

The “new” ideology of the Front National (FN) under Marine Le Pen: A slight change with a big impact

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Abstract

Over the past years, the FN, under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, has experienced a political revival. In elections, membership numbers and in public opinion polls the party could make impressive gains. In this article, I argue that these gains stem, at least, in part from a strategical repositioning of the party. Through an analysis of party documents and the secondary literature, I first highlight that Marine Le Pen has changed the FN on three fronts: (1) she has given the party a presentable outlook, (2) she has rendered the party more populist and (3) she has succeeded in better packaging the party’s leitmotif immigration. Second, I illustrate through an analysis of the number of “Likes” various types of articles, which the FN has posted on Facebook, have received that this new image resonates well with FN sympathizers.

Key words: Front National (FN), ideology, Marine Le Pen, Jean-Marie Le Pen

Introduction

Since Marine Le Pen took over the presidency of the Front National (FN) from her father Jean Marie Le Pen in January 2011, this radical right-wing party has been successful on three fronts: membership, electoral success and public opinion. In terms of membership, the FN has gained 60,000 new dues paying members in the less than three years (e.g. the party's membership increased from 22,000 members in January 2011, to 83,000 members in December 2014 (Le Figaro 2014). On the ballot box, the party has reached new heights. Winning nearly 18 percent of the popular vote in the 2012 presidential election, Marine Le Pen recorded the party's best result in the 40 year history of the party. In the 2014 and 2015 European- and departmental elections, the party could further consolidate this result, winning 24.9% and 25.2% of the popular vote, respectively. In terms of public approval ratings Marine Le Pen could modify the opinion of a significant portion of the French population towards the FN. For example, opinion polls show that the percentage of individuals, who consider the FN a "danger", has decreased by nearly 20 percentage points from 70 to 50 percent between 2002 and 2012 and that a majority of the French population now considers the FN as a party like others (TNS-Sofres, 2012a; 2012b).

How has this unprecedented success been possible? Recent studies have explained the resurgence of the FN by structural conditions such as immigration (e.g. Della Posta 2013), or the economic crisis (Hewlett 2012) or changes in the electorate (Mayer 2013). In this study, I focus on the party's ideology. Using a supply and demand framework, I argue that subtle changes in the party's ideology (e.g. rhetorically, the use of an acceptable language, the renewed focus on populism, and a better thematic packaging of the party's leitmotif immigration) have helped the FN to attract renewed support and to consolidate the backing of old sympathizers. I build my argument in a two-step process. First, using the secondary literature, party documents and electoral platforms, I highlight the (subtle) changes in the party's ideology from Le Pen father to Le Pen daughter. Second, analyzing 500 Facebook posts on the official FN France Facebook page and the "Likes" any of these postings or press-releases receives, I illustrate that the FN's ideological repackaging resonates well with the party's members and supporters.

This article proceeds as follows: in the next section, I shortly explain the theoretical and methodological framework adopted for this research. In the third part of this article, I analyze the FN ideology under Jean Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen and bring the subtle ideological changes the party has adopted under Marine Le Pen to the fore. Forth, analyzing FN Facebook

postings and readers reactions, I illustrate that “this renewed FN ideology” resonates well among the party’s supporters. Finally, I conclude and provide some avenues for further research.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The success of a social group or party relies heavily on its capacity to respond to activists’ demands for action. To explain this relationship, the social psychological literature on social movement- and party activism (e.g. Klandermans 1984, 1997 and 2004) has introduced the supply and demand metaphor. This metaphor compares party elites to entrepreneurs and activists to consumers in the free market economy. In the original metaphor, demand refers to the potential buyers of a product, whereas supply stands for the entrepreneurs’ capacity to meet these demands. For a company to be successful, it must either match the demand for a certain product or create some request for that specific product. Applied to party activism, this implies that “a demand for populist radical right politics does not necessarily result in its emergence and success at the party system level” (Mudde 2007: 202). Rather, the political standing and success of these parties hinges upon the capabilities and choices of these groups and their leaders (Kitchelt 1995). In other words, a right-wing party is the more successful the more it can convince members and recruits that activism is worthwhile and necessary. Most importantly, parties like the FN must use convincing ideological frames and conditions; both old members and new recruits must be convinced by the party’s values and beliefs and must see the necessity of engagement (van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2007).

