

WHY EXTREMES DON'T MEET

Le Pen and Besancenot Voters in the 2007 French Presidential Election

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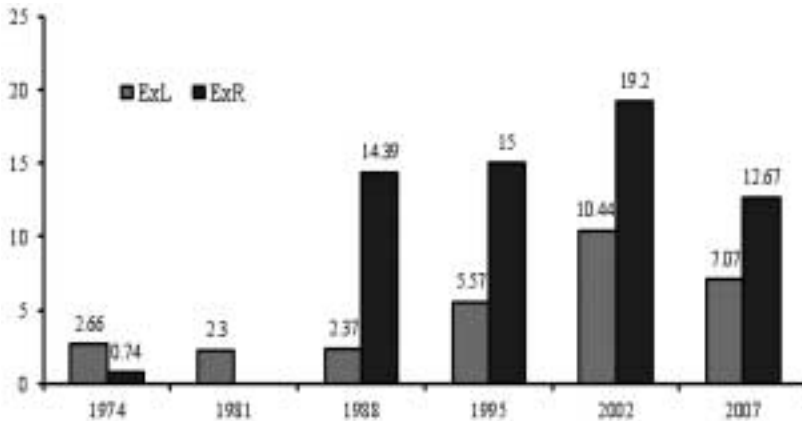
Introduction

A commonly received idea, one strengthened by the post-war debates about the nature of totalitarianism, is that “extremes meet.” Rather than a straight line between the Left and Right poles, the political spectrum would look more like a circle, or a “horseshoe,” a metaphor the philosopher Jean-Pierre Faye used to describe the position of German parties in 1932, from the Nazis to the Communists.¹ And because it focused on the “antidemocratic” and “potentially fascistic individual,” Theodor Adorno and his colleagues’ pioneer study *The Authoritarian Personality*,² sparked a large body of research on “left-wing” authoritarianism, from the early studies of Edward Shils, Hans Eysenck, and Milton Rokeach³ to Bob Altemeyer’s repeated attempt to build a specific scale measuring “revolutionary” conventionalism,⁴ and the more recent work by Stanley Feldman and Karen Stenner.⁵

This article proposes to revisit the convergence of the extremes theory, focusing on the French case. France has a long tradition of political extremism going back to the Revolution of 1789 and the Counter Revolution to which it gave birth. The strength of the extreme Right, and more recently the extreme Left, makes France an exception in Europe. In the first round of the 2002 presidential election, the cumulated scores of the two far-right candidates, Jean-Marie Le Pen and Bruno Mégret, and of the three Trotskyist candidates, Arlette Laguiller, representing Lutte ouvrière (LO), Olivier Besancenot for the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR), and Daniel Gluckstein for the Parti des travailleurs (PT), amounted to some 30 percent of the votes (Figure 1).⁶ In the last presidential election, this proportion fell to 20 percent; but Olivier Besan-

cenot maintained his 2002 level (4.1 percent compared to 4.3) and alone did better than the three other candidates of the extreme Left together (2.9 percent). His rising scores, his growing popularity, and the early dynamic of the Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste (NPA) launched to replace the old LCR (June 2008–February 2009),⁷ have restarted a debate about the similarities between extremes, some seeing Besancenot as a populist “Le Pen of the Left.”⁸

Figure 1. Presidential scores of the extreme Left and extreme Right candidates



Source: Official results France (overseas included).

I will try to answer some of the questions raised at the electoral level, comparing the voters of Le Pen and Besancenot in the 2007 presidential election. After a rapid presentation of the French political extremes, I will show that divergent social and political logics are at work to explain the electoral support for these two candidates, drawing from the first two waves of the French Electoral Panel 2007.⁹ Their voters do not occupy the same political space, they do not have the same social background, and they do not hold the same values.

Extreme Left and Extreme Right in France in 2007

Studies of political parties often variously refer to the “radical” Left or Right. In France, however, the term is confusing, associated with the oldest French party, the Parti républicain radical et radical-socialiste (1901), which held a centrist and stabilizing position on the French political scene during the Third and Fourth Republics.¹⁰ We will use the term “extreme” instead, adopting a spatial definition.¹¹ Since the Revolution of 1789, French political space has been structured by the Left/Right cleavage. In the first wave of the 2007 survey, interviewees were asked to place themselves, then the main candidates,

on a ten-point scale where “zero” denoted extreme Left, “ten” extreme Right, and the points in between allowed for a more moderated judgment. Some 95 percent of the sample placed themselves and the main candidates on the scale.¹² The higher the score a person or a candidate received, the more right-wing he or she was. In that sense, Le Pen was clearly located on the extreme Right and Besancenot on the extreme Left. The former got the highest score, far ahead of the other right-wing candidates (9.1 versus 7.7 for Nicolas Sarkozy, and 5.4 for the centrist François Bayrou). When the question was worded explicitly, as in the 2002 French Electoral Panel asking respondents to place Jean-Marie Le Pen in relation to the extreme Left, the Left, the Center, the Right or the extreme Right, 86 percent opted for “extreme Right.” Symmetrically, Olivier Besancenot in 2007 was located at the extreme left of the political axis, with a score of less than two on the Left-Right scale, lower than the anti-globalization candidate José Bové and the Socialist Ségolène Royal (2.5 and 3.8 percent).¹³

These two denominations have different connotations. “Extreme Right” is an infamous label, associated in the French collective memory with Nazism and Fascism, the collaborationist Vichy regime, and the extermination of Jews. Le Pen fiercely rejects it, calling himself a “populist” and proud to be so.¹⁴ But ever since his comments about the gas chambers as a “detail” in the history of World War Two in 1987, he has been assimilated to the extreme Right, and considered by a large majority as a “danger for democracy.”¹⁵ The proportion of voters who exclude the possibility of ever voting for his party has been rising, from 52 percent in 1984, at the beginning of its electoral emergence, to 65 percent in 1988, 72 percent in 1996, and 79 percent in 2002, after Le Pen qualified for the second round of the presidential election.¹⁶ In the presidential race of 2007, just before the first round, when the party seemed to be losing its electoral influence, the proportion was still 62 percent.¹⁷

