University of Glasgow

Garraud, Nicholas (2017) *Students and far right parties: a case study of the electoral behaviour of students voting for the National Front in the last French presidential elections.* [MSc]

School of Social and Political Science

Students and far right parties: A case study of the electoral

behaviour of students voting for the National Front in the last

French presidential elections

September 2017

Word Count: 12,565

Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree

of M.Sc. in International Relations

University of Glasgow

Acknowledgement

I wish here to express my gratitude to my Supervisor, Dr. Christopher Claasen who has always made himself available to answer my questions and guided me throughout this paper with particular enthusiasm.

I am also particularly grateful to my friends and family who provided me with unconditional support and patience through this incredible academic and human journey at the University of Glasgow. Completing this dissertation would not have been possible without their love.

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Abstract

The electoral behaviour of students voting for far right parties is an underdeveloped area of research in political behaviour studies that this project aims to explore. Focusing on the case of France and the National front, this dissertation seeks to answer the specific question of why some students chose to vote for the national front in recent presidential elections. Drawing upon existing literature on electoral behaviour and the transcript of semi structured interviews I have conducted with students who voted for the national front in recent French political elections, this dissertation offers a qualitative analysis of a political phenomenon that is subject to little analysis. The findings show that the student's vote for the national front relies on a clear lack of party identification, which allows for greater mobility on the right side of the political spectrum. This lack of party identification associated with student's strong ideological stances as well as the national front capacity to transform its image over the years has led the participants not only to vote for the national front but also to abandon traditional right wing parties.

Chapter 1: Introduction:

In the vast majority of contemporary democratic systems, the act of voting still represents one of the highest symbols of democracy in action (Coleman, 2013, 2-3). It is a practice that allows individuals to make common decisions of any nature. This practice is essential within many systems as it brings legitimacy to political choices surrounding a plethora of issues. From ancient Greece and the agora where citizens were gathered to vote for important decision for the city, the election of a representative in trade unions to modern elections, the act of voting remains an inevitable social practice in any given system, whether it be formal or informal. The act of voting has the power to guide a nation's political future but it also reveals a lot about general social and political tendencies within a country and can provide a significant insight into people political desires (Evans, 2004, 2-4). Stephen Coleman rightfully pointed out that the act of voting is the highest symbol of freedom as it is supposed to put the ideas of the people forward and also to hold the powerful accountable (2013, 2).

But why do people vote the way they do? This question has given birth to a specific area of research in the academic world namely the study of voting behaviour. The purpose of this field of study is specifically to understand what variables intervene in people decision-making process when they choose to vote for a particular party or candidate. Understanding why people vote the way they do has been a major concern for political scientists and other public actors since the middle of the 19th century (Bartels, 2013, 240-241). This concern will also be at the heart of this paper as we will seek to understand the student's vote for the national front.

The students' vote for the national front is a relatively new phenomenon (Lefebvre, 2014) that occurs within a larger context of renewal of populist parties' popularity and attitudes

all over Europe (Dzurinda, 2016, 171-172). This new aura surrounding populist parties in Europe has resulted in an important presence in different elections in European countries. In France the National Front led by Marine Le Pen became the most popular party among young people aged between 18-24 in previous regional election in 2015 (IPSOS, 2015; Pouchard, 2015) and came second in popularity behind left-wing Populist Party *La france Insoumise* during the last presidential elections (IPSOS, 2017; Maupoil, 2017). Even though abstention remains a large phenomenon within the young generation both in France (IPSOS, 2015) and in Europe (Condon and Holleque, 2013, 169-171) the fact that the national front emerged as one of the most acclaimed political party by this strand of the population is a relatively new phenomenon as it only appeared in the middle of the 1990's (Zriem and Mayer, 2007).

This renewed popularity of the national front parallels the capacity of this political party to expand its electorate since its creation in 1972 (Mayer, 2012). There is however an element that remains when it comes to the national front vote: the low scores made among people with higher education (Makooi, 2015; IPSOS; 2017). Indeed, student have been a social group usually hermetic to the national front ideology. The growing popularity of this political party is usually linked with difficult economic contexts and the basis of their electorate traditionally lies within those with a poor financial income and a low level of educations (Mayer, 2012). Different studies conducted by analytical agencies have come to the conclusion that the national front vote decreased when the level of education got higher (IPSOS, 2017, 2012) Still, as Vincent Pons revealed in an interview for the online journal *Franceinfo,* the vote for the National Front as expended in various social categories, including student (Caro and Pons, 2015). The students vote for the national front constitutes an interesting political phenomenon as this social category is usually the less prone to endorse the ideology defended by the party (Mayer, 2012, 169). Thus, it is from this paradox that my study and my research question depart: Why do some students chose to vote for the National Front?

This paper will aim at explaining a phenomenon that has been subject to little analysis in past and recent electoral behaviour studies. In order to do so, we will first set the theoretical framework for this study before explaining our methodology and method of analysis. Thus, Chapter 2 will first provide a review of the literature on electoral behaviour, its application in the context of French politics and in relation to young people. As the study is based on the understanding of the vote for the national front, it is essential that we understand the main attributes of the political party we are analysing. Thus, Chapter 3 will be dedicated to understand the evolution of the national front in the context of French politics. Chapter 4 will be dedicated to present the research design of my research, justifying the use of semi-structured interviews and qualitative analysis to answer the research question and will answer issues related to the limitations and ethical considerations of such a method. The case study's findings and results from the interview will be covered in chapter 5. The last concluding chapter will offer a conclusion summing up the key findings of my research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This first chapter aims at presenting the key concepts and notions revolving around this dissertation and the research question through an analysis of the relevant literature related to electoral behaviour. I will first review the main paradigms existing in the field of electoral behaviour before looking more specifically at researches related to electoral behaviour in France and related to the electoral behaviour of young people.

2.1 Electoral behaviour theories: Understanding the 3 foundational models of analysis

In this section we are going to set the theoretical framework for our study on the electoral behaviour of students voting for the national front. As the core of the subject being treated in my dissertation is voting behaviour, it is essential that we have a clear understanding of what the term refers to, and what theories shape its existence within the academic world.

As well as other independent fields of political study, diverse competing and complementary paradigms orientate the study of voting behaviour. From those theories we will be able to anticipate some hypothesis related to the research question. The study of electoral behaviour is influenced by three major model of analysis, namely the sociological model, the psychological model and finally the rational choice model.

