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France: Party system change and the demise of the post-Gaullist right

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Abstract

The 2017 French presidential and legislative elections constituted a crisis point for a mainstream Right. Since the mid-1980s, the mainstream right had proved remarkably adept at exploiting the political opportunity structure of the French political system, balancing the centripetal forces of Silent Revolution value change and the 'liberal consensus' with the centrifugal pull of the Silent Counter-Revolutionary *Front National* (FN) on the populist radical right. This chapter will analyse how, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the conservative Gaullists and their centre-right liberal coalition partners constituted competing but stable bloc components within France's two-round majoritarian electoral system, while pursuing weak accommodative strategies vis-à-vis the FN. The absence of an effective centre-located competitor ensured that the Gaullists' increasing encroachment upon the centre-right's support, culminating in the formation of the UMP in 2002, did not threaten the bloc's stability. Conversely, from 2007 onwards, a more conservative mainstream Right faced challenges from both the populist radical right, reviving Silent Counter Revolution values which were again salient in the wake of the economic crisis, and renewed centrist formations largely accepting of progressive Silent Revolution cultural values. The chapter demonstrates that significant, simultaneous electoral challenges from the centrist and populist radical right compromised the Right bloc's integrity, and recast the French party system, pulling liberal Republicans wing towards cooperation with the centrist government, and leaving conservative-authoritarian Republicans wing to drift towards the populist Radical Right.

Introduction

The French mainstream right finds itself at its weakest point in the history of the Fifth Republic. As the political bloc dominating the first twenty years of the Gaullist regime, the governing right – principally *Les Républicains* (LR), the latest manifestation of the former Gaullist movement – find themselves fragmented and electorally diminished. After holding the Presidency from 1995 to 2012, the incumbent, Nicolas Sarkozy, was defeated by the Socialist François Hollande. Five years later, despite strong public discontent with Hollande, LR's frontrunner, François Fillon, was unable to make the run-off ballot with 20% of the vote, falling third behind centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron (24%) and Marine Le Pen of the populist Radical Right *Front nationa*l (FN, now *Rassemblement national*, RN) at 21.3%. In the legislative elections that followed, the right lost 68 of their previous 199 seats, while Macron's new centrist formation, *La République en Marche!* (LREM), together with their centrist allies, won an overall majority of 61% of parliamentary seats.

Whilst there were idiosyncratic reasons for the right's failure both in 2012 and 2017 – the 2008 financial crisis during Sarkozy's presidency, Fillon's financial scandal in 2017 – the party system dynamics and electoral realignment evident over the past 20 years had led to a situation where the electoral collapse of the mainstream right, if not inevitable, has certainly become possible. The role of LR in legitimising, then losing control of what may be termed the cultural values of the Silent Counter-Revolution (Ignazi, 1992) – reactionary law-and-

order, morality, and ethnocentric values, as well as neo-liberal economic reaction to the post-materialism of the silent Revolution (Inglehart, 1977) – has pushed the party into a position that lacks credibility in challenging the status quo, and lacks currency in representing it.

In 2017, the simultaneous challenge of centrist and radical candidates proffering political renewal forged the perfect storm for LR. Moreover, the systemic marginalisation of LR, and the narrowing of its electoral space, has allowed Macron's LREM to broaden its own political space into areas traditionally well inside the mainstream right bloc. In the European elections of May 2019, support for LR fell to an all-time low of 8.5% of the vote, casting doubt on the viability of the post-Gaullist right in the new party system that has emerged from the 2017 elections.

This struggle to identify an electorally viable political offer has resulted from a gradual shift in values and social structure over the last half-century. This chapter asks how mainstream right parties in France have tried to adapt over time to the policy and political challenges caused by socio-demographic and value changes that have taken place in Western countries since the 1970s as part of the Silent Revolution and the conservative backlash against it. We look at how these parties have attempted to reposition themselves within a transforming political space produced by processes of internationalisation such as European integration, immigration and economic globalization.

We argue that, whilst the core values of the post-materialist revolution such as environmentalism, feminism and egalitarianism were essentially absorbed by the left in France, notably through a Green party (*Les Verts*, now EELV) within the leftist electoral cooperative, and whilst the counter-revolution backlash has doubtless fuelled support for the FN, the pull of the populist radical right has primarily taken mainstream parties further to the right on the cultural dimension –most particularly immigration issues– and, more recently, European integration, balancing vote-seeking and policy-seeking motivations. As our analysis suggests, however, successive periods of electoral outbidding of the FN on such issues by the mainstream right since the mid-1980s have gone against a more general trend towards cultural liberalization and greater support for the EU amongst numerous moderate right-wing voters, which has opened a political space for Emmanuel Macron's LREM as a credible centrist liberal and pro-European alternative.

This chapter is organised as follows. First, we present the key actors of the right, and the institutional context in which they operate. We then look at the path dependency of the reshaping of the party system which occurred in 2017. We focus on historical changes in competitive patterns and voter demand along issue dimensions as well as the institutional continuities in political opportunity structure. We argue that these developments have not been monotonic, however, and look at four main periods since the early 1980s which are characterised by significant variation in voter demand, party supply and strategy. Finally, we examine possible implications of those developments for the future of the mainstream right in a party system currently dominated by Macron's liberal centre and Le Pen's populist radical right.

The French Right in context: heterogeneity under majoritarian constraints

The two streams of the mainstream Right: conservative Gaullists and liberal Centrists

The mainstream right since 1959 has constituted a coherent political bloc, only twice losing the presidency, and holding government for 38 of the Republic's 58-year existence. Historically, the mainstream right in France has been divided into two main components, namely the conservative Gaullists and non-Gaullist liberal centrists (Knapp and Wright 2006).

From the mid-1970s to the early 2000s, the main Gaullist party was the *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR). The first viable centrist alternative to traditional Gaullist dominance was Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's *Républicains Indépendants* (RI) in the early 1970s, which later provided the organizational basis for the *Union pour la Démocratie Française* (UDF) federation, formed in 1978. During the 2000s and early 2010s, the conservative right continued into the *Union pour un mouvement populaire* (UMP), which changed its name to *Les Républicains* (LR) in 2015 following a series of political scandals. From the early 2000s onward, the liberal wing of the French right was embodied in the new UDF led by centrist leader François Bayrou, which later transformed itself into the *Mouvement démocrate* (MoDem), setting out a new direction further away from the right. By 2017, Emmanuel Macron's newly formed LREM took over this 'independent' political centre, winning moderate voters from both left and right (Evans and Ivaldi 2018).

While these two streams of the right relate to distinct ideological traditions, they have also been marked by internal ideological diversity. Additionally, personal rivalries and presidential ambitions have been important factors in party strategies on the right, and these interact with the Fifth Republic's institutional constraints. We will consider the broader institutional incentives in the next section, but to summarise here briefly the impact of presidential ambition as well as of variations in affiliation at the subnational level - the non-Gaullist, centrist pole in particular has traditionally been more fragmented, accommodating a wider array of small parties –including liberals and Christian Democrats, and has been organizationally unstable over time. This diversity of actors with different positions and strategies makes it difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between the sub-components – Gaullist and non-Gaullist – of the French right. Nonetheless, five areas of divergence can be identified.

First, since the early 1970s, the centrists were generally more economically liberal than the Gaullists. In contrast, the typical Gaullist political economy has traditionally been defined by its support for state intervention and planned economy ('*dirigisme*'), reflecting its appeal to voters across the left/right divide, and the strong working-class component to the Gaullist movement (Demker, 1997: 411).