In this article, I show that some changes on the supply side of activism (e.g. some reshaping of the party’s message) rendered the new FN under Marine Le Pen more attractive to sympathizers, members and potential recruits than the “old” FN under Jean Marie Le Pen. To do so, I engage in a two-step process. Using the secondary literature and party documents, I first juxtapose the party’s program under Jean Marie Le Pen with current FN programs aiming to underline the changes on the supply side offered by the new FN leadership. Second, I use the social media outlet Facebook to analyse whether representatives of the new FN image, which is rhetorically more correct, more populist and which tries to address the problems of everyday citizens, get more online support than Facebook posts of the old elite (e.g. Jean Marie Le Pen and Bruno Gollnisch).

In more detail, I analyse followers’ reactions to different types of press releases written by various types of individuals within the FN. To do so, I first quantitatively analyze 500 press

releases posted by the FN France between March 18 and November 6, 2014. In more detail, I evaluate how many “Likes” postings by the new generation of FN leaders (e.g. Marine Le Pen and Nicolas Bay), as compared to the old generation of FN leaders (e.g. Jean Marie Le Pen and Bruno Gollnisch), receive. Second, hypothesizing that articles that push forward the new FN image, which, among others, is rhetorically more republican and more populist, I qualitatively analyze the content of these articles (i.e. FN articles and posting that receive a lot of “Likes” and articles that do not receive a lot of “Likes”) with regards to topics, style and rhetoric.

I think Facebook postings and readers’ reactions are particularly well-suited to analyse the intersection between supply and demand in explaining support for a radical right-wing group such as the FN. For one, social media is one of the most, if not the most, important platform for parties like the FN to diffuse their message (Elinas 2014). With the help of Twitter, Facebook or Youtube, parties like the FN can reach thousands, if not ten thousands of activists amplify their message, recruit followers and organize their activities. In the words of Bartlett, Budwell and Littler (2011) there is a shift in how political support in favour of parties’ like the FN is expressed: formal party membership numbers are often dwarfed by thousands of online supporters on Facebook and other social media websites. In addition, especially proponents of a non-mainstream ideology can find online what they are looking for; a non-mainstream and alternative interpretation of society and the world around them. Therefore, I maintain for the purpose of this study that sympathizers’ reactions to these Facebook postings can provide a rather accurate picture of FN supporters’ preferences and their demands for action (for a similar claim see Ceron, Curini and Iacus 2014).

The old FN under Jean Marie Le Pen and the new FN under Marine Le Pen

At first glance there is little difference in the ideology of the old FN under Jean Marie and the new FN under Marine Le Pen. For over 40 years, the FN has pushed a simplistic frame that pushes anti-immigrant, anti-established and nationalist sentiments. As such the FN portrays the French society as tainted by foreign influences and governed by corrupt elites, who embrace lax government policies in the area of public security (Crépon 2012). The FN embeds these vices in an ethno-centric worldview; a worldview that puts forward the argument that the nation should be primarily reserved for a certain type of people; individuals, who share the same ethnicity, history, religion and identity (Hainsworth, 2008: 12). In practice, this ethnocentric worldview translates into a political discourse, which advances anti-foreigner and anti-immigrant positions,

which are often linked to unemployment, public insecurity and welfare chauvinism, (i.e. social programmes should work to the exclusive benefit of a nation's 'own' people (cf. Eatwell, 2000: 413). However, aside from these constants in the FN program, there are three changes, which the FN implemented after Marine Le Pen took over the presidency in January 2011. These modifications in the party's message are: (1) a rhetorical re-positioning as a mainstream party, which uses acceptable language instead of the sometimes racist and anti-Semite comments of the old elites, notably Jean Marie Le Pen. (2) Thematically, the better repackaging of the party's leitmotif immigration and (3) a stronger populist appeal. While, these changes should be interpreted as a rhetorical and thematic rebalancing of the party's vision, rather than an ideological reorientation, I argue that these slight changes have been sufficient to increase the demand for activism and support in favor of the FN's platform. On the pages to come, I will introduce the FN's ideological repositioning under Marine Le Pen.