2.1.1   Lazarsfeld's sociological model: *The school of Columbia*

Voting behaviour became a specific field of study in the second half of the twentieth century in the United States after predictions made by national poll significantly failed to predict the result of the election and the failure of working class parties to win despite their clear numerical superiority (Bartels, 2013). The sociologist Paul Lazarfeld, from the University of Columbia, opened the field of electoral behaviour studies by offering a sociological model to explain the vote of Americans in the middle of the 19th century. He analysed the effect of the

political campaign on citizen voting preferences during the 1940 presidential campaign in the united states opposing democrat candidate Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Republican Willkie in *The People's choice.* In order to do so, he based his research on a representative panel in Ohio. It appeared that the campaign had very little effect on changing the votes of the representative panel of American citizens in Ohio (Lazarsfeld 1944 cited in Evans, 2004). Instead, their political choice was mostly based upon loyalty to specific sets of values coming from religious heritage and different social classes (Lazarsfeld, 1944 cited in Boy and Mayer, 1997). The results of this study showed that the vast majority of citizen had made a choice way before the beginning of the campaign. The main finding of the Columbia school is that social characteristics determine political choices. At the time, the study broke down many wide spread assumptions such as the almightiness of the media in influencing political choices and also of citizens as being subjects aware of political issues at stake and offered a model of electoral behaviour where people's vote was determined by their social environment (Evans, 2004). Even though the study was limited in scope the model developed by Lazarsfeld still remain a major pillar in current behavioural studies where the sociological variable is still considered as central (Boy and Mayer, 1997).

2.1.2 The psychological model and the key concept of party identification: *The school of Michigan*

Following these findings, researchers from the survey research centre of the university of Michigan offered a second model in electoral behaviour studies to Lazasfeld in what shortly became another prominent model in electoral behaviour studies: the psychological model. Instead of considering the sociological aspect formerly described by Lazarsfeld, they also considered and emphasized the psychological aspect in people's vote.

Thus, the school of Michigan, as it is called in electoral behaviour studies, presented party identification as the key concept driving electoral choices in *The American Voter,* largely considered as the "cornerstone" of their academic work (Evans, 2004, 24). They identified the notion as an "affective orientation to an important group object" in one's political environment *(*Campbell et al, 1960, 121*)*. They further add that this psychological affinity is constructed through the socialization process during one's childhood where individuals pick up the values and partisans affinity of their parents (Campbell et al, 1960, 146). This theory was of major importance because it brought a solid argument explaining why the vote of citizen rarely fluctuated over time (Evans, 2004, 25). In this sense a study conducted in 1964 by Converse, one of the author of the American Voter found that the majority of American voters had very little knowledge about political issues at stake. The panel interrogated had to express their point of view and opinions on particular *political* issues and their answers reflected fluctuating opinions on different policies conducted by political institutions (Converse, 1964, 38). These fluctuations appeared to be contradictory to the stability of voting. Again, the concept of party identification provided a satisfactory answer to that paradox. The psychological attachment one has for a political party since the socialization process resembles the way people put their trust in a religious institution (Campbell, 1964). Hence, people trust the political party to which they identify regardless of the fluctuating aspect of their opinion because the endorsement of a party was regarded as an act of affective attachment rather than a rational informed decision.

These study conducted between the 1940's and the 1960's presented an electorate heavily influenced by external constraint and showing very little critical judgement. These deterministic models appeared redundant in the 1970's as the electorate was more diversified and more politically aware explaining the development of a new model of explanation, namely the rational electorate model.

2.1.3   The rational electorate model

As it has been said, these two influential models, which appeared between the 1940 and 1960's, both relied on voter's social influence and psychological traits to different extent but left aside their rationality.

In the fertile ground of academic debate, an alternative theory grew to refuse the social determinism model offered by the two previous models. The authors of the changing American voter hence highlighted that the electorate was not the same as the electorate that had been previously studied (Nie, Norman et al, 1979, 35) and argued against the idea of voters as prisoners of their social conditions. The social and political context in the 1970's was indeed terribly different from the context of the 1960's and 1950's as new actors emerged in the and within the American electorate, most notably women, young people and Afro-American citizens (Boy and Mayer, 1997; Key, Orlando et al, 1968). Alongside these new wave of actors, there was a greater diversity of issues in American politics such as War in Vietnam or racial tensions (Nie, Norman et al, 1979, 104-105). Conversely, these new actors and issues resulted in votes being less guided by partisan loyalty and more centred around political issues, such as war in Vietnam, racial equality and so on. These theories leave aside the image of a voter faithful to his political party and put the emphasis on people's rationality where people vote for politician's or issues that are at the heart of their political concern. This third model of electoral behaviour has been oftentimes compared to the behaviour of consumer within a market (Boy and Mayer, 1997; Evans, 2004, 26). Thus, the choice of a citizen voting is similar to the choice of someone buying a brand on a market. In other words, the political "brand" chosen by the elector is the brand that appears the most beneficial to one's own goal.

These theories might seem abstract at first sight but they are essential if one wants to understand the academic context under which this study is being conducted. Trying to understand and explain a particular vote of a social category such as students, supposes that one

understands the main theoretical foundations of the academic area that deals with such questions. Setting this general academic context sets up the framework within which we will be making our developments.

However, each one of these theories has shaped the set of fundamental question related to that academic discipline and will guide our study related to student voting for the national front. There is already a set of specific question that emerges in relation to the students vote for the national front: What's the importance of the social environment in individual's electoral decisions? How does the interaction between long term ideological beliefs and situational politics operates? Is party identification still redundant to explain the vote of student for the National Front?

The validity of these different theories obviously varies across time, space and democratic systems because of different historical development, social context and political set ups. As we will see these models are not all necessarily applicable to the French political context. As my study focuses on France it is therefore interesting to look at previous work that has been done on the voting behaviour related that specific geographical area and also to have a look at the French political scene.

2.2 Electoral behaviour studies in France

The first section of the literature review focused on the theories that shape the discipline of voting behaviour in political science. This section will specifically look into researches that have been conducted in relation to electoral behaviour in France. Analysing general French electoral behaviour will allow us to compare it to the behaviour of young French people, and more precisely students voting for the national front in latter chapters.

Previous developments on electoral behaviour study have shown that electoral behaviour theories are rooted in the context of American politics where traditional bi-partism between Republican and democrats is at the centre of politics. This political reality is not to be found in the case of France (Boy and Mayer, 1997). Even though two parties stand out as the two main political forces in French politics, namely the *Parti Socialist (left)* and *Les Républicains (Right)*, France has a political environment in which a plethora of political party competes for leadership, such as the Greens, the national front, the socialist and so on. These smaller political parties are central to French politics because they are often at the heart of alliances that allows one of the two main parties usually in power to have a political majority at the Assembly. Not only are all these parties of varying importance but they are also subject to a lot of changes. However, even though the dualism in French politics does not exist when it comes to political party, it can be found in the traditional cleavage between right-wing and left wing political ideology (Boy and Mayer, 1997). A study conducted in 1995 asked French electors to position themselves on a political spectrum going from 1 to 7. 1 being the extreme left, of the political spectrum 7 being the extreme right and 4 being central, namely neither right nor left. The study showed that 25% identified as being centrist which meant that the remaining 75% of the population identified as either right or left (Study conducted by CEVIPOF cited in Mayer & Boy, 1997), which proves that the right/left dualism is still relevant in French politics. In order to explain the origin of this division and to find patterns in French electoral behaviour one can look at the very informative work made by Michelat and Simon on political behaviour in France (1977). Similarly, to previous findings made by Lazarsfeld and other scholars of the school of Columbia, the two authors confirmed in a very detailed analysis of the French electorate that an individual's social condition is the most influential factor influencing one's vote and among all the variables, religion was found to be the one that had the most significant impact and influences on one's vote (Michelat and Simon, 1977).