Second, culturally, the Gaullists represent the conservative pole of the French mainstream right, while centrists have traditionally supported more progressive and culturally liberal policies – for example, the Veil reforms to contraception and abortion laws during Giscard's presidency – despite their accommodating Christian Democrats with conservative views.

Third, the Gaullist and non-Gaullist strands of the right have diverged in their support for European integration over time. The defence of national independence and national sovereignty has always been at the heart of the Gaullist ideology, resulting in scepticism, if not outright hostility towards the EU, as well as international alliances such as NATO. In contrast, centrist liberals have traditionally been more supportive of federalism and a more integrated EU.

Fourth, centrist liberals have historically been more open to institutional reform and modernization, whereas Gaullists would strongly defend a strong leadership and the institutions of the Fifth Republic as the legacy of De Gaulle.

Fifth and finally, Gaullist and centrist parties also differ in terms of party organization. The successive iterations of the Gaullist party – from the UNR in the 1960s to the UMP during the 2000s and 2010s – generally follow a model of mass party with large membership (by French standards) as opposed to the constellation of small cadre parties that form the centrist pole, with low membership and strong local *notables*.

As can be seen from Figure 1, which shows electoral results of right-wing parties in France, in the 'modern' period of the Fifth Republic, that is, when the system finally alternated in 1981 to a left executive, the story has ostensibly been one of relative consolidation of the conservative right, at the expense of the liberal centre-right, particularly post-2002, and the implantation of the third stream, the populist radical right. In 2017, however, these three political blocs achieved similar levels of presidential support, attesting to the reshaping of the party sub-system on the right of French politics.

[Figure 1 about here]

Enter the Populist Radical Right FN

The FN was formed in 1972 from a collection of far right groupuscules, monarchists, Vichy nostalgics and remnants of the anti-Gaullist OAS. While it originated in the far right milieu, by the mid-1980s the FN pioneered a new 'populist radical right' agenda combining nativism, authoritarianism and populism (Ivaldi 2018a). The FN under Jean-Marie Le Pen challenged on the right flank of the Gaullists first as an economically neo-liberal, national sovereignist party, drawing on similar shopkeepers, small entrepreneurs and petty bourgeois trades support as the 1950s Poujadists, in opposition to the variants of *dirigisme* offered by both left and the conservative right. As we will discuss later, support from the blue-collar class, which would underpin much of the electoral analysis of the FN from the 1990s onwards, was notable by its absence in the mid-1980s – just 9 per cent, the lowest of any intra-occupational class proportion, in 1984 (Ysmal, 1984: 9). To a large extent, Bell's observation from the 1970s, that the FN's ideological profile was largely indistinct from the conservative right's (1976: 103), remained valid long into the 1980s and 1990s. Only with the welfare chauvinist shift leftwards by the FN from the late 1990s did bloc differentiation begin to emerge (Ivaldi, 2015).

What differentiated FN from conservative right was anti-establishment populism, anti-system position partly forced upon, partly embraced by, the former, and a niche strategy primarily emphasizing cultural issues such as immigration and law-and-order. The FN's reactionary roots and willingness to play upon growing anti-immigrant sentiment as an issue more than the mainstream right dared to made it an attractive alternative for working class and lower-middle class voters ignored by a post-materialist left, and subsequently disappointed by a socially conservative right. This Silent Counter Revolution position remained the preserve of the FN, given the moderate right and centre's erection of the cordon sanitaire subsequent to a failed ideological and electoral flirtation with the populist radical right in the late 1980s.

That the ideological affinity between moderate and radical right, which extended to voters as well as parties well into the 1990s (Andersen and Evans, 2003), did not result in bloc consolidation may be accounted for by the institutional and competitive context. To

understand the impact of value change on the right's support, we must take into account the rules of the game under which it competes.

Institutional context

France's two-ballot majoritarian electoral formula plays a significant role shaping the behaviour of parties and voters (Elgie 2006). Paradoxically, whilst incentivising fragmentation through its presidential race, it also provides strong incentives for parties to cluster within the two dominant party subsystems, in order to achieve electoral competitiveness, which limits structural opportunities for independent centrist and radical forces. The main threat to the mainstream right, namely the FN's 'nuisance potential' in legislative three-way run-offs (*triangulaires*), never realised its potential, despite losing the Right well over 30 seats to the left in 1997. This was partly due to the reaffirmed right-wing cooperation through the UMP from 2002 onwards, but owed far more due to the realignment of the electoral calendar as part of the five-year presidential term (*quinquennat)* reforms two years previously. Since 2010, the primacy of the presidential race has turned the Assembly elections into essentially the third and fourth rounds of the presidential election (Dupoirier and Sauger, 2010), with a steep fall-off in support for presidential losers and smaller parties.

Furthermore, the majoritarian electoral system manufactures highly disproportional parliamentary majorities which are primarily detrimental to peripheral parties, favouring more established parties with strong local bases, such as a well-implanted conservative right with networks of its own and other right-wing (*divers droite*) candidates – either regional conservative groups or independent local politicians (Knapp and Wright, 2006: 216). On average, since 1981, the winning parties of the left and right have received over 61% of all parliamentary seats in French legislative elections. Finally, voter apathy and record high abstention rates in legislative elections result in a rise in effective thresholds for second-round entry in a fragmented and highly competitive race, which creates a favourable context for larger parties. Reflecting such institutional mechanisms, there have been on average 3 effective parliamentary parties in France since 1981, compared with an average 5.5 effective competitors in legislative elections over the same period.

Because of this strong bipolarising effect of majoritarian rule, the centre ground was assumed not to be a threat, and certainly not a viable location for a presidential challenger. As we shall see in the next section, this was illustrated by centrist candidate François Bayrou's albeit creditable third place in the 2007 presidential election. Ideologically, a viable centre space existed on the Right, between a conservative right-wing UMP candidate and the entrenched Socialist agenda of Ségolène Royal. Perversely, however, the lower level of fragmentation and the weakness of the radical vote across both sides of the spectrum helped maximize support for the two dominant parties of the left and right, contributing significantly to Bayrou not being able to disrupt the more traditional pattern of left-right competition (Evans and Ivaldi, 2018). That said, the 2007 presidential race first illustrated the growing tension between this institutional logic and the Silent Revolution shift of traditionally more centre-right electorates, especially in larger conurbations with service and graduate-level employment, moving to more liberal positions hitherto associated more with the left. So, while 2007 and 2012's traditional Left/Right run-off seemed to confirm the resilience of the bipolarity of France's electoral politics (Grunberg and Haegel, 2007; Grunberg, 2008), increased political fragmentation and the rise of radical alternatives would, by 2017, see support for traditional parties of the mainstream diminish, ultimately making room for Macron.

With these institutional parameters in mind, we turn now to unpick the two (counter-) revolutionary logics across four main periods, focusing on three key elements – the competitive array in play; party supply in terms of issue positions; and voter demand, particularly in terms of attitudinal profile[1]. We look at how these elements have changed across different periods and for each period we analyse the reconfiguration of the party sub-system of the Right.

The four periods of the French right since 1981

The start of each period may be defined by a critical juncture affecting one or more of the above elements. The main features of the four periods of right-wing politics in France since the early 1980s are summarised in Table 1. We look at each period in turn in the sections below.

