

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2023-01-09

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Carvalho, J. (2019). The Front National's influence on immigration during President François Hollande's term. In Benjamin Biard, Laurent Bernhard, Hans-Georg Betz (Ed.), *Do they make a difference?: The policy influence of radical right populist parties in Western Europe.*: ECPR Press.

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://www.amazon.com/Do-They-Make-Difference-Influence/dp/1785523295?asin=1785523295&revisionId=&format=4&depth=1>

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Carvalho, J. (2019). The Front National's influence on immigration during President François Hollande's term. In Benjamin Biard, Laurent Bernhard, Hans-Georg Betz (Ed.), *Do they make a difference?: The policy influence of radical right populist parties in Western Europe.*: ECPR Press.. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

The Front National's influence on immigration during President François Hollande's term

João Carvalho

Book chapter in Biard, B., Bernhard, L. Betz, H. (2019) 'Do they make a difference? The policy influence of radical right populist parties in Western Europe'. ECPR Press

Fifteen years after the victory in the 1997 legislative elections, the French centre-left *Parti Socialiste* (PS) celebrated its return to power with the 2012 presidential elections. As widely expected, the PS candidate François Hollande was elected President of the French Fifth Republic after beating the incumbent centre-right President Nicolas Sarkozy, albeit with a mere 51,64 per cent of the vote in the second round (Gaffney, 2015). At the same time, the 2012 presidential elections represented the first national ballot contested by the French radical right populist party (RRPP) – *Front National* under Marine Le Pen's leadership, who managed to achieve a historical new electoral record for this party. Driven by Marine's 'de-demonization' project, the FN's electoral inroads progressed throughout the cycle of second-order ballots taking place during the presidential term, whereas the PS's electoral support observed a continuous and severe nationwide decline. The pressure posed by the FN over the French Socialist presidency intensified, especially after the polls started to forecast Marine's participation in the second round of the 2017 presidential ballot (Feltesse, 2017). Given this context, this research explores what was the FN's influence on the French policies of immigration control and immigrant integration during President Hollande's term.

Research on the RRPPs' influence on their domestic political systems continues to be considered scarce and limited in scope (Mudde, 2013). While the lack of available studies can be associated with the complexity of measuring this political process, the recurrent focus on immigration is understandable, given that xenophobia/racism is a distinctive trait of most members of this party family (Carter, 2005). Furthermore, the member states of the European Union (EU) benefit from broad discretionary powers on this topic, unlike what happens in other areas, such as macroeconomic management. However, most researchers focusing on RRPP influence on immigration failed to acknowledge that immigration control is typically the outcome of a bargaining process between distinct stakeholders rather than being driven solely by political parties' preferences (Mudde, 2013; see Carvalho, 2014). Another shortcoming

reflects the disregard for the interdependence between immigration policies and other policy areas, such as the labour market or foreign policy (Czaica and Haas, 2013). By contrast, this research will highlight the broadening of the FN's influence from domestic policy into French foreign policy in the context of the European asylum crisis.

Most of the research available on RRPPs' influence focuses on the terms led by centre-right parties or right-wing coalitions that integrated these extremist parties (Minkenberg, 2001; Schain, 2006; Akkerman, 2012; Carvalho, 2014). With few exceptions (see Bale et al., 2010; Alonso and Fonseca, 2011; Odmalm and Hepburn, 2017, Carvalho and Ruedin, 2018), the political interaction between RRPPs and centre-left parties or executives remains overlooked in the literature. Thus, President Hollande's term constitutes a crucial case to study the influence of one of the most successful RRPPs in Western Europe over a centre-left executive. Recent comparative analysis drawing on Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, and Switzerland suggested that RRPPs' influence on the mainstream left's political claims regarding immigration between 1995 and 2009 was negligible. Furthermore, the liberal tone of the mainstream left's political claims on immigration control and immigrant integration was closely aligned with their left-wing ideological preferences in seven European nations (excluding France; Carvalho and Ruedin, 2018). In parallel to the assessment of the FN's influence, this research will assess the potential alignment between the Socialist executive's discourse on immigration and its centre-left's positioning or if in alternative, an ideological 'aggiornamento' was observed.

Past investigations asserted that the FN's electoral entrenchment had moderate or intense repercussions at the electoral and policy level since the 1990s (Schain, 2006; Williams, 2006; Hainsworth, 2008). Further research identified a significant level of influence on immigration control by the FN during President Jacques Chirac's term (2002-2007). This political process was closely associated with Nicolas Sarkozy's tenures at the Interior Ministry, where he announced a new policy paradigm of 'selected immigration against unwanted inflows'. However, the intensity of this political process expanded to a very significant level throughout the first two years of President Sarkozy's term (2007-2009). This trend reflected for example the creation of the ephemeral Ministry of Immigration and National Identity in 2007 (Carvalho, 2014). This comparative investigation suggested that the RRPP's impact in Italy and France on immigration policy was contingent upon two premises: the RRPP's salient electoral threat to mainstream parties and the formal or informal engagement of mainstream political elites with the RRPPs (Carvalho, 2014). Through the employment of process tracing, this research will