As for “extreme Left,” its origin varies from one country to another. In France it mainly includes the parties and movements to the left of the Communist Party (PCF). The Trotskyist family, the most important at the time of the 2007 election, has its roots in the Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938 to oppose the Stalinist Third International, which he saw as a betrayal of the communist ideal; and French “leftists” vigorously opposed the PCF during the May '68 movement.¹⁸ But the public eye assimilates them to the wider communist family and they suffer from the same rejection. In 1984, at the time of the FN's electoral emergence in the European elections, there were more voters declaring that they would under no circumstances vote for the LCR and the PCF than for the FN (respectively 58 and 57 percent versus 52 percent).¹⁹ The collapse of Communism and the increasing strength of radical right-wing movements in Europe have changed the perspective. In 1988, for the first time, the FN was more rejected than the Communist Party and the extreme Left.²⁰ On the eve of the 2007 presidential election, according to the French Electoral Panel, the proportion of respondents who excluded the pos-

sibility of ever voting for LO, the LCR or the PCF was respectively 28, 35, and 33 percent, compared to 62 percent for the FN. The image of the extreme Left has mellowed, and it arouses far more sympathy than the extreme Right.²¹

The electoral dynamic of both extremes is also quite different. The launching of the FN in 1972 by the group *Ordre nouveau* was meant to bring together all the components of the extreme Right, from Vichy nostalgics to Poujadists and supporters of *Algérie Française*, and provide an inroad to parliamentary politics. It was a complete failure until the Socialists won the 1981 elections and called four Communist ministers into the government, which radicalized part of the right-wing electorate. After a series of successes in 1983 in by-elections such as in Dreux, the European elections of 1984 marked the FN's take-off. That year, the party attracted a part of the left-wing electorate that had been disappointed by the liberal turn taken by the Socialists' economic policies after 1983. Between 1988 and 1998, the FN consolidated its scores at a level of some 15 percent of valid votes, first in presidential ballots (1988–1995) then in parliamentary and regional elections (1997 and 1998). In spite of the internal crisis leading to a split in 1998–99,²² the 2002 presidential election marked the culmination of the FN's electoral ascent, a record score of 16.9 percent qualifying Le Pen for the second round, instead of the Socialist candidate.

As for the extreme-left parties of Trotskyist persuasion, they have systematically presented candidates in the presidential elections of the Fifth Republic (Figure 1). But their electoral take-off came later, in the wake of the disappointment caused by the policies of the center Left and the revitalization of the social movement sector in the political context of the 1990s.²³ In 1995, Arlette Laguiller (LO) alone drew more than 5 percent of the vote and, in 2002, the scores of the three extreme-left candidates together amounted to more than 10 percent.

The 2007 presidential election took place in a different context, one that limited the space available to the extremes. The memory of the "earthquake" of 21 April 2002, when Le Pen qualified for the second round in the presidential election, along with a desire to renew the political class, led voters to sweep away the older generation and to limit the number of votes dispersed to small parties. There was a repolarization around Nicolas Sarkozy on the Right and Ségolène Royal on the Left. From one election to the other, Le Pen lost one million votes and his score dropped to 10 percent, his worst result in a presidential race since 1974.²⁴ As for the extreme Left, represented by Olivier Besancenot for the LCR, Arlette Laguiller for LO, José Bové for the anti-globalization movement, and Gérard Schivardi supported by the PT, its share of the votes dropped to 7 percent. But its three-point loss was more limited than the extreme Right's (minus 6.5 points); and Olivier Besancenot's score was almost stable (minus 0.2 points). The number of voters he attracted even increased (1.5 million, up from 1.2 million in 2002), confirming his leading position on the far Left.²⁵ On the whole, the share of the extreme Left in the total count of

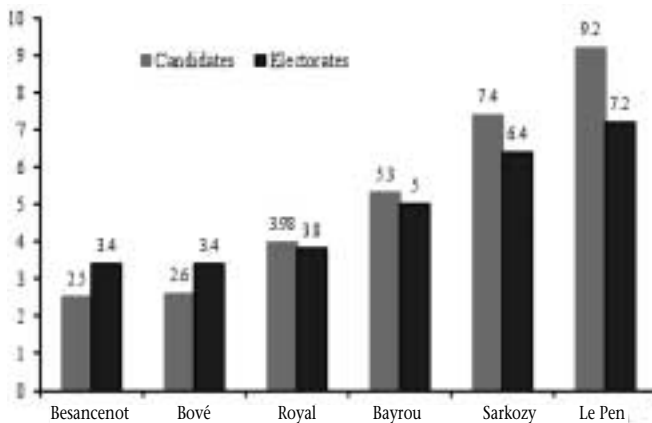
votes attracted by the Left increased, from some 5 percent until 1988 to 13.4 percent in 1995, 24 percent in 2002, and 26 percent in 2007.²⁶

Antagonistic Political Positions

Three main models explain electoral behavior. The sociological one emphasizes the conformity of voters to the norms of the groups to which they belong, to the weight of their social entourage and social networks. The psycho-political model highlights the role of long-lasting attitudes (left-wing or right-wing orientations, party identification) that structure perceptions of politics. The economic model stresses the strategic dimension of the electoral decision, building on a reasoned evaluation of candidates and platforms. We shall combine the three to show how different Le Pen and Besancenot voters are in their partisan and ideological anchoring, as well as in their social connections and their positions on candidates and issues.

On the eve of the 2007 presidential election, the scores of these two groups of voters on a ten-point Left-Right scale located them at opposite poles of the political spectrum (Figure 2). Olivier Besancenot's potential voters were the most left-wing, with a score of 3.4; potential Le Pen voters were the most right-wing, with a score of 7.2. Respondents' self-location was coherent with the way they placed their respective candidates, which in both cases were actually perceived as a little more extreme than the respondents themselves: the LCR candidate got a mean score of 2.5 among his supporters (0.9 points less than the candidate's), while Le Pen scored 9.2 among his (2 points more).

Figure 2. Left-Right placement of electorates and candidates in 2007

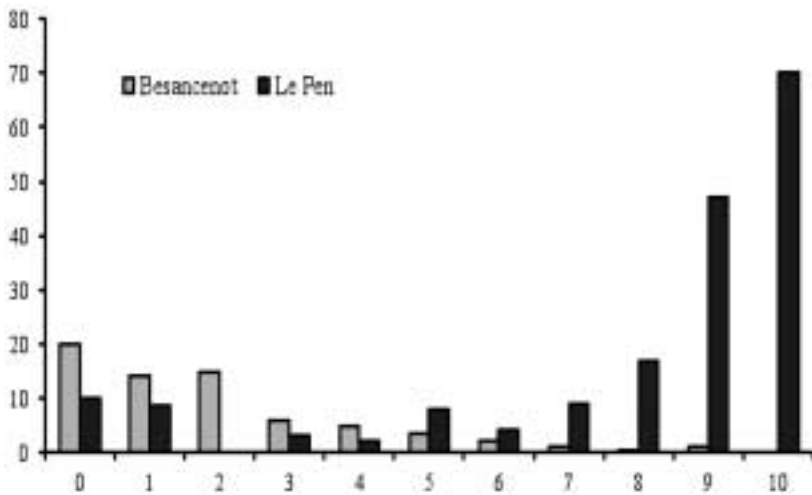


Source: French Electoral Panel 2007 wave 1.

