been to adapt to circumstances and to know how to opportunistically exploit historical contingencies.

Davies' analysis underlines how the concept of nation is fundamental to the frontist ideology and *“from the moment it incorporated the word into its party title, the FN has consistently stressed the importance of the nation and the related notion of identity”*⁵² The concept of nation is also defined in the propaganda document *“300 mesures pour la renaissance de la France: Front national, programme de gouvernement”*⁵³. In an initial section of the document there is a key step: *« Être fils et filles de la France est un privilège et une responsabilité. Nés en Bretagne, en Provence, en Alsace ou dans le Nord, nous sommes les héritiers de notre peuple. Nous sommes attachés à cette terre par les siècles de labeur, de souffrance et de sacrifices de nos pères qui, génération*

⁵¹ DAVIES, P. (2012), *The National Front in France* (1st ed.), Taylor and Francis, Chapter 2.

⁵² IBIDEM

⁵³ FRONT NATIONAL (1993), *300 mesures pour la renaissance de la France: Front national, programme de gouvernement : l'alternative nationale*. Editions nationales, Chapter 1.

après génération, nous ont transmis la vie et qui nous ont confié le patrimoine national. Cette communion historique entre notre peuple et notre terre est le point de départ de notre nation. »⁵⁴ This statement affirms the importance that the Front National attaches to their homeland. It imposes a sacred and bloody bond with the French people and represents the starting point of every political initiative. The question of identification is a complex theme for the FN. In the electoral programme mentioned above, “*300 mesures pour la renaissance de la France: Front national, programme de gouvernement*”, FN included all the fundamental themes for its political missions such as immigration, family, education, culture, and the environment. Therefore, the FN views identity as a core problem, and the party is open about how it expresses this in its speech. Le Pen, for instance, has argued forcefully for the reasons of naming the FN's doctrinal review journal *Identité*. The deep connection that exists between the homeland and the militants of the Front National demands the necessity to defend it from any enemy, be it internal or external, and thus to concern itself with the greatness of the nation. The elaboration of the concept of “enemy” is fundamental to understand the ideological and value system of the militants of the Front National. The big populist parties, of which FN is an illustrious example, use this strategy of simplifying reality to create guidelines that can be spent on the electoral level.

The operation of reducing reality into two distinct categories, and in which it is easy to understand which side to be on, allows FN militants to

⁵⁴ IBIDEM

Translation: To be sons and daughters of France is a privilege and a responsibility. Born in Brittany, Provence, Alsace or the North, we are the inheritors of our people. We are attached to this earth by the centuries of labour, suffering and sacrifices of our fathers who, generation after generation, have passed life on to us and who have entrusted us with the national patrimony.... This historic communion between our people and our land is the starting point of our nation

identify themselves in the “right” side and become the bearer of political truth. The binary code mentality necessitates the identification of the political enemy. In the case of the Front National, the enemy is represented on the issue of immigration by immigrants and by the left and center parties for the electoral competition.

France is considered by the FN as an entity that requires ongoing protection from outside forces, and defensive ideals of preservation, loyalty, and insularity are central to its definition of the nation. In essence, this perspective portrays France as a helpless, humiliated, and fragile country in irreversible decline. There is a desire for “*la renaissance de la France française*”⁵⁵ under the leadership of a nationalist leader as well as an almost reactionary antipathy to unpatriotic interferences, which are constantly blamed for the nation's decline.

The Front National has gone through different phases in its history, but during the presidency of Jean-Marie Le Pen, it focused its political action mainly on these two fronts. The party faced those issues with different strategies and instruments, according to the historical contingencies. As stated in the first chapter of this thesis, the historical phase that goes from the birth of the party in 1972 to the end of the 80s saw the Front National radically exposed on the issue of immigration and EU integration. The language and propaganda made in those years had created an image of firm intransigence on certain issues, sometimes even falling on racist and anti-system positions. This strategy, which can be defined as “ideological positioning” in party competition, has had fluctuating effects on the party. In that political phase, the main objective of the party was to

⁵⁵ FRONT NATIONAL PROGRAMME (1985), *Pour la France (PLF)*, Paris, Albatros, PP. 19-22.
Translation : the rebirth of French France

make itself known to the French electorate and to be recognized as a formidable opponent.

Another relevant issue that the Front National has addressed since its birth concerns the relationship between France and the European institutions. The relationship between the European populist Right and the EU has always been characterized by deep ambivalence. This political part always felt the connection to the concepts of European civilization, recognizing the historical commonality that the states of Europe have had since immemorial times. The main problem regards the concept of European integration provided by the EU. The EU is perceived as a mere economic organization, full of bureaucracy, and not involved with the prosperity of the member states. According to the Front National, the blood ties and the millenary European civilization should be the basis for a united Europe and instead have been supplanted by individual economic interests. The architecture of the European institutions, therefore, represents the antithesis of the ideal vision of the Front National and has been under constant attack throughout its history. The party rejects the idea of a “European construction,” or a fictitious, bureaucratic Europe founded only on economic considerations (part of the FN's present perception of the EU). Instead, it supports the idea of a “Europe of nations,” with the different nations retaining their identities; in other words, it supports the belief in a European Europe held by French France. The geopolitical bloc in the FN's vision of Europe would be strong, formidable, and tightly defined, ready to fend off any prospective challenges. Le Pen has described the Europe he wants to revitalize inside the

*Magazine Hebdo*⁵⁶, affirming that Europe was to be populated by soldiers and heroes, ready to die for their people, driven only by love for the homeland.

The apex of dissent occurred after the introduction of the Maastricht Treaty; the revolution of the communitarian system had an epochal significance for the Member States and the party's propaganda also evolved. The new FN propaganda had as its main target the “*New World Order*” specifically Maastricht, Schengen, and GATT treaties; “*la poursuite de l’intégration européenne a été considérée en termes apocalyptiques et le spectre de « l’internationalisation » a été évoqué*”⁵⁷. The specter of internationalism was part of the populist discourse of the Front National because the new European tendency was considered a threat to the nation-states and there was a real demonization of the political opponent. Le Pen's statements highlighted how the cold bureaucrats in Brussels had as their main goal the creation of an aseptic federation of states also erasing the national sovereignty. At the beginning of the new millennium, the concept of the European Union was increasingly strengthened within the citizens of the Union. This order had helped to guarantee peace among the nations of the old continent, also leading to an increase in economic well-being. For these reasons, attacking the EU ceased to be a political opportunity for the Front National. FN's vision of the EU softened and the language also changed. In frontist propaganda, the European Union became a problematic but improvable organization and was no longer considered a threat to the existence of the French nation. This new vision has been adopted thanks to

⁵⁶ VALLA, J.C. (1984), *Magazine hebdo*, Part 1.

⁵⁷ FRONT NATIONAL (1972–92), *Le Front National a 20 ans*, (FN brochure, 1992).

Translation : further European integration has been viewed in apocalyptic terms and the spectre of 'internationalisation' has been raised.

the leadership of Marine Le Pen and will be deepened in the continuation of this thesis.

The last aspect that will be addressed in the ideological universe of FN under the presidency of Jean-Marie Le Pen concerns the relationship with Charles De Gaulle. The figure of Charles De Gaulle was fundamental to the history of post-war France and the party of Jean Marie Le Pen has always had a conflictual relationship with him. Jean-Marie Le Pen describes his relationship with De Gaulle in his book: *Mémoires fils de la nation*⁵⁸, which is basically a biography of his life. « *Je me sentais comme Till Eulenspiegel devant le duc d'Albe. Je savais que je n'avais aucun moyen de m'opposer à lui, que je ne pouvais rien faire sauf lui présenter un esprit rebelle. À ma manière modeste, j'étais un anti-De Gaulle absolu. Lui, le « mainteneur », a cédé l'empire ; lui, le « national », a rendu la France plus petite ; lui, le « rassembleur », divisa les Français. Il y a apparemment eu deux De Gaulle, le rebelle de 1940 et l'écraseur de rebelles de 1961. Mais tous deux, ensemble, forment pour moi un seul, faussement grand, dont le destin était de contribuer à amoindrir la France.* »⁵⁹ The origins of the differences between Le Pen and De Gaulle are to be found within the history of French. To fully understand these divergences it is important to investigate the conditioning effect of the Algerian war, the evolution of the *Algérie française*, and the aftermath of the decolonization crisis of the 1950s and 1960s. Charles De Gaulle was elected President of the Republic

⁵⁸ LE PEN, J.(2018), *Mémoires fils de la nation*, Paris, Editions Muller.

⁵⁹ IBIDEM, P.391 **Translation** : I felt like Till Eulenspiegel before the Duke of Able. I knew that I had no way to oppose him, nothing I could do except present a rebellious mind to him. In my modest way, I was an absolute anti-De Gaulle. He, the “maintainer,” gave away the empire; he, the “national,” made France smaller; he, the “uniter,” divided the French. There were apparently two De Gaulles, the rebel of 1940 and the rebel-squasher of 1961. But both, together, for me make up a single, falsely great man whose destiny was to contribute toward lessening France.

in 1958 and since that year he began to find a solution to the Algerian question. The FLN's legal branch, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Algeria (GPRA), was established by the Algerian revolutionaries on September 19, 1958. First in charge was Ferhat Abbas. The majority of Arab countries, numerous African governments, and other countries, including China, immediately recognized the GPRA. Thanks to this victory, the FLN was able to bring the fight to France. It carried out 400 terrorist assaults on French territory in September 1958, resulting in more than 80 fatalities; one bomb was even discovered at the top of the Eiffel Tower (it was defused). When the FLN halted its attack at the end of September, De Gaulle returned to Algeria and issued an appeal for a *paix des braves*, or a peace of the soldiers, on October 3. However, the FLN was now unable to accept peace without independence. The most reasonable FLN leader, Ferhat Abbas, declined De Gaulle's invitation. De Gaulle had thought that his moral authority would allow for a generous vision of integration that would put a stop to the war, but it was already too late. The army, not Algeria, was now De Gaulle's main priority. After gaining political influence, he took action to command the army. His deceptions during the winter of 1958–1959 resulted in the transfer or retirement of more than 1500 officers. He was aware that the Algerian situation was a pain in the French lion's side and that without an end to the conflict there could be no “*grandeur*.” In Algeria, France had 600 000 soldiers, the most of them conscripts. The French contingent present in Algeria in those years will play a fundamental role in the political growth of Jean-Marie Le Pen, but this topic will be addressed later. De Gaulle, meanwhile, had made no headway on removing the Algerian thorn a year after taking office. In that period, he made a significant radio and television speech on

Algeria and on September 16 1959 he said: « *Notre redressement progresse, mais le sujet difficile et sanglant de l'Algérie doit encore être résolu.* »⁶⁰ He continued by saying that the solution would be for Algerians to vote in an election for self-determination at a later period, once peace had been restored.

