

THE NATIONAL FRONT AND AGENDA FORMATION IN FRANCE

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Introduction

The influence of marginal political parties over agenda formation has generally been understood from the perspective of coalition politics. Thus small parties influence the development of the policy agenda in a cabinet system through their ability to provide a majority of votes to one of two parties with a plurality in parliament in the process of government formation. However, little attention has been given to the influence of marginal parties over the political agenda when they are not needed for coalition formation. In the case of the French National Front, the party was represented in the National Assembly for only a brief period of two years (1986-88). Before that and since, although its electoral support has grown, the electoral law has more or less assured that it would have virtually no national representation.

This leaves us with two related puzzles. Why then does the party seem to have had considerable influence over the policy agenda, and why have voters continued to support a party that appears to have little hope of actually entering government? There is no obvious reason why NF should have significant influence over agenda formation on immigration, since, at least in principle, the major parties reached a general understanding on immigration policy over a decade ago with the passage of the Law of July 17, 1984, which established the equivalent of a French "green card."^[1] On the most fundamental aspects of immigration policy there has been a sustained agreement since that time: the continued ban on non-EU immigrants (balanced by a policy of family unification); the encouragement of voluntary repatriation; and the incorporation of existing immigrant groups into French society. For its part, the Left no longer focuses on multiculturalism, as it did before 1984, and the Right has generally avoided references to repatriation.

Despite occasional acknowledgements of this broad area of agreement, however, both the left and the right have tended to develop very different portrayals of the immigration issue, and have focused on policy differences that derive in part from these divergent portrayals. Moreover, the political issues of immigration have considerably exaggerated the policy differences. How can we understand this tendency to focus on differences and increasingly politicize immigration issues, and how can we understand the role that the National Front has played in this process?

What we will focus on here are the strategic behaviors of party leaders and policy-makers, and their attempts to manipulate the terms of the political debate on immigration. Seen in these terms, the substance of the issues involved in the immigration debate can be best understood as a part of a more general strategy of political competition. The importance of immigration issues on the political agenda, and the way that these issues have been portrayed, has had little to do with either how much opposition there has been to immigration or even the potential impact of the policy proposals. As Frank Baumgartner argues, The degree of conflict surrounding an issue, and therefore the incentives for the adoption of different strategies of policy-making, is not determined simply by the content of the policy. On the contrary, certain environments are much more likely than others to lead to conflict, no matter what the content of the policy.

The content of the issue or the policy proposal may limit strategic possibilities, argues Baumgartner, but an issue is defined and determined by policy-makers and policy proposers in the context of political conflict.[2]

The political importance of some issues is sometimes clear and evident, and in that sense cannot be denied, but most often policy-makers pick and choose issues around larger strategic considerations. Moreover, the way an issue is defined and portrayed determines who will become involved in the debate, what E.E. Schattschneider calls the "scope of conflict," and in which political arena the issue will be decided. Schattschneider argued that the struggle to expand or contract the scope of conflict is the most important determinant of its outcome.[3]

The impact of this struggle can be seen in the evolution of the issue of immigration issues in France. The party struggle has revolved around issue portrayal, the result of which has effectively expanded the arena of conflict; within the expanded arena of conflict, in turn, it has become more difficult to maintain the general agreement that was reached in the late 1980s. The success of the National Front has been more than electoral. Through the dynamics of party competition and policy formation the party has succeeded in changing the terms of the debate on immigration in a way that favors its own electoral success. In the remainder of this paper, I will analyze the dynamics of this success.

The Emergence of Conflict and Issue Portrayal

From the perspective of 1995 it is difficult to remember that conflict over immigration policy in France emerged relatively recently. One measure of this is that, except of the 1972 legislation against racial discrimination, no legislation on immigration was passed by the French parliament between the end of the Second World War and January, 1980. Since then, as Alec Hargreaves has accurately noted, every new French government has proposed important new legislation.

The lack of attention to questions of immigration at the parliamentary level under the Fifth Republic, is in part a consequence of the reduced powers of parliament under the constitution, and the ability of the executive to act without the parliamentary approval. However, parliament refrained from acting during the entire period of the Fourth Republic as well. In fact, the lack of legislative action can be attributed to the relatively uncontroversial nature of immigration policy during the long period of economic expansion and labor shortages. As long as immigration policy was portrayed in terms of labor recruitment there was little conflict among the diverse administrative agencies responsible for developing and monitoring this recruitment.

By the late 1960s, however, economic expansion had begun to slow down in France, and conflict began to emerge over how to deal with immigrants as "problematic" residents rather than necessary labor. Government reports issued after 1969 favored the restriction of immigration, especially immigration from North Africa, presuming that such immigrants constituted an "unassimilable island." [4] There was no significant conflict around the idea of immigration restriction, but there was also no agreement on how to implement these ideas. Throughout the decade of the 1970s, governments attempted to use the same administrative approach that they had used to recruit immigrant labor both to impose restrictions and create processes through which resident immigrants could be more easily integrated into the society and economy. Here the consensus which had supported this approach broke down.

The first indication of the breakdown was the reaction of the Left to two ministerial circulars issued in 1972. The Marcellin circular, issued by the Ministry of the Interior, stipulated that the well-established practice of regularizing illegal immigrants must be linked to a one-year work contract and proof of adequate housing; the Fontanet circular, issued by the Ministry of Labor, was intended to improve housing conditions for immigrant workers. As was usually the case, neither of these directives was issued with either the consultation or the approval of labor or employer organizations. The result was a somewhat strange explosion of conflict and opposition. The directives served to mobilize the support of the Socialists and Communists -- as well as the CGT and the CFDT -- in favor of the rights of immigrants in France.