evaluate the potential FN's influence on immigration during President Hollande's term and assess the observation of the suggested causal mechanism.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part of this research lays down the theoretical background for this analysis. This starts by exploring the proposed definition of RRPP's influence and the methodology employed to identify this political process. The subsequent section examines the French republican paradigm that supports the French immigration model and the socialists' approaches towards immigration in the past tenures in office. The final section of the first part appraises the FN's electoral development under Marine's leadership, as well as the contents of her 'de-demonization strategy'. The second part examines the FN's influence on the PS executive approaches towards immigration control and immigrant integration. The first section of the second part investigates the French government's policy towards EU citizens of Roma origin led by the interior minister Manuel Valls, who was promoted to Prime Minister by President Hollande in 2014. The second section explores the French President's single speech on immigration, and the third section investigates the centre-left executive's response to the European asylum crisis. Lastly, this chapter reviews the government's relationship with Islam after the 2015 terrorist attacks.

Definition of RRPP influence

RRPP influence has been frequently associated with the observation of the 'co-option of radical-right issues', a political process that produces a modification of the political agenda and the terms of conflict between political parties (Schain, 2006). Drawing on past research, an RRPP's political influence is conceived as the ability to promote a policy outcome that would not have been otherwise observed if not for the agency of the selected party (Carvalho, 2014; 2016a). This past research suggests that the political influence of these parties on immigration politics and policy should encompass the dissemination of their xenophobic framing of immigration and the formal/informal co-option of their anti-immigration proposals by mainstream parties (Van Spanje, 2010; Carvalho, 2014). Nonetheless, this investigation seeks to expand the scope of this definition to include the promotion of policy inaction. This political process is interpreted as the executive's covert unwillingness to deploy the necessary resources to attain their proposed policy objectives throughout the implementation stage of the policy process. While it can be conceived as a conventional form of policy making at the theoretical level, the problem consists of tracing the causal factor that propels the undisclosed inaction (Page, 2008).

The FN's influence will be classified according to a three-points scale (insignificant, significant, very significant) to prevent binary assessments (Carvalho, 2014). This political process will be simultaneously classified as proportional/disproportional at relative level, considering the selected RRPP's relevance and electoral support within the domestic party system. Secondly, RRPP's influence can be also disaggregated as direct/indirect depending on these parties' representation in government and their access to the policy making process. Nonetheless, this research also acknowledges the potential observation of several constraints on the scope of RRPP's influence derived from France's EU membership, the liberal character of the political system, and the presence of domestic veto players (Carvalho, 2016). EU membership presupposes recognition of the right of free movement of EU citizens and respect of the directives set at the supranational level. In parallel, the French political executive and legislature must abide by their national legal framework and constitutional rights were extended to foreign citizens. This legal entitlement forced French centre-right governments to reverse the halt to family reunion in the past (Hollifield, 2014). Lastly, this investigation highlights that domestic veto players either of partisan or institutional character can overturn government's decisions and water-down RRPP's influence on policy developments (Tsebelis, 2002).

This analysis develops a single-case analysis of the FN's influence on immigration control and immigrant integration during President Hollande's term supported by the employment of process tracing. Process tracing seeks to trace the causal mechanism behind the selected political phenomena by exploring causal process observations to assess the proposed causal relationships (George and Bennet, 2004; Collier, 2011). Building on past research, this study will employ a theory test-based approach to evaluate the presence of the aforementioned casual mechanism related with the RRPP's electoral threat and the agency of mainstream parties (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). Remarkably, President Hollande was distinct from his predecessors due to the publication of a controversial tell-all book based on private conversations with two journalists from *Le Monde* before the end of his term (Davet and Lhomme, 2016). This source alongside two of his close collaborators' autobiographies enhances access to the French President's state of mind throughout his tenure in power providing indispensable empirical evidence to support the argument presented in this investigation alongside the analysis of political discourse and policy developments. The next section reviews the influence of the French republican heritage on contemporary management of immigration.

The French Republican paradigm and the PS's past approaches towards immigration

France's founding myth is based upon the French Revolution of 1789, which preceded the development of large-scale immigration into the country. France, as a republic, depicts itself according to the Jacobin slogan of 'one and indivisible', presuming the ethnic homogeneity of its population. Since the French revolution was driven by a mass rejection of feudalism, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen expresses a violent rejection of any privilege or stigmatization based on origin (Noiriel, 2011). Thereby, the French republican paradigm inhibits the employment of concepts like ethnicity or race and imposes strict colour-blindness, preventing the collection of ethnic statistics (Simon, 2013). On the other hand, the Revolution also represented an intense struggle against the clerical power of the Catholic church. This trend was reflected on the importance attributed to laicity and the confinement of religion to the private sphere, strictly separated from the public sphere. Access to the French citizenship became determined by nationality, and foreigners were welcomed as citizens if they assimilated the French republicanism and relinquished their native cultures (Hollifield, 2014). As it is widely recognised in the literature, the French republican heritage entails important repercussions on the contemporary management of immigration.

In the post-Second World War period, labour immigration increased steeply, until it was halted after the oil shocks of the mid-1970s, with this topic rising to the forefront of the French political