Following this strategy, in September 1962 the General called a referendum in Algeria to formalize its independence. This decision was considered a betrayal by a large part of the French population present in Algeria and this favored the birth of *Organisation armée secrète*⁶¹ (OAS) which had much support among *Pieds-Noirs*⁶². Le Pen, during the years of the conflict in Algeria, had a prominent role within the Poujadist party and was firmly convinced that Algeria was of vital importance to French interests in North Africa. In this situation of strong contestation against presidential power, Le Pen became the spokesperson for this dissent, convincing a large part of the *Pieds noir*'s electorate. After the foundation of FN, the *Pieds noir* remained loyal to Le Pen, united by deep criticism of De Gaulle's political actions. Algeria was, and should continue to be, a vital component of the French country, according to FN officials. This fundamental premise, which is at the core of party discourse, makes Algeria a crucial subject for Le Pen and his party. The FN's steadfast opposition to any celebration of Algerian independence is a tangible proof that the wounds of war are still present. A full-page advertisement made disparaging reference to the Evian Accords of March 1962, which formally recognized

⁶⁰ DE GAULLE C. (1970), *Discours et Messages*, Vol. 3, Plon ,PP.117-119.

Translation : Our recovery is progressing, but the difficult, bloody subject of Algeria still needs to be resolved.

⁶¹ The Organisation armée secrète (OAS, "Secret Armed Organisation") was a far-right French dissident paramilitary and terrorist organisation during the Algerian War. The OAS carried out terrorist attacks, including bombings and assassinations, in an attempt to prevent Algeria's independence from French colonial rule.

⁶²The term Pieds-noirs is used as a noun or adjective, colloquially indicates the French of Algeria repatriated since 1962, at the end of the Algerian war.

Algerian autonomy, in a party bulletin published in 1990. “No to the Celebration of March 19, 1962”. The party's ideological vision of the Algerian conflict not only had implications for the past but was the direct link to the creation of its own proposal on immigration: Algerian foreigners had already once defaced the mother country of its territory, the Front National would not allow this to happen again. Jean-Marie Le Pen's party exploited any news event, linked immigrants' actions, in order to accumulate consensus and consolidate its strategy. One of the best examples of such a modus operandi concerns the murderer of a party militant by an Algerian immigrant. In a public speech, the day after the murders, Marie-France Stirbois affirms: *«Le but de ces forces est la désintégration de l'identité française et de nos valeurs républicaines, et elles sont à l'œuvre pour briser la dernière résistance de notre société occidentale et européenne. Il est temps que nous appelions nos compatriotes à une nouvelle résistance dans le sillage de la montée du fanatisme (musulman et juif)... Notre mouvement doit être le roc inébranlable autour duquel doit s'organiser l'élan de résistance populaire.»*⁶³

Another issue on which De Gaulle and Le Pen deeply differed concerns the General's handling of the post-World War II period and his consideration of the Vichy Republic. *«Je ne reproche pas à De Gaulle son (bonne) intuition concernant la victoire alliée : les événements l'ont confirmée. Je lui reproche son mépris des hommes et les petites et odieuses méthodes qu'il a utilisées pour obtenir le pouvoir. Je déplore qu'il ait à la fois voulu et imposé à la France une*

⁶³ NATIONAL HEBDO, (16–22 Nov 1989) (no.278) and (30 Nov–6 Dec 1989) (no.280).

Translation: The aim of these forces is the disintegration of the French identity and our republican values, and they are at work to break the last resistance of our Western and European society.... It is about time that we called our compatriots to a new resistance in the wake of the rise of (Muslim and Jewish) fanaticism...Our movement must be the unshakeable rock around which the momentum of popular resistance must be organized.

guerre civile inutile et injuste. Sans doute a-t-il eu le mérite de sauver les marrons du feu, d'amener la France à la table des vainqueurs, ne serait-ce qu'au bout de cette table. Il s'agit d'une victoire politique extraordinaire et nous devons l'en remercier. Mais fallait-il pour cela diviser l'armée et les citoyens ? »⁶⁴ According to Le Pen's view, De Gaulle's choice to train with the Americans has been positively judged by history, but he accused the General that his actions would have pushed France to the brink of civil war. Territorial continuity is fundamental for Le Pen, especially during a time of war, and he has never forgiven De Gaulle for the ruthlessness of his actions. The roots of his aversion are cited by Le Pen himself in his biography: *«Le portrait délirant qu'ils ont dressé du maréchal Pétain est désormais obligatoire pour tous. Ils ont finalement accrédité l'idée d'une France trahie avant même la guerre par des conspirateurs au service des nazis. Je n'ai en aucune façon participé à la politique de Vichy, mais j'ai immédiatement rejeté ce mensonge. Ces attaques incessantes – à la fois injustes, indécentes et honteuses – contre le maréchal Pétain sont l'un des deux méfaits emblématiques de De Gaulle, avec l'assassinat de Brasillach⁶⁵, qui révéla dès 1945 la laideur morale et la nocivité du personnage, qui sont à l'origine de mon aversion pour lui. »*⁶⁶

⁶⁴ LE PEN, J. (2018), *Mémoires fils de la nation*, Paris, Editions Muller. P.392-393 **Translation:** I do not criticize De Gaulle for his (correct) intuition concerning the Allied victory: events have confirmed it. I criticize him for his contempt for men, and the little, odious methods he used to obtain power. I deplore that he both wanted and imposed a useless and unjust civil war on France. No doubt he had the merit of saving the chestnuts from the fire, of bringing France to the victors' table, even if only to the end of that table. This was an extraordinary political victory and we must thank him for it. But was it necessary for this to divide the army and the citizens?

⁶⁵ Robert Brasillach was a French writer, journalist, poet and film critic, best known for being the editor-in-chief of the weekly *"Je suis partout"*. After the liberation of Paris in 1944, accused of collaborating with the Third Reich, he was sentenced to death and executed after De Gaulle's refusal to grant him a pardon.

⁶⁶ IBIDEM PP.393-394

Translation: The delirious portrait that they have painted of Marshal Pétain is now mandatory for all. They have ultimately given credence to the idea of a France betrayed even before the war by plotters working for the Nazis. I in no way participated in Vichy's policy, but I immediately rejected this lie. These relentless attacks – at once unjust, indecent, and shameful – against Marshal Pétain are one of De Gaulle's two emblematic misdeeds, along with the murder of Brasillach, who revealed as early as 1945 the character's moral ugliness and harmfulness, which are at the root of my aversion for him

2.2 The composition of the party under the presidency of Jean-Marie Le Pen

The last paragraph of this chapter will analyze the composition of the party under the presidency of Jean-Marie Le Pen; the factors that will be deepened are leadership, governance, and electorate. These characteristics will be analyzed to understand the evolution of the party from an organic point of view, how have they changed over the years? Are those changes the result of a precise strategy or have they been influenced by historical contingencies?

2.2.1 The leadership

The role of leadership within right-wing populist parties has always been dominant. The personality of the leader has often been the foundation of entire political experiences, determining their success or failure. This paragraph will investigate the leadership of the two presidencies and how it contributed to the construction of the actual FN. The charismatic leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen was fundamental for the growth of the Front National, especially on the electoral side. His charismatic figure allowed the party to come out of the fringes of French politics, becoming a main player in the political scenario. In this context, to better understand the charismatic genesis of Jean-Marie Le Pen it is important to underline the historical context in which his figure was born. In 1972, the year FN was founded, the French far-right was divided into many small organizations that did not have a unitary and charismatic leadership. The end of the Vichy

Republic, the war in Algeria, and the colonial question were very important issues in the debate of the extreme right and no movement had been able to channel this political attention. Le Pen understood the existence of this great political space and used his charisma to rump up his political career, “soon after his election to the party presidency, Jean-Marie Le Pen became the sun face of the FN. Having consolidated his position, he governed his organization with an iron fist”⁶⁷

Le Pen was, throughout his political experience, the undisputed leader of the party, he was not only the public face of the party but also dealt with political proposals. His presidency was therefore characterized by a strong unity within the party, he did not allow the birth of any internal debate, expelling political exponents who did not respect the guidelines of the party

Le Pen's leadership donate to him an aura of infallibility, he was the master of the party and the only one who had its fate in his hands. The absence of internal debate gave a granite image to the party, which appeared strong and impenetrable. One of the most controversial aspects of De Gaulle's leadership concerns the role of his family. Le Pen has always said that it was crucial for him that the party was governed by people close to him, preferably from his family. In an important speech, he affirmed «*I prefer my daughters to my cousins, my cousins to neighbors, my neighbors to strangers, and strangers to enemies*»⁶⁸ The choice to entrust positions of power to family and friends created the “Le Pen legacy” and contributed to the personalization of the Front National. Le Pen's family charisma significantly contributed to the leadership of

⁶⁷ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.44.

⁶⁸ IBIDEM

Jean-Marie, who in the common imagination could lead the party as he led his own family.