The scores of the voters on a Left-Right 10-point scale are in black, the scores they give their candidate in gray.

The closer a person was to the left of the scale, the higher the chances of a vote for the Trotskyist candidate, and the closer to the right, the more likelihood of a vote for Le Pen (Figure 3). Olivier Besancenot did attract some right-wing voters and, symmetrically, the voting intentions in favor of Jean-Marie Le Pen rose slightly at the left end of the scale. But these deviant cases weighed less than 10 percent in each candidate's electorate.²⁷ One must also take into account the fact that respondents could locate themselves at the center of the scale (position five) if they were unwilling to choose between Right and Left. Asked whether they would describe themselves as "somewhat right-wing," "somewhat left-wing," or "neither right- nor left-wing," sixty-two percent of the Besancenot voters and 56 percent of the Le Pen voters who located themselves in position five chose the answer "neither-nor." But even if one excludes them as well, the vast majority of Le Pen and Besancenot supporters still stand at opposite poles of the political space.

Figure 3. Votes for Besancenot/Le Pen by Left-Right placement



Source: French Electoral Panel 2007 wave 1.
 Voting intentions weighted by results of 1st round.

Their position on the Left-Right scale makes sense; it is coherent with their other political characteristics such as their family political orientation, their party identification, and their previous votes (Table 1). A series of questions allow to qualify the political leanings of the interviewees' parents. The subjects were asked if their father, their mother or their partner was "somewhat left-wing," "somewhat right-wing," or "neither left- nor right-wing." One can thus build two symmetric indicators, one of a left-wing environment, one of a right-wing environment, varying between zero if neither father, mother nor partner was left-wing (or right-wing) and three if father, mother

and partner were left-wing (or right-wing). The majority of Besancenot's voters were socialized in a left-wing family, and nearly half of Le Pen voters in a right-wing family.

In a multiparty system like that of France, with its experience of frequent change, the question is not so much whether people "identify" with a party as it is their degree of proximity to or distance from one, the usual question being which party in a given list respondents feel closest to or least remote from. For a long time the vote for the extreme Right was a candidate-centered vote for Le Pen; his party by itself did not attract much support. But when Bruno Mégret was its delegate-general, the party grew in size and visibility and the proportion of Le Pen voters who also felt close to the FN rose from one third in 1995 to 45 percent in 2002 (after Le Pen's surprise qualification for the second round), and then further to a record 50 percent in 2007.²⁸ Between the first rounds of the 2002 and 2007 presidential elections, Le Pen lost one fifth of his voters. The French Electoral Panel data show that those who remained faithful form the hard core of his electorate, the most convinced and therefore most likely to have developed an attachment to the party.²⁹ Those who did not feel close to the FN either felt close to no party at all (almost a fifth) or to the traditional Right (UMP, 10 percent; MPF, 3 percent) (Table 1). Only 14 percent declared proximity to a left or an extreme-left party. Their past electoral choices show the same pattern: they massively voted for Le Pen in the first round of the 2002 presidential contest (82 percent), while only 6 percent voted for left or extreme-left candidates (Table 1).

Table 1. Political profile of Besancenot and Le Pen voters in 2007 (%)

Voting intentions for the first round of the 2007 presidential election	Besancenot (N=232)	Le Pen (N=266)	Total (N=3455)
Political background			
≥1 left-wing father, mother, partner	63	30	52
≥1 right-wing father, mother, partner	28	49	39
Vote in 2002 (% valid votes)*			
Extreme Left	49	2	10
Left	31	4	40
Right	15	11	36
Extreme Right	4	82	14
	(31)	(19)	(20)
Party proximity			
Extreme Left (LO, LCR)	36	5	7
Left (PC, PS, MRC, RG, Green)	31	9	38
Right (UDF, UMP, CPNT, MPF, other)	9	16	27
Extreme Right	1	51	5
None, NA	24	19	23

Source: French Electoral Panel 2007, wave 1, except "Social background" (wave 2, the only one including questions about social origin.)

* Population of voting age in 2002.

The 2007 Besancenot voters also conform to a Left-Right logic (Table 1). Only 10 percent feel close to a Right or extreme-right party, while 80 percent voted for a Left or extreme-left candidate in 2002. But they differ from Le Pen voters in two ways. Because they are younger (Table 2), they are less likely to have formed any party attachment at all and less likely to have voted in the 2002 election. They appear much closer to the rest of the Left than extreme-right voters do to the moderate Right. Almost as many Besancenot voters in 2007 felt close to the Socialists, the Communists or the Greens (31 percent) as to an extreme-left party (36 percent, of whom 29 percent for Besancenot's party) (Table 1). The extreme-left scene is more fragmented than the extreme-right; and its parties, especially the LCR, have been more active in the social movements sector than in electoral politics.

Table 2. Sociocultural profile of Besancenot and Le Pen voters in 2007 (%)

Voting intentions for the first round of the 2007 presidential election	Besancenot (N=232)	Le Pen (N=266)	Total (N=3455)
Demography			
Women	48	46	53
< 40 years old	52	36	39
Educational achievement			
≥Baccalaureate	41	22	41
University students	10	2	7
Socio-economic status			
Unemployed	9.5	7.5	7
Difficulties to cope with present income	70	70	59
Social Precariousness *	25	19	16
Profession (present or last one occupied)			
Self employed	5	10	9
Upper and middle level salaried class	25	17	30
Clerical workers	31	30	27
Blue collar workers	27	37	24
Never worked	11	5	11
Social background			
Father and/or mother working class	62	56	48
≥1 working class link (self/father/mother)	70	68	56
Origin			
≥1 foreign parent and/or grand parent	30	15	26

Source: French Electoral Panel 2007, wave 1, except "Social background" (wave 2, the only one including questions about social origin.)