The Council of State struck down the Fontanet/Marcellin circulars in 1975 (their implementation had been delayed as opposition to them increased), but this did not deter the government from making

even more rigorous proposals a few years later. By the end of the decade it was no longer possible to limit consideration of immigration policy to a small group of administrators, or even to the executive alone. So, when the president decided to deal with problems of immigrant labor in 1979, two of his ministers proposed legislation (projects de loi). The Minister of the Interior, Bonnet, proposed broader police powers to deal with illegal immigrants, and authorized those accused of illegal entry to be held up to a week; Labor Minister Stol,ru proposed the abolition of permanent labor permits, and limiting new permits to three years, only where jobs actually existed. But Bonnet and Stol,ru were in disagreement (Bonnet felt that his colleague's bill was too weak, and forced it to be withdrawn); and large chunks of the Bonnet law, finally passed in 1980, were declared unconstitutional by both the Council of State and the Constitutional Council.[5]

Bonnet/Stoléru dealt primarily with questions of entry and expulsion. However, as the initiatives of the state moved from frontier control to intervention both against and on behalf of immigrants already in France, conflict among policy-makers, and among political parties and interest groups, became more widespread and more intense. Conflict on this case followed changes in the policy arena, and the arena expanded as a result of the way that the definition of the immigration issue evolved during the 1970s.

At the national level, efforts to expel migrants in the country were opposed by the parties and unions of the left, but at the local level, efforts to develop programs to incorporate and integrate migrants increasingly involved many local political officials from the left, as well as administrative decision-makers, in the process. Thus a 1974 amendment to the finance law that required that a portion of the employer salary tax be set aside for immigration housing programs, ultimately required collaboration between national and local housing officials (OHLM), who in many cases are local elected officials. Similarly, the language classes for immigrant children, provided for in decrees by the Ministry of Education in 1970 and 1975, and other efforts to deal with the education of immigrant children involved similar collaboration, despite the fact that local governments have only limited involvement in education matters.

In this new and more complex decision-making arena that dealt with policies of integration representatives of the left played a more ambiguous role. During the 1970s numerous Communist and some Socialist-governed municipalities began to portray the immigration issue in terms of a dispute over limited social resources between native French and immigrants. Communist mayors, who had previously (1969) publicly protested the inequitable distribution of immigrant workers and their families in Communist-governed towns, reiterated their position in stronger terms in 1972 and 1974, and sent delegations to the prefectures to underline their differences with local administration.[6] By the late 1970s it had become commonplace in Communist and Socialist-governed municipalities to exclude immigrant families from housing, schools and even social services, actions often justified by notions of a "threshold of tolerance." [7]

In some cases these actions were taken in concert with local and national administration, while in others they represented a challenge to established practice. As conflict among decision-makers developed, however, local authorities tended to expand the arena of politics through public statements and public meetings, using a negative portrayal of immigrants and a general portrayal of the dangers of immigration as mobilizing devices. This conflict at the local level spread to the national level during the presidential campaign in 1980-81 when the Communist Party engaged in a more generalized anti-immigrant campaign which related immigrants not only to housing problems, but to crime as well.[8] The expansion of decision-making arena was given greater impetus by urban riots involving immigrant youth during the "hot summer" of 1981. The organization of two major commissions to deal with urban problems not only assured broader participation and consultation on problems of integration, but also further transformed the portrayal of immigration by expanding the number of issue areas to which it was related.

Thus, by the time of the electoral breakthrough of the National Front in 1983-84, not only were immigration issues on the political agenda, but their portrayal had changed fundamentally as compared with a decade earlier. As a result of efforts to deal with questions of integration, especially after the suspension of most legal, non-European immigration in 1974, local officials were brought into the policy-making process. Within this larger arena, local officials (especially those in municipalities governed by the left in which there were large concentrations of immigrants) in conflict with the some of the policies imposed or permitted by central authorities, further expanded the scope of conflict by going public with a portrayal of immigration as an ethnic danger to mobilize support. This portrayal

was further accentuated when issues of immigration were injected into the presidential campaign in 1980-81, and the scope of conflict was further widened as a result of the urban riots during the summer of 1981 and further incidents during subsequent years.

Even without the National Front, by 1983-84, the broad portrayal of immigration issues had ensured a broad scope of participants in decision-making at several levels of the French governmental structure, all of them periodically tempted to expand the scope of the political debate from time to time. In this context, I would argue that a broad party agreement on immigration issues would be difficult to maintain under the best of circumstances.

Furthermore, the electoral breakthrough of the National Front at this point becomes more understandable in a context in which that scope of conflict had been expanding for some time, and in which the portrayal of the issues by some of the participants had approached the portrayal that NF had been advocating at least since after the 1978 legislative elections.[9] Two trends tend support this conclusion. First, although dissatisfaction with the Socialist-Communist government developed rapidly in 1983-84, voters need not have expressed this dissatisfaction by voting for the National Front; after all, they had the obvious option of voting for the established opposition, which is exactly what voters had done in 1981. The National Front and its precursor, *Ordre Nouveau*, had been preaching an anti-immigrant theme for a decade, without any significant electoral response. By the early 1980s, however, the restructured policy arena, and the conflict within the arena, not only provided the dynamic to expand the scope of conflict, but also changed the structure of opportunities for a marginal party such as the National Front. The mobilization efforts initiated by local officials worked to the party's benefit by reinterpreting the core issue of the extreme fight in terms of the rhetoric of the left.