2.2.2 The governance

After the analysis of the charismatic characteristics of leadership, now it is the turn of the governance and the party elite around which the entire organization operates. As stated before, FN works as a “family organization”, where the members of the Le Pen family and close friends always gained a great number of party responsibilities and substantially control the party. However, this dynamic did not prevent the emergence of power groups that were able to put pressure on the leadership. Following the same modalities used in the previous paragraph, we will be analyzed first the governance under the presidency of Jean-Marie Le Pen.

During Jean-Marie Le Pen's presidency, the majority of the decision-making positions were occupied by men of his trust, generally aligned with his ideology and with whom he had personal experience. He carefully chose the people to surround himself with, essentially friends who would not hinder him during his political rise. In the context of this thesis, I will not go into mentioning every person present in the governance of Jean-Marie Le Pen, but I will focus on the most remarkable cases. FN vice-president Bruno Gollnisch is a relevant example of the party's ruling class. He is considered one of the most loyal advisers to Jean-Marie Le Pen, who has always been ideologically close to

the president and has occupied positions of power within the party all his life. He is considered Le Pen's political strategist and the last of his loyalists. The case of Gollnisch allows us to highlight how the almost familiar link between the leadership and the party elite is so strong and all-encompassing. After the change in the presidency of the party, Gollnisch remained the only member of the party to publicly defend the former president, despite he was put aside. Gollnisch remained loyal to Jean-Marie Le Pen throughout his political career, demonstrating the iron unity of the party elite, but there have been cases in which the meticulous selection of the president has not worked.

2.2.3 The electorate

The last paragraph of this chapter will focus on the electorate of the Front National, the aim is to examine FN voters during the presidency of Jean-Marie and understand the reasons for the party's electoral growth. The change of presidency has brought many novelties within FN and the party has reached electoral peaks never seen before. In this paragraph, I will try to understand the causes of this electoral growth and if with the presidential passage there has been a consequent enlargement of the reference electorate.

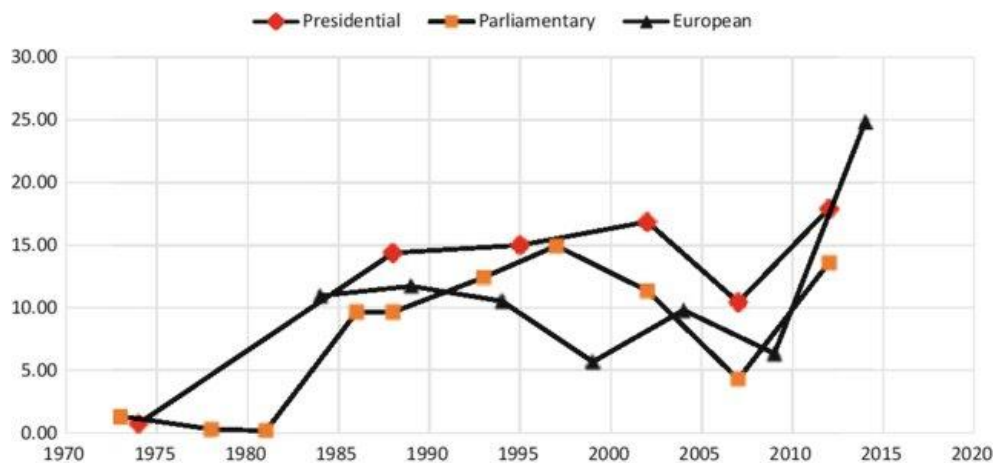


Fig 1.1 The FN's electoral evolution since its foundation. Source Daniel Stockemer and Lecoeur and Poulterniez 2013; *Site du Ministère de l'intérieur* 2015a, b

During the period of Jean-Marie Le Pen's presidency, the FN electorate had very specific sociological characteristics. FN was a party voted essentially by middle age men, young people, the working class, and people with a low degree of education. Jean-Marie Le Pen's political discourse, as addressed in the first chapter of the Thesis, was directed at those who had lost the challenge of modernization and who had no benefit from globalized society. The targeting of the political proposal has allowed FN to establish itself at a national level, coming out of the extra-parliamentary phase, and has obtained great media visibility. Using a cultural perspective, this strategy has proved weak and ineffective outcomes. Concentrating its political efforts mainly on the less well-off sections of the population has not allowed the party to create a strong cultural base, maintaining a “top-down” approach to politics. By “top-down” approach in politics we mean organized political parties with very strong and narrow governance that takes decisions for the whole base. The elitist character of these decisions has strengthened the party but has not favored the enlargement of the

base, failing to involve the entire population. If the process of political decision-making is always directed by a small group of people, voters always suffer the decisions and cannot participate in the system.

2.3 Anti system parties

The aim of this study is to reconstruct an ideal type, taking a Weberian perspective, and to note the commonalities and differences with the Front National. In the context of this thesis, the studies of Giovanni Sartori, Giovanni Capoccia and Mattia Zulianello will be analyzed in order to fully reconstruct the fundamental characteristics of anti-system parties. This type of classification does not have homogeneous characteristics, each organization moves within a well-defined political spectrum and for this reason I will specifically analyze the anti-system parties attributable to the extreme right, a container to which FN belongs. These considerations will allow us to frame FN within a clear political framework, clarifying the historical role played by Le Pen's party within the history French and the motivations that led it to become one of the most important parties of this historical period. The historical evolution of FN has certainly been characterized by deep ambiguities, the process of centralization implemented by Marine Le Pen has had effects from an electoral and perceptual point of view but it is not clear whether the party has definitively changed its anti-systemic soul and this analysis will clarify this question.

2.4 The anti-system party and their main characteristics

The term “anti-system” is nowadays frequently used to characterize a party or group that engages in a radical form of opposition, even decades after it first appeared in the comparative political lexicon. However, the phrase has come to be utilized in an ever-more-unique way, making comparative studies problematic. The idea first appeared in Giovanni Sartori's work “*Partis et systèmes de partis, Un cadre d'analyse*”⁶⁹. This analysis on party systems from the 1960s and 1970s regards the totalitarian parties of the interwar and postwar periods. However, since its beginnings, the idea of an anti-system party has been employed to signal threats to its stability, legitimacy, or, more recently, consolidation in the context of empirical studies of many facets of the life of democratic regimes. The concept of an anti-system party is central to Sartori's theory of party systems. At first glance, Sartori's definitions of “anti-systemness” encompassed the objective component of a party's ideological character. The definitional attribute of anti-systemness, according to Sartori's theory, is relational and is determined by the ideological divergence between one or more parties and the other system parties. Therefore, in party system theory, the measure of “party anti-systemness” is the ideological separation between parties on topics that are essential to the system in which these parties stands. But in the literature, the quality of “anti-systemness” is frequently given to a party (or group) solely based on the objective content of its ideology, without reference to either the party's “distance” from the other parties. An “anti-system

⁶⁹ SARTORI G. (2011), *Partis et systèmes de partis. Un cadre d'analyse*, Bruxelles, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles.

party” in these circumstances is simply viewed as a challenge to that regime, and frequently as an evident threat to democracy.

The definition of an anti-system party has changed over time and has had to adapt to historical events that have influenced its characteristics. Continuing with the analysis of Giovanni Sartori and Giovanni Capoccia, it is possible to arrive at two types of definitions, both based on ideology but with different shapes. *“The broad definition is conceived as encompassing all the possible variations in time and space of the attitudes of such parties and their electorate . The various elements brought within this definition have as a minimum common core the delegitimizing impact on the regime of the party's propaganda and actions.”*⁷⁰ The restricted definition, in contrast, emphasizes the party's ideologies because an anti-system party would not just replace the government if it could, but also the system of governance. It is opposed on the basis of “principle.” It follows that Sartori's idea of the anti-system party is “relational” in two different ways: first, it refers to the ideological distance between a party and others in the political (left-wing) space of electoral competition; second, it refers to the delegitimizing effect of the party's actions and propaganda on the regime in which it operates.

In the analysis of anti-system parties, these two definitions rather than as alternatives present themselves as complementary. The simplest definition can be incorporated into the more complex one, and both are fundamental to

⁷⁰ CAPOCCIA, G. (2002), *Anti-System Parties: A Conceptual Reassessment* - Sage Journals, journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/095169280201400103. P.13.

understanding the phenomenon. According to Sartori, there are three major characteristics that identify the behavior of anti-system parties:

1. Distant spatial location of its electorate from that of neighboring parties
2. Low coalition potential
3. Outbidding propaganda tactics/delegitimizing messages.

Such traits are important for party system analysis since they can cause the three systemic effects or potentially contribute to them. The systemic consequences for each of these attributes are as follows:

1. Unequal spacing between neighboring parties (or space disjunction)
2. Multi-polarity
3. Centrifugality and increase in polarization (process)

The most important thing to remember is that these traits do not necessarily mean that the party opposes the ideals that are inherent to all democracies. The relevance of such objectives for that particular regime, and consequently also for the other parties, provides the genuine dimension of comparison instead of the political objectives with which the party's ideology is incompatible. Briefly, the relational anti-systemness refers to a party's ideological difference from other parties participating in a certain regime, which, in spatial terms, translates to a high ideological distance. The party typically has a very low chance of forming a coalition, employs outbidding and delegitimizing strategies in electoral competition when it is at a remove from the ideological space. Therefore, in reference to these qualities, parties can be defined as

relationally pro- or anti-system and can be compared on that basis. Furthermore, the existence of relevant parties with these characteristics is likely to cause the party system to become polarized. Any discussion of the usefulness of this conceptual analysis must start with the initial finding that neither of the two types of anti-systemness is typically investigated in isolation, but rather in connection to a system. Considering the democratic system as a whole, the ideological anti-systemness of parties or organizations is significant because it may have an effect by opposing one or more of its core principles on the latter's stability, legitimacy, or consolidation, in the examples described previously. However, the relational anti-systemness of parties is significant for the party system since it may affect its mechanics by promoting greater polarization and centrifugality.