[Table 1 about here]

The Mitterrand years (1981-1991)

During the Mitterrand incumbency, the mainstream right was split between two blocs of relatively equal size, namely the conservative Gaullists of the RPR and centrist Liberals of the UDF. The victory of the left and first alternation in power in 1981 had produced strong incentives for party co-operation, eventually seeing the formerly separatist liberal UDF effectively ceding leadership to Chirac's conservative Gaullists following Giscard's failure to secure a second presidential term. During this first period, both the RPR and UDF opted for formal co-operation in all legislative elections, while presenting individual candidates in the 1981 and 1988 presidential races. In terms of party supply, two critical junctures were decisive. First, as reflected in the manifesto data, the rise to power of the Socialists and Communists in 1981 resulted in a market-liberal policy backlash by the mainstream right, with the Gaullists in particular moving away from Colbertist state intervention and *dirigisme* to unambiguously endorse free market economics, small government and deregulation – closer to their traditionally more liberal centrist counterparts.

[Figure 2 about here]

Among their voters, the traditional strong class and religious basis to RPR/UDF mainstream right support still obtained, with private sector employees, managers, the petty bourgeoisie plus the farming community showing high levels of support for parties of the right. Within the last two of these social groups, shopkeepers and freehold farmer declined in numbers, lessening their electoral value, underscoring characteristic demand-side Silent Counter Revolution vulnerability. Such a typically right-wing socio-demographic profile corresponded to voters' economic attitudes during the period, with both RPR conservative and UDF liberal supporters being firmly located to the right on the economic dimension, showing strong neoliberal preferences in reaction to the failed interventionism of the PS-led left-wing coalition in power between 1981 and 1986.

[1] Here, we must rely upon a small number of items that are comparable across national election surveys in France over the period covered in this chapter.

A second critical event was the electoral breakthrough of the FN in 1984. During its period of identity formation, the FN managed to establish a distinctive appeal, primarily galvanizing voters on immigration and law-and-order, in due course politicizing opposition to European integration and competing directly against the mainstream right on a free market capitalist agenda strongly influenced by the international wave of Reaganomics. In its entry phase of the mid-1980s, the FN drew most of its electoral support from the right in national elections. It posed only a moderate electoral threat to both the RPR and UDF, most visible in regions such as Mediterranean France where traditionally anti-Gaullist, and previously anti-system (Bartolini, 1984) centrist voters made a significant electoral pool for the FN.

In response, the mainstream right incorporated a number of the FN's positions on immigration and law-enforcement (Schain 2006) – a crucial legitimising step in terms of the Silent Counter Revolution, polarising the mainstream right towards the populist radical right challenger. Meanwhile co-operation with the populist radical right occurred in a small number of cases locally, mostly in the Southern region, mostly as a response to the shock caused by the victory of the left in 1981, and because the ideological borders between the mainstream right and radical right were historically more 'porous' in the South. By the early 1990s, however, conservatives and liberals under Chirac's leadership put an end to such attempts to incorporate the FN, reflecting the moral condemnation of the party's far right legacy (Ivaldi 2018a).

Furthermore, beyond such tactical co-optation of radical right themes, Chirac's conservative Gaullists also upheld their traditionally more social conservative agenda, which continued to set them apart from some (though certainly not all) UDF centrists[2], as well as from the Socialist left which timidly began to adopt Silent Revolution-oriented, culturally liberal policies such as the abolition of the death penalty, granting more rights to immigrants and liberalizing the media. Demand-side data for the 1981-1991 period suggest that authoritarian social and moral positions were already predominant amongst RPR voters (more so than amongst UDF centrists) and, even more prominently, supporters of the left. In contrast, both the centrist and Gaullist electorates showed more convergence on immigration, possibly reflecting the impact of this issue's politicization by the FN on both conservative and liberal sectors of the mainstream right after 1984, and independently from traditional moral values associated for instance with age and religiosity (Figure 3).

[Figure 3 about here]

Finally, while not a prominent issue for voters at the time, Europe began to gain salience during this first pre-Maastricht Treaty period. Increasing co-operation between centrists and Gaullists saw the latter progressively move towards more pro-EU positions, in sharp contrast with the old Gaullist agenda of national sovereignty and independence pushed by leading Gaullist figures such as Pierre Juillet and Marie-France Garaud, and endorsed by Chirac himself in his notorious *Appel de Cochin* (Call of Cochin) (Schonfeld, 1986: 21) in 1978, in which Giscard and the UDF were simply labelled the *parti de l'étranger* ('party of the foreigner'). As the expert survey data for France suggest, however, the RPR remained much

[2] Unfortunately, the MARPOR dataset does not include data for the UDF between 1981 and 1988. The available data for 1993 suggest however that the UDF was more culturally liberal than the RPR, which is corroborated by the data for their predecessor parties during the 1970s.

more sceptical of European integration during the 1980s, when compared with both the UDF and the PS.

The Chirac Era and the 'social fracture' (1992-2002)

The Chirac era of the mainstream right from 1992 to 2002, showed substantial changes from the previous period. Party system fragmentation and polarization rose significantly, as epitomized by the 2002 presidential election's record high number of candidates and a substantial rise in support for radical parties at both ends of the spectrum. Meanwhile, electoral turnout began to falter both in national and subnational elections, reflecting growing popular discontent with the political establishment.

The period saw a significant change in the balance of power within the right as Chirac's conservative Gaullists firmly established their leadership over an electorally declining UDF. Similarly, the FN enjoyed a significant rise in support, predominantly from working class voters traditionally affiliated with the Left (Evans, 2000), as well as from disenfranchised voters outside the classic left-right divide (Mayer 2002). As revealed by both Balladur and Bayrou's failed attempts to challenge Gaullist dominance in the 1995 and 2002 presidential elections, electoral support for the bourgeois liberal centre declined, while rural voters increasingly turned to the populist radical right in protest against EU agricultural policies as agricultural protectionism began to falter (Gombin and Ivaldi, 2015).

Important organizational changes occurred within the UDF as both Alain Madelin's neo-liberal *Démocratie Libérale* (DL) and social conservative Catholics rallying behind Christine Boutin left the federation. Both DL and Boutin's small party, the *Forum des républicains sociaux* (FRS), ran independently against UDF leader, François Bayrou, in the 2002 presidential election, eventually joining the conservatives of the new UMP under Gaullist tutelage. The 2002 presidential election showed a record high level of fragmentation within the right, with no less than five candidates, mostly accounted for by the schism in the UDF of its historical components. While the UDF had continued electoral co-operation with the Gaullists under the *Union pour la France* (UPF) during the 1990s, by the end of the period, Bayrou turned the centrists' strategy into one of greater independence from the right, positioning the UDF as a new 'neither left nor right' actor at the centre of the political spectrum.

As illustrated by the manifesto data, in the context of the economic recession of the early 1990s, all parties of the right – including the FN – shifted positions and converged towards the economic centre. In 1995, Chirac secured his first presidential term by campaigning on the 'social fracture' (*fracture sociale*) advocating social justice and solidarity, clearly breaking with the laissez-faire economic policies of the mid-1980s. Amongst RPR and UDF voters, the failed neo-liberal experiment by the right during its years in power between 1986 and 1988 led to the consolidation of middling economic positions.

Culturally, the manifesto data suggest that the push of Silent Counter Revolution values was most evident in the rightward shift by DL liberals who were increasingly at odds with the somewhat more progressive agenda advocated by UDF moderates rallied behind Bayrou; meanwhile the Gaullists maintained their previous social conservative agenda, as did the FN at the authoritarian end of the GAL/TAN dimension (Hooghe et al, 2002).[3] Particularly

[3] The Green-Alternative-Libertarian and Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist scale is a composite attitudinal scale used to map socio-cultural attitude and policy positions, normally orthogonally to the traditional economic left-right.

notable was the emergence in the 1992 regional elections of the Green party pushing a strong Silent Revolution agenda. As the Greens became rapidly incorporated into the sub-system of the Left, entering a formal *gauche plurielle* alliance with the Socialists and the Communists between 1997 and 2002, polarization over cultural issues continued throughout the 1990s.