Second, what most differentiated the FN electorate from the electorate of the established fight from the very beginning of the breakthrough, was its opposition to immigration and its commitment to voting in terms of fears about security. (See Table 1.)

The initial electoral breakthroughs of the party assured that pattern that had developed in the late 1970s would continue, that political party conflict would continue to generate conflictual (rather than consensual) portrayals of immigration (and integration) issues, even when divergence on policy was relatively narrow. This was true first because the challenge of the National Front brought increasing numbers of voters into the arena of conflict, even when they tended to support other political parties; second because electoral support for the National Front grew, even when the party lost elections, posing a challenge to the electoral, if not the representational balance between left and right; finally, the electoral success of the National Front has been sufficient for the party to gain representation below the national level, and to create considerable policy pressure.

The Voters and the Agenda

The primary influence of the National Front on the political agenda derives from its ability first to attract and hold voters, and second from its ability to influence the priorities of voters who support other political parties. As the party has attracted and held voters, it has posed a strategic problem primarily for other political parties of the right, but increasingly for parties of the left as well for somewhat different reasons.

The electoral emergence of the National Front in 1983-84 has been well documented and analyzed: from the sudden breakthrough in the European Elections in 1984 with over 11 percent of the vote (2.2 million) to the 14.4 percent of the vote that Jean-Marie Le Pen attracted in the first round of the presidential elections in 1988 (4.4 million votes), to the record 15.1 percent (4.6 million votes) vote for Le Pen in the first round of the presidential elections in 1995.[10] The structure of that vote has changed somewhat over the years, but what is most important from the point of view of its influence on agenda formation is first that the overwhelming majority of National Front voters in 1984 "converted" from the established parties of the right (see Table 1), and that since then, the growth in the electorate can be attributed to the ability of the party to attract a large percentage of new voters (and former abstainers), while holding on to its old voters better than any other party in France.

Half the of those voters who supported Le Pen's list in the European Elections in 1984 had "converted" from one of the two major political parties of the established right, while another 19 percent had been mobilized from the ranks of new voters and abstainers. The remainder had either

voted for François Mitterrand in 1981 or had voted for one of the lesser candidates of the right or left. Clearly, in 1984, these were not party loyalists for the most part, since three-quarters of these voters identified with a party other than the National Front (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

The Political Origin of the 1884 FN Electorate (%)

Vote in the first round of the 1981 Presidential Elections:

G. Marchais (Communist)		1
A. Laguiller (far left)	--	
F. Mitterrand	24	
B. Lalonde (environmentalist)		2
V. Giscard d'Estaing (UDF-Centrist)		23
J. Chirac (RPR-Gaullist)	27	
M. Debr.,-M-F Garaud (div. right)		4
Abstainer, no response or new voters		19

Party Preference in 1984:

Communist	1
Socialist	9
MRG	1
Ecologists	2
UDF	12
RPR	33
FN	24
No response	18
TOTAL	100

Source: From a SOFRES survey in Edwy Plenel and Alain Rollat, *L'effet Le Pen* (Paris: Editions La D,couverte/Le Monde, 1984), p. 130.

Between 1984 and 1986 this electorate gradually solidified. Surveys indicated that 65 percent of those who had voted FN in 1984 voted once again for the party in the 1986 legislative election. Almost 30 percent of this electorate did "return," to the RPR/UDF. Nevertheless, FN continued to attract a proportion of former abstainers and new voters that was larger than the proportion of its vote in the election, and its "loyalty" rate was far higher than that of other protest parties, such as the Ecologists (with a 20 percent level). It was argued at the time that the temporary impact of proportional representation had encouraged the electorate to vote FN in this "serious" election (as compared with the European Elections four years earlier, which were deemed to have no serious consequences).

However, when proportional representation was abandoned in for the 1988 legislative elections, the proportion of the vote remained about the same as in 1986, but the proportion of voters remaining loyal between 1986 and 1988 rose to that of the established parties (see Table 2). Moreover, FN continued to attract a disproportionate share of new voters and former abstainers. These new recruits, combined with defectors from the established parties of the right, made up for the losses to the right. Some softness in FN electoral support was signified by the fact that Le Pen the candidate for the presidency in 1988 had attracted five percent more than Front National the party, with most of those losses going to support candidates of the established right. Nevertheless, by the 1993 legislative elections, NF candidates (none of whom won a seat) attracted 89 percent of the voters that had voted for the National Front in 1988, as well as a significant number of votes from both the right, the left and new voters and former abstainers, to increase its legislative showing by 25 percent (see Table 3).

TABLE 2

Vote Transfers From 1986 to 1988 Legislative Elections

Vote in 1988 Legislative Elections, First Round

VOTE/86	COM	SOC	ECO	RT.	NF	
COM	85	15	0	0	0	100%
SOC	8	84	0	5	3	100%
RPR/UDF(RT)	1	5	1	86	7	100%
NF	0	0	0	19	81	100%
ABSTENT/-	12	34	1	38	13	100%

NEW

Source: Sofres, Les Elections de printemps 1988 (Paris: Sofres, 1988), p. 36.

TABLE 3

Vote Transfers From 1986 to 1988 Legislative Elections

Vote in 1993 Legislative Elections, First Round

VOTE/88	COM	SOC	RPR	UDF	NF	
COM	78	4	1	5	2	100%
SOC	7	50	8	6	7	100%
RPR/UDF	1	2	39	35	8	100%
NF	1	2	2	4	89	100%
ABSTENT/-	6	15	21	19	13	100%

NEW

Source: J. Jaffr., "Legislatives, 93...", Sofres, L'Etat de l'opinion 1994 (Paris: Seuil, 1994), p. 145.