The following three points can be underlined in light of this reconstruction: First, a party's 'relational' anti-systemness is not a function of its ideology per se, but rather of how it differs from the ideologies of the other parties in the system. Therefore, parties that wouldn't be considered "anti-democratic" according to a particular definition of democracy can nonetheless have polarizing effects on the workings of the party system and therefore be relationally anti-system. Comparing the coalition and propaganda techniques of parties across (party)systems, as well as their impacts on party system mechanics, can be done using the idea of "relational anti-systemness." It is crucial to emphasize that, as a result, the presence of polarization and centrifugal tendencies in a country's party system does not automatically imply that the democratic nature of the regime is a danger. The party system may just consist

of polarizing parties that may or may not adhere to the standards of the minimal definition of democracy.

After carrying out this analysis on the very concept of anti-system party I will focus on the historical evolution of these movements, using the studies on the subject of Mattia Zulianello. The scholar, in his book “*Anti system party*” has theorized 3 decisive turning points that the anti-system parties should pass in order to obtain political recognition to govern. The first turning point is: the achievement of parliamentary representation. “*Parliamentary entry represents a major step within the lifespan of any political party , and the crossing of the threshold of representation indicates that a formation has been able to gather sufficient support to overcome the (explicit or implicit) barriers imposed by the electoral system.*”⁷¹ Representation within democratic institutions is a fundamental stumbling block for the anti-establishment party. The extra-parliamentary galaxy of each nation is composed of a generally very large number of parties, in which everyone seeks visibility and political agility. The initial turning point for the newcomer, namely ensuring legislative representation over time, is provided by the very event, though. The achievement of parliamentary representation for an organizationally new party raises at least two additional and concurrent pressures: consolidating electoral support and overcoming the challenge of party institutionalization. These pressures are in addition to the entry into a complex environment. The consolidation of electoral support aims to avoid that the achievement of parliamentary representation is only a moment of ephemeral success and not the

⁷¹ ZULIANELLO, M. (2019), *Anti-System Parties* (1st ed.), Taylor and Francis, <https://www.perlego.com/book/1377051/antisystem-parties-from-parliamentary-breakthrough-to-government-pdf> (Original work published 9 April 2019). Part 1

beginning of a strategy that aims to obtain power. Following this reasoning, it is important to introduce the concept of 'electoral sustainability' that is, the ability of a party to maintain and consolidate a certain level of support over time, resulting in the capacity to secure two consecutive re-elections following parliamentary entry.

The second turning point, theorized by Zulianello within his studies, is the changing interaction streams. Changing interaction streams is a process that leads anti-system parties to change information channels with their electorate. According to Zulianello, this phenomenon can have 3 different results. The flow of information can have "*positive integration, negative integration, or radical disembedding.*"⁷² These three cases represent three different possibilities for the evolution of anti-system parties. The positive or negative characteristic of integration depends on the party's ability to homogenize with the political landscape already present within the country. Successful integration means that the party has passed its outsider stage and is considered politically trustworthy. The last possibility, the radical disembedding, is one of the rarest cases for the evolution of anti-system parties. This case concerns the dismemberment of the party, generally following an electoral victory, due to the complete incompatibility between the political system and the party.

The last turning point predicted by the theory on the evolution of anti-system parties is the "transition to government". The third and final turning event is the 'point of climax' of any political party's existence. Given the significant pressures the event itself brings, joining the government is a risky

⁷² IBIDEM

move for any political party. However, given the formations' hostile ideological and behavioral backgrounds, taking part in the government could have devastating effects on formations that have historically gone through a phase of being anti-system parties. Parties that had a transition from anti-system status to government are typically thought to be doomed to face an “additional cost of governing” in comparison to conventional parties, where in this case government participation frequently results in a loss of votes in the post-incumbency election. After the transition to government, parties with anti-systemic origins lose more voters than systemic parties. The scientific literature on the subject does not provide empirical explanations for the reason for this huge loss, but the rationale should be investigated into the party's behavior after the transition to government.

After having outlined the phases that an anti-system party must go through for the conquest of political power, we will compare them with the historical evolution of the Front National, understanding if the party has managed to achieve these objectives and to what degree. The first point, according to Zulianello's analysis, is parliamentary representation and the party's ability to confirm itself within representative institutions. The Front National achieved its first electoral success in 1983, with the municipal elections of the city of Dreux, about 10 years after its foundation. This result was confirmed by the European elections of 1984 and the legislative elections of 1986 in which the party managed to get its members into these institutions. The objective of electoral representation has been carried out systematically since the early years of the Front National and the party has managed to gain the electoral sustainability necessary to consolidate its electoral base. This first phase was

completed throughout Jean-Marie Le Pen's presidency and lasted until 2011. The second turning point first appeared in FN during Marine Le Pen's presidency. The change of streaming, theorized by Zulianello, predicts the success or failure of the integrative process within the system in which the party is inserted. As emerged within this thesis, the goal of the new presidency of FN was to get out of diabolization and be accepted by the French institutional system. The willingness to be accepted within the system has led to a series of changes for the party and will be analyzed in the next chapter. What we can say in this context is that the date party is still between the second and third turning point of the anti-system parties. Its successful integration into the French system is questionable and the transition of government is an increasingly plausible prospect for Marine Le Pen's party.

Chapter 3

The ideology of the Front National under the presidency of Marine Le Pen

In the last chapter of this thesis, I will describe the ideology of the Front National during the presidency of Marine Le Pen. The change in leadership, which took place after the election of Marine Le Pen in 2012, led to the exponential growth of the party from an electoral point of view. The main goal of the new governance of FN was clear from the beginning: to complete the process of *dediabolization* also giving new legitimacy to the party. In this chapter, it will be analyzed the way in which this process has been carried out, paying particular attention to the transformation of the electoral programs. Following this perspective, the electoral programs of 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2016 will be examined in order to understand if there has been any kind of programmatic change in the transition between one presidency to another. The last topic that will be addressed in this chapter concerns the relationship between Marine Le Pen and the figure of De Gaulle. The initial research question asked whether the “centralization” of FN was linked to the recovery of the historical figure of De Gaulle and this third chapter will deal with entering deeply into this debate.

3.1 The ideology of the Front National with Marine Le Pen

The political experience of Jean-Marie Le Pen as the head of FN ended in 2011; he is generally considered the key man for the birth and growth of the party, but now belongs to an antiquated political era. The internal elections of 2012 sanctioned the rise of his daughter Marine Le Pen as president, beginning a new ideological phase for FN. In the context of this thesis, it will be analyzed the most important themes in the ideology of FN under Marine Le Pen, also highlighting any differences between the two governances.

In 2012, just one year after the election of Marine Le Pen as president, the *2012 presidential platform*⁷³ was published. This program contains the cornerstones of the party's new politics, with many similarities with the recent past of FN. The political program of the 2012 emphasizes recurring themes in the political history of FN, especially “*for immigration, anti-Europeanism, welfare chauvinism, public security, and national identity, the FN suggests the same solutions as it did in 2007.*”⁷⁴ During the electoral campaign of her first presidential elections, Marine Le Pen chooses the line of programmatic coherence, but this does not mean that also the political strategy remained unchanged. The transition from one leadership to another could have created confusion among voters, accustomed to Jean-Marie Le Pen's presidency and who now found a new face at the helm. The main goal of the campaign was to give recognition to Marine Le Pen as leader of the party, placing her figure at the center of the electoral program.

⁷³ LE PROJET MARINE LE PEN 2012 (2012), *Comité Marine Le Pen*.

⁷⁴ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.32.

Marine Le Pen was physically placed at the center of the cover of the electoral program, presenting the candidate as the new face of FN and the only hope for the French people. The title of the electoral program is emblematic: *"Mon projet, pour la France et pour le peuple français, et Marine Le Pen, la voix du peuple, l'esprit de la France"*⁷⁵. This stylistic choice highlights Marine Le Pen's need to strengthen her leadership, coming out of her father's shadow and presenting her face to the French population. The first difference between the two phases of the Front National lies not in ideology but in political strategy. The Front National, from its birth to the 21st century, had indicated Jean-Marie Le Pen as its main exponent; but he was "only" the spokesman of party ideas, never more important than it. During the 2012 election campaign, but this pattern will be recurring in the new course of FN, the image of the Marine is almost more important than that of the party. She presented herself to the French electorate as a new face, who had never been candidate as a President of the Republic and was the only credible alternative to the parties that had governed France for 60 years. The strong personalization of the electoral campaign had positive implications also from the communicative point of view, *"another factor which helped to frame Marine Le Pen's campaign was the highly personalized contest with Jean-Luc Melenchon, leader of the far-left Parti de Gauche and candidate of the Communist-backed Front de Gauche coalition. For a time Melenchon was the phenomenon of the campaign, surging to around 15% in predicted vote share and reinvigorating a 'left of the left' that did not recognise itself in the compliant orthodoxies of François*

⁷⁵ LE PROJET MARINE LE PEN 2012 (2012), *Comité Marine Le Pen*.

Translation : My Project, for France and for the French people, and Marine Le Pen, the voice of the people, the spirit of France

Hollande and the Socialist Party. The populist contest between Melenchon and Le Pen was projected by the media not just as a clash of ideological extremes but as a hero-villain conflict."⁷⁶

Beyond the propaganda components of the cover of the electoral program, the important issues for FN remained substantially unchanged. The regulation of the migratory flow, social and economic policies in support of the less well-off sections of the population, anti-Europeanism, and defense of national borders were the basis of the ideology of the Front National also in 2012. Analyzing the 2012 program it is possible to understand that the whole ideological system is based on conflict. Any argument ultimately boils down to a clash between two factions: the French and those who want to destroy them. The identification of the political enemy is one of the key elements of FN's populism; which was improved under the presidency of Marine Le Pen.