The implementation of a Silent Revolution policy agenda by the left in power fuelled a Silent Counter Revolution reaction by Liberals and conservatives to the right of the party system, at a time when, as voter survey data suggest, support for socially conservative values was beginning to decline amongst voters of the RPR and UDF. Those voters were displaying more support for homosexual adoption and less support for the death penalty, for instance, thus widening the gap between right-wing party elites and voters, most visibly amongst supporters of a 'split' UDF. Meanwhile, attitudes towards immigration remained stable within the electoral base of the mainstream right, thus providing a pool of particularly conservative voters in the RPR susceptible to the FN's ethno-cultural appeal. In response, the mainstream right under Chirac's leadership adopted a *cordon sanitaire* against the FN, refusing tactical alliances both nationally and locally, while endorsing the *Front Républicain* (Republican Front) – i.e. the unwritten rule that mainstream parties automatically support each other in a run-off election where the FN is still running.

Finally, a critical juncture was the 1992 Maastricht referendum which significantly increased the salience of European integration issues both for parties and voters. As conservatives in the RPR in particular continued their move towards more pro-integration positions, Maastricht provoked a split resulting in the formation of a new Eurosceptic party by Gaullist Charles Pasqua, the *Rassemblement pour la France* (RPF). In the UDF, a schism occurred with the break by Philippe de Villiers and the creation of the *Mouvement pour la France* (MPF). While ambivalent about the EU during the 1980s, the FN took a clear Eurosceptic turn in the mid-1990s, voicing its opposition to Maastricht and the deepening of European integration, thus contributing to the growing polarization of party competition over Europe (Ivaldi 2018b).

The Sarkozy Period and 'the France that gets up early' (2003-2012)

Despite Jacques Chirac still being president until 2007, the final four years were for the right a period of power-building for Nicolas Sarkozy ahead of his electoral campaign for the Elysée, officially taking over the party in 2004. The formation of the UMP after Chirac's victory in 2002 was designed as much to set up a party machine for the next election as it was to secure a parliamentary majority for the incumbent. That the FN candidate had progressed into the 2002 presidential run-off had been a major political shock, producing strong incentives for all mainstream actors to build more competitive unified blocs.

Under the leadership of François Bayrou, the UDF – that would become Modem in December 2007 – was organisationally and ideologically separatist from the UMP. Having left the EPP in 2004 and co-founded ALDE in the European Parliament, Bayrou's formation increasingly opposed the UMP in the National Assembly, culminating in supporting a vote of no confidence in the de Villepin government, together with the Socialists and Communists, and refusing to endorse Sarkozy's second-round candidature in the 2007 presidential election. Ideologically, the party pushed for a social liberal economic agenda, while maintaining the centrist tradition of strong Europeanism.

Whilst now remembered as culturally conservative and authoritarian on the GAL/TAN scale, conservatism in Sarkozy's initial presidential programme was more pronounced in economic

terms, proposing reductions in welfare and social protection. As the manifesto data illustrate, the UMP under Sarkozy moved towards materialist, growth-oriented policies focusing on productivity, while reviving the right-wing mythology of the 'hardworking people' –as reflected in Sarkozy's appeal to "France that gets up early" (*la France qui se lève tôt*)– and adopting a soft anti-establishment rhetoric against 'liberal elites'. However, the 2008 financial crisis and growing public deficit shifted the neo-liberal economic agenda back to a hybrid centrist position, eventually forcing the right in power to implement unpopular austerity policies. It was only subsequent to the infamous Grenoble speech in December 2010, in response to riots caused by police shooting an armed robber, that a more authoritarian, ethnocentric profile emerged.

Finally, Europe returned to the forefront of the political agenda following the rejection by the French of the ECT in the 2005 referendum and subsequent adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. However, despite increasing polarization over Europe and split from the sovereigntist right of Nicolas Dupont-Aignan and *Debout la France* (DLF), the expert survey data suggest that the conservative UMP did not significantly deviate from pro-EU positions of the Chirac years.

From an electoral demand perspective, this polarization of positions followed the Silent Counter Revolution trajectory of legitimising the FN's position which had remained strongly towards the authoritarian end of the GAL/TAN dimension. During the last days of Jean-Marie Le Pen's leadership of the party, its electoral showing had dropped. The party's split in the late 1990s had weakened its grassroots potential, and the persistence of the *cordon sanitaire* (which we explore further below) alongside the hostile institutional environment for an isolated extremist party – such ostracization had been clearly exposed in the 2002 presidential run-off – had ostensibly led to an atrophying of its electoral potential. Additionally, Sarkozy's agenda of workfare helped the moderate right reclaim petty-bourgeois, middle and working-class voters who had previously defected to the populist radical right, thus temporarily rebuilding the traditional cross-class electoral alliance of Gaullism. The basis of Bayrou's 2007 centrist liberal challenge, in contrast to its more socially conservative, religiously active roots still in evidence in 2002, lay in mobilising an electorate that in many ways appeared prototypically new left – younger, educated, well-off, secular, and socially liberal – but which fell equidistant between the left and right candidates on matters of economic liberalism and welfare (Sauger, 2007: 451).

The early 2010s saw a drop in support for the mainstream right, an electoral revitalization of the FN under Marine Le Pen, and the PS building a more competitive bloc to the left. By the end of the Sarkozy period, the right's (albeit relatively moderate) electoral decline was rooted as much in the failure of its neo-liberal economic agenda as in any Silent Revolution-driven leftist agenda – an agenda that had largely been pushed back by the *gauche plurielle*'s own tribulations in 2002. Rather, Silent-Counter Revolution issues of cultural and moral conservatism which had become salient in the late 1980s and 1990s as a result of a pushback against the more centrist and immobilist policies from *cohabitation* were given a 'second wave'. By the early 2010s, on issues of law and order, immigration, and broader identity issues, the FN was credibly placed to exploit failure of governments of both the left and right to address flashpoints of social unrest, as well as broader economic sclerosis after the 2008 crisis.

Perhaps the most revealing element to a growing divide pushing the right towards the populist radical right, away from a liberal centre, was the increasing fragility of the so-called *front républicain*. In 2011, the UMP formally adopted a 'ni-ni' approach for the local elections, supporting neither the PS nor the FN in the second round, thereby strengthening the FN by default. This indirect weakening of the cordon sanitaire was as much a product of an

ideological shift towards the FN as a purely competitive strategy against the PS (Perrineau, 2014: 85). Nonetheless, as a competitive strategy, it contributed to the legitimisation of a supposedly 'banalised' FN, which, in the most recent period of the post-Gaullist shift to the right, would encourage much greater porosity between moderate and radical right actors.

Fillon and the social-conservative moment of the Right (2013-)

Perhaps the most significant reorientation of the right bloc has occurred in the last decade, with the destabilisation of LR (successor to the UMP since 2015), and the displacement of the right pole towards the political centre. Whilst Bayrou's presidential campaigns during the previous period had evidenced the competitive viability of the centre ground under conditions of weakness among the two main blocs, the establishment of Macron's LREM with an absolute majority in the National Assembly, in part through poaching a liberal wing of LR increasingly at odds with the conservative right of the party (Evans and Ivaldi, 2017), has established a new market liberal centre pole predicated upon some of the cultural values associated with the Silent Revolution, tempered by a realist economic positioning and more restrictive policies in the areas of immigration and law-and-order.