Thus during the past decade the National Front has become established and stabilized as an electoral party, largely, though not entirely, at the expense of the more established parties of the right. But, in a more subtle way, the establishment of the NF has also come at the expense of the left. One of the most striking aspects of the electoral growth of the party has been its spread to current and former "bastions" of Communist strength. Thus if we consider 23 towns (with more than 30 thousand population) in which the PCF dominated from at least 1947 until at least the early 1980s, in all of these towns the National Front has attracted an electorate well above its national average, and in some it has become the second party to the Communists. In 1986, when the party gained less than 10 percent of the vote nationally, it gained more than 13 percent in these bastions. In 1993, with more than 14 percent of the vote nationally, the party attracted 17 percent of the vote in these towns, and since 1986 the FN vote has been generally stabilized, at least in terms of percentage.

There is no evidence of which I am aware that there has been any substantial direct transfer of votes from former Communist voters to the FN, but the FN has pretty clearly succeeded in mobilizing the kinds of voters that used to be mobilized by the Communists: young working class voters. This is probably what accounts for the sharp rise in the proportion of working class votes going to the National Front (see Table 4).

TABLE 4

Percentage of Blue and White Collar Workers Voting for the National Front: 1984-93

	1984E	1986L	1988P	1988L	1993L	1995P
BL. COL	10	11	18	11	15	27
WT. COL	11	12	13	10	16	17

Sources: Elisabeth Dupoirier, "L'Electorat français, le 17 juin 1984," in Sofres, Opinion publique 1985 (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), p. 209; Sofres, Les Elections du printemps 1988, pp. 4 and 34; Jérôme Jaffr., "Legislatives 93: l'alternance inéluctable," Sofres, L'Etat de l'opinion 1994 (Paris: Seuil, 1994), p. 144; Liberation, 25 April, 1995, p. 8.

Thus, in important ways, the National Front has become an established political competitor, and this role has been stabilized not only at the national level, but within the constituencies and sub-national politics as well. With both the right and the left, the NF is seeking to expand its influence by competing in different places (and sometimes in the same place) for similar voters. This process seems to have had the impact of changing the political agenda for voters, not only of those who have voted for the National Front, but for voters who have supported other parties as well. One possible indication of this impact is the priority that voters have given to various issues from election to election.

In 1984, what most clearly differentiated the voters for the National Front from those of the more established right (as well as other parties) was the priority that they gave to the issue of immigration. Twenty six percent of those who voted for the National Front cited "immigrants" as their primary concern, and 30 percent cited "law and order," compared with 6 percent and 15 percent for the entire sample (see Table 5). By

1986, as the NF electorate began to solidify, the priorities of party voters also solidified, with 50 percent giving priority to law and order and 60 percent to immigration (several responses were possible).

What is more striking, however, is how the issue priorities of the National Front and its voters have influenced the priorities of those voting for other political parties. In 1984, relatively few voters outside of the those that supported the National Front considered either immigrants or law and order to be a strong priority. Now, the importance of these issues rank with such issues as social inequality, and far higher than concerns with the environment, corruption and the construction of Europe; only concern with unemployment ranks higher.[11]

TABLE 5

The Motivations of Voters: 1984-93*

(Percentage of Party Voters Voting for These Reasons)

?: Law and Order Immigrants Unemployment Soc. Inequality

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	84	86	88	93	84	86	88	93	84	86	88	93	84	86	88	93
PC	9	13	19	29	2	7	12	16	37	59	59	77	33	30	50	52
PS	8	10	21	24	3	8	13	19	27	40	43	71	24	25	43	40
RT	17	31	38	37	3	16	19	33	20	50	41	67	7	8	18	23
NF	30	50	55	57	26	60	59	72	17	35	41	64	10	10	18	26
TT	15	24	31	34	6	17	22	31	24	46	45	68	16	17	31	32

*Since several responses were possible, the total across may be more than 100%. For 1988, the results are for supporters of presidential candidates nominated by the parties indicated.

Sources: Exit Poll, SOFRES/TFI, June 17, 1984, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, June 22, 1984; and SOFRES, *l'Etat de l'opinion, Cl,s pour 1987* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p. 111. Pascal Perrineau, "Les Etapes d'une implantation ,lectorale (1972-1988), in Nonna Mayer and Pascal Perrineau, Eds., *Le Front National ... d,couvert* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP, 1988), p. 62. Pascal Perrineau, "Le Front National la force solitaire," in Philippe Habert, Pascal Perrineau and Colette Ysmal, *Le Vote sanction* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP/Dept. d'Etudes Politiques du Figaro, 1993), p. 155.

We can look at the relationship between the rise of the National Front and the evolving priorities of voters in a somewhat different way. In 1993 fewer than half of the voters who identified themselves ideologically as "center" said that they had voted for a candidate of the established right, compared with 63 percent in 1986; on the other hand, 63 percent of those who identified as "extreme right" voted for the established fight in 1993, compared with 55 percent in 1986. Since the vote for the established right in 1993 was slightly lower than in 1986 (despite the electoral sweep in 1993), and those identified as "extreme right" was somewhat larger, by 1993 "We find ourselves... in the presence of a political radicalization of the moderate right electorate, probably linked to the increase of its audience among working class categories." [12]

Thus, the emergence of the National Front in electoral politics in the early 1980s first reflected the preceding weakening of the party system, as well as conflict about the political agenda among political actors involved in the policy-making on integration and incorporation across the political spectrum. But the ability of the party to build an electoral following, and its increasingly important role in the political debate, had an impact on the priorities of all voters. In a little more than a decade, the National Front has played a role in the development of the political agenda by effectively challenging the Communist Party in mobilizing young working class voter, and by moving the priorities of the voters for the moderate, established right further to the right.