The populism of FN, under the presidency of Jean-Marie Le Pen, had managed to create an enemy, through the binary code mentality, an argument previously exposed in this chapter, but the ruling class that perpetrated this message was not credible at the institutional level. French citizens at the time of electoral choice could agree with the ideas of the FN but did not trust their leaders. For this reason, creating trust between the French electorate and the party's new ruling class was one of the main objectives of Marine Le Pen's presidency. The operation of cleaning the face of the party started immediately and led *"the FN and Marine Le Pen to present themselves as outsiders to the political system; they see themselves as an alternative to mainstream politics*

⁷⁶ SHIELDS, J. (2012), *Marine Le Pen and the 'New' FN: A Change of Style or of Substance?*, Parliamentary Affairs, 66(1), PP.179–196.

and, more generally, to the political system. The party proposes a form of populist democracy, a form of government that assembles French citizens under the banner of nationalism.”⁷⁷

A further difference between the political strategies of the two presidencies is represented by the electorate of reference. During the 2012 election campaign, Marine Le Pen decided to target her program directly at the lower classes of society, with a focus on the working class. These sections of civil society were those most affected by the economic crisis and who felt closely the problem of uncontrolled immigration. The decision to concentrate the efforts of the electoral race only towards the electorate of reference strengthened the relationship of trust between voters and candidates, giving credibility to the entire Front National.

After the analysis of the ideological characteristics of the new phase of the Front National, it is possible to address the issue of dédramatisation. There is no doubt that the FN under Marine Le Pen has transformed from the party that was almost entirely run by her father, not only in terms of its leadership but also in terms of its programs and discourse. Marine Le Pen poses a challenge to the ideals that her party formerly upheld as a twice-divorced mother of three children and career woman. The fundamental components of FN policies from the 1980s and 1990s still exist, but in toned-down versions that take into account public opinion and a political acceptability standard that was formerly mocked by a FN.

From a programmatic point of view, Marine chose a position of coherence, but it is possible to notice that a real re-branding work has been

⁷⁷ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.34.

implemented. Marine Le Pen's populism had as its main objective the demonization of economic and social liberalism, considered the main responsible for the economic crisis and social inequalities within France. Globalization, the free market, and multiculturalism had caused damage to the working class and to the poor classes, which looking for answers from the French political class. The frontist ruling class tried to give a practical answer to the problems of liberalism through a nationalist recipe, which envisaged a ubiquitous presence of the state within all spheres of public life. The state was supposed to regulate the dysfunctions of the free market in such a way as to limitate the social differences and favor French citizens over immigrants.

3.2 A nation in danger

Marine Le Pen's interpretation of her nation's history is primarily characterized by the idea of "resurgentism," which is held by the bulk of the far-right political movements that have formed in recent decades. The idea is as follows, to put it schematically: the nation (here broadly understood as *natio*, that is, as a community that shares a common origin and history) used to be great and powerful, mainly because it adhered to a number of fundamental values, but at a certain point, its essence started to be corrupted by a concatenation of ideas and actors, and so the task at hand is to revive it by fighting these "anti-national" or "anti-patriotic" feelings. Therefore, the nation must "become itself," adhering to a providential definition of identity that holds that one must become what they are meant to be. Although it takes on many forms and "degrees," this ideal may be found in most, if not all, far-right ideologies, ranging from right-wing populist ideas of making a country "great again" to fascist original ideas. As a result, according to the leader of the FN, France's history has mostly been one of decline. The resurgentism of Marine Le Pen, as just described, clearly differs from the vision of her father Jean-Marie. Both propose a pessimistic view of reality but come to different conclusions. Marine Le Pen's vision can be interpreted like a possibilistic version because: The Nation is in danger, but not everything is lost because a small elite group can still save it from the decline. Jean-Marie Le Pen's vision is clearly influenced by Evolian pessimism and the conviction that the world is now lost, that European civilization is in ruins and that human beings must seek refuge outside the world. Of course, Jean-Marie Le Pen applies these concepts to his political vision and built the party's ideology

there until 2011. The two visions start from the same beliefs, but they implement different strategies for their own goals. However, this decline may be stopped if the right political force comes to power and implements a number of cultural and political changes that are founded on an understanding of French history. The issue is that certain French intellectuals and politicians seem to wish to distort history and rewrite France's past. Marine Le Pen claimed that education programs should focus *“on the glorious aspects of France’s history’ instead of reproducing ‘a certain masochist spirit”* ⁷⁸ In this context of degradation of the values of the French nation, FN remains the last bastion willing to fight to revive the fate of the nation.

According to Marine Le Pen, the French values must be searched inside Christianity and in the warrior character of the French population. France would have forgotten its Catholic Christian origins and this would be one of the main causes of the decline of society. Marine Le Pen in 2018, following a meeting of French President Emmanuel Macron with a group of French bishops, released the following declaration: *“as I have done on many occasions, that it is quite evident that France has Christian roots. Yet the French government not only seems to ignore such ‘historical fact”*⁷⁹ In contrast to its rivals' more secular viewpoints, FN sees Catholicism as a vital component of French history. However, as will be explained later, FN has recently incorporated the defense of *laïcité* into its discourse, which has resulted in a somewhat confusing position. The case of Jeanne d’Arc is emblematic; she was both a Catholic saint and a

⁷⁸ COUTASSE, J. C.(2009) , « Résilience et volonté » : à Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises, Emmanuel Macron rend hommage à l’esprit de De Gaulle, cinquante ans après sa mort, Le Monde.

⁷⁹ LE PEN, M. (2018), *Marine Le Pen: Macron veut “anesthésier” les catholiques pour changer la loi de 1905*. France Soir.

national heroine, and represent for Marine Le Pen the perfect French citizen.⁸⁰ Since the French Revolution, when modern nationalism began to replace dynastic and religious allegiances as the primary source of political allegiance, France has been considered as the model of power and independence, fending off foes from abroad and promoting its ideals and values there. France, over the years, has seen its strength weakened and the only way to find it lies in “drawing upon the same historical matrix, that which inspired both Jeanne d’Arc and Henri IV, both Richelieu and de Gaulle”⁸¹ This speech, delivered by Marine Le Pen during the electoral campaign for the 2012 presidential elections, is not only important to understand the ideology of the party but is the first time that the new president of FN spent positive words for Charles De Gaulle. The operation of recover of his historical figure began that day and I will address this topic later in this chapter.

The weakening of France's strength has, according to FN, the main culprits between the European Union and American hegemony over the entire European continent, considered the symbol of liberalism and capitalism. The European organization is guilty of having inhibited the combative character of nations, serving its own economic and particular interests. France once entered the bureaucratic whirlwind of the EU became a weak and divided nation. The liberalism of which the EU and the US are the emblem does not only concern the economic sphere, but is interpreted by Marine Le Pen as a real vision of the world. One of the reference authors from whom FN “steals” its vision on liberalism is Alain de Benoist, who in the book “*Contre le libéralisme*”⁸²,

⁸⁰ LE PEN, M. (2011), 1er-Mai: Marine Le Pen, “combattante” de “la France Libre”. Le Monde.

⁸¹LE PEN, M. (2012b, February 26), Discours de Marine Le Pen à Châteauroux. Rassemblement National.

⁸² DE BENOIST, A. (2019, February 1) *Contre le libéralisme*. Editions du Rocher.

defines how society is now a slave to the rules imposed by capitalism and the illusion of economic success is the only impetus allowed by liberalism.

3.3 The evolution of the electoral programs since 2002

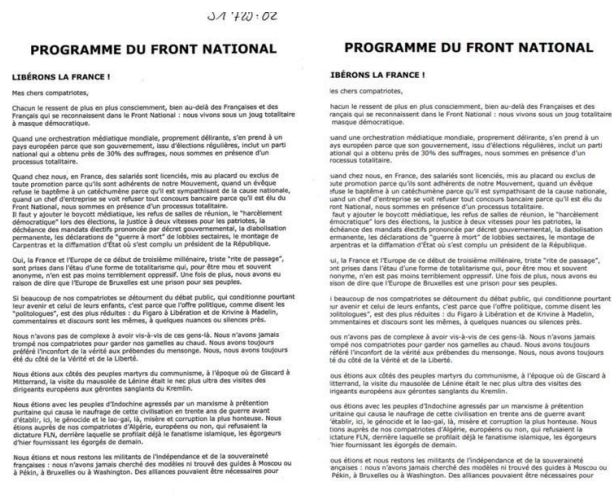


Fig 2.1 In the figure, from left to right, the electoral programs of the Front National for the presidential elections in France in the years 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017

The images above represent the cover of the electoral programs of the Front National for the presidential elections in France from 2002 to 2017.⁸³ The initial part of this analysis aims to highlight the stylistic differences of propaganda between the period before and after the election of Marine Le Pen to

⁸³ MANIFESTO PROJECT DATA DASHBOARD: [Browse Data. visuals.manifesto-project.wzb.eu/mpdb-shiny/cmp_dashboard_dataset.](https://www.manifesto-project.wzb.eu/mpdb-shiny/cmp_dashboard_dataset)

the presidency of the party, in the continuation of the paragraph I will also analyze the ideological content.

Stylistically, the 2002 and 2007 election manifestos are very similar. The header bears the same motto “*Libérons La France!*”⁸⁴ and the party has chosen to tell who the Front National is and what it wants to do for France. The image represents two documents written in a dense way and with a strongly ideological character. The first two electoral programs are schematic and aim to convince voters with the goodness of their proposals, without spending energy in associating a face to the electoral campaign. This choice, in my opinion, is due to the great recognizability of Jean-Marie Le Pen at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The president had led the party since its birth in 1973 and had managed to consolidate both his political positions and his electorate. Jean-Marie Le Pen was universally recognized as the leader of the party, as well as its public face. She firmly believed in the goodness of his political proposals, which therefore had to be the center of FN's electoral campaign.

The first elections with Marine Le Pen at the head of the party bring with them obvious stylistic and propaganda differences. The first page of the electoral manifesto shows Marine Le Pen's face in the foreground, with the main motto located at the bottom and bearing the inscription “*La voix du peuple, l'esprit de la France*”⁸⁵. The first obvious difference that should be noted is that for the first time since its foundation in 1973 the electoral program of FN has a face on the front page. The image of Marine Le Pen has replaced the party's programmatic points. On the 2012 cover, the name of the Front National does

⁸⁴ **Translation:** Let us liberate France!