* Social precariousness index: respondents either unemployed or with fixed term contract and finding it difficult to cope with their present income.

Distinctive Social Backgrounds

It is true that these two groups of voters share a disadvantaged socio-economic status. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents who intended to vote for

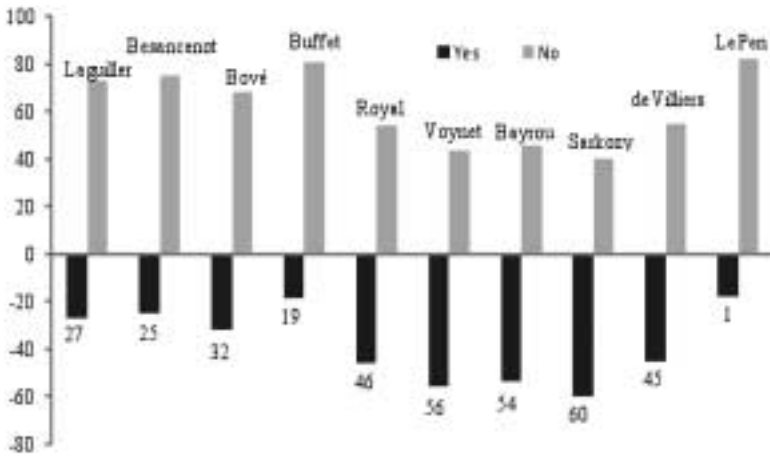
Besancenot, as well as more than two-thirds of potential Le Pen voters, were blue-collar manual workers or non-manual clerical workers, both of which are groups with low socio-economic status (Table 2). They also mostly came from working-class families: 62 percent of Besancenot voters and 56 percent of Le Pen voters had a blue-collar mother and/or father, while the average proportion in the sample was less than half. On a global indicator taking into account the occupation of the interviewee and of his or her parents, some 70 percent of Le Pen and Besancenot voters had at least one link with the blue-collar world (as against 56 percent in the total sample). Seventy percent found it hard to get by on their present income (Table 2). If one combines this economic stress with the fact of being unemployed or having a fixed-term contract, one gets an indicator of social precariousness, a condition that affects 15 percent of the 2007 French Panel sample, but one Lepenist voter out of five and one Besancenot voter out of four.

Yet if one looks more closely, differences do appear. Among Le Pen voters there are more blue-collar workers belonging to the manual working class. One finds more of the lower service class, the "post-industrial" proletariat, among Besancenot supporters, a trend noted by Nathan Sperber in a detailed study of extreme-left voting in 2002.³⁰ Lepenist voters are older, the majority of them over 40, and one quarter are retirees. The majority of Besancenot voters are under 40, and only some 10 percent have retired. Being younger, they are also more educated. Over 40 percent have at least the baccalaureate, the degree that marks the end of high school in France, double the proportion found in the Le Pen group; and 10 percent of Besancenot supporters were university students at the time of the survey (as against some 2 percent of Le Pen voters). Lastly, the Besancenot group is more multicultural, 30 percent of them have a foreign parent or grandparent, twice as many as among Le Pen supporters.

Contrasted Motivations

The fact that the extreme Right and the extreme Left both are particularly hostile to European integration is one of the arguments often used to emphasize their convergence, as suggested by the provocative title of Dominique Reynié's book *Le Vertige social-nationaliste: La gauche du Non et le référendum de 2005*.³¹ Indeed, when asked how they voted in the referendum of 2005 on the European Constitution (Figure 4), respondents intending to vote for Le Pen or Besancenot in 2007 both declared an exceptionally high level of "No" votes. But the reasons behind the "No" were quite different. As Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj have shown,³² left-wing voters in general defend the public service and the welfare system against a European Union (EU) they associate with big business and economic neo-liberalism; there is a social dimension to their opposition, while Le Pen voters associate the EU with open borders and massive flows of immigration threatening French national identity.

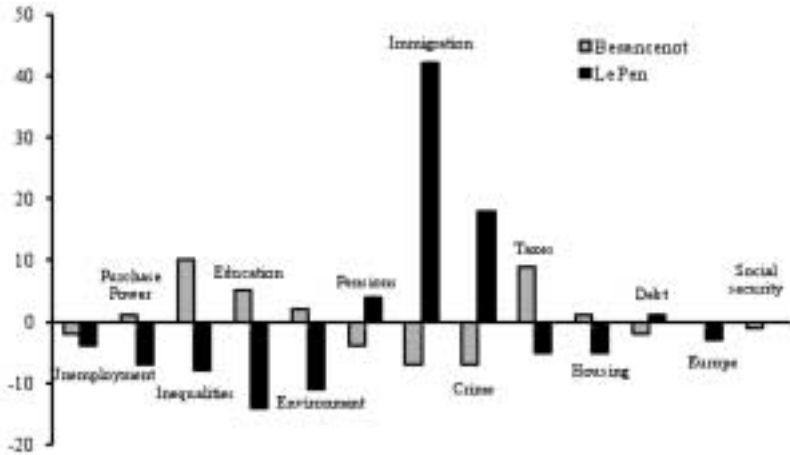
Figure 4. 2007 voters declared votes in the referendum on the European Constitution of 2005



Source: French Electoral Panel 2007, wave 1

One finds the same kind of contrast in 2007. When presented with a list of problems and asked to select the two that would be most important for them at the time of voting, Besancenot supporters put forward social issues. Unemployment, social inequalities, and purchasing power were ranked first or second by respectively 38, 35, and 27 percent of them.³³ The hierarchy was different for Le Pen voters; they gave priority to the issue of immigration, followed by unemployment and crime, chosen by respectively 49, 34, and 25 percent.³⁴ A majority of both groups believed that their candidate offered the best solutions on the issues that mattered most to them. If one compares the choices of extreme-right and extreme-left voters to those of the sample at large, computing for each issue the difference between the average answers and those of Besancenot and Le Pen voters (Figure 5), the former stand apart by the importance they attach to social inequalities and taxes, the latter by the importance they give to immigration and crime. And both groups appear almost systematically opposed on ten out of the thirteen issues. When one rates an issue higher than the sample average, the other will rate it lower. They clearly have antagonistic visions of the world.

Figure 5. Most important problems in first round of the 2007 Presidential election



Source: French Electoral Panel 2007, wave 1.
 Deviation from the mean score of the issue in the sample.