Conversely, the party identification theory does not appear as relevant in a multi-party system as it is in the United States where there is only two parties involved. Instead French research on electoral behaviour has put the emphasis on the importance of voter's social environment in shaping their ideological belief, showing that class and religion were variable better suited at explaining voting behaviour in France than the concept of party identification.

In a context where party identification is a minor variable in electoral behaviour because of party erosion, and an ever changing political scene, the research conducted by Boyd and Mayer in relation to the electoral behaviour of the French electorate between 1993 and 1997 shows that there is a clear phenomenon of electoral mobility not between the Right or Left camp but rather within the same side of the political spectrum (Boy and Mayer, 2000). The authors provide a broad definition of the concept of political mobility by applying the traditional definition of mobility "where people change their political affiliation" to any type of political mobility, including mobility within a political faction, namely the Right or the Left (Boy and Mayer, 2000, 489). This mobility, referred to as internal mobility, has been a defining feature of French electoral behaviour. Because the new electorate appears as more informed and concerned about politics, it is also more prone to political movement as their political ideology is more stable while the ideology and discourse orientation of traditional political parties varies across elections (Hebert and Lancelot, 1996). In this sense. The study shows that 10% of the national front electorate was constituted of people who voted for the traditional right wing candidate in previous elections (Boy and Mayer, 2000, 504).

To sum up the development made on French electoral behaviour it appears that the French electorate voting behaviour show clear pattern of a lack of party identification. In this regard French politics has seen a rise of "electoral volatility" since the 1970's and has been confirmed in political elections in 2012 where fluctuation on the right side of the political spectrum still appeared as a common phenomenon (Perrineau and Barra, 2016, 96).

The student's vote for the national front might therefore be the result of electoral mobility as it is possible that the interrogated students have moved on the political spectrum, either from the left to the right which could be referred as pure mobility or have move within the right side of the political spectrum. Looking at how exceptional the cases of pure mobility appear we can expect the latter cases to be more plausible.

The next element to consider in order to tackle the question of behaviour of students voting for the national front is the issue of electoral behaviour of young people per se because the students participating in the interview will be aged between 18-26, which means they fit that category.

2.3 Young people electoral behaviour

What we are trying to do in this study is to understand the rational behind the vote for marine le pen coming from some students. In order to do so, we can first focus on theoretical frameworks related to the voting behaviour of young people in general and see how these patterns are latter reflected in the voting behaviour of students. In this regards, the fact that students are of a same age category means that they have been witnessing the same political events during their socialization. Looking at what political events have been central to them and how they reacted to it can be of a significant importance to understand the rationale behind their vote.

This common experience by a category of people that are the same age is sometimes referred to as a generational bound. Generation in the context of political studies is a concept that originates from Manheim's studies on the relationship between age/generation and politics and that could be defined as "a group of people who are approximately the same age and have politically lived some politically crucial events" (Manheim, 1952 cited in Maggini, 2017) which

gives them a sense of belonging to a particular social category. Magnini's work on the voting behaviour of young people in Europe provides a substantial insight into the rationale behind the vote of the current young generation. Defining the age group of the young generation by including people aged between 18-35, his findings show that young people are generally defiant and mistrusting towards political activism and "display a secular profile" (Maggini, 2017). More specifically, Maggini states that this high level of distrust toward traditional political parties and institutions that has been traditionally observed in other countries (Condon and Holleque, 2013, 175) leads to the fact that young European voters are characterized by their political radicalism (Maggini, 2017, 43). This means that percentagewise they tend to vote more for either radical left or radical right political parties. Thus, this voting preference can be found within the voting preferences of French young people. Thus the high percentage of vote obtained by the national front among young people as well as the popularity of left wing populist party, *la France Insoumise* is a good illustration of that phenomenon.

The study also shows that European young people political concerns revolve around both materialist and post materialist values, which means that they are both concerned with financial security as well the fulfilment of personal values (Maggini, 2017, 79). What also emerges from the study conducted is that the relationship between age and vote is made relevant not because of one's age per se but because of a "generation effect", in which members of a generation are identified through the fact that their political socialization has happen in a given historical period. (Maggini 2017).

Another striking feature related to young people and voting behaviour is the significant level of abstention observed in their political behaviour. The act of not voting has been even designated by some as the norm when it comes to youth political engagement (Dermody, Loyd and Scullion, 2007). In this regard, abstention levels have reached a number as high as 30% in the first round of the presidential election among people that were under 30 and was of 34% for

people aged between 18-24 in the second round of the presidential election (IPSOS, 2017). It would be quick to assume that these high numbers of political abstention coincide with a general disinterest in politics coming from young people. The general picture is slightly more complex. Thus, a study conducted prior to the 2017 presidential election by the *Institut Français d'Opinion Public* showed that 56% of people aged between 18-25 declared themselves either very or partially interested in the presidential election (IFOP, 2017). Studies focusing on young people and electoral behaviour as well as data analysis show that the voting behaviour of young people is characterized by important signs of cynicism toward the political system. The concept of cynicism is opposed to political trust, in the sense that it demonstrates a lack of belief that the government is delivering its political promises and a mistrust in politician's intentions (Dermody et al, 2010, 423). Additionally to that element of cynicism, it appears that some young people also express doubts concerning the political efficacy of their vote or political action. Political efficacy has been defined as people's perceived belief of "control over their public and personal environments through acceptable political processes" (Sulitzeanu-Kenan and Halperin, 2012, 298). Even though the distrust and cynicism towards politician is a common feature of the young electorate there is a distinction to be made between those who still consider that political knowledge and action is important and those whose distrust toward political institutions act as a barrier preventing them from voting.

In this context of party erosion, lack of strong partisanship, political distrust and cynicism coming from young people and all strand of the population, it is no surprise that populist parties such as the National Front have been able to capitalize on this political situation. It appears that there is a parallel that can be drawn between the growing mistrust of young voters and the growing popularity of populist parties who capitalize on this general feeling of dissatisfaction and cynicism toward political institutions. This leads us to consider the growth of the national front on the French political scene in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The national front in the French political landscape

Understanding the student's vote for the national front implies that we understand what the party stands for and how it presents itself today. Because of the specificity of the recent political context and the growth of populism in European politics, it appeared central that this paper tackled issues of populism in the French political context in order to apprehend the research question rigorously.

3.1 The National Front: evolutions of a right wing populist party

In this section we are going to look at the place of the National Front on the French political scene. We will also dedicate a section to the extensive use made by the national front of a populist political discourse and see in future developments if these changes have played an important role in the student's choice to vote for the party.