The Party System and the Political Agenda

The changing priorities of the electorate, however, both reflected and supported the dynamics of the party system with the National Front as an emerging player. Once immigration became an issue of party politics, the dynamics of the party system gradually changed its portrayal to that of an ethnic danger to the French nation. In fact, in the 1980s a significant gap emerged between the political portrayal of immigration and the principal aspects of immigration policy. The role of the National Front assured that conflict over policy portrayal would continue to dominate the essential agreement about immigration policy among the established parties. In the context of French party politics, the National Front has succeeded in expanding the terms of the political debate from specific issues of immigrant integration to broader questions of French national identity.

Through the dynamics of party competition it has forced other political parties, especially those of the right, to address these issues and to place them high on their political agendas. The story of immigration politics after 1983, is less the struggle over policy than the struggle by political parties on both the Right and the Left to undermine the ability of the National Front to sustain the initiative in portraying these issues. Jacques Chirac's centre-right Rassemblement Pour la R. publique (RPR) has been torn between competing with FN for voters who are frightened by the problems of a multiethnic society by cooperating with the party and accepting their issues in more moderate terms, and attempting to destroy their rival on the right through isolation and rejection of their portrayal of the issue altogether. Each time that RPR feels that it has succeeded in out maneuvering the National Front (the legislative elections of 1988 and the municipal elections of 1989), it is reminded that the challenge will not disappear (the by-election victories of the FN in Marseilles and Dreux in December, 1989, the Legislative elections of 1993 and the Presidential elections of 1995). In the end, the electorally weak parties of the right frequently need the 10-15 percent of the electorate that has voted FN.

As for the Socialists, through 1993 they struggled to defuse the rhetoric of the National Front by a variety of approaches: by policy initiatives (strengthening border controls, at the same time that they tried to develop a policy of integration -- see below) when they have controlled the government; by agreeing with the established Right, as did Socialist Prime Minister Laurent Fabius while debating with Chirac in 1985 that "the National Front poses some real questions..." when they have been electorally threatened by the opposition; and, more generally, by alternating between the pluralist rhetoric of a "right to difference" approach to immigrants and an individualistic "right to indifference" approach (see below).[13]

Despite the confusion, the dynamics of party competition have resulted in redefinition of the issue of immigration in national politics, from a labor market problem, to an integration/incorporation problem, to a problem that touches on national identity, problems of education, housing, law and order, as well as the requirements for citizenship. A reasonably clear consensus among the established parties of the Right and Left developed between 1984 and 1985, if not about the detail of policy, then about a general approach to policy, that goes back to the consensus vote on legislation to establish a single 10-year residency card (a French Green Card) in July, 1984, and the Fabius-Chirac debate in 1985: a policy of integration "...respecting our laws, our customs and our values," that limits any substantial increase in immigrants, but that also excludes recourse to forced return.[14]

However, within the relatively open national arena it has been difficult to relate the general consensus on policy to the details on application and (most of all) to public portrayal of immigration issues. The National Front maintains pressure on the Right, while the Socialists in government were challenged by more politicized North Africans born in France ("beurs"), who are now well organized, and by more assertive Moslems who have been less hesitant about questioning French laws, customs and values. Thus, the Rocard government wanted to downplay the issues of immigration when it first arrived in office in 1988. Nevertheless, it found that, because of the challenge of the "Islamic scarf" crisis in the fall of 1989, as well as subsequent electoral victories of the National Front, it was unable to avoid the pressure that moved immigration to center- stage. The "foulard affair," very quickly became the concern of the Minister of Education, as well as an issue of parliamentary debate.[15] A decade earlier, such incidents might have been dealt with more quietly within the local arena, in the same way that it dealt with housing and other school problems. By 1989, however, local school problems that involved integration could no longer be contained by the local political-administrative system, and were rapidly translated into the vocabulary of national political issues. In the context of party competition, new incidents are thus redefined in terms of the existing debate.

The importance of the struggle over issue portrayal is illustrated well by the events in the spring of 1990, when the Rocard government attempted to develop a consensus about, what amounted to, the portrayal of the immigration problem. Using as a pretext a disturbing report by the National Consultative Committee on the Rights of Man, the prime minister called a meeting of all political leaders, except those of the National Front, to develop a program to combat racism. The opposition, however, rejected this definition of the problem, and organized their own meeting (on March 31/April 1) the weekend preceding the meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss problems of immigration. When they met with the Government, the opposition came armed with four propositions for changing from the Rocard government a commitment for a second meeting that would deal with their initiatives, preceding a general parliamentary debate on racism and immigration in May, 1990.[16]

Behind most of this activity was the continuing pressure of the National Front, which was holding its National Congress while the government and the centre-right opposition were developing their positions. The opposition groups had never come closer to agreement on a unified approach to the politics of immigration, and their propositions represented a way of differentiating themselves from the government while tentatively approaching some of the ideas of the National Front. The clearest statement was made by former president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who was quoted as saying: "The foreigners can live in France with full rights [dans le respect des droits de l'homme] but they cannot change France." Giscard promptly launched a national petition to hold a referendum to make naturalization legislation more restrictive (one of the proposals agreed to by the opposition and eventually passed in 1993).