Rhetoric

Throughout his tenure as the party leader (1972 to 2011), Jean Marie Le Pen walked a fine line between a republican discourse and racist or anti-Semite statements. Most notably, in multiple interviews and speeches, Jean Marie Le Pen has considered the gas chambers that the Nazis' used in the 1940s to systematically kill Jews and other ethnicities as a mere detail in the history of the Second World War (DeClair, 1999: 89; Kling, 2012: 68;). The FN leader has further used anti-Semite remarks to qualify or insult politicians of different camps. Most notably, in 1989, he referred to the then serving Minister of Public Service, Michel Durafour as "Monsieur Durafour Crématoire" directly alluding to the gas ovens that the Nazi's used in Auschwitz and other concentration camps. Jean Marie's provocations have not only targeted Jews both also other ethnicities. For example, as recently as in 2013, Le Pen labelled gypsies "a people that fly like a bird and steal" (The Independence 2013).

Throughout the party's history, Le Pen's provocations have shed a negative light on the party. With the exception of the presidential elections in 2002, they prevented the party from gaining more than 15 percent of the vote and 20,000 party members over a quarter of a century (1985 to 2010).¹ Largely because of Le Pen's racist comments, the party has lacked legitimacy;

¹ In the 2002 presidential election, Jean Marie Le Pen, advancing to the 2nd round, gained 16.9 percent of the popular vote. However, this slightly higher electoral performance than usual (e.g. Le Pen gained 15 percent of the vote in the presidential elections in 1995 and 14.4 percent in 1988) could not necessarily attributed to a higher demand for the ideas of the FN. Rather the 2002 contest was characterized by the lowest turnout rate in presidential elections since

this lack of legitimacy displayed itself in opinion polls, where normally more than 70 percent of the surveyed considered the FN a danger to democracy. Moreover, FN members were not integrated in the French society. The FN had an outsider role, which manifested itself most clearly in the public and private stigmatization of FN members (Klandermans, 2013; Von Mering and McCarty, 2013). Privately admitting that you are a member of the FN often meant for individuals that they lost friends and acquaintances. Professionally, FN members were often disadvantaged in pay and promotion (Stockemer 2014: 52). Referring to this stigmatization, Bizeul, in 2003, labelled the FN a “community of victims” (19) – outcasts who find refuge within the party.

Aware, that the FN can only achieve legitimacy and respect in the eyes of voters, sympathizers and members, if it behaves as a party like others, a new generation of FN leaders (e.g. Marine Le Pen, Louis Aliot, and Samuel Maréchal) have tried to gradually refine the FN’s discourse in a manner, which popularized its political ideas over the past decade. They have started this endeavor in the mid-2000, at a time when the FN was losing popular support and members.² Through what they have labeled ‘*dédiabolisation*’, this new generation of FN leaders have tried to strip the party of its radical elements, and have focused on an acceptable rhetoric (Dézé, 2012: 139). With Marine Le Pen’s election to the presidency in January 2011, this rhetorically more moderate faction within the FN has become dominant. Beating her internal rival Bruno Gollnisch in the internal election to the FN presidency, who alongside Jean Marie Le Pen has incorporated the old image of the FN, Marine Le Pen’s election stands for a rhetorical renewal of the party (Kling 2012: 119).

This rhetorical renewal has three components. First, Marine Le Pen self-labels the FN as a republican party. In contrast to her father, who never questioned the term radical right or nationalist right, Marine Le Pen presents the FN as republican alternative to the two mainstream parties, *l’UMP* and *le PS*. In interviews and press releases, she repeatedly affirms that the party is “neither right nor left”, but “rather has radically different ideas from the *PS* and the *UMP*” (La Libération 2013). To further strengthen her and the party’s republican credentials, Marine Le Pen has removed any reference in her speeches to figures of the French radical right such as Charles

1974 and some widespread dissatisfaction with French president Jacques Chirac and his “main” challenger Lionel Jospin (Le Geoff 2011)

² For example, the FN gained a meager 10.7 percent in the 2007 presidential elections, and in the parliamentary election the FN’s vote share dropped to less than 5 percent (Lecoœur and Poulterniez 2013)

Maurras, Robert Brasilach or Alexis Carrel, who have been cited frequently by Jean Marie Le Pen. Rather than rhetorically associating herself with this radical right-wing tradition, she deliberately refers to republican figures such as Emily Zola, Jean Jaures or Hannah Arendt in her speeches (Almeida 2013). To give further credence to this new republican outlook, Marine Le Pen has also repeatedly threatened to sue anybody, who labels the FN an extremist party.