As a unique political party in the French political landscape, the National front was and still is a subject of particular interest for researchers in various research fields in social sciences since it became an active actor in French politics since 1983 (Mayer, 2012; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2002; Reynié, 2016). Understanding its evolutions is crucial in order to understand how the party's changes over the year have potentially affected the decision of some students to vote for it.

The far right political party has undergone major changes in recent years and appears or at least is perceived as quite different from the party as it was under the leadership of Jean Marie Le pen (Stockemer and Amengay, 2017). The party roots and origins clearly places it at the very right side of the political spectrum. The party was created and carried by charismatic leader and founder Jean Marie Le pen. It gained significant media attention and electoral support which resulted in the National front obtaining 4.5 millions of vote in the 1995 presidential election as opposed to the 100 000 in the 1981 presidential election. Nonna Mayer, exposed the four different set of factors that have been put forward in order to explain this growing popularity (1998). The first being the singular personality of the Front National leader, secondly she mentions the new socio-economic factors including the immigration from north African countries, the revival of a counter revolution temperament against a more liberal conception of the society and finally the deception coming from the policies made by successive right and left government (Mayer, 1998). Through these different contextual and social factors the FN imposed its legitimacy as the principal French far right party. As such, the party manifesto and

ideology focused extensively on issues such as patriotism, security, immigration, and national identity. This growth, eventually led the party to access the second round of the presidential election in 2002. Jean Marie Le pen's party was however strongly defeated against his opponent Jacques Chirac, leader of the traditional right wing party Rassemblement pour la République. The national front declined then in popularity with the party winning 10,4% in the 2007 presidential election (Mayer, 1998). After that debacle, the party was subject to internal conflict and questions appeared in regard to its capacity to remain relevant in the political landscape. Thus, it is Marine le Pen, Jean Marie's daughter, who emerged as the new face of the historic far right party. She won the party presidency through internal elections in 2011. The accession of Marine Le pen as a leader of the FN is a cornerstone in the development of the party as the newly elected leader took the path of what's referred to as a process of "de-demonization" which was aimed at polishing the image of the party (Mayer, 2012). The intention of Marine le Pen was to radically change the image of the party from a simple "party of protest" that was subject to several scandals involving members being nazi-sympathisers to the only legitimate patriotic political force on the right side of the political spectrum (Mayer 2012). The process of de-demonization is a defining feature of the strategy of the national front to change its nature after Jean Marie le Pen's leadership. This strategy was put into practice with Marine le Pen actively taking measures to bring more political credibility to the party such as the systematic dismissal of members who have been involved in extreme political activities and ultimately led to the banning of Jean Marie le Pen from the party in 2015 (Le Monde, 2015). Additionally the national front substantially renewed its political board dismissing previous party executive. As a result, a new generation of sympathizer emerged from this image change, most notably young people and women (Stockemer and Amengay, 2016). It has to be noted however that these votes of young people and women were came from citizen with a low level of income and education, which was the traditional voting niche of the National Front.

Adding to the previously made hypothesis one can consider that the role played by this strategy of de-demonization was significant in order to influence the student's vote for the party.

3.2 National front and populist attitudes

Another defining features of the National Front is the reinforced populist discourse adopted by the party since Marine le Pen became the party leader (Reynié 2016). While it is certain that the national front falls under this category, we have to have a clear understanding of the concept of populism as the notion is at the heart of many academic research and debates.

3.2.1 Defining populism

Generally speaking, the notion and concept of populism is at the centre of many political debate, academic research and public discussion (Wodak, 2013; Mudd and Kaltwasser, 2012). Thus it has often been heard that populism as a form of political discourse is gaining popularity within the public domain. But what is populism then?

. The notion has indeed been often subject to misinterpretation and described as a pejorative term in the sense that it was misleadingly associated or assimilated with the concept of demagoguery (Mudde, 2004, 542) which also refers to a political discourse aimed at appealing to people's emotions and prejudice. While it is true that many populist movements involve demagogic features, the two concepts are to be considered separately. Some have also condemned populism to be a "vague understanding of democracy" where the practice of indirect democracy is seen as denaturing the true democratic ideal of direct democracy by taking the power away from the people (Pelinka, 2013). I would disagree with these normative definitions as well as with the use of normative definitions in academic research. This stance relies on the belief that normative definitions are counterproductive to a good academic research and appear as an obstacle to objective and informative research. A definition should state the objective characteristic of an object or concept, which means that it should not include a judgemental section. I would in this sense join those who advocates that definitions should not

be normative but descriptive (Mudd and Katwasser, 2013). Using a minimal definition that captures a concept's essential element is the best way to enter the path of a constructive and meaningful academic discussion. I will thus be relying extensively on the very complete and informative research made by Mudde and Katwasser who offered the clearest and most complete definition of the concept. Thus, I will consider the concept of populism both as a type of political discourse and a political ideology as presented by Mudd and Katwasser (2013, 149). As a political discourse, populism is a form or set of political stances and discourse oriented towards the people and opposing its interest to the interest of the elite (Pelinka, 2013). As a political ideology, populism is a belief that relies on three core assumption (Mudde, 2004, 543) the primary importance and the purity of the people, representing the general interest, and its Manichean opposition to the self interested elite which is seen as an obstacle to the democratic ideal and common good. This definition is one that captures the essence of the concept with no normative references and a definition around which consensus can be built. Academic research on populism also makes a distinction between inclusionary and exclusionary populism. The difference between those two types of populism relies on the conception made of the people and the elite.

Whereas some party consider the people broadly as those who fall under a specific economic category, other would use national identity as their defining feature. Mudde and Katwasser, have thus opposed Latin American populism to European populism (2013). Latin American populism has then been described as inclusionary because those who fall within the definition of the people have a common economic and social condition (Mudde and Katwasser, 2013, 159) namely poverty. This type of populism is usually associated with left wing populism. On the other hand, exclusionary populism is so because of its conception of the people. It includes classic elements of the definition, which is the opposition of the people to the elite, but also as a narrower and more selective conception of the people as the people are defined

according to national, ethical or religious criteria (Mudde and Katwasser, 2013, 160). The exclusive element in this form of populism lies within a definition of "the people" relying on the exclusions of others (Pelinka, 2013).

3.2.2 National Front's exclusionary populism

The national front has been using this type of discourse extensively (Stockemer and Barisione, 2016) in the sense that the party often directs its discourse towards the people and opposes its interest to the interest of the elite. This feature is also to be seen within images used by the National Front during the presidential campaign as marine le pen delivered many speeches in front of a great blue wall engraved with her political motto "In the name of the people". This characteristic can be found within the national front political manifesto. The introductory note of Marine Le Pen's presidential project, "Une France Libre" (A Free France) opens up with the will of the party to "restore" the sovereignty of the people (Le Pen, 2017). Alongside with this clear direction of the political discourse towards the people, Marine le Pen's political program also designate a clear adversary to the people. In this regard, the National front repeatedly targets the elite as the entity who should be held accountable for the hardships of lower and middle economic classes (Le Pen, 2017). Its leaders often targeted the government as being a political actor working for the interest of European and international organization benefiting a small proportion of privileged population.