So, what began as a local problem in the Fall of 1989 was magnified by the electoral success of the National Front in by-elections a month later, and seems to have exacerbated divisions between the government and the opposition over immigration--or rather how to define and treat foreigners on French soil. The far right benefited from growing national concern about immigration (between September, 1989 and February, 1990, the issue moved from seventh to second place among the concerns of French voters), but also mediated and defined that concern within the party system. In this kind of environment, it seems unlikely that any kind of expression of consensus could develop, despite the more general agreement on general policy. As *Le Monde* noted several years ago, "...political leaders are convinced that the issue is too important for partisan quarrels They vie with each other to accentuate their divergences as if to mask their agreements.[17]

These divergences were further accentuated with the return of the right to power in 1993. The victorious coalition of the Right made immigration/integration policy a centerpiece of their campaign, but this did not prevent the National Front from increasing its percentage of the vote by 25 percent over 1988. The organization of the new government in April, 1993, reflected its intention to move in a clear and aggressive way to attract the extreme right electorate by raising the stakes of the immigration debate in a way that would differentiate it from the previous Socialist government. The platform of the Right coalition had already announced the intention of the new government to resuscitate legislation that would modify the nationality code to make it more difficult for children born in France of non-French parents to obtain French citizenship; the resuscitated proposals would also give mayors the right to block family reunification, and facilitate the jailing and expulsion of undocumented foreigners. While all of these moves certainly made life more difficult for resident foreigners (and non-white citizens as well), their implementation produced results that should have broadened the attraction of the establish right.

The powerful ministry of the interior was given to Charles Pasqua, who had held the same post during the period 1986-88. Pasqua, strongly committed to such changes, would be the chief government spokesman for this high-profile effort. At the same time, Pierre M,hagnerie, whose position on immigration and integration is far "softer" than that of Pasqua, was given the ministry of justice, and Simone Weil, who was an open opponent of the National Front and a hard line towards immigrants, became Minister of Social and Urban Affairs. Thus, Weil would be the effective spokesman for integration policy, while M,hagnerie would attempt to soften the rough edges of the Pasqua hard core policies.[18] The focus on new departures in immigration policy had been organized into the ministry of the interior, while lower priority management of integration policy had been left with the ministry of social and urban affairs. In both cases, policy-making remained in the public arena, centralized in the office of the minister, and arbitrated through the office of the prime minister through public and well-publicized moves.[19]

In fact, these bold and open moves produced real results. "Agreement with the ideas supported by J-M Le Pen" fell by 40 percent (and even more among the electorate of the right) after the conservative victory in 1993, and opposition to his ideas as "a danger to democracy" increased to record levels.[20] In addition, by 1995 it was clear that the new legislation was producing desired policy results by dramatically reducing immigration by 30 percent in 1994.[21] None of this produced the desired political results, however. The electoral appeal of the National Front remained sufficiently strong to enable Jean Marie Le Pen to top his previous record in Presidential elections with over 15 percent of the vote in April, 1995.

Clearly the established parties of the right have been under particular pressure to appear to take strong action in order to combat the challenge of the National Front, but Socialist governments have

also been sensitive to challenges from the right opposition, which in turn was speaking to the challenge from its right.

Thus, after the Socialists returned to power in 1988 there was a steady increase in the number of foreigners detained because of invalid documents: the number of foreigners detained rose two and a half times from 1989 to 1991, but the percentage of these actually expelled (some after hearings) has declined from over 60 to 18 percent.[22] The government was clearly making a point at a time when it was under considerable pressure from the opposition, and when the National Front was doing well in by-elections. The particular action in 1991, represented a move by the Cresson government to emphasize border controls rather than integration policy, according to a key official in the Ministry of the Interior.

This way of expressing the concern of the Cresson government (1991-92) was decided in a well publicized meeting of a *comité interministériel* (meetings of a group of ministers called and chaired by the prime minister) on immigration. The report issued at the end of the meeting accentuated the government's commitments to focus on border controls.[23] *Comités interministériels* have been relatively infrequent in recent years, and have been used as an arena for a public shift in the political agenda.

This focus, was a change from that of the previous Rocard government (1988-91), which had been reacting to a series of incidents that began with the "foulard" affair in the Fall of 1989 (see above). The Rocard government, which had been forced to give more weight to problems of integration because of the foulard affair, attempted to circumscribe and contain these issues in a different way. It first created a new framework for political decision-making: a High Commission on Integration under the auspices of the same director (Marceau Long), whom the previous conservative government had named as to head their commission to study the naturalization and citizenship aspects of immigration in 1987; and a special Secretary-General (Hubert Pr, vot) who operated out of the Prime Minister's office and, in effect, establish a direct link with him.

With the support of the commission, the government also attempted to redefine the portrayal of the problem of integration, with a much stronger focus on immigrants as only one of several groups on the margins of urban society. In its first report to the prime minister, the High Commission, rejected notions of insertion that were current in the early 1980s as too close to *le droit ... la différence*, and ideas of assimilation as too close to a narrow Jacobin notion of cultural unity. Instead, borrowing from the work of Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux, the commission chose to focus policy recommendations on integration, defined in terms of a dynamic, reciprocal process which, while recognizing the importance of cultural differences, stresses the importance of those cultural elements shared by the entire community.[24]

The report, in fact, reflected policy choices that were well underway by the time it was published. Since 1989, the Rocard government had been focusing increasingly on immigrant problems as a part of the urban agenda, and the need for equal treatment for immigrants in many sectors of French social and economic life. This policy orientation picked up and emphasized aspects of policy development that had begun in the early 1980s in housing and education, and in practical terms, seemed to mean a portrayal of immigration in terms that could defuse those aspects of the immigration issue that were most effective for electoral mobilization.[25]