Second, Marine Le Pen has adopted pro-active measures to insure that everybody in the party, including her father, Jean Marie Le Pen adheres to a republican discourse. For example, Marine Le Pen has repeatedly threatened to expel anybody, who makes outright racist, anti-Zionist, or revisionist comments in public. She also violently opposes her father, when the latter uses his provocative anti-Semite rhetoric. For example, in 2014, Marine Le Pen labelled her father's comments about some Jewish artists, who the former FN leader referred to as "batch", regrettable. Reminding her father that he is no longer in charge of the party, she also made it clear that his comments regrettable and not line with the official FN positions (L'Express 2014)

Third, the FN has put the two republican concepts sovereignty and laïcité at the center of its program. In more detail, the party instrumentalizes these two terms to push its own ethno-centric positions. For example, blaming supranational bodies such as the EU and international agreements such as the Lisbon Treaty, Schengen and GATT for the economic and social crisis France has been suffering throughout the 2010s, the FN juxtaposes these vices with national sovereignty, which is presented as a remedy to France's social and economic decay (Le Monde 2014). Similarly, the FN uses the terms secularism or laïcité to attack Islam. For example, to push her anti-Islam agenda, Marine Le Pen embeds racist comments such as the use of "occupation" to describe Muslim's praying on the streets within a republican discourse (see Shields, 2013: 193).

Repackaging of immigration as the party's leitmotif

Since the 1970s, (anti)- immigration has been the leitmotif of the FN rhetoric, ideology and campaigns. Traditional slogans such as "A million unemployed is a million immigrants too many! France and the French First", "Defend our colors" or "We are in France" have been used over and over again in speeches, press releases and campaigns (e.g. Bariller and Timmermans 1993: 257). However, while the single most important issue of the party immigration has remained the same under Marine Le Pen, the presentation and packing of the FN's anti-immigration discourse has changed. During most of Jean Marie Le Pen's presidency, anti-

immigration or xenophobia was the central theme of the FN program; all other policy areas were seen through an anti-immigration lens. For example, the first sentence in Jean Marie Le Pen's presidential program in 2007 consists of a blatant attack on immigration: "the costs of immigration are 60 billion Euros yearly, 70 percent of France's prison population is comprised of individuals of foreign origins, when counting legal and illegal immigrants, 95 percent of foreigners enter France without a work contract, and 50 percent of the beneficiaries of social welfare are foreigners" (Front National 2007: 2). In the same document, the party first informs the French citizens of "the facts about immigration". And then only in a second step, the FN links immigration to other policy areas including public insecurity (e.g. "the overrepresentation of immigrants in crime and criminality is a fact"), national identity (e.g. "for France to remain France, the French people must remain masters of their own home"), social security ("immigrants (illegal and legal) are taking advantage of the social welfare system and other advantages that they 'can't find in their home countries") and the labor market ("massive and uncontrolled immigration takes more than 1 million jobs away from the French and severely punishes our economy by imposing costs of over 300 billion francs").

In Marine Le Pen's 2012 presidential program, immigration is not at the center of the program. Rather the major preoccupations of large parts of the French public such as salaries, purchasing power, as well as social and public security are emphasized in Marine Le Pen's platform. Discussed in the middle of program, the topic of immigration is sandwiched, between the party's economic platform, which is the FN's focal point, and social and cultural affairs. While the measures the FN proposes (e.g. the adaption of the national preference in public sector employment, the elimination of all pensions for foreigners, who have not worked in France for at least 10 years, and the introduction of harsher punishment of hate crimes committed against white people) are not different from the party platform under Jean Marie Le Pen, the FN anti-immigration platform is no longer presented as an end in itself, but rather as part of a holistic solution; a solution that not only stresses republican values such as national sovereignty, but also concrete measures, which include a raise of incomes and pensions, stimulus measures to boost the economy and the protection of the pension system.