⁸⁵ **Translation:** The voice of people, the spirit of France

not appear, stressing that the focus of voters should be on the candidates and not on the whole party. From a strategic and communicative point of view, this move has well-founded reasons. Marine Le Pen was a candidate for President of the French Republic in 2012 having only served as a Member of the European Parliament, following the 2004 elections. Its political rise had been really rapid and for this reason a good part of the French population, especially in the rural part of the nation, did not know it politically. Her face was not as recognizable as that of her father, who in 40 years of politics constructed his political credibility and was the absolute image of FN. For this reason, the image of Marine Le Pen needed all possible visibility. In addition to the necessity to get out of the shadow of her father, Marine Le Pen's goal was also to clean up the image of FN and try to distance herself from an obsolete ruling class belonging to another political era.

The 2017 program represents a hybrid between the two antipodes. The cover features the face of Marine Le Pen, presidential candidate, at the top right of a box. The written text is an unconventional propaganda document, as it is a letter written by Marine Le Pen and addressed to the French citizens in which the candidate outlines her plan for the nation. After consolidating her political position, Marine Le Pen is now one of the main faces of the French political landscape, her image always remains inside the cover but is smaller and does not represent the main focus for the voter. The main focus here is on the letter, very direct and summarizing the candidate's idea of nation. *“Le choix patriote de l'autre, que j'incarne dans cette élection, qui met la défense de la nation et du peuple au cœur de toute décision publique et qui par-dessus tout veut la protection de notre identité nationale, notre indépendance, l'unité des Français,*

la justice sociale et la prospérité de tous.”.⁸⁶ With these words ends Marine Le Pen's letter to the nation, in which she affirms once again how France is in danger and she is the only alternative to save it.

After conducting this stylistic analysis on the cover of the election programs, I will focus on the ideological aspect. I decided to select two categories to investigate in order to be able to compare the proposals of FN in the various historical periods. The two categories are: immigration and the relations with European Union.

3.3.1 Immigration

In the context of this thesis, analyzing the national security means observe the political proposal of FN in the years 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017 on a theme that has always been very important for the party: immigration and the defense of national borders. The 2002 election program, under the heading “*propositions*” lists a series of proposals of the party in all areas of French political life. The first one of this proposal concerns the immigration, under the

⁸⁶MANIFESTO PROJECT DATABASE, manifesto-project.wzb.eu/. P. 2.

Translation: The patriotic choice of the other, which I embody in this election, which puts the defense of the nation and the people at the heart of all public decisions and which above all wants the protection of our national identity, our independence, the unity of the French people, social justice and prosperity for all.

heading “*renverser le courant, inverser les fluxes migratoires*”⁸⁷. This proposition is divided into 5 other points, which represent the central topic of the FN proposal on the migration issue.

1. *Mettre fin à toute immigration*
2. *Abroger le regroupement familial en France*
3. *Rameder le droit d’asile à sa vocation initiale*
4. *Lutter contre le faux tourisme*
5. *Procéder à la expulsion effective des immigrés clandestins*⁸⁸

Reading these programmatic points, the most “interesting” point to analyze for the purposes of this essay is certainly the first. The focus of FN's migration proposal in 2002 regards the total elimination of this phenomenon. In the official document, the paragraph under the proposal point affirms that legal immigration should be completely banned in France, except in specific cases and according to the needs of the moment. This proposal represents the most “extreme” point of the anti-immigration propaganda of FN because, as we will see later, no other electoral program will propose an absolute ban on the migration phenomenon but there will be a progressive weakening of the party's positions.

Beginning the analysis of the 2007 election manifesto, it is immediately evident that the FN narrative has changed. The title of the paragraph on immigration is entitled « *L'IMMIGRATION : DES MENACES MORTELLES*

⁸⁷ **Translation:** Turning the tide, reversing migratory flows

⁸⁸ *MANIFESTO PROJECT DATABASE*, manifesto-project.wzb.eu/down/originals/31720_2002.pdf. P.6 **Translation:** Putting an end to all immigration, abolishing family reunification by France , bringing the right of asylum back to its original purpose , fight against fake tourism, carry out the effective expulsion of illegal immigrants

POUR LA FRANCE ET LES FRANÇAIS »⁸⁹. In this part of the electoral manifesto there is a detailed reconstruction of why immigration is a threat to French identity and what causes these threats. Islamic immigration is at the heart of FN's reasoning and the danger of Islamization of France must be fought in every way. The Islamic religion is considered incompatible with the European way of life by its very nature, below is an integral passage that testifies this feeling: *“Reposant, à l’instar du marxisme, sur une opposition dialectique entre le dâr-al-harb, territoire où se déroule la guerre légale contre l’infidèle (jihâd) et le dâr-al-islam, territoire conquis où s’applique la loi de Mahomet, l’islam se caractérise par la permanence d’une éthique qui modèle dans un sens unificateur des normes sociales et des comportements (vie quotidienne, statut de la femme, héritage, droit social) qui ne sont, ni de près, ni de loin, compatibles avec notre civilisation, notre conception de l’homme, nos traditions juridiques.”*

⁹⁰ The 2007 electoral program differs from 2002 because it abandons the analytical character of the latter, which schematically listed the solutions for France, and focuses on striking at the imagination of the French population, building a narrative around Islamic immigration.

The electoral program for the 2012 presidential elections, the first for Marine Le Pen at the head of the party, is structured in a completely different way than the last two. The program is certainly much shorter than those of 2002

⁸⁹ *MANIFESTO PROJECT DATABASE*, manifesto-project.wzb.eu/. P. 22 **Translation:** IMMIGRATION: DEADLY THREATS FOR FRANCE AND THE FRENCH.

⁹⁰ IVI p.23

Translation: Based, like Marxism, on a dialectical opposition between the dar-al-harb, territory where the legal war against the infidel (jihâd) and the dar-al-islam takes place, conquered territory where the law of Muhammad applies, Islam is characterized by the permanence of an ethic that models in a unifying sense social norms and behaviors (daily life, status of women, inheritance, social rights) that do not are neither closely nor remotely compatible with our civilization, our conception of man, our legal traditions

and 2007 and uses illustrative images to introduce the macro-themes. Immigration finds space in the program on page 6, which reads “*immigration, inverser la tendance*”.⁹¹ The 2012 programme proposes a reform of the legal immigration system by lowering the number of immigrants entering France each year. The issue of legal immigration was already addressed in the 2002 electoral program, but with very different tones. In this ideological analysis, it is very important to underline how 10 years after one election and another and the change of presidency between Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen, the party has reconsidered its own positions on the regular immigration.

Another important issue that was deeply addressed during the 2012 election campaign concerns the so-called “*priorité nationale*”. The national priority is a political proposal by FN, which provides that French citizens should have a fast track in French public life. This sort of “right of citizenship” should have applied in both the workplace and the public sphere. The electoral program describes it as follows: “*Les entreprises se verront incitées à embaucher en priorité, à compétences égales, des personnes ayant la nationalité française. Les administrations respecteront également ce principe, et la liste des emplois dits « de souveraineté » sera élargie, notamment dans les secteurs régaliens où les professions seront réservées aux personnes ayant la nationalité française. Les étrangers qui travaillent et qui cotisent bénéficieront du fruit normal de leurs cotisations.*”⁹² 2012 is a year of deep transformation for the

⁹¹ MON PROJET ET LES FRANÇAIS POUR LA FRANCE - Manifesto Project Database, manifesto-project.wzb.eu/down/originals/31720_2012 P.6.

⁹² IBIDEM **Translation:** Companies will be encouraged to hire people with French nationality as a priority, with equal skills. The administrations will also respect this principle, and the list of so-called “sovereignty” jobs will be expanded, especially in sovereign sectors where professions will be reserved for people with French nationality. Foreigners who work and contribute will benefit from the normal fruits of their contributions.

party, which also has been reflected in the electoral program for the presidential elections.

The last document analyzed is the 2017 electoral program. The electoral program for the 2017 presidential elections is consistent with the 2012 program. The program is quite short, there are only 24 pages that compose it and inside there are 144 bullet points in which the candidate expresses her project for the nation. Immigration is mentioned twice in the initial letter signed by Marine Le Pen, and also occupies points 24 to 28. From a programmatic point of view, the first observation to be made concerns that the issue of migration has changed its function in the electoral program from FN. In the programs of 2002 and 2007 there are entire pages dedicated to the subject, with historical contextualizations that explained the theme at length. The 2017 electoral program has four points on the subject, written in a concise manner and which substantially take up the proposals of 2012. The continuity between the two programmes is evident in the point 26 of the 2017's program: *“Réduire l’immigration légale à un solde annuel de 10000. Mettre fin à l’automaticité du regroupement et du rapprochement familial ainsi qu’à l’acquisition automatique de la nationalité française par mariage. Supprimer les pompes aspirantes de l’immigration.”*⁹³ The containment of legal immigration is the common thread that links the two electoral programs, specifying the same number of entries to be allowed to legal immigrants.

⁹³ *MANIFESTO PROJECT DATABASE*, manifesto-project.wzb.eu/. P.6.