Bayrou's own role as centrist precursor saw a growing entrenchment of a divide between conservatives in LR and Modem liberals. Bayrou's endorsement of Socialist François Hollande rather than Sarkozy in the 2012 presidential second round signalled a critical juncture ending Modem's role as a potential right-wing ally. Only the federation of the UDI, extending a hand to both Modem and the UMP, offered a short-lived bridge between the former cooperating blocs. By 2012, however, the UDI had emancipated itself further from the UMP, forming an independent group in the National Assembly, pursuing a dual strategy of co-operation with both the Modem and LR. The party reluctantly supported Fillon's candidacy in the 2017 presidential election, having previously endorsed Alain Juppé in the 2016 primary. In June 2017, the UDI's centrists were joined by *Les Constructifs* – LR moderates such as Thierry Solère and Franck Riester – who had failed to resist the radicalization of LR. Conversely, in October, liberals who had gathered in Hervé Morin's *Centristes* left the UDI to maintain the alliance with Laurent Wauquiez's LR, effectively splitting the party in two.

The recent period shows a re-orientation of the mainstream Right on both the economic and cultural dimensions of competition. Despite the rapid curtailing of Sarkozy's new right programme after the financial crisis, Hollande's commitment to supply-side measures rather than austerity provided LR with the opportunity to revive market policies as an economic orthodoxy. As the manifesto data suggest, François Fillon was placed the furthest Right in economic terms in the 2017 presidential race, as were LR voters according to survey data. Yet events during the Hollande presidency pushed the right towards harder stances on non-economic social and moral issues. Particularly important in this respect were the following: the 2015 Paris and 2016 Nice terrorist attacks, with the ensuing state of emergency; the 2015 refugee crisis; and, internally, the social movement mobilisations by *Manif' pour Tous* and *Sens Commun* against same-sex marriage, which were supported by hard right conservatives in LR, as well as former UDF centrists such as Christine Boutin and intensified the social conservative position of the right against the cultural liberalism of the Taubira Laws.

Cultural issues represented a significant divide in the 2016 right-wing presidential primary, showing a growing gap between the victorious hard conservative core of LR supporters rallied behind Fillon and the more liberal preferences of the general right-wing electorate.

Centrist Alain Juppé could have enhanced LR's electoral competitiveness against Macron. Instead, as shown by the manifesto data, LR continued its rightward shift on the cultural dimension, if anything perpetuating the hard right strategy initiated by Sarkozy in the early 2010s. Moreover, expert survey data show that this has been accompanied by a substantial move towards more Eurosceptic positions since 2014, further shrinking the electoral basis for the right and tipping the balance of pro-EU voters further towards the political centre, allowing Macron to further encroach on right-wing territory.

Whilst it may be tempting to see this as a unified reaction in line with the Silent Counter Revolution hypothesis, we must be careful to acknowledge dynamics that do not line up with this theory. First, as Figure 2 shows, all parties were already moving towards more culturally conservative positions at the beginning of the Hollande presidency. Second, from the demand side, the liberalisation affecting all electorates in the late 20th century is not reversed – even the FN sees its voters stabilise on an albeit still conservative position. The largest change in the demand side is seen in the widening of the gap between centrist liberals on the one hand, and LR's conservatives and populist radical right voters on the other, not least in terms of their position on moral issues such as same-sex adoption.

But, for LR, this growing schism with the liberal centre represents a further diminution of its social and political relevance. Whilst the loss of the more liberal LR *notables* to the centre has homogenised the conservative core of the party, in line with its membership's values, such a hardening of its reactionary post-Silent Counter Revolution positioning threatens to impose longer-term electoral penalties, as seen in the 2019 European elections. Swathes of LR voters have decamped either to LREM, or to the RN, which continues to attract lower-middle and working class voters of the *couches populaires* (working and lower middle class voters). Figures 4 and 5 separate out the conservativeelectorate by age and religious practice. Contrasting the youngest (18-24) and oldest (over 65) subpopulations of the conservative electorate over time, its younger supporters have always been more culturally liberal; but the gap in 2017 has widened – even among those younger voters who supported Fillon in spite of the financial scandals whirling around him.

[Figures 4 & 5 about here]

There is greater consonance between younger voters and the centre on modern cultural tolerance – an issue which, on the conservative right, LR would claim as its own. A similar situation pertains to religiosity and conservative support. Those who practise regularly – almost exclusively Catholics – are much less tolerant and more culturally conservative. Clearly, this disparity has existed for some time – from 1988 at least. However, this disparity is one where the centrist offer of Macron and LREM, rather than the Silent Counter Revolution alternative of the FN, is more fully in line with non-Catholic support. In short, the Silent Counter Revolution logic towards which LR has recently moved indulges older, traditionalist supporters, rather than targeting a broader electoral pool in the way that LREM has.

Conclusion

Since the mid-1980s, the core values of the post-materialist revolution have been essentially absorbed by the left in France, through a relatively stable political bloc including the

Socialists and the Greens. Meanwhile the counter-revolution backlash together with processes of internationalisation such as European integration and economic globalization have fuelled support for the populist radical right, in particular amongst working and lower-middle class voters.

As this chapter suggests, right-wing parties in France have pursued weak accommodative strategies vis-à-vis their radical right challenger and maintained a clear demarcation, which was facilitated by the institutional context of the Fifth Republic. Electorally, the pressure by the populist radical right has taken Gaullist conservatives further to the right on the cultural dimension of competition. Over time, this shift has been most discernible in the area of immigration and, more recently, European integration, primarily reflecting vote-seeking motivations and the attempt to win back voters defecting to the FN. In contrast, policy-seeking orientations have dominated the socio-economic agenda of the right, depending on the electoral incentives produced by shifts in public opinion, as exemplified by Chirac's social fracture agenda in the mid-1990s or Sarkozy's productivist policies in the mid-2000s. Similarly, policy-seeking goals were well in evidence in the reactionary turn by Fillon in the 2017 elections, aligning his presidential bid with the preferences of core conservative voters.

Electoral outbidding of the FN on cultural issues by the mainstream right has opened a political space at the centre of French politics, which is now occupied by Emmanuel Macron's centrist liberal and pro-European LREM. The adoption by the conservative right in France of silent counter revolution values has located it closer than ever to a progressively 'de-demonizing' RN, and threatens to see the once dominant party reduced to a reactionary minor party on the flank of the upstart LREM. The positioning of LREM, particularly as a new movement devoid of ideological baggage, remains fluid and will largely be determined by its tactics in the next presidential race in 2022. But it certainly has the potential to displace the Gaullist movement as France's most obvious party of government.

Macron's success in 2017 confirmed the viability of social liberal, centrist electoral support, at least under certain political conditions – namely, sufficient fragmentation of presidential candidate supply; ideological polarisation of the governing parties and, connected to this, the strength of radical challengers. Without both the post-materialist value change among previously bourgeois, centre-right voters, many of whom are now closer to centre-left liberals on the social dimension, and the subsequent counter-revolutionary backlash, pulling older cohorts of voters to a reactionary social conservative position, the traditional left-right balance in the bipolar system might well have continued. Whether Macron continues to occupy a more traditional rightist space, as current policy proposals suggest, or once again attempts to build a bridge to more leftist Silent Revolution-based values will potentially influence whether the mainstream right can once more find competitive space in French politics.