Unlike every right wing populist parties coming under the definition we have established previously, we can say that the National front populism is of exclusive type. Looking at public political standpoints and party ideological line, the national front regularly emphasis its patriotic values and the danger faced by the people in the era of globalization (Reynié, 2016). One of the recurring threat to people's national identity is the issue of massive "uncontrolled" flows of immigration. In accordance with the national front political standpoint, this immigration is at the origin of cultural tensions between "real" French people and people

from Arabic countries and their Islamic values (Le Pen, 2017). The national front often relies on the clashes existing between the republican values and certain aspects Islamic religion. Marine Le Pen has embraced this form of populism when she became the leader of her father's political party (Stockemer and Barisione, 2016). In addition to designating globalization and the highest institution as the cause of the people's hardship, Marine le Pen's communication also designates an enemy at the base of the population, namely Islamism. At a party conference in Lyon in February 2017, the National front leader clearly pointed out the threat of two "totalitarianism" threatening the French people, economic globalization and Islamic fundamentalism (Le Pen, 2017). Mentioning this two faced enemy to the people gives us a valuable example of exclusionary populism explained above. As opposed to other forms of populism that opposes the people to elites from the "top", the national front designate enemies from the top as well as the bottom of the country. This position has been explicitly defended by Marine le Pen through many occasions and designated both massive immigration and global economy as people's "opponent". These invectives are often followed by choired reactions from the audience saying "On est chez nous !" (This is our home), and attacks against the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism resulting from massive immigration in France are often followed by strong cheering from the crowd.

Looking at these defining features, it will be interesting to pay particular attention to participants response to populist discourses made by the national front throughout the presidential campaigns.

Marine le Pen's populist strategy and ideology obviously paid off since the party effectively imposed itself as one of the most popular party in the political landscape and several factors can explain the success of this strategy.

Chapter 4: Methods

4.1 Introduction

In order to tackle the research question previously mentioned, this paper relies on the use of a single case qualitative analysis of data collected from semi-structured interview with students who voted for the national front in recent political elections. The next sections justify the focus on France as a case study and explain the choice of choosing qualitative analysis of semi structured interviews as the optimal method and design to tackle the research question.

4.2 Research design and Research method: Case study and semi structured interviews

In order to tackle the aforementioned question adequately I have thus chosen to use the case study of French students voting for the national as a research design and semi structured interviews as a research method. Bryman defines a research design as a "structure that guides

the execution of a research method and the analysis of the subsequent data" (2016. 40) whereas a research method is "simply a technique for collecting data" (Bryman, 2016. 40). Before justifying the specific choice of method and design it appears important to justify why the qualitative approach was used and not the quantitative one. The qualitative method of research is a "research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2016; 375). It also reflects an ideological stance that holds that the analysis of the social world must be done "through the perspective of the people that are being studied rather than as though they were incapable of their own reflection on the social world" (Bryman, 2016, 392). Qualitative researches are usually used to tackle open-ended question where the purpose is to explore, describe or explain a particular aspect of social life (Hesse-Biber, and Leavy, 2011, 10). As my research question is concerned with why some students vote for the national front, it aims at both exploring and explaining an under researched political phenomenon. These concerns of exploring and explaining a particular phenomenon thus justify the use of a qualitative approach to my research.

The case study as a research design has been defined by Bryman as a "detailed and intensive analysis of a single case" (2016, 60-61). The case study for this research is based on the setting of the French political scene and it specifically looks at French student's electoral behaviour toward a designated party, namely the national front. I chose to focus on the French political scene for two main reasons. First and foremost because of my familiarity with the French political system because of my nationality and secondly because the increased popularity among the population including students is a good case of the phenomenon I am attempting to explain.

In order to put the emphasis on an extensive analysis of this specific setting it appeared that semi structured interviews with students who voted for the national front were the optimal method to provide an in depth analysis of the phenomenon as I am trying to both explore and

explain. Specifically the method of semi structured interview has been chose in this paper because, as opposed to quantitative interviewing where there is a need to "standardize the way in which each interview is dealt with " (Bryman, 2016, 467), this dissertation aims at letting the significant issues come out of the interviewee point of view. The format of semi-structured interview allows for a richer variety of answers from the participants and allows to understand the social world through their perspective. As the study is concern with exploring and explaining the electoral behaviour and the decision making process of students making a political decision it was key that the research method reflected this particular concern. A close ended questionnaire would have reversed the role of the interviewer and interviewee where the interviewer would have led the interview. In the semi-open ended approach, which is the method used in this dissertation, it is the interviewee who conducts the interview which allows the researcher to get more in depth answers and opinion and gather a significant amount of textual data. Because a quantitative approach aims at quantifying and confirming already existing theory it has been dismissed as a suitable research approach to a paper concerned with exploring and explaining a phenomenon that has not been subject to extensive research.

4.3. Issues of ethics and interview process

As the method of semi structured interviews involves the participation of human subjects, it was central to consider issues of ethics when starting the process. Ethics are undoubtedly a key element to consider in academic research as they "relate directly to the integrity of a piece of research" (Bryman, 2016, 120). The main issue arising when one chose to use semi structured interview is the issue of consent. As the goal of this particular research method is to extract content from the discussion with participants, it is key that they are fully aware of the meaning of their participation. As I have mentioned before, participants were presented with a plain language statement explaining the aim of the study and how participants would take part in it and also with two informed consent form. One form was related to the

participants consent to be interviewed and the other one was related to the consent of audio-recording the interview. Additionally, discussing people's ideology and political opinions can appear as very personal I wanted to guarantee the anonymity of the participants. Thus, the participants will be designated only according to their age and field of study. When transcribing the interviews I deliberately chose to omit specific details that could make one of the students identifiable such as mentioning of a particular city, place of work and so on.

In order to find participants for this study I mainly used Facebook as a social media platform that would allow me to get directly in contact with people that would be prone to participate. I contacted administrators of National Front's student association facebook pages explaining the meaning of my research to them and also asked various facebook contacts asking them if they knew someone who would be willing to participate. This led me to be put in contact with 6 different students that voted for the national front in the 2017 presidential election or in the presidential election of 2012. 5 of these students where student who endorsed the national front in the first round of the French political election. One of them voted for the party in the second round but not in the first one. This particular student will be a good example of a "negative case" to draw upon in order to confront it with the vote of the other students. After obtaining their consent I was able to start the interviewing process. They agreed upon conditions of interview that can be found in the plain language statement that will included in the appendix section. Participants will be designated through their age and field of study.