Translation: Reduce legal immigration to an annual balance of 10,000. Put an end to the automatic nature of family reunification and reunification as well as the automatic acquisition of French nationality by marriage. Removing suction pumps from immigration

3.3.2 Relations with the European Union

The second category that will be investigated in the continuation of the paragraph concerns the relations between FN and European institutions. As described above, the Front National's opinion on the European Union has definitely deteriorated since the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, leading the party to take strongly anti-European positions. I will investigate whether these positions have changed since the elections of 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017. The 2002 French presidential election took place in a historical context of major transformations for the EU system. The introduction first of the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and then of the Treaty of Amsterdam (1998) upset the European structure, leading the Union to expand its competences and to enshrine the importance of the supranational character of its institutions. The supranational character provide for the strengthening of those decision-making systems that deal with the specific interests of the EU, creating a balance with intergovernmental decision-making processes. The particular decisions of the governments must be balanced by the interests of the whole EU, acting under a delicate system of checks and balances. The introduction of these treaties was seen by the Front National as a serious reduction of French sovereignty in the international arena and was sharply criticized in the 2002 election manifesto. The title of the paragraph on Europe is very clear in this sense: *“L'Europe fédérale, ultime étape avant le gouvernement mondial l'enjeu européen: la fin de*

la France”⁹⁴ FN's propaganda describes a very worrying situation for France's political and economic sovereignty. The European Union was seen as the prelude to the creation of the new world government, in which nation states do not exist and any difference is canceled. The process, according to FN's propaganda, is not irreversible and the only way to regain sovereignty is to leave the EU and especially the euro. In this first electoral program, the European Union is perceived as a cage that will lead to the end of the nation French and FN proposes itself as the only possible barrier to this drift.

Analyzing the electoral program of 2007, it is possible to affirm that it is written in substantial ideological continuity compared to that of the previous elections. The difference that should be underlined, however, concerns the different rhetoric with which the party has carried out its battle against the EU. In the 2002 electoral program the language used to describe the relationship with Europe is disastrous, there is no future for France within the European Union and this organization “*rejoindra le cimetière des empires disparus.*”⁹⁵ In the 2007 program, the language used to describe the French situation in Europe is quite analytical and addresses the issue without an apocalyptic narrative. The Front National proposes the immediately exit of France from the European Union and the termination of all the treaties previously signed. The main target of the 2007 recipe of FN concerns the worrying economic situation that is affecting the european countries, affirming that the only possible way to restore

⁹⁴ *MANIFESTO PROJECT DATABASE*, manifesto-project.wzb.eu/download/originals/31720_2002.pdf. P. 29 **Translation:** Federal Europe, the last step before world government The European challenge: the end of France

⁹⁵ *IBIDEM* pag.30 **Translation:** will join the cemetery of lost empires

the economic credibility of France is strictly linked with the concept of sovereignty.

The 2012 programme, as pointed out earlier, is stylistically very different from the previous two and tackles the issue of the European Union in a new way. The first difference is that the issue examined in the electoral program does not concern the EU in general, but strictly considered only the theme of monetary union. According to this, the second page of the manifesto is dedicated to the euro and there are the results that France has “achieved” since its introduction. *“Depuis 10 ans, l'euro, monnaie unique, n'a tenu aucune de ses promesses. Son bilan Est sans appel : explosion des prix, chômage, délocalisations, dette”.*⁹⁶The introduction of the comunitarian currency was a enormous mistake, according to FN propaganda, and led to a number of problems in both the microeconomic and macroeconomic fields. Therefore the proposal of the Front National is the implementation of a national referendum to leave the eurozone. This step is fundamental because for the first time the party does not speak openly of leaving the EU but only of the monetary union, changing its political target. This strategic shift reflects a change in the ideology of FN's governance. In 2012, the European Union is a well-established organization in the European citizen mind, the majority of people agree on the benefits that the latter has brought at least for the security and stability of the old continent. However, these considerations do not apply to the eurozone, which has often been deeply criticized since the 2008 economic crisis. The euro is

⁹⁶ *MON PROJET ET LES FRANÇAIS POUR LA FRANCE - Manifesto Project Database*, manifesto project.wzb.eu/down/originals/31720_2012

Translation : For 10 years, the euro, the single currency, has not kept any of its promises. Its balance sheet is clear: exploding prices, unemployment, relocations, debt

therefore a very simple target to hit and this political manoeuvre ensured that FN achieves a very high number of votes during the elections of 2012.

To conclude, let's move on to the analysis of the European issue in the 2017 electoral program. As stated above, this program presents bullet points with various topics important to the party. The theme of the EU is described in the first of these points and is very short and precise. The title of the paragraph is *“Retrouver notre liberté et la maîtrise de notre destin en restituant au peuple Français Sa Souveraineté”*⁹⁷ Sovereignty continues to be a central theme within FN's discourse, but it has taken on different shapes over the years. In this program, the proposal of the Front National returns to being a national referendum to re-discuss France's membership of the European Union. However, the issue is approached in a different way. The programme asserts that the aim is not to isolate oneself from the international context but to *“parvenir à un projet européen respectueux de l'indépendance de la France, des souverainetés nationales et qui serve les intérêts des peuples”*⁹⁸ FN for the first time, seems to accept the rules of the European game, not demonizing the European Union as an entity but judging it according to a principle of opportunity.

⁹⁷ *MANIFESTO PROJECT DATABASE*, manifesto-project.wzb.eu/. P.3

Translation: Regaining our freedom and control of our destiny by restoring to the French people their sovereignty

⁹⁸ *IBIDEM*

Translation: achieve a European project that respects the independence of the France, national sovereignties and serves the interests of the people

3.4 The composition of the party under the presidency of Marine Le Pen

As done in the previous chapter for Jean-Marie Le Pen, this paragraph will analyze the composition of the party under the presidency of Marine Le Pen. The components that will be analyzed are: the leadership, the governance of the party and its electorate. The aim of this work is to contextualize the terrain where FN's new political discourse developed.

3.4.1 The leadership

Fulfilling her father's wishes, Marine Le Pen became president of the Front National in 2011, inaugurating a new era for the party's leadership. Marine began her journey inside the party from below, starting from the base and knowing the popular reality of FN. From the point of view of leadership, Marine implemented a real rebranding of the Front National, intending to clean up its image. According to Marine, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the party had reached a stalemate; his father's political strategy had allowed FN to be recognizable in the French political chessboard but his rhetoric was now considered obsolete and anti-historical. Jean-Marie Le Pen's communication style was considered offensive and incorrect by much of public opinion and even part of FN, made up of insults and demonization of the political opponent. He use strong anti-Semitic rhetoric and used to make highly controversial historical

statements, such as Holocaust denial against Jews. This behavior helped to strengthen the very extreme image of the party, considered too dangerous for the democratic system French. For this reason, the new president Marine Le Pen tried to distance herself from her father's rhetoric, considered an obstacle to the progress of FN. Marine Le Pen's leadership tactic was inspired by the *"political strategies used by the Dutch radical leaders Pim Fortuym and Geert Wilders. Following the Dutch model, she has pushed a more human face of the radical right, condemning anti-Semitism, adopting gay-friendly positions, and presenting herself as defender of the French secular republican model"*⁹⁹ Marine Le Pen essentially changed the public face of the Front National, avoiding identifying it as a far-right party and referring to it as "nationalist". This modus operandi led to the birth of a new political strategy: *Marinism*. This term refers to the new direction taken by the Front National after the election of Marine Le Pen and the stylistic distance from the previous era.

3.4.2 The governance

After 2011 and the election of Marine Le Pen as party president, FN's governance deeply changed. The new president replaced the old party elite with younger people, mostly militants that had shared with her an experience inside

⁹⁹ STOCKEMER, D. (2017), *The Front National in France*, In Springer eBooks, P.44.

the *Generation Le Pen*¹⁰⁰ organization. This organization, created in 2002 by Marine Le Pen, was a great political reservoir from which the new ruling class of the party came. The political militants enrolled in *Generation Le Pen* had a much more coherent and innovative approach to politics than the old FN militants. They had formed within a French ever-changing society and had developed an open political consciousness. The new impulse given by these young militants was the result of Marine Le Pen's precise strategy, which wanted to build a new image of the party, cleaner and that people could trust. Following her father's strategy, Marine Le Pen also created her inner circle, composed of people very close to her and who held positions of power within the party. From this analysis of the governance of the party under the presidency of Marine Le Pen, it emerges that its change has occurred only in form not in substance. On the one hand, he had given a new face to the party, taking the new ruling class from the youth organizations and on the other hand he made use of political professionals capable of organizing the party and guiding it in the right direction.

3.4.3 The electorate

The change of presidency and the new leadership of Marine Le Pen tried to attract new groups of the French population, also consolidating the old voters. In the analysis of the electorate, there are several factors to take into account:

¹⁰⁰ *Generation Le Pen* is a political organization, created by Marine Le Pen at the beginning of the twentieth century. The original idea of Marine Le Pen was to create a new political place where the youngest militant of FN could share ideas and think about the future of the party. This initiative also will be fundamental for the party because the new ruling class takes inspiration from it.

such as demographics, socio-economic factors, and social context. From the demographic point of view, there have been the most significant changes. The new leadership, young and feminine, has given a fundamental contribution to the opening of the youngest sections of the population. The new presidency could combine a new and young image with the populist and conservative discourses, typical of FN. The new image of the party was therefore of a populist party, interested to the needs of low-income people but able to relate to a young audience. The damage of the 2008 economic crisis had increased youth unemployment and young workers were tired of the promises of the French old ruling class. Marine Le Pen did not change her political and economic recipe, she adapted it to the new public that was willing to listen. This strategy led FN to continue to have the support of the working class and the old conservatives but broadened its support towards the unemployed youth and those who had suffered the most from the economic crisis.

From a socio-economic point of view, we can say that there is an inverse relationship between the level of education and the tendency to vote for extreme right parties. A good rate of education is often an indication of good economic satisfaction and for this reason, there is no need for a radical change like the one proposed by parties like FN. Despite the renewal of Marine Le Pen, the electoral program remained largely unchanged between 2007 and 2012 and these population groups were not attracted.

Another socio-economic factor to consider concerns the residence of voters and the place where they live. During the period of Jean-Marie Le Pen's presidency, FN had greater support especially in the countryside and in the suburbs of the city. These places are generally inhabited by workers, attached to

the traditional values of family and religion. In cities and large urban centers, left-wing parties have the greatest support, as they are inhabited by citizens accustomed to a multicultural society, in which citizens of all cultures live together. Marine Le Pen's new course has slightly altered this paradigm; the young inhabitants of the cities, struggling with the problems of youth unemployment, listened to the propaganda of FN and a part of them turned into voters for the party.