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Tables and figures

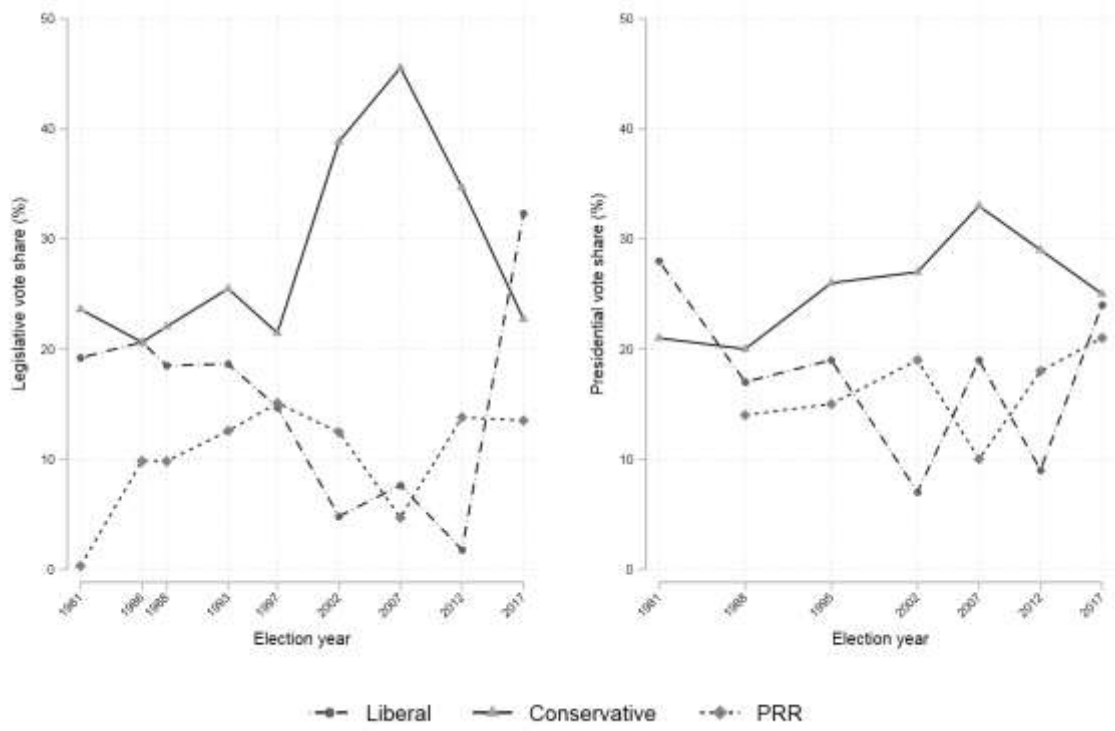
Table 1. Four Main Phases of the Mainstream Right in France since 1981

	The Mitterrand years (1981-1991)	**The Chirac Era and the 'social fracture' (1992-2002)**	**The Sarkozy Period and 'the France that gets up early' (2003-2012)**	**Fillon and the social-conservative moment of the Right (2013-)**
Critical juncture	Victory of the Left (1981) FN electoral breakthrough (1984)	Maastricht referendum (1992)	Le Pen-Chirac runoff (2002) ECT referendum (2005) Financial crisis (2008)	Victory of the Left (2012) EU migration crisis (2015)
Leadership	Chirac	Chirac	Sarkozy	Copé, Wauquiez
Policies				
Economic	Liberal free market 'moment'	Moderation of free market neoliberalism	Productivism, workfare and the 'hardworking' people Post-2008 crisis economic orthodoxy and austerity	Economic orthodoxy and market liberal policies
Cultural	Co-optation of FN cultural issues (immigration, law-and-order) Cultural conservatism continued from previous period	Stability of right-wing cultural agenda and policies	Persistence of right-wing cultural agenda Co-optation of FN ethno-cultural agenda (Grenoble speech, 2010)	LR shift towards social conservatism and reactionary right Cultural liberalism of Centre
Europe	Gaullist move towards pro-EU positions	Gaullist support to Maastricht	UMP support to ECT and Lisbon Treaty	Soft-Euroscepticism
Voter demographics	Partisan Gaullism Class / religious basis to RPR/UDF support - private sector, managers, petty bourgeoisie plus farming community; Catholic	Beginning of decline of bourgeois centre (post-Balladur 1995, Bayrou (2002) Alignment of farmers' vote destabilises	Sarkozy / UMP – mobilisation of *couches populaires* (2007) Ageing, Catholic Right-wing electorate Educated, young centre (2007)	Loss of *couches populaires* and farmers to Le Pen. Consolidation of (petty) bourgeois, ageing, Catholic + entrepreneurs by UMP Educated, urban young centrists to Bayrou
Voter attitudes	Shift to neo-liberal economic positions from Authoritarian- social / moral positions.	Middling economic positions Social and moral liberalisation among moderate right-wing voters Anti-immigrant stability	Attitudinal split between Centre and Right – social moral liberalisation of former, stability of Gaullists Return to economic neo-liberalism predating financial crisis	LR moral conservatism but 'liberalised' on security. Centre liberalism – social and economic

(cont...)	**1981-1991**	**1992-2002**	**2003-2012**	**2013-**
Mainstream competition	Tactical co-operation in legislative elections Gaullist leadership UDF back to party sub-system of the Right	Formal co-operation within UPF Electoral decline of UDF 2002 Fragmentation of the mainstream right Splinter right-wing Eurosceptic sovereignist parties (MPF, RPF)	UMP merger of Gaullist and Liberals UDF emancipation from the right. Splinter Eurosceptic sovereignist party (DLF)	Bayrou's endorsement of Socialist candidate (2012) UDI move away from LR since 2017 Bayrou's endorsement of Macron (2017) Accommodation of Sens Commun by LR
Party Organization	RPR/UDF organizational differentiation since the mid-1970s	UPF umbrella organization Separation of DL Liberals from the UDF (1998)	UMP organizational merger Independent UDF	Split of UDI from UMP (2012) Split of Constructifs from LR Diaspora of moderate right-wing leaders (e.g. Juppé and Pécresse)
Populist Radical Right	Accommodation Tactical co-operation with the FN at local level	Republican front and cordon sanitaire Chirac's moral condemnation of the FN in 1990	Cordon sanitaire Localized and episodic Republican Front	Cordon sanitaire Neither, nor strategy vis-à-vis FN and Left Change in FN leadership and 'de-demonization'
Average support in national elections (P & L)	Conservatives (Gaullists)=19,5 Liberals (Centrists)=20.6 Populist Radical Right (FN)=8.6	Conservatives (Gaullists)=22,1 Liberals (Centrists)=11.2 Populist Radical Right (FN)=14.9	Conservatives (Gaullists)=32,9 Liberals (Centrists)=9.3 Populist Radical Right (FN)=11.7	Conservatives (Gaullists)=19,4 Liberals (Centrists)=28.2 (Macron) Populist Radical Right (FN)=17.4
Average turnout in national elections	P=81.3 L=71.4	P=75.0 L=67.1	P=81.6 L=58.8	P=77.8 L=48.7
Average ENP (P & L)	4.8	6.8	4.8	6.1
Election years	1981P, 1981P, 1986L, 1988P, 1988L	1993L, 1995P, 1997L, 2002P, 2002L	2007P; 2007L, 2012P, 2012L	2017P, 2017L

Note: ENP = Effective Number of Parties; P=Presidential; L=Legislative elections

Figure 1. Electoral results in legislative and presidential elections of right-wing parties in France since 1981