At a deeper level, these electoral choices are based on different value systems. For a long time, the Left/Right cleavage opposed two visions of the economy: a liberal right-wing view defending free trade and markets, and an interventionist left-wing view calling for more state regulation. Then, in the wake of the May '68 social movement, a second socio-cultural dimension started to gain weight, opposing supporters of an authoritarian and closed society on the one side, and of an open and libertarian society on the other. The trend can be seen in all of the most advanced industrial democracies, where the level of education has increased, as well as the attachment to individualist, "post-materialist" values.³⁵ Today, traditional class voting based on economic issues can conflict with "cultural" voting based on non-economic issues.³⁶ To measure these two dimensions one can build two scales. The "economic liberalism" scale combines three questions, two on the positive or negative connotations attached to the words "profit" and "privatization," and one on the choice between two priorities in the coming years, improving either "the situation of workers" or "the competitiveness of the French economy." The "ethnocentrism-authoritarianism" scale comprises three questions, about restoring the death penalty, not "feeling at home as one used to" in one's own country, and the impression that there are "too many immigrants" in France.³⁷ Because the majority of Besancenot and Le Pen voters are socially disadvantaged, they are in favor of state control on social and economic issues, and their scores are quite similar on our scale of economic liberalism (respectively 4.1 and 4.9). Their scores contrast sharply, however, on the second scale. Le Pen voters' distinctive mark is their exclusionist stand and their demand for

law and order. Ninety percent of them (as against one third of Besancenot voters) think there are “too many immigrants” in the country, 80 percent no longer feel “at home” in France (as against 36 percent), and three out of four want to restore the death penalty (as against one third). As a result, they get a higher score than any other group of voters on the second scale, while Besancenot voters score below average (7.7 versus 4).³⁸

A Model Explaining Votes for the Extreme Left and Extreme Right

Values can conflict. In the specific context of the 2007 election, some considerations weighed more than others when the time came to decide. To show this, we did a multinomial logistic regression. This method selects among our indicators those that have the strongest influence on electoral choice for the extreme Left or the extreme Right. We limited our analysis to those who voted for the main candidates: the Trotskyist Olivier Besancenot, the Socialist Ségolène Royal, the centrist François Bayrou, the UMP (Union pour un mouvement populaire) candidate Nicolas Sarkozy, and the FN leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen. The dependent variable was declared voting intention for the first round, taking the vote for Sarkozy as the baseline modality, to which we could compare the four other choices. The explanatory variables were the scores on our three ideological scales—the ten-point Left-Right scale, the economic liberalism scale, and the ethnocentrism-authoritarianism scale—combined with the three socio-demographic variables of age, gender, and degree of educational attainment.³⁹ The model shows the most predictive factors in the choice between these five candidates.

If one only puts into the model the ideological scales, the three have a statistically significant impact on voting intentions for the first round (Table 3). Position on the Left-Right scale is the best predictor of votes for all candidates except Le Pen. Voting intentions in his favor do rise sharply as a voter’s position approaches the far right of the scale, but the score on the scale of ethnocentrism-authoritarianism is an even better predictor of such a choice. The lead driver in support for Le Pen is fear of the “other,” at a level found in no other voting group, while a low score on that scale is a strong predictor of Socialist, centrist or extreme-left votes. Last, a low level of economic liberalism (and conversely demand for state regulation) is the second best predictor of votes for both the Socialist and the extreme-left candidates. Le Pen supporters are far less concerned by economic issues; but contrasted with Sarkozy voters (our baseline modality), they appear more interventionist. This explains why one finds a significant negative correlation between scores on the economic scale and support for the leader of the FN (Table 3).

Table 3. Logistic regression on the votes for Le Pen, Sarkozy, Bayrou, Royal, and Besancenot

Votes in the 1st round of the 2007 presidential election		Predictors	B	Exp(B)
Besancenot		Constant 5.796		
		Left Right Scale (0-10)	-1.034	.356
		Ethnocentrism-authoritarianism scale	-.184	.832
		Economic liberalism scale (1-8)	-.452	.636
Royal		Constant 6.537		
		Left Right Scale (0-10)	-.866	.421
		Ethnocentrism-authoritarianism scale	-.198	.820
		Economic liberalism scale (1-8)	-.306	.736
Bayrou		Constant 3.654		
		Left Right Scale (0-10)	-.451	.637
		Ethnocentrism-authoritarianism scale	-.163	.849
		Economic liberalism scale (1-8)	-.164	.848
Le Pen		Constant -3.165		
		Left Right Scale (0-10)	.180	1.197
		Ethnocentrism-authoritarianism scale	.283	1.328
		Economic liberalism scale (1-8)	-.257	.774

Source: French Electoral Panel 2007, wave 1.

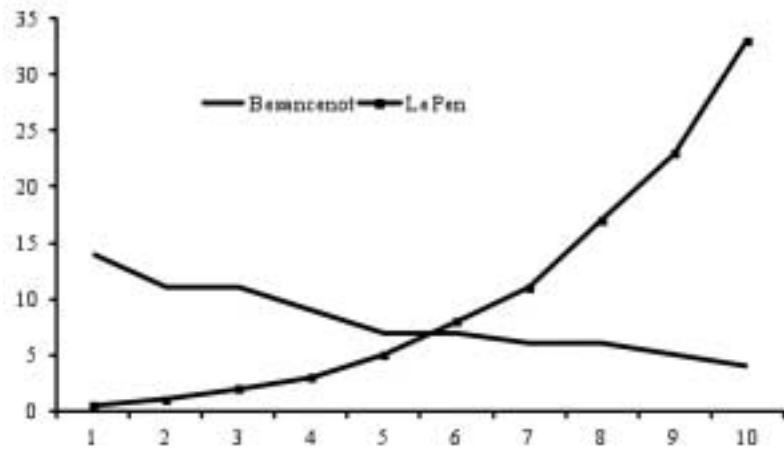
Reference modality: Nicolas Sarkozy. All predictors are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Pseudo R2 (Nagelkerke) 0.48.