3.5 The new relationship among Marine Le Pen and Charles De Gaulle

The last topic that will be analyzed in this chapter concerns the reconsideration that FN, under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, had for the historical figure of Charles De Gaulle. In the second chapter of this thesis, I described the troubled relationship between Jean-Marie Le Pen and General De Gaulle, considered a traitor by much of the extreme right French because of the Algerian question. Marine Le Pen's first public statement praising De Gaulle was during the 2012 election campaign. The presidential candidate during a public event defined him as one of the most important historical figures of France, comparable to Joan of Arc and Richelieu. Also during the 2012 election campaign, the words of Florian Philippot, Marine Le Pen's right-hand man and political strategist, had a great media resonance. He claims to have had an image of De Gaulle in office and that FN was the historical heir to his political

legacy.¹⁰¹ The figure of Florian Philippot is considered fundamental in the implementation of the FN normalization process. He joined the party in 2011 and was appointed by Marine Le Pen as strategic director of the 2012 election campaign. Philippot was Marine's number two throughout the election period and brought a new vision to the party. During any election rally or press conference he always refused to associate FN with the extreme right, asserting that these political schemes no longer represented the essence of the Front National and that it was a patriotic and popular party. The defense of De Gaulle is actually a part of a larger effort to distance oneself from any ties to the French far-right of the middle of the 20th century and join the mainstream of historical politics while adapting it to match the party's ideology. This strategy was also implemented through the use of a different language by FN governance, restructuring its rhetoric and using terms in a different way. This step can be noted in the use of the word “*collaboration*”. This term was generally used in France to describe the accommodating attitude of the French towards the Nazis during the 40s. Marine Le Pen decided to “steal” this term and reuse it in order to make it useful to the narrative of her political party. FN began using it to accuse the behavior of French elites, considered guilty of favoring Islamic fundamentalism. The collaboration obviously had nothing to do with armies or firearms, but concerned the attitude of tolerance that the French mainstream parties had towards fringes of the population. In a public speech of 2012 Marine Le Pen said that Nicholas Sarkozy “*doesn't like France*” and “*every day he*

¹⁰¹ FICEK, I (2019), “*Philippot, l'atout “ Techno “ De Le Pen.”*”, Les Echos, www.lesechos.fr/2012/03/philippot-latout-techno-de-le-pen-1093072.

*collaborates a little more with his masters: the markets and the banks*¹⁰². Creating this new image of the Front National ready to fight against all kinds of oppression by the French elites, Le Pen also affirms that she was “the candidate of *la France libre*”¹⁰³, causing shock among the numerous journalists. Here, the mention of totalitarianism resonates with both genuine socialism and its right-wing variations. Le Pen's consideration of Philippe Pétain and the Vichy regime, which she described as a collaborator and an illegal regime, clarified that for her, “*the République and France were in London during the Occupation and Vichy was not France*”¹⁰⁴. The connection between French political leaders and Petain's regime, which was continuously resigned depending on the situation, is a particularly interesting explanation of how history and speech are intertwined. Despite the party's and the government's historical ties, Marine Le Pen simply positions herself in the republican mainstream. Le Pen's strategic choice was clear in this context. The new president tried to recycle all the issues on which the mainstream parties had always attacked FN and make them her own, in order to defuse them and take weapons away from her political opponents. Marine Le Pen makes an attempt to reverse the historical-political order by arguing that her party is now the one fighting for equality and freedom, rather than the other parties, intellectuals, and historians who tend to associate the far-right with totalitarianism, Nazism, and collaboration. The challenge is in trying to turn the situation around by connecting the slanderous incidents to her opponents in politics while still avoiding any association with them.

¹⁰² ELTCHANINOFF, M. (2018), *Inside the Mind of Marine Le Pen*, Oxford University Press, Part three.

¹⁰³ WERLY, R. (2013, September 19), *La «France libre» du Front national de Marine Le Pen*, Le Temps.

¹⁰⁴ ROUDEN, C. (2017, April 10), *Marine Le Pen, un rapport ambigu à l'Histoire*, La Croix.

Her attempts face significant challenges, of course: those historical events have already been mapped by the majority of political forces in a particular way, and it is challenging for a political party (especially one that tends to be stigmatized) to change the meaning of those events. When *Jeunes avec Marine*¹⁰⁵ posted a photomontage of Le Pen's face and the phrase “*La Résistance c'est nous*”¹⁰⁶ over Eugène de la Croix's *La liberté guidant le peuple* (1830), many in the French media were undoubtedly taken aback. The primary thesis supporting this kind of position is that liberalism is basically an outgrowth of Christianity, just like the Enlightenment was. Le Pen asserts that Islam could coexist with the *République* provided it recognizes the principles of the Enlightenment and that France has Christian roots that have been secularized by the *Lumières*.

De Gaulle's recovery operation can be considered the first part of Marine Le Pen's plan. Since his election in 2012, FN's narrative has changed dramatically. The Front National has decided that it no longer wants to be alone against the whole French system, but has tried to integrate itself into the system itself, seeking political viability. The normalization of FN is a process that has accompanied the party throughout its history, with not always positive results, but the political capacity of Marine Le Pen has allowed it to become one of the most important parties in France.

¹⁰⁵The *Jeunes avec Marine* is the youth organization of the Front National. It was founded in 1973 and it had 25,000 members in 2013.

¹⁰⁶FNJ-MIDI-PYRENEES (2015), “Nouvelle Campagne Des Jeunes Avec Marine : ‘La Résistance, c’est Nous.’” *FNJ Occitanie*, fnj-midi-pyrenees.over-blog.fr/article-nouvelle-campagne-des-jeunes-avec-marine-la-resistance-c-est-nous-99941717.html. **Translation** :We are the resistance !

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to understand if the historical evolution of FN has modified its ideology, softening its political positions. The search for this question generated a series of subsequent arguments. It is clear that a party with 60 years of history is subject to important changes, but it is essential to point out that Marine Le Pen's presidency has changed the paradigm of FN, rather than its ideology. What has emerged is that the Front National in its history has developed a great capacity to adapt to the historical and political conditions of its time, always trying to maximize its interest. This observation also helped me to reflect on new points. First of all, the Front National was born with a very clear ideological component, made up of key points around which its party system revolved, but it has never been a party insensitive to external mutations. It is important to underline that, systemic events such as the crisis of the French parties in the 80s, the introduction of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1994, and the moments of economic recession were perceived by the governance of FN as key moments in the history of France to which it was necessary to give a clear answer. To outline this reasoning, it is possible to divide the history of the Front National into 4 different phases, each of which is attributable to a specific period of history:

1. The genesis of the party (1972-1986)
2. The consolidation of the political position (1986-2011)
3. Change in the governance (2011)
4. The new discourse of FN (2012-now)

The first two stages refer to the presidency of Jean-Marie Le Pen. The analysis just carried out shows that in the two initial phases of the Front National, the political objective was the consolidation of its ideology. The Front National is the first real far-right mass party present in France following the Second World War, proposing an absolute novelty to voters. Le Pen's election programs, public statements, and interviews were aimed at attracting media exposure to the party, so as to reach as many citizens as possible. This *modus operandi* has certainly increased the publicity of FN and its leader but has had harmful effects from the point of view of political and parliamentary viability. Le Pen's public statements during the 80s and 90s were very heated and he was accused of racism and anti-Semitism. The ostracization of the FN continued throughout the period of Jean-Marie's presidency, causing disappointment among the more moderate ranks of the party. In 2011, with the succession to the government of his daughter Marine, the change was evident. From the analysis just carried out, we can say that the process of normalization of the Front National was very long, and in some ways, it is still ongoing. The promotion in 2012 of Florian Philippot as the Marine Le Pen's strategic campaign director, is crucial in several respects. He had an essentially technical background, had studied at the most prestigious universities in the USA, and understood that the new space to occupy for FN was towards the center of the French political spectrum. As stated earlier in this thesis, Philippot and Marine Le Pen identified in the recovery of the figure of De Gaulle the possibility of attracting a moderate electorate and finally implementing the *dediabolization*. The decision to change their opinion on Charles De Gaulle is certainly not accidental. The General still represents for most French citizens an example of leadership and attachment to the nation. He

led the resistance French the Nazis during World War II and served as President of the Republic on two occasions, demonstrating his willingness in times of difficulty in his nation. As analyzed in the last part of the report, in the period from 2012 to 2017 the new governance of FN continued to carry out this strategy and the 2017 presidential campaign confirms this. In the course of this analysis, I tried to show that the ideological evolution of the Front National was the result of a normalizing strategy very long over the years and that the two presidential courses had the same political objective, but they sought it through different paths. The fear for the old Front National, racist and with strong anti-Semitic hues of Jean-Marie Le Pen has been replaced by a new political subject, whose governance has been able to understand the disruption of French citizens and turn it into political proposals of their own party.

Abstract

This master's thesis aims to describe the evolution of the Front National in France from its birth to the presidency of Marine Le Pen. The main focus will be placed on the ideology of this political party, with particular attention to the cultural universe of the Front National. The founder and main figure of the Front National is Jean-Marie Le Pen, who essentially monopolized the internal decision-making process of the party from its foundation until 2011. In that year, his daughter Marine Le Pen took his place as president and sanctioned a new phase for the Front National. This handover led to relevant changes within the Front National's electoral program, with consequences also on an ideological level. One of the main pieces of evidence is the new consideration of the political figure of Charles De Gaulle. The recovery operation of De Gaulle's historical inheritance allowed the party to finalize the process of "*dédiabolisation*" and be more expendable on an electoral level. This transformation process and its causes represent the research question of this thesis. In the first part of this master's thesis, I will analyze the historical evolution of the Front National through the study of secondary literature. The second part will deal with the analysis of the party's primary sources, such as cultural journals, social propaganda, and ideological material to understand the reference universe of the Front National and the evolution of the relationship with De Gaulle's thought.

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