Student 1: 22, MSc Law and Political Science, voted national Front for the 2017 election

Student 2: 26, 3rd year History student, voted for the national front in the 2012 election

Student 3: 24, Medicine Studies, voted for the national front in the 2017 election

Student 4: 21, Engineering studies, voted for the 2017 election

Student 5: 22, MSc Commercial Law, voted for the national front in the second round of the 2017 election

The interviews were conducted through Skype and the entirety of the conversation was audio-recorded so I would be able to extract the maximum amount of content from the answers of the interviewees. The process began with an introduction about the study conducted and a clarification of participants' role in it. After assuring them of the guarantee of their anonymity in the participation, we were able to start the interview process. I prepared a set of key question that aimed to guide the discussion between me and the participants. The main questions were related to their political ideology, their opinion on the current political environment, the rationale behind their vote for the national front and their consideration about the political party they voted for. They were formulated in a way that allowed participants to expand their thought process. The interviews length varied between 25 and 45 minutes and covered the main question previously mentioned. The interviews were conducted between the 1st of August 2017 and the 17th of August 2017.

4.4 Content analysis methodology

It is expected that semi-structured interviews will give birth to an important amount of unstructured textual material. In this regard, it is crucial to explain how this mass of information collected will be processed and examined in the next Chapter. The next chapter sections will aim at both analysing and interpreting the textual data produced by the interviews and before doing so we have to explain how the analysis and interpretation is going to be conducted.

In this regard, there is a plethora of methods to analyse qualitative data and it is misleading to consider the procedure in a "cook book fashion" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, 302). The first crucial phase is therefore obviously the collection of data. In this regard, I have chosen to conduct audio interviews through Skype and audio record the content of participants answer. I have then proceeded to transcribe the entirety of the interviews on a word document that would help me locate recurring elements in participant's answers.

With these transcripts entirely written down, the analytical part of the research will begin with the transcribed data being open to the analysis of the researcher. On this issue it is important to note that even though we use qualitative interview to offer the interviewee the possibility to provide in depth answers to the question asked by the interviewer, it is ultimately the researcher that will interpret the data produced. This will be done through what is referred in social science methods as grounded theory. It is a method that relies on the process of breaking down the "data into components parts which are given names" (Bryman, 2016, 573) This involves undoubtedly a subjective judgement from the researcher which has been an element of critique towards this method. However, subjectivity is an inherent component of qualitative methods of analysis and while there is no way to prevent the use of such a subjective judgement it is important that we, as researcher, understand this criticism.

In this regard, the qualitative approach naturally comes with disadvantages and the limitation of my study coincides with the limitations of the method employed.

4.5 Limitations

The limitation of this kind of approach lies in the fact that it is limited in scope because of the reduce number of participants involved and does not allow to draw generic conclusion. The conclusions that will be drawn from the interviews I have collected offer a plausible explanation for the phenomenon that is being observed within a specific context but because of the nature of the method employed the possibility of generalization are limited. However, the aim of this research is not to offer a generic model of electoral behaviour of students voting for far right parties but rather to fill a gap in the current electoral behaviour research by exploring the vote of a social category that has not been subject to much analysis. Thus, providing an in depth content analysis of data that will reflect the complexity of the vote for the national front coming from students could open the path for future similar research.

Chapter 5: Interviews' Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the key findings of the interviews conducted with students who have voted for the national front through a grounded method theory of analysis.

After completing the interviews with all the participants there is a set of reccuring themes and issue related to the participants vote that arose. First, it appeared that participants expressed strong ideological positions and showed a high level of political interest, often expressing distrust and cynicism towards the current political environment. Secondly I have found that there is a parallel that can be drawn between these ideological stances of students and how the national front successfully, through a politic of de-demonization and renewal of credibility, managed to move on the political spectrum in order to get closer to their ideology and appear as the most legitimate representative of a conservative right camp. Finally the interviews have highlighted that there is a strong lack of party identification coming from the participants, which in turn results in an important electoral mobility.

5.2 Ideological common grounds

One of the first question that has been asked to participants was related to their political ideology and how they assessed French politics in general. We are going to divide this section into 3 parts. The first one will be related to the similarities found in participants' ideology, then we will discuss the generational bound existing between the different participants that arose from the interview and how these features influenced them to vote for the national front

5.2.1 Participants Conservative right-wing political ideology

What appeared from the first questions is that the participants unsurprisingly expressed their attachment to traditional right wing values. More specifically in the context of French politics and the existence left/right cleavage, participants' answers exposed that they recognized themselves in Bonapartism and Gaullism. These adjectives, inspired by two major French political figures, refer to a political ideology centred around the belief that France is a great nation and must occupy as such a predominant place on the political scene (Choisel, 1987). Conversely, they have expressed various degrees of euro-scepticism and distrust towards globalization, which is something we will analyse later on. The entirety of the participants mentioned their attachment to values of either patriotism, traditions, French national identity and national security which are themes that traditionally belong to the far right but have also been used extensively by other traditional right wing parties. When asked "*What issues are central for you in politics?"*, all participants mentioned at least one of those three themes. *Student 1* mentioned that "*essential questions for me in politics are related to national cohesion. It is a vast notion but by that I mean the capacity of the French nation to recognize itself as such…"* and added: "*questions of security are also central. Although economy is very important I would consider it as an issue that comes after questions of national cohesion and security."* Similarly Student 2 who voted for the national front in the 2012 presidential election emphasised the importance of the French nation. He stated that the concept of nation "*brings*

people that share a common culture, a common language, a common heritage, together" because people naturally *"fundamentally don't like difference, the concept of nation provides common values that unite people together".* Answers from others students also included *"the importance of national sovereignty (...) and security",* concern about *"France's prosperity (...) and traditional family values"* and how fundamental it is *"to believe in the French nation."*

These values expressed unanimously by the entirety of the participants are classic attribute of a right-wing, conservative ideology in regards to social question (Mayer, 2012). These social questions were often put first in participant's political priorities as opposed to economic issues. They also reflect traditional right-wing ideological values with attachment to the importance of national identity, the key role of security etc. In this regard, the participants I interviewed fit in a category of students sensitive to traditional conservative ideas of tradition, security, and national sovereignty. Furthermore, the participants showed a high interest in politics and strong opinions on various social subjects and fit criteria made to define a new rational electorate (Habert 1996; Nie, 1979). As opposed to the traditional vote of young people for the national front, the participant came from a middle class background where they admitted that these patriotic or right wing values have been present in various degrees through their socialization.

Another element that appeared subsequently from the interview is that the new political context both nationally and internationally coincides with the traditional left/wing dualism being challenged by new political oppositions, that can be found in participants opinions and are beneficial for the national front.

5.2.2 Going beyond the traditional Left/Right cleavage

In this section we a re going to discuss how the participants responses to questions related to their ideology revealed the multi dimensional aspect of French political cleavages as opposed to the traditional left/right divide. By revealing these new elements of political division

we will see in latter developments how the national front new political strategy has been able to capitalize on this diversification of cleavages to attract these students into their electorate.