Populism

While throughout its history, the FN has always played with a populist message (e.g. as early as in the presidential election in 1984 Jean Marie Le Pen used the slogan "Le Pen, Le Peuple" (Le

Pen, The People)) (DeClair, 1999: 81), populism has not been strongly pronounced in Jean Marie Le Pen's speeches and party platforms, in particular at the end of Jean Marie Le Pen reign as president. For example, Jean Marie Le Pen's 2007 electoral platform contains 69 pages, is written in a scientific way and full of data and statistics (e.g. every policy measure, which the FN proposes is accompanied by a precise statistic of the costs and/ or benefits of the respective measure). The program has a very neutral tone and there are no direct references to Jean Marie Le Pen. The program starts very neutral. It is entitled: Presidential Election 2007: Program. The main target of populism, the lower and middle classes are not mentioned in one single sentence; there are no proposals of populist measures either. In addition, the program has very little of an anti-elite character. There are no references to the "UMPS" or the fraudulent French elites. The word corruption is not used one single time. In fact, the document only has somewhat of an anti-elitist touch, when it criticises the international elites (e.g. the European Union, multi-national corporations or transnational banks), which according to the FN harm France's economy, culture and identity.

In contrast, the FN under Marine Le Pen is as populist as it can be (see Krastev 2007: 57 and Liang 2007: 3-6 for a description of populism). Much more so than her father, Marine Le Pen portrays herself as a charismatic leader, a king of the people who can rebuild France. In this respect, the 2012 presidential program is not presented as a party program, but rather as Marine's personal project. From the cover page, which shows a close up picture of Marine Le Pen, to the last line in the document, Marine Le Pen is present and dominant in the document. This personification starts with the title of the program which reads "My Project, for France and for the French people" and "Marine Le Pen, the voice of the people, the spirit of France." Throughout the program, it is also Marine Le Pen and not the party that counts (e.g. the program contains 10 references to Marine Le Pen and no reference to the FN as a party). On several occasions within the program, Marine Le Pen also juxtaposes herself directly to the mainstream parties and their policies. For example on page 3, the party platform reads "There are only two choices to make France competitive again: either to reduce wages and to dismantle the social protection system; this is the choice of the UMPs, or to act on our money and to refuse the drastic austerity plans: this is the choice of Marine Le Pen."

As a second feature, Marine Le Pen's program has a strongly anti-elitist character. Marine Le Pen presents herself as the representative of the honest and hard-working people who

not only face disloyal foreign competition, but who are also governed by corrupt political and social elites. For instance, in her 2012 presidential program, the FN leader not only promises to stop the sumptuous expenses and excessive reimbursements of the party elites, she also identifies the lavish lifestyle of France's political elites as a major cause for France's debt crisis. She wants to break with corruption, elitism and France's dependence from international organisations. The document also portrays a vision of decline and decay. Rhetorically, she uses the words "rupture" or "break up" to display her complete opposition with the system and the actors that represent it. Similarly, the FN leader deliberately uses war language (e.g. "small neighborhood markets must be defended against multi-national corporations" or "social abuse will be combatted").

As a third and final feature of populism, Marine's program directly addresses the masses. The program is written in the language of working class and lower middle-class people. It is short, clear and simple. It merely contains 16 pages, repeatedly addresses the common sense of the electorate and focuses on the major preoccupations of the popular classes (e.g. salaries, purchasing power, as well as social and public security are at the center of the program). In addition the program contains popular measures including a raise in modest salaries, the protection of France's economy against foreign influences and the reward of honest work. In sum, the FN and Marine Le Pen present themselves as outsiders to the political system; as an alternative political force that proposes a form of nationalistic popular democracy.

A match of demand and supply: the popular success of these thematic changes

To determine the degree to which the new image of the FN resonates better than the old image among members, supporters and sympathizers, I have analysed all 'communiqué' articles published by the Front National (FN) from March 18 to November 6, 2014 on Facebook (i.e. the total number of articles I analyzed is 500). In more detail, I have gathered information on the number of individuals, who expressed approval of any FN press release by clicking the 'Like' button on Facebook. These articles have diverse authorship (i.e. 90 percent of these articles have an author, whereas less than 10 percent are written under the banner of the FN or the *Rassemblement Bleu Marine*); some of them are written by representatives of the FN's new image such as Marine Le Pen or Nicolas Bay, while others are written by the old elites such Jean-Marie Le Pen or Bruno Gollnisch. The average number of likes from the selected articles is 1 579 (i.e. the most "Likes" an article receives is 16,882, whereas the lowest number is zero). I

also maintain that the number of “Likes” an article receives is a rather concrete indication of the actual appreciation of these articles by the readership, rather than an indication of the amount of traffic on the FN Facebook page. For example, articles published on the same day can have a wide range of “Likes” (e.g. three articles published on August 4th, 2014 have 44, 1,400, and 11,925 likes, respectively). Hence the readers are actively looking at the articles but are only liking the ones that resonate well with them.