The Cresson government made a different agenda choice. It downgraded consideration of integration questions altogether by removing consideration of integration issues from the prime minister's office, by downgrading the office of Secretary General for Integration, and by naming a Secretary of State for Integration of African origin (Kofi Yamgnane) attached to the Ministry of Social Affairs. The new Secretary of State had been mayor of a small village, and had little political weight. The Secretary General, Pr, vot, remained, but he was now attached to the Ministry of Social Affairs. While he continued to attend some meetings, the office no longer played any role in coordinating immigration policy.[26]

Yamgnane might have replaced him in this role, but his position was too weak, and the mandate of his office reflected the new thinking about immigration to a far greater degree than that of his predecessor. All of the top civil servants in the secretariat were experts on urban problems (indeed almost all of them had come from the *Ministre de la Ville*), and none had any experience working on immigration problems.[27] The projects in which the secretariat was involved included projects on immigrants, but the majority dealt with more general considerations of "the excluded": poverty, prostitutes and battered women, young workers and job training.

Thus, under Cresson, between electoral cycles, integration policy was moved from the more public political arena back to the administrative arena, constrained by what the administrators refer to as a "general political line" that emphasizes "integration" in the ways that it has been defined above. However, we have seen that the dynamics of the party arena create a volatile situation, and, with the onset of yet another electoral cycle in the Fall of 1992, integration policy was "politicized" once again.

Thus, it is hardly surprising that the electoral success of the National Front has served to define and has driven agenda formation of successive governments. One lesson we might draw is that portrayals of immigration/integration issues that are meant to mobilize a broad scope of participation seem only to increase NF support. However, governments, driven by the dynamics of party competition, seem incapable of eluding the pressure to recapture a volatile electorate by expanding the scope of conflict.

The Dynamic of Alliance Formation

The dynamic of competition is also evident at the level of alliance formation at the subnational level. Alliance formation in regions, departments and communes takes place at two levels: at the level of electoral alliances, and at the level of governing. In general, established political parties would prefer not to engage with the National Front in the formation of alliances either explicitly or implicitly. Nevertheless, from the very earliest days of the electoral breakthrough, this became a position that was almost impossible to maintain. In the municipal elections of March, 1983, local RPR and UDF politicians in Dreux decided to form a joint list with the NF, a decision that was approved by the national leadership of both parties. That decision was reversed when irregularities forced a second election in September. However, under existing electoral rules the joint list of the right would have been forced to play an unacceptable price if they continued to ignore FN in the second round, and they decided to form a joint list, which was victorious. As a result, three National Front councilors were named assistant mayors in the new local government.[28]

Since then, the ability of the party to win elections at the sub-national level, where there is some dose of proportionality, has increased with its ability to field candidates. In 1986, NF lists were presented in each of the 22 regions in France. With almost 10 percent of the vote, the party elected 137 (out of 1682) regional councilors; not a lot, but enough to exert strategic influence over coalition formation in 12 of the 22 regions. In six regions their votes were needed to elect a council president from the established right. In Languedoc-Roussillon the Gaullist President reached a formal accord on a "Program of Action" with FN; in five other regions FN was able to negotiate important positions in the regional government, and in five additional regions it gained some lesser positions.[29] Six years later, the FN increased its regional representation to 239, with representation in every region. In 14 of the 22 regions the right now depended for its majority on the councilors of the NF, who carefully demonstrated their ability to arbitrate in the election of regional presidents and the selection of regional executives.[30]

The influence of NF elected representatives on agenda formation is still unclear, but the expanding implantation of the party at this level probably has an impact on the day to day operation of government and on the construction of alliances for future elections. We find a similar pattern at the local (commune) level.

With almost little presence at the local level (despite the victory in Dreux), the party benefited from some conversions of local notables from the established right. By 1989, NF was able to present lists in 214 of the 392 cities with more than 20 thousand people. In other cases, candidates of the NF joined with others in lists simply dubbed divers droite or extrême droite. Well over a thousand NF municipal councilors were elected in 143 towns with more than 20 thousand people, 478 on lists with the NF label and 621 on alliance lists or as individual candidates. Here too, the agenda-setting role of these municipal councilors is unclear. What is clear that at least in the larger towns in France, the National Front is now engaged in day to day politics, and is in a position to build support on the basis of its local notability, in much the same way that it has in Dreux.[31]

Conclusion

Now we can return to some of the questions with which we began. The National Front has been a major force in agenda formation essentially because of its ability to attract large numbers of voters that other parties are not willing to concede to them. The electoral breakthrough of FN can be attributed in part to electoral volatility and the willingness of voters to reject the established parties of the early 1980s, but also because of what had happened to the core issue represented by the National Front. During the period of the 1970s, governments had shifted the focus of policy-making to problems of integration/incorporation, which in turn brought into the policy-making network large numbers of elected local officials and administrators. The expansion of this network also served to increase disagreement about policy choices, and conflict about policy tempted those in disagreement to expand the scope of conflict by increasing portraying immigration issues in terms that would bring them new allies. This process then created an environment favorable to the National Front.

In the cauldron of party competition the National Front then proved adept at altering the political agenda, first by actually winning some elections, second by threatening to deprive other parties of winning elections, and finally by winning enough electoral contests at the sub-national level to engage in alliance-building (often unacknowledged) and/or political blackmail. In either case, the NF gained influence over agenda formation. One major result of this process was to convince increasingly large numbers of voters that, whichever party they supported, questions of immigration were an important priority.