Thus, the interviews showed that not only did participant thought that the left right divide was central but they also highlighted the importance of other political cleavages. Thus they have often mentioned or expressed a division between those who advocates the positive effect of globalization and those who are standing for more social and economic protectionism. 4 out of 6 of the participants thought of globalization as a negative phenomenon going against the interest of the French nation. Student 4 stated that "*France did not take the necessary measures against the phenomenon of globalization and let itself be taken down by the different systems of international trade*" before adding that there is "*now a clear dualism between patriots and globalists*". Student 1 also mentioned the fact that there is a large category of the French population, most notably social workers "*that are left aside by globalization*", whereas others, such as students "*are pure product of this phenomenon and are the ones benefiting from it*" "*I have had the experience of meeting some of those left aside by globalization (..) as they constitute the French nation, I think they should be considered as important*". Student 2 also pointed this division existing between "*those who are in urban areas and benefit from globalization and those leaving outside these areas that do not*", in another question related to the importance of the concept of nation, this student stated that "*this trend to claim yourself as citizen of the world actually disconnects people and does not unite them*" whereas the protection offered by the concept of nation around certain tradition "*unites them*". Alongside this negative opinion on globalization, participants expressed a certain feeling of euro-scepticism. Student 2 stated that Europe is now being built "*leaving the people and their opinions aside*".

5.2.3 Generational bounds/ Distrust and cynicism

We have mentioned in the literature review that a generation is not so much defined by an age group per se but rather by the living of common political experiences happening during their socialization (Manheim, 1952). In this regard, the interviewees were asked what political events have struck them in the past 20 years. 4 out of 6 students mentioned various political scandals involving the corruption of different ministers. Another common feature involved the mentioning of the contentious Treaty of Lisbon referendum in 2005 where citizens were asked to pronounce themselves on the possibility of having a European constitution. Even though the majority of citizen rejected by referendum the idea of a European constitution, the French ministers still ratified the treaty of Lisbon in 2007 that included political measures that were very similar to those contained in the rejected European constitution. 3 out of 6 participants presented this political event as a key moment that made them very critical of the current political environment. Student 1 thus referred to the treaty when asked when he felt betrayed by the political institutions/leaders: " *54%The population said no to the European constitution during the 2005 referendum but Sarkozy still managed to pass this idea through parliament. (...) I do not agree with that conception of democracy that advocates that "démocracy is good as long as people vote the way we want them to vote".* Similarly Student 2 mentioned the contentious referendum as the cornerstone of its scepticism regarding politics: "*It seems to me that this event has been often consciously ignored. It was a piece of legislation that the French people refused by referendum but the political institutions forced its adoption by changing its form without changing its legal substance.*"

In this context, traditional parties associated with these political failures have progressively lost their legitimacy and the political support of young voters including students. As we have said in previous developments related to young people voting behaviour, students also expressed a particular distrust toward traditional political parties that is traditionally found in the electoral behaviour of young people across Europe (Maggini, 2017; Dermody and

Scullion, 2010) On the other hand, the national front has successfully been able to diversify its political offer which allowed them to attract a larger proportion of voters including students. These elements mentioned by the participants parallel the erosion of political partisanship already expressed in early works by Habert and Lancelot in which they explain that the new electorate distinguishes itself by its capacity to be critical and a lot more informed about current issues (1996).

5.3. The National front's new political legitimacy

In this section we are going to focus on how participants responded to the national front's strategy of de-demonization and diversification of its political offer. It comes up from the interview that the participants expressed that the party has entered into a new political dimension since marine le pen took over as a the new leader of the National Front and they highlighted that this change of status led them to think that the party was now legitimate to represent their ideology. Student 2 answers illustrates this change of political dimension: "*Marine Le Pen was a big change from her father. Her father use to bring everything down to the issue of immigration in a stereotypical manner whereas Marine le Pen was dealing with a wider variety of issues and had a more serious political agenda. She tried to talk more about economic issues and used think tanks organizations*".

Student 5 who voted for the national front during the second round of the president election also expressed a similar opinion when asked if he thought the party was more legitimate than 20 years ago : "*I think the party is totally legitimate within French politics, even more than before*". Student 1 admitted that the party "*used to be solely a protesting party under Jean Marie le Pen (…) Jean marie le Pen was not willing to get into power*" but the change of leader resulted in Marine le Pen "*professionalising the party, and giving more depth to the National Front's political project*".

It appears clearly coming from these answers of the participants that they were really responsive to the internal and external change made by Marine le Pen to change the national front to become a party better equipped and more suited to be a serious contender for accessing the highest political role in the French landscape. This results confirm and expands the conclusion made by Stockemer and Barisione in their study on the impact of the change of discourse of the national front (2016).

5.4 National front successful use of a populist discourse

It was also clear that the adoption of a populist political discourse by Marine le Pen was also an appealing feature for student who chose to vote for marine le Pen in the last elections. Their positive response to this type of discourse was expressed directly when they were asked specifically what they thought of this type of political discourse's use by marine le Pen. They also expressed sympathy toward populist attitudes indirectly in the interview when they presented their views concerning the current political context and often designated the ruling elites or institutions as having "lost the people" or not "concerned with real people". 5 out of 6 students referred to this type of discourse as necessary in times where they found that traditional party do not pay attention to the people enough. Student 1 expressed that *"the populist discourse reflects a political reality. The populist discourse puts back people at the centre of politics after they have been betrayed by the elite."* Conversely, Student 3 felt that *"this type of discourse is very important"*. Answers from Student 2 and 4 were more critical vis à vis the concept of populism but still acknowledged its importance in the political context and also expressed clear criticism towards political representatives. The fact that the students considered the people as being often betrayed by the elite and their conception of the French nation made them particularly responsive to the national front exclusionary populism. The national front populist discourse combines both this struggle of the people against the elite and the reduced

conception of who constitutes the people through the designation of two threats to the French population, namely the elites and immigration which is perceived as a threat to security and national identity.

These populist attitudes were activated in the specific context of French politics as political scandals and distrust toward political leaders have provided a fertile ground for the resurgence of populist attitude and nurtured a vote of students' expressing high level of distrust toward public institutions.

5.5 Participants electoral mobility and lack of party identification

This element that came up from the interview is probably one of the most interesting characteristic of the student's vote for the national front. All 6 participants either said that they have voted for other parties in the past or would consider voting for another one in other elections. This reveal a defining element in their voting behaviour, namely the lack of party identification. It has been said in the literature review that party identification was a theoretical framework explaining voting behaviour by stating that people identify psychologically with a political party during their political socialization and remain faithful to the party the way people remain faithful to a religious institution despite their lack of political knowledge. In the case of the student's interviewed it was the exact opposite. Thus, it provides support for the argument developed by those advocating the emergence of a new electorate (Habert and Lancelot, 1996) which is more inclined to change partisan affiliation as party discourses change over time and as situational consideration results in the electorate favouring those who have similar opinions on specific issues. The socialization process provided indeed the participants with strong ideological positions but did not result in any particular loyalty to a party. The questions related to party identification were two folded. I proceeded to ask them if it was the first time they

voted for the national front and also enquired about considering the possibility to vote for another party in other elections. The answers were unambiguous as all participants admitted either a vote for another party in previous elections, or that they would consider voting for another party in future elections. Student 1 provided the following answers "*I voted for Nicolas Sarkozy in 2012 and I have seen what he has done during his presidency. He talked about the issues I cared about, but his acts did not match his words*" "*I then voted for the national front for the first time in 2015 for local elections because they were closer to my political ideology.*" Student 2 3 and 4 provided similar answers. "*I did not wanted to vote for Nicolas Sarkozy again after its political failures (...) I felt that what Marine le Pen had to offer was more genuine. It was the most legitimate party among conservative political formations.*"; "*I personally voted Sarkozy in 2012*" "*As for the latest presidential election I was hesitating between the UPR* and Marine le Pen. I finally chose the National Front because it was the party that received the most media attention and that was the most serious to represent my ideology.*" Student 4 despite expressing continuity in his vote for the national front said he "*considered voting for another conservative right wing party, DLR represented by Nicolas Dupont Aignan*".