Analyzing the popular support of these articles, I can see two tendencies. First, articles written by the new elites (e.g. Marine Le Pen, Nicolas Bay and Florian Philippot) receive more Likes than articles written by the old elites (e.g. Jean Marie Pen, Bruno Gollnisch, Wallerand de Saint Just). Second, and more thematically, the most successful articles are written in a populist tone, link immigration to other topics such as the economy, and present their arguments within a republican framework. With regards to the first point, authorship, table 1 highlights the popularity of articles written by the “new” and “old” elites. It becomes clear that the new elites, the FN leader Jean Marie Le Pen, the vice president responsible for the party’s communication Florian Philippot and the general secretary’s Nicolas Bay’s posts receive at least three times as many “Likes” as the old elites’ postings (i.e. the articles by honorary president Jean Marie Le Pen, treasurer Wallerand de Saint Just and long-time vice president Bruno Gollnisch). Except for two articles, written under the banner of FN/ Rassemblement Bleu Marine, all of the 10 most liked articles out of my sample of 500 (see table 2) are also written by this new generation of party elites. This new generation stands for a younger and more dynamic FN; a party that wants to popularize and renew its image.

Table 1: The number of Likes of articles written the old and new FN elites

Old Elites	Average number of Number of “Likes” per article	New Elites	Average number of Number of “Likes” per article
Jean Marie Le Pen	950	Marine Le Pen	5385
Bruno Gollnisch	581	Nicolas Bay	1959
Wallerand de Saint Just	640	Florian Philipot	1598

Looking at the number of “Likes”, it also sticks out that Marine Le Pen’s postings are by

far the most popular. As the charismatic leader, she is the face of the party and to a certain degree the personification of the FN. As such, it is her postings and articles that receive the most attention. In contrast, Jean Marie Le Pen's articles receive 5 times fewer "Likes". At first sight, the apparent lack of approval of the former FN leader seems odd, given that Jean Marie Le Pen has shaped the FN for 40 years as president, face of the party and presidential candidate. However, at second sight this apparent lack of enthusiasm with the former leaders' posting might stem from the fact that the FN has entered a new era, the era of a young, dynamic, populist radical right-wing party, which tries to present itself as a republican alternative to the mainstream political parties. The 87 year old Jean Marie Le Pen does not fit this image any more.

Thematically, the most liked articles comprise all the features of the new FN, which I have laid out in the first part of this article. They have a populist undertone, except for one article advance multiple topics and embed the sometimes violent rhetoric within a republican framework. Table 2 presents the topics, authorship and number of "Likes" of the most supported articles. The topics mostly discussed are the economy and nationalism. In line with the major preoccupations of the population, the articles directly address two of the crises the French population has been suffering in the 2010s; the economic crisis and the identity crisis (see Balent 2012). To address these crises the FN offers clear and simple solutions: (1) the strengthening of the national community, its costumes, traditions and its history. (2) Protectionist measures to defend France's economy. For example, in the third most liked article, Nicolas Bay opposes Islam to the national community and warns of the Islamisation of France. He writes: "Wanting to integrate the Muslim holidays in our calendar would be [...] denying the heritage upon which our identity, our values and our principles" are based. While implicitly defending the Christian/Catholic background of France, Nicolas Bay also makes references to the republican principle of *laïcité* or the separation between the church and the state. He further states that Islam threatens this republican principle. Similarly, in the most "Liked" article overall, Marine Le Pen warns of the explosion of 'clandestine' immigration in France and its social cost to the French state and people. She declares the only way to control the situation is "the exit from the Schengen area, the return to permanent national frontiers and the automatic expulsion of apprehended clandestine immigrants." In many cases, the authors swiftly link individuals' preoccupations such as unemployment or individuals' feelings of a loss of identity to immigration. As such, many of the popular articles advance the party's anti-immigration platform as a means to bring meaningful

political change and not as an ends in and of itself.