What is most striking about this process that we have analyzed here is first the extent to which issue portrayal has been dominated by the concerns of the National Front, second the gap between the conflict over portrayal and broad area of agreement among political parties on policies of immigration, and third the extent to which portrayal appears is different from what we know about immigrant integration. The National Front taps deep fears about national identity, and the ethnic danger posed by large numbers of North African immigrants of the Islamic faith, fears that have been fed by leaders of all major political parties, as well as by administrative reports for decades. Nevertheless, the most recent study of Algerians in France indicates a steady process of quiet integration: a high level of intermarriage (50 percent for men born in France) and a low level of religious practice that rivals that of the "native" French population.[32] While such data is important to integrate into our analysis, they do not necessarily have an impact on the political debate, since political issues, and political reality are constructed through dynamics that tend to mold new facts into old political categories.

ENDNOTES

1. See Patrick Weil, *La France et ses étrangers* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1991), Chapters VI and VII.
2. Frank R. Baumgartner, *Conflict and Rhetoric in French Policymaking* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), p. 6.
3. E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People* (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 4.
4. See the best known report written by Correntin Calvez, "Le Problème des travailleurs étrangers," *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Avis et Rapports du Conseil Economique et Social*, March 27, 1969.
5. See the account in Douglas E. Ashford, *Policy and Politics in France: Living With Uncertainty* (Phila: Temple University Press, 1982), Chapter 7.
6. See Andr  Vieuget, *Français et immigrés: le combat du P.C.F.* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1975)
7. I have previously explored this process in "Immigrants and Politics in France," in John S. Ambler, *The French Socialist Experiment* (Phila: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1985).
8. I have analyzed this campaign in "Immigrants in the Town: Communism and Urban Politics in France," in Ida Simon-Barouh and Pierre-Jean Simon, *Les Etrangers dans la ville* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990).
9. The anti-immigrant theme had been part of the FN rhetoric from the very beginning. However, after 1979 the party strongly emphasized the danger of immigrants and immigration as a way to establish a clear demarcation with the established right.

10. See my article, "The National Front in France and the Construction of Political Legitimacy," *West European Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April, 1987; and the excellent collection edited by Nonna Mayer and Pascal Perrineau, *Le Front National & d,ouvert* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP, 1989).
11. See Pascal Perrineau, "Le Front National la force solitaire," in Philippe Habert, Pascal Perrineau and Colette Ysmal, *Le Vote sanction* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP/Dept. d'Etudes Politiques du Figaro, 1993), p. 155.
12. Jean Chiche and Elisabeth Dupoirier, "Les Voies contrast,es de la reconquête ,lectorale. L',lectorat de la droite moder,e en 1993," in Philippe Habert, Pascal Perrineau and Colette Ysmal, *Le Vote sanction* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP/Dept. d'Etudes Politiques du Figaro, 1993), p.133.
13. *Le Monde*, February 11 and December 7, 1989. See Judith Vichniac, "French Socialists and Droit ... la difference," *French Politics and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Winter, 1991.
14. See Leveau "Les partis et l'int,gration des beurs," pp. 258-261; and Weil, *La France et ses ,trangers*, pp. 181-185 and Ch. VII.
15. See David Beriss, "Scarves, Schools and Segregation: The Foulard Affair," *French Politics and Society*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1990.
16. The initiatives of the government and the opposition are reported in *Le Monde*, April, 3 and 4, 1990.
17. *Le Monde*, April 3, 1990, 12.
18. *Le Monde*, 2 April, and 20-21 June, 1993
19. *Le Monde*, 22 June, 1993
20. *Le Monde*, February 4, 1994
21. *Le Monde*, February 12/13, 1995
- 22.
- ARTICLE 22 EXPULSIONS ("Reconduites frontiŠres
- | | Detained for Expulsion | Expelled | Percentage |
|------|------------------------|----------|------------|
| 1988 | 8992 | 5863 | 65.2 |
| 1989 | 7669 | 4808 | 62.7 |
| 1990 | 9641 | 4567 | 47.4 |
| 1991 | 32673 | 5867 | 18.0 |
- Source: Ministry of the Interior, Fichier GASCH3
23. comit,s interministerials are infrequent formal meetings initiated by the prime minister around a specific subject. More frequent, regular contacts among ministries dealing with a particular problem are r,unions interminist,rielles, usually attended by high civil servants. For the results of the July, 1991 meeting, see: *La Maitrise de l'immigration*, Premier Ministre, Service de Presse, July 11, 1991
24. Haut Conseil ... l'Int,gration, *Pour un module fran§ais d'int,gration* (Paris: La Documentation fran§aise, 1991), pp. 18-19; Costa-Lascoux, *De l'immigr, au citoyen*, Paris: La Documentation fran§aise, 1989) pp. 11-12.
25. Costa-Lascoux, op. cit., pp. 77-114.
26. Interview with Hubert Pr,vot, June 4, 1992.
27. Interviews at the Secretariat d'Etat de l'Int,gration, May 27, 1992.
28. I have explored the Dreux election in "The National Front and the Construction of Political Legitimacy," *West European Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 1, April, 1987.
29. See Guy Birenbaum, *Le Front National en politique* (Paris: Balland, 1992), pp. 79-80.
30. See Claude Patrait, "Pouvoirs r,gionaux en chantier...," in Philippe Habert, Pascal Perrineau and Colette Ysmal, *La vote ,clat*, (Paris; Presses de la FNSP/Dept. d',tudes politiques du Figaro, 1992), p. 311.
31. See Birenbaum, op. cit., pp. 164-170.
32. These are results of a study by INED, published in *Le Monde*, March 31, 1995, p. 8.