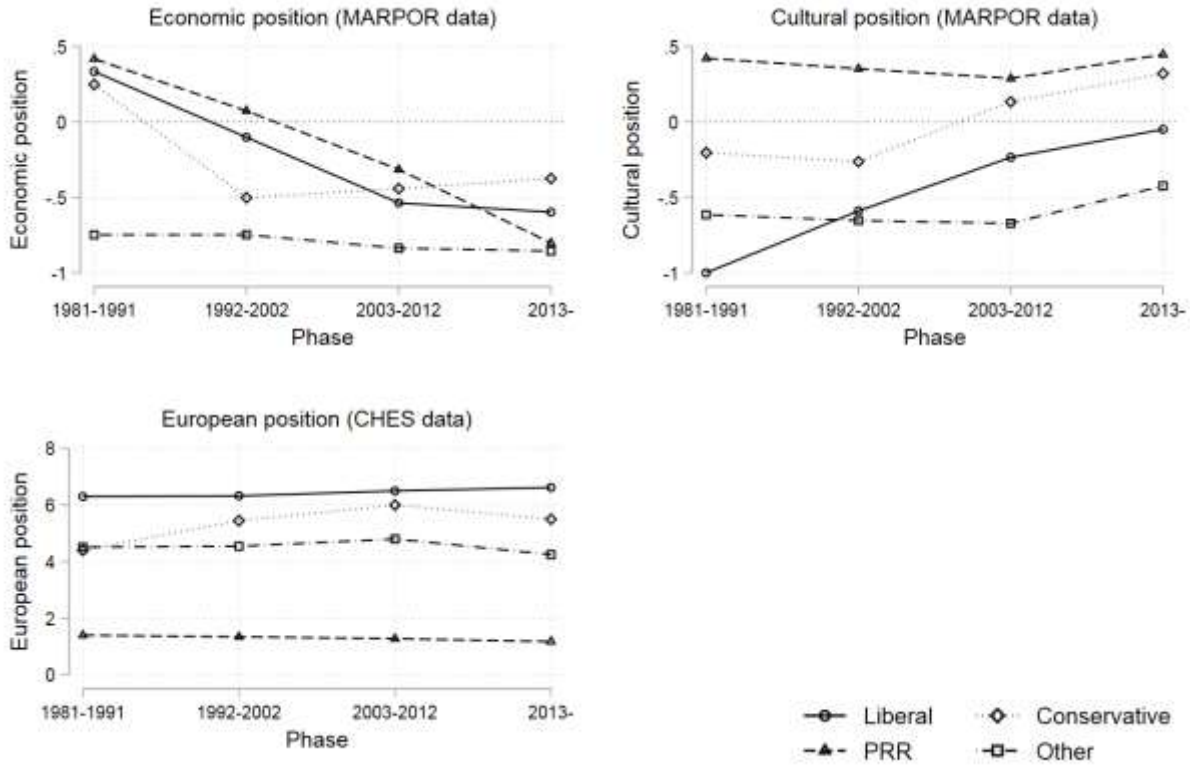


Notes:

Liberal – UDF, Modem, LREM; Conservative – RPR, DL, UMP, NC, LR, UDI, other Right; Populist Radical Right (PRR) – FN, MNR and Extreme Right. In the 1986 legislative elections, Liberals and Conservatives ran unitary lists winning a total 42% of the vote. To avoid disrupting the trend in Figure 1, we divide those votes in two across both party families.