Table 2: The 10 most liked articles

	Total Number of Likes	Author	Themes
1	16,882	Marine Le Pen	Immigration, Security
2	15,367	Marine Le Pen	Nationalism, Immigration, Economy, EU
3	15,238	FN/ Rassemblement Bleu Marine	Security, Religion
4	14,164	Nicolas Bay	Religion, Nationalism, Immigration
5	13,380	Marine Le Pen	Economy, Unemployment
6	11,925	Florian Philippot	Economy, Nationalism, Europe
7	11,670	FN/ Rassemblement Bleu Marine	Immigration
8	10,692	Marine Le Pen	Social Security, Nationalism
9	10,164	Marine Le Pen	Economy, Nationalism
10	10,076	Marine Le pen	Economy, Taxes

The most liked articles are further written in a populist style: (1) they are clear, simple and short (seven of the ten most liked articles are less than 300 words in length) (2) use emotive writing with expressive punctuation to evoke the indignation of the reader (e.g. “Europe colander desired by the UMPS”) (3) have some anti-elitist tone and character, as well as use strong language (e.g. the sitting president François Hollande’s is criticized for his recurrent powerlessness and his complete submission to Germany) (4) suggest popular and simple measures (e.g. an increase of modest incomes pensions as well as protectionist policies and France’s exit from the EU and (5) celebrate a folk community of patriots (e.g. “all patriots attached to France’s greatness”). In short, simple articles, which push the FN’s broad populist agenda are the most popular among its readership. In contrast, articles about a specific topic or policy are less “Liked”. For example, an article that talks about the possibility that the French state will sell/ privatize 15% of its shares of EDF (*Energie de France*) gets only 43 “Likes”. This article is very specific, demands a lot of knowledge from the readers about the subject matter, is speculative and does not include concrete policy measures. Hence, this article has not received a

lot of support. An article by Jean Marie Le Pen entitled, because I refuse to surrender to the Brussels dictators, who want to impose on France a type of ultra-liberal society [...] I support the French Notaries” equally lacks popularity. While short, the article talks about a niche topic, lacks background information to situate itself, does not provide any justification of the danger the notary profession is facing or any solution to the non-defined problem. The article also does not address the French population as a whole but only a very small portion of it and does not link the notary profession to any greater concern.

Conclusion

In this article, I have first retraced the FN’s new style, which better packages the FN leitmotif immigration, uses populist tactics and an acceptable rhetoric. Second, through an assessment of supporters’ approval of FN Facebook postings, I have illustrated that the new style and repackaging of the FN’s ideology resonates well with supporters and potential sympathizers (e.g. representatives of this new image have received three times as many “Likes” for their postings and articles than the old elites have for their postings). Hence, there is support that in the mid-2010s, a times of (multiple) crises (e.g. economic, identity and political) a populist strategy which emphasizes the sorrows of the working and lower middle classes, adopts anti-European, anti-elitist and anti-neo-liberal positions, stresses nationalism and rejects immigration within a large republican framework resonates well with quite a large part of the population (see also Kriesi et al. 2008). However, the question will be how this framework works, once France has overcome these crises.

At least indirectly, my study also hints that the FN is no longer “an old boys club” (Birenbaum 1992). Rather it is likely that the FN, through its activism on social platforms and, even more so its ideological reorientation, has diversified its support base. For sure, the almost exclusive use of a republican rhetoric, populism and the redefinition of its anti-immigrant message, as well as the younger and more dynamic outlook has increased the vote base of the FN; in contrast to 20 or 30 years ago, the FN now attracts as many women as it attracts men (Mayer 2013) and becomes more and more popular among young people (Arzheimer 2012). It is very likely that the party’s membership, as well as its informal support base beyond elections has also widened by including more groups. Yet, future research should determine the degree to which this is the case. With regards to the future of FN support and activism, I do not want to make any far-reaching claims. However, looking at the party’s recent support, it is probably safe

to say that a slight change in the party's ideology has had a large influence on the demand for action in the FN. The policies and solutions, which the new FN proposes resonate well with an electorate and a population, who have lived through several years of economic, political and identity crises and who are disappointed with the mainstream parties. There is no reason to assume that this renewed support will wane, unless the conditions on the ground change rather drastically.

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