If one adds the socio-demographic variables, they have no statistically significant effect,⁴⁰ with the exception of age (and, to a lesser degree, education and gender) in the case of Besancenot voters, and gender in the case of Le Pen voters. Whatever their age, education or political orientation, women are always more reluctant than men to support a movement like the FN, associated with a traditional vision of gender relations and surrounded by an aura of violence. Besancenot's radicalism attracts the younger generations born after 1968, who reached voting age at a time when the Communist Party had ceased to be a credible alternative, and when the Socialist Party in office had shown its limits. This is all the more true of those who have at most a basic education or a post-high school vocational qualification insufficient to protect them from precariousness and unemployment. Lastly, men are slightly more likely to vote for Besancenot than women.⁴¹

As for the ideological variables, controlling for the socio-demographic variables, the three of them retain a high and significant impact on voter choice. The predicted probability of supporting Besancenot falls from 25 percent among voters positioned at the extreme Left to less than 1 percent at the extreme Right (while the probability of voting for Le Pen rises from 0 to 48 percent). The probability of supporting Le Pen varies above all in relation to a voter's scores on the scale of ethnocentrism-authoritarianism, rising from 0.4 percent among the interviewees with the lowest score to 33 percent among those with the highest (Figure 6). When voting day draws near, these voters'

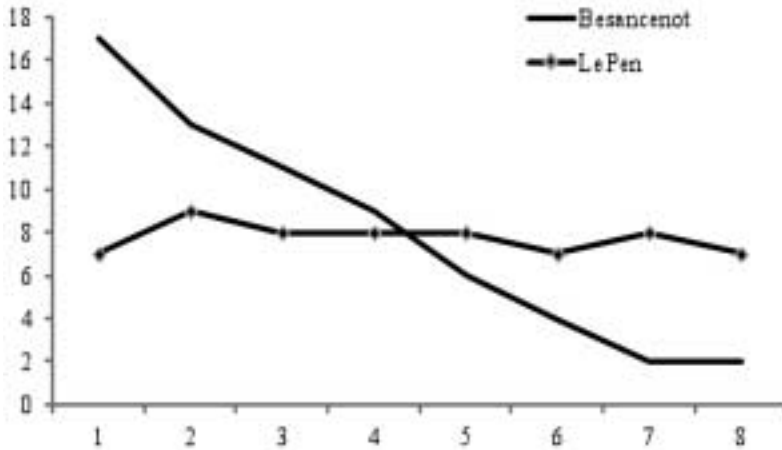
main concern is toughness towards immigrants, and by association towards delinquents, more than economic issues. The probability of choosing Besancenot, on the other hand, depends more on both dimensions. It rises from two percent among the strongest supporters of economic liberalism to 18 percent among the most interventionist, and from 4 percent among the most authoritarian and ethnocentric to 15 percent among those who have the lowest scores on the scale (Figures 6-7). These voters have chosen Besancenot as much for their desire for an open and more permissive society as for their distrust in the market economy and private business and for their demand for a more interventionist state.

Figure 6. Voting intention for Besancenot/Le Pen by level of ethnocentric authoritarianism



Source: French Electoral Panel 2007 wave 1
 Predicted probabilities by score on scale

Figure 7. Voting intention for Besancenot/Le Pen by level of economic liberalism



Source: French Electoral Panel 2007, wave 1. Predicted probabilities by score on scale.

To explore voters' thought processes more deeply, the 2007 French Electoral Panel proposed a list of words connected to current debates, about the economy, immigration, Europe, etc. The respondents were asked whether each word evoked for them something very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, or very negative. Two separate logistic regressions on the vote for Le Pen and for Besancenot, using eight issues as vote predictors, confirm the contrast between the world of the extreme Right and that of the extreme Left (Table 4).

Table 4. Logistic regression on the votes for Le Pen and Besancenot in 2007

Word evokes something "very negative"(1) to "very positive"(4)	Le Pen		Besancenot	
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
Privatization	+1.176	.839	.390***	1.477
Profit	+0.054	.948	-.046	1.047
Islam	-.717***	2.048	+.122	.885
European Union	-.514***	1.672	-.217**	1.242
Solidarity	-.342***	1.408	+.079	.924
Secularity	-.288**	1.334	+.103	.902
35 hours week	-.111	1.117	+.146	.864
National Identity	+.271*	.762	-.308***	1.361
Constant	+6.401	.002	+4.084	.017

Source: French Electoral Panel 2007, wave 1. The 8 items are reversed and considered as ordinal variables. *p<0.05, **p< 0.01, ***p< 0.001. Pseudo R2: 0.22 and 0.06.

All of these issues were statistically significant for predicting a Le Pen vote in 2007 except economic issues (profit, privatization, hours of working week) (Table 4). Voters most likely to cast a ballot for Le Pen are those who have a negative image of Islam, or of the EU, who do not express solidarity with others, who hold a negative image of secularism, and who valorize “national identity.” During the campaign, Sarkozy put forward the idea of a Ministry of Immigration and National Identity, as part of a strategy to win back extreme-right voters. But this issue was paradoxically less predictive than a plain aversion to Islam,⁴² to “secularity,”⁴³ or to “solidarity,” in line with the “national preference” principle at the heart of the FN’s program. The level of support for Le Pen rises from less than 1 percent if one has a very positive image of Islam to 16 percent if it is very negative, and from 4 percent among those who have a very positive image of secularism or solidarity to over 26 percent if it is very negative. But it only rises from 5 to 11 percent depending on whether “national identity” is perceived as very negative or very positive.

For Besancenot supporters, in contrast, the economy matters a great deal. The best predictor of such a vote is the extent to which one rejects “profit,” the essence of capitalism, closely followed by one’s rejection of the issue of “national identity.” The predicted probability goes from 3 or 4 percent among those who have a positive image of these two words to respectively 12 and 14 percent when it is negative. Perception of the EU comes last, with the predicted probability of voting for the extreme Left rising from 5 percent among those who have a positive image to 10 percent when it is negative. So the extreme-left vote is as much a traditional “class vote” with a strong economic dimension as it is a “cultural” vote, while the vote for Le Pen is more clearly a “cultural” vote.

Thus the intention to vote for Besancenot or Le Pen in 2007 resulted from divergent social and political logics, which preclude an amalgam between the two electorates. While both have tight links with the working-class world, they do not attract the same workers. A generational, cultural, and ideological gap separates them. Both groups see themselves at the poles of the Left-Right scale, but at opposite poles. And they vote in the name of conflicting reasons and values: social justice and equality for Besancenot’s voters, hierarchy and exclusion for Le Pen’s.