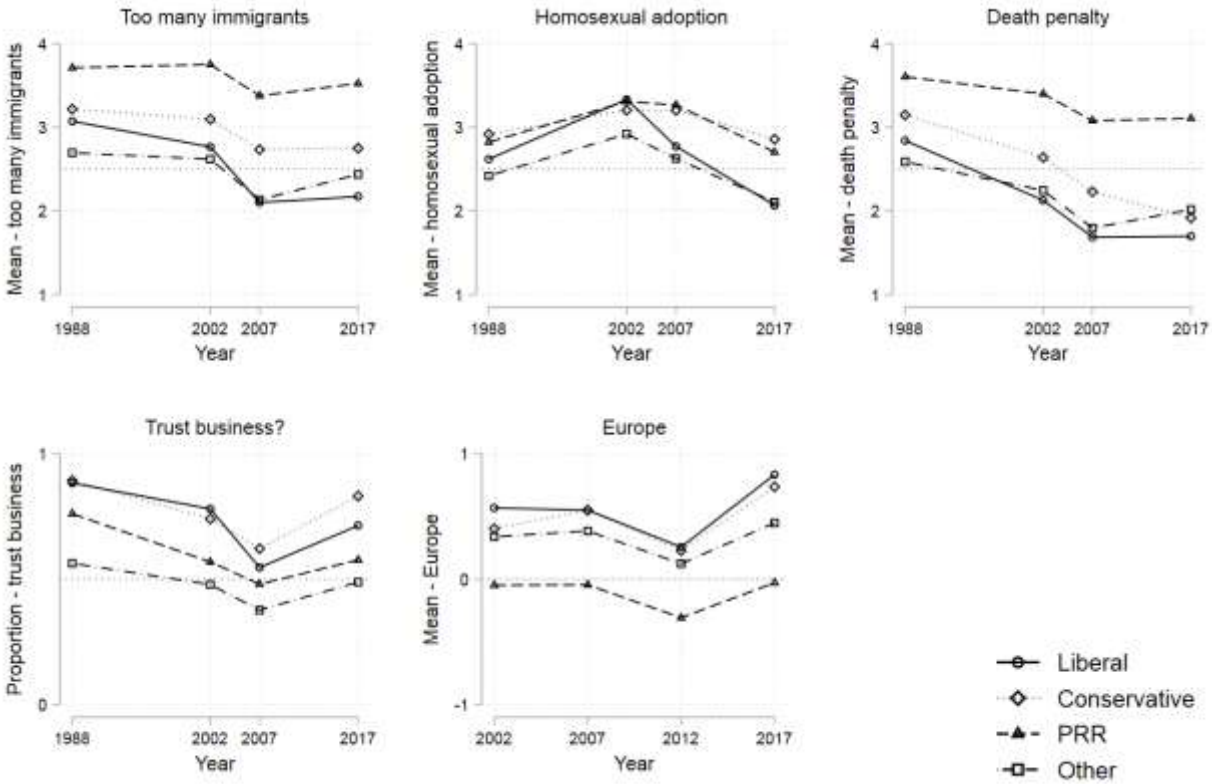
Source: Ministry of Interior figures

Figure 2. Policy positions of French parties



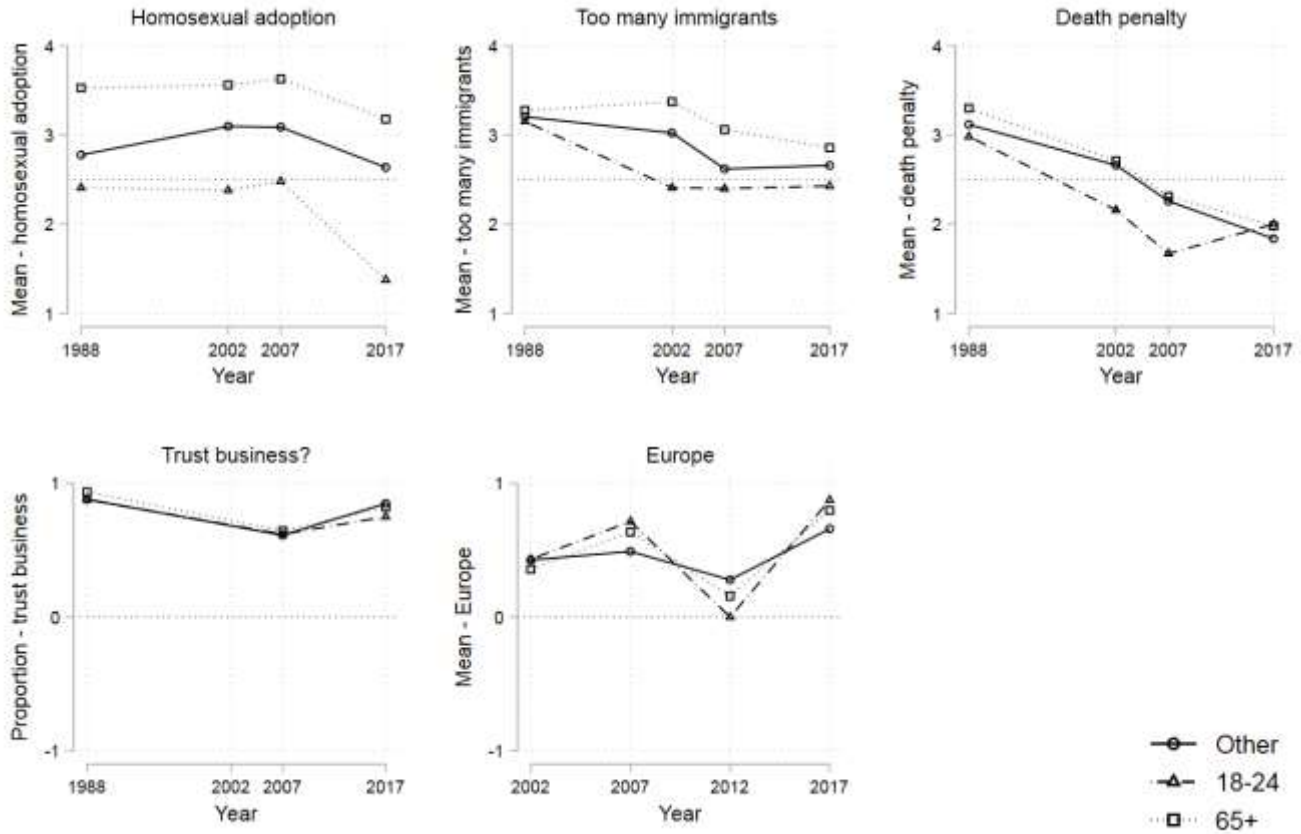
Source: Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR) (Volkens et al. 2018). To estimate parties' positions on the economic left-right dimension, we use Lowe et al. (2011). Party positions on the cultural dimension are calculated using Wagner and Meyer (2017). Data on party positions on European integration come from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (see Polk et al. 2017). Parties coded as in Figure 1, with the exception of Eurosceptic parties of the Right (RPF, MPF and DLF which were excluded from calculations).

Figure 3. Mass attitudinal positions of French electorate



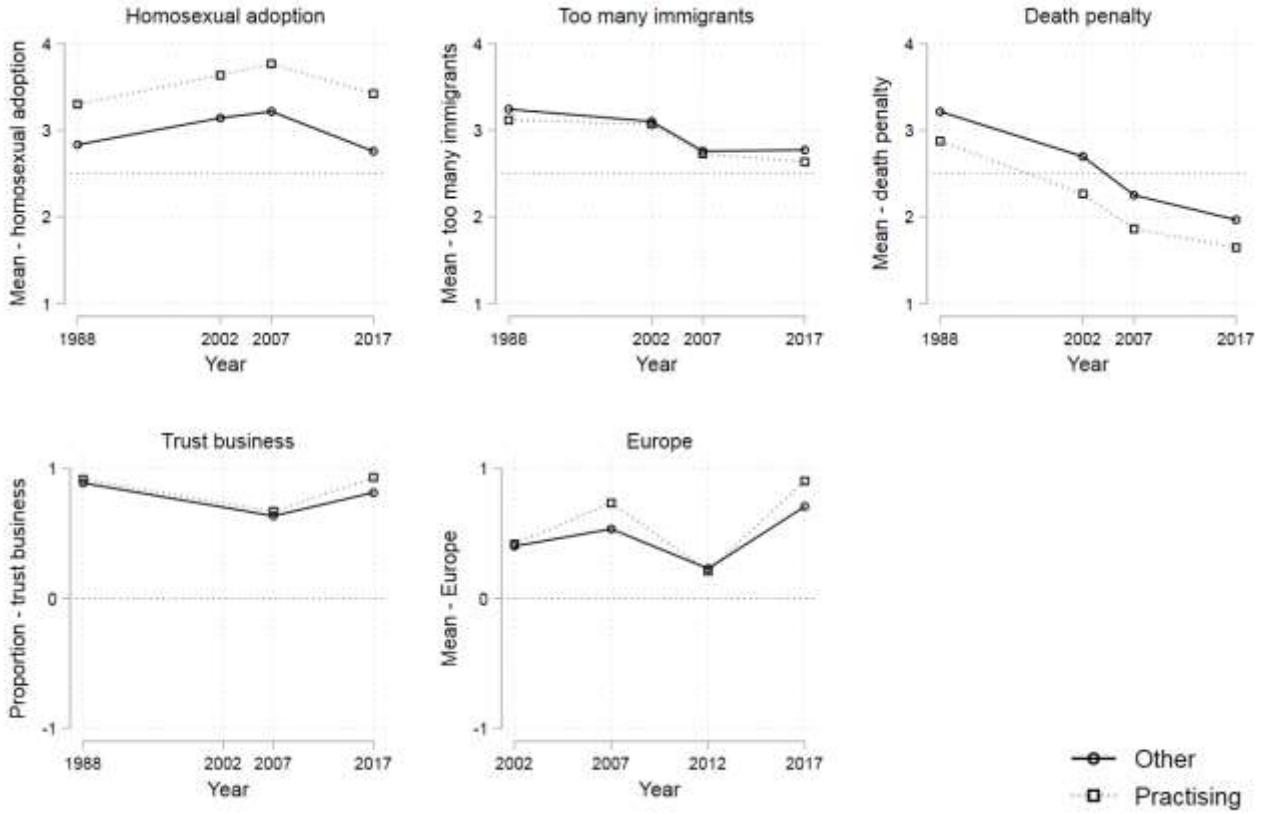
Source: CEVIPOF election surveys (as year); 4-point Likert scales (scaled high = Right-wing position); 'trust business or state intervention in times of economic crisis?'; positive /ambivalent / negative view of Europe. 1988 – question on homosexuality, all other years on homosexual adoption. Vote: **Liberal Right** – Raymond Barre; François Bayrou; Emmanuel Macron. **Conservative Right** – Jacques Chirac; Nicolas Sarkozy; François Fillon. **Populist Radical Right** – Jean-Marie Le Pen; Marine Le Pen. **Other** – all other presidential candidates.

Figure 4. Age differentiation on mass attitudes of the conservative electorate



Source: CEVIPOF election surveys (as year); 4-point Likert scales (scaled high = Right-wing position); 'trust business or state intervention in times of economic crisis?'; positive /ambivalent / negative view of Europe. 1988 – question on homosexuality, all other years on homosexual adoption. Vote: Conservative – Jacques Chirac; Nicolas Sarkozy; François Fillon.

Figure 5. Religious practice differentiation on mass attitudes of the conservative electorate



Source: CEVIPOF election surveys (as year); 4-point Likert scales (scaled high = Right-wing position); 'trust business or state intervention in times of economic crisis?'; positive /ambivalent / negative view of Europe. 1988 – question on homosexuality, all other years on homosexual adoption.

Vote: Conservative – Jacques Chirac; Nicolas Sarkozy; François Fillon.

Practising – attends a place of worship at least once a week.