This finding unsurprisingly shows that party identification remains a concept that does not transfer well to the context of French politics as students' political experiences do not reflect any particular attachment to a political party but rather loyalty to a political ideology. In this regard in this very interesting to observe that their electoral behaviour reflects the behaviour of a what is described as the model of "a new voter" and confirms the increase of voter volatility (Habert, 1996).

5.6 Findings overview and conclusion

This study aims at tackling the question of why some students voted for the national front as it seemed that this social category was traditionally hermetic to the national front ideology and the data coming from polling institutes also goes in that direction. What emerges

from the discussion and the findings we have developed before is that the student's vote for the national front is the result of a combination of conjectural and behavioural factors with party identification, or the lack thereof, being the key variable explaining the student's vote for the national front.

In this sense, the electoral behaviour of students voting for the national front completely opposes the model offered by the school of Michigan (Converse, 1964; Campbell et al, 1960). The result of their analysis showed that the psychological affinity toward a political party explained the consistency of people's vote despite the fluctuation of opinion (1960). In the case of the student's vote for the national front we can see the exact opposite happening. The variation in the student's vote is here explained through continuous ideological positions and a lack of party identification. This situation shows that the participants continuous ideological beliefs associated with a low level of partisan loyalty can be described as an important variable explaining the student vote for the national front. The rational choice aspect also seems to play an important role since the student often referred to Marine le pen as the most serious offer on the political market today but would consider voting for another party.

It also comes up from the interview that the participants share common ideological foundations, specifically a strong commitment towards a traditional right wing ideology and values. Thus, issues of securities, respect of traditions, the primary importance of the French nation and the protection of its sovereignty are viewed as central. This set of values is associated with what is designated as the Bonapartist right which refers to a political movement emphasizing the primary importance of the French nation. Even though these values used to exist within the mainstream right wing party, Union pour un movement populaire, it appears that the current political conjuncture has weakened the status of the major French political parties, left wing and right wing included, because of a plethora of factor, most notably globalization, repeated political scandals and a diversification of political cleavages. This

decline in credibility within the sphere of both traditional right wing and left wing parties has been followed by a renewal of actors in the political scene. On the right side of the political spectrum the National Front goal was to become the new legitimate political faction representing a bonapartist/patriotic right. By doing so and through the results of the interview conducted it seems that the national front effectively succeeded in changing its political aura and managed to get closer to the ideology of the students interviewed thus explaining the attraction of this category of electors. The various changes happening within the party direction and leadership as well as the effort to get the party out of its solely "dissenting" role attracted the vote of students who abandoned traditional right wing parties.

The fact that political cleavages go beyond the traditional left/right opposition between liberal and socialist, has also been a major factor influencing the student vote for the national front. The fact that the national front has extended its political discourses to new debate, most notably regarding questions of globalization, political conservatism, and patriotic values, has attracted a strand of students for whom these questions were central and not legitimately represented by traditional right wing parties. It is also interesting to observe that the rational choice model of electoral behaviour is relevant to explain the student's vote for the national front as the choice to endorse this political party was not only done on ideological grounds but also according to rational considerations in which the national front was the party most likely to get access to power. In this regard, several students have expressed that they did or would consider voting for another party with similar ideological foundations if the national front declined in popularity.

1 of the 6 participants interviewed did not vote for Marine le Pen in the first round of the presidential election but in the second round. Although he admitted sharing very similar ideological positions to the national front regarding social issues, and subsequently to other

interviewees, he stated that economy was a central thematic in politics and an issue he viewed as a priority.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation as sought to understand why some students voted for the national front in recent French political elections. Drawing on electoral behaviour theories as a theoretical framework to tackle that question we were able to build hypothesis and hypothetical answers. The format of semi structured interview was here to provide qualitative data that would in turn be compared to the hypothesis built on previous theories. The participants expressed indeed a strong lack of party identification but continuous ideological stances. The lack of identification with traditional political parties in a specific political context was the key element that allowed students to move on the political spectrum and endorse a party that was closer to their ideological family. Many elements came into play in the choice of the participants to vote for the national front but the lack of party identification and the rational aspect of their political judgement were the element that played the major role in the endorsement of this political party. We have indeed seen that the participants expressed strong political scepticism and a particular distrust toward traditional political parties and institutions when they were asked about their views on the current political environment and the important political moments in the process of their socialization. The interviews also revealed a diversification of the political cleavages that now go beyond the traditional left right dualism as students are now opposed on issues such as globalization and euro-scepticism. The change of nature of the political environment in the sense that traditional political parties were perceived as ideologically similar with difference existing on superficial issues reinforced the position of the national front as a party with a clear ideological line.

This change of political context where traditional political parties have been perceived by the students has having unclear ideological positions on specific issues left other parties with

clearer ideological stances in a better position to attract the vote of the participants involved in the interviews. The question now remains as to whether the participants will remain prone to electoral mobility throughout their future political choices. The answer coming from the participants in the interview reveal that this outcome is the most likely to happen as 5 out of 6 of the participants said they would consider voting for another party in the next elections if the national front did not manage to capitalize on its political renewal. One of the 6 participants who also voted for the national front in 2012 did not replicated its vote in the latest presidential election. In this regard it seems then that the students vote for the national front can be explained first and foremost by the strong ideological opinions of the participants and the fact that their voting behaviour match the description made of a "rational electorate" as they considered the national front to be the best political offer within the political market at a specific time (Nie, et al, 1979; Habert 1996).

The research problematic we have put forward at the beginning of this dissertation has provided very interesting results as we have shown that the student's vote for the national front is deeply related to a lack of party identification coming from a highly informed and critical electorate in a context of erosion of traditional political parties. The qualitative study of the student's vote for the national front has offered a contribution to the already existing literature on electoral behaviour by providing an analysis of a vote that has not been fully explored yet. The renewal of popularity of populist party could lead future research based on the student's vote for far right parties in France but also elsewhere. The qualitative nature of my study reduce its capacity to be generalized and a quantitative approach could in this sense confirm the conclusions I have attempted to offer or could open the ways to new path to explore.

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