Conclusion

Since 2007 the political context has changed. The NPA’s low scores in the 2009 European elections and the 2010 regional elections (respectively 4.9 and 2.4 percent in the first round) started an internal crisis and a questioning of its electoral strategy of “no alliance” with the rest of the Left. It is also faced with a new competitor since the creation of a new party, the Parti de gauche (PG), in November 2008 by the former Trotskyist and Socialist dissident Jean-Luc

Mélenchon, which did better in these two last elections (6 percent in the European elections and 5.9 percent in the first round of the regional elections, allied with the Communists). Olivier Besancenot has decided not to run for the presidential election of 2012, and voting intentions for the NPA's new candidate, Philippe Poutou, stay below 1 percent. As for the FN, on the contrary, its future looks brighter after its fairly good results in the regional elections (with a score of 11.7 percent allowing it to qualify for the second round in twelve regions), and the increasing popularity of Marine Le Pen following her election to succeed her father as FN leader in the party congress of January 2011. For the next presidential election, voting intentions for her have been steadily going up, from 13 percent in November 2010 to 20 percent since May 2011.⁴⁴

It is, of course, far too early to predict what will happen in 2012. Yet the political preferences analyzed in this article show that potential NPA and FN voters remain socially and politically contrasted. Besancenot's scores double among young voters and the lower service class, and rise as one moves towards the left of the political scale, reaching a peak (48 percent) among respondents close to extreme-left parties. Le Pen's scores rise among the elderly, the uneducated, the unemployed, and also rise as one moves towards the right of the political scale, with a peak among FN sympathizers (77 percent). Whatever may be the electoral fortunes of the extreme Left and the extreme Right, whatever their past and future ups and downs, one thing is sure: they do not meet.⁴⁵

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Notes

1. Jean-Pierre Faye, *Langages totalitaires* (Paris: Hermann, 2004), 407.
2. Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), 1.
3. Hans Eysenck introduced a tough-/tender-minded dimension to show that British fascists and communists were equally tough radicals, while Milton Rokeach insisted on the cognitive dimension of authoritarianism, neither left-wing nor right-wing by nature, opposing closed-mindedness to open-mindedness. Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind: Investigations into the Nature of Belief Systems and Personality Systems* (New York: Basic Books, 1960); Hans J. Eysenck, *The Psychology of Politics* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1954).

4. Bob Altemeyer, *The Authoritarian Specter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 216–34.
5. Stanley Feldman and Karen Stenner, “Perceived Threat and Authoritarianism,” *Political Psychology* 18, 4 (1997): 741–70; Karen Stenner, *The Authoritarian Dynamic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For an update of the literature and an experimental approach, see John Transue et al., “Searching for Left Wing Authoritarianism” (paper presented at ISPP 31st Annual Scientific Meeting, Sciences Po, Paris, France, 9 July 2008, http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p246103_index.html).
6. For a presentation of the French extreme Left, see Serge Cosseron, ed., *Le Dictionnaire de l’extrême gauche* (Paris: Larousse, 2007) and Philippe Raynaud, *L’Extrême gauche plurielle: Entre démocratie radicale et révolution* (Paris: Autrement, 2006).
7. The process started in June 2008. The LCR was dissolved on 31 January 2009 and the new party was officially created on 7 February 2009, claiming at the start over 9,000 members.
8. In Pascal Perrineau’s view: “Vous avez deux groupes dont l’attachement à la démocratie pluraliste laisse à désirer. Qui pratiquent le populisme: les gens d’en bas contre les gens d’en haut, accusés de toutes les turpitudes, toujours en train de préparer un mauvais coup. Le conspirationnisme renforce une culture de l’ennemi absolu—ennemi de race pour l’extrême droite, ennemi de classe pour Besancenot.” Interview by Claude Askolovitch, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 3 July 2008. See also Yves Thérard, “De Le Pen à Besancenot,” *Le Figaro*, 20 June 2008.
9. In this article we mostly use the first two waves of the Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po (CEVIPOF) French Electoral Panel 2007, conducted on large samples representative of metropolitan registered voters, and in particular wave 1, based on face-to-face interviews, 29 March–21 April 2007, before the first round (N=4004). Wave 2 was a telephonic survey, 9–23 May (N=4006) conducted after the second round. The structure of the results is similar in both waves. In keeping with French tradition, these are not probability samples, they are quota-based (age, gender, occupation of head of the family, stratified by region and size of town on the basis of the Census). All the CEVIPOF electoral surveys are available on <http://cdsp.sciences-po.fr/enquetes.php?idTheme=19&idRubrique=enquetesFR&lang=ANG>.
10. Serge Berstein, *Un siècle de radicalisme* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004).
11. For a good introduction to the debate around defining the extreme Right in Europe, see the article of Cas Mudde, “The War of Words: Defining the Extreme Right Party Family,” *West European Politics* 19, 2 (1996): 225–48.
12. Five percent was the non-response rate for Le Pen, Sarkozy, and Royal. It rose for more recent and less known candidates such as Olivier Besancenot, running for only the second time, the anti-globalization leader José Bové, and the centrist François Bayrou (respectively 14, 16, and 9 percent of non-respondents).
13. The French Electoral Panel 2002 (the previous CEVIPOF survey) only asked about the location of Le Pen and Chirac. The 1995 CEVIPOF survey showed that Arlette Laguiller’s score on a seven-point Left-Right scale came just above the Communist candidate Robert Hue (1.9 versus 1.85), but the proportion of the sample locating her in the very last position on the left was higher (56 versus 42 percent).
14. Pierre-André Taguieff, *L’Illusion populiste* (Paris: Berg International, 2002).
15. TNS-Sofres annual surveys on the image of the FN for *Le Monde* and Radio RTL. For the period October 1983–October 1998, see Nonna Mayer, *Ces Français qui votent Le Pen* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), 453. The 2000–2010 series are available on: http://www.tns-sofres.com/_assets/files/2010.01.14-FN.pdf.

16. For the period 1984–1996, see Nonna Mayer, *Ces Français qui votent Le Pen*, 200; and for 2002, the French Electoral Panel 2002, wave 2.
17. French Electoral Panel, wave 1.
18. For a discussion of far-left diversity in Europe, see Luke March, “Contemporary Far Left Parties in Europe: From Marxism to the Mainstream?” Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung: International Policy Analysis online publication, November 2008, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/05818.pdf>.
19. TNS-Sofres survey, in Mayer, *Ces Français qui votent le Pen*, 200.
20. *Ibid.*
21. In the second wave of the 2002 French Panel, on a thermometer of sympathy ranging between 1 and 10, Arlette Laguiller and Olivier Besancenot scored 4.3 each, Jean-Marie Le Pen 2.2 (the Green candidate 4.7, Lionel Jospin 5.9, and Jacques Chirac 5.7). On the changing image of the extreme Left, see the surveys conducted by CSA for CECOP and *Le Monde*, 24–25 November 2003 (N=1000), “L’image de l’extrême gauche auprès des Français” (<http://www.csa-fr.com/dataset/data2003/opi20031125c.htm>), and by IFOP for *Acteurs publics*, “Les Français et l’extrême gauche,” 9–10 March 2006 (N=957) (http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/800-1-study_file.pdf).
22. The delegate-general Bruno Mégret left with more than half the party executives and created a dissident movement, the MNR (Mouvement national républicain). For the history of the party, see James Shields, *The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen* (London: Routledge, 2007).
23. On the mobilizations of “les sans,” or “the dispossessed,” deprived of jobs, housing, documents, etc., and the anti-globalization movement, see Isabelle Sommier, *Les Nouveaux Mouvements contestataires à l’heure de la mondialisation* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001).
24. On the way Nicolas Sarkozy “shrank” Le Pen’s electorate, attracting half of his unfaithful voters of 2002, see Nonna Mayer, “Comment Nicolas Sarkozy a rétréci l’électorat le Pen,” *Revue Française de Science Politique* 57, 3-4 (2007): 429–45.
25. After the 2002 presidential election, Olivier Besancenot was seen as the leader who “represents best” the French extreme Left, along with Arlette Laguiller (at 28 percent each), ahead of the anti-globalization candidate José Bové, the ecologist Noël Mamère, and the communist Marie-George Buffet (respectively 21, 14, and 7 percent), according to a survey conducted by CSA for CECOP (Centre d’études et de connaissances sur l’Opinion publique) and *Le Monde* on 24–25 November 2003. By 2006 he came ahead of Arlette Laguiller by 12 percentage points, according to a survey conducted by IFOP for *Acteurs Publics* in March 2006 (respective scores were for Besancenot 34 percent, Laguiller 22 percent, Buffet 17 percent, and Bové 15 percent). The monthly Popularity Barometer conducted by TNS-Sofres shows that the proportion of respondents who wanted Besancenot “to play an important part in the months and years to come,” in the year before the 2007 election, was increasingly higher than the proportion for Laguiller, with a peak at 40 percent (versus 22 percent) in May, after the first round (<http://www.tns-sofres.com/popularites/cote/>).
26. Dominique Reynié, “La gauche pure,” in *L’Extrême Gauche, moribonde ou renaissance?* ed. Dominique Reynié (Paris: PUF, 2007), 22, for the 1969–2002 period and updated for 2007.
27. Besancenot voters located in positions six to ten, and Le Pen voters in positions zero to four are counted as deviant.
28. Data from the CEVIPOF post-electoral surveys of 1988 and 1995 and the CEVIPOF French Electoral Panel 2002 and 2007 (first wave).
29. From 4.8 to 3.8 million, in Mayer, “Comment Nicolas Sarkozy a rétréci l’électorat Le Pen,” 440.

30. Nathan Sperber, "Three Million Trotskyists? Explaining Extreme Left Voting in France in the 2002 Presidential Election," *European Journal of Political Research* 49, 3 (2010): 359–92.
31. Dominique Reynié, *Le Vertige social-nationaliste: La gauche du Non et le référendum de 2005* (Paris: Éditions de La Table Ronde, 2006).
32. Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj, "The French Referendum: The Not So Simple Act of Saying Nay," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 39, 2 (2006): 261–68.
33. French Electoral Panel 2007, wave 1.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Cees P. Middendorp, *Progressiveness and Conservatism: The Fundamental Dimensions of Ideological Controversy and Their Relationship to Social Class* (Paris: Mouton, 1978); Herbert Kitschelt with Anthony McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Gérard Grunberg and Étienne Schweisguth, "Vers une tripartition de l'espace politique en 1995," in *L'Électeur a ses raisons*, ed. Daniel Boy and Nonna Mayer (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1997): 179–218.
36. Dick Houtman, Peter Achterberg, and Anton Derks, *Farewell to the Leftist Working Class* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2008).
37. The Cronbach alpha that measures the scale's reliability is 0.75 for the ethnocentrism-authoritarianism scale and 0.54 for the economic liberalism scale; their mean score is 4.9 out of ten (we recomputed the scores on both scales on the basis of ten to make comparison easier). The "non-responses" are excluded. French Electoral Panel 2007, wave 1.
38. French Electoral Panel 2007, wave 1.
39. The reference modality is a woman, between 50 and 64, and with a secondary education qualification lower than the baccalaureate.
40. The level of statistical significance selected is 0.01 (a probability of one in one hundred that the observed result is due to chance). The relation between education and gender and the vote for Besancenot is less significant (0.05).
41. Nathan Sperber, in "Three Million Trotskyists?" finds the opposite relation between gender and extreme-left support in the 2002 presidential election, but he combined the votes for Olivier Besancenot with those of Arlette Laguiller who at that time attracted twice as many female voters (his scores were 4 percent among men and 5 percent among women, and hers respectively 4 and 7, according to the French Electoral Panel 2002, wave 2).
42. On the importance of the debate around Islam, its compatibility with "French values," and its electoral impact, see Vincent Tiberj, *La Crispation hexagonale* (Paris: Plon/Fondation Jean-Jaurès, 2007).
43. The term is obviously understood here in its left-wing and anti-Church sense. On the ambiguous relation of the Right and the extreme Right to the principle of "laïcité" or secularity, see Martine Barthélémy and Guy Michelat, "Dimensions de la laïcité dans la France d'aujourd'hui," *Revue Française de Science Politique* 57, 5 (2007): 644–98. Secularity, a republican principle first put forward at the time of French conflict between church and state, has been appropriated by the FN and other right-wing parties in order to delegitimize Islam.
44. Survey "Presidential Election 2012: Voting intentions" conducted by TNS-SOFRES for *Le Nouvel Observateur* and I-Télé, wave 2 (19–20 November 2010) and wave 4 (20–21 May 2011), telephone (N=1000).
45. For a similar conclusion based on a comparative study of extreme-left and extreme-right activists, see Antonio Chirumbolo, Nonna Mayer, and Hans De Witte, "Do Right and Left Wing Extremists Have Anything in Common?" in *Extreme Right Activists in Europe: Through the Magnifying Glass*, ed. Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer (London: Routledge, 2006), 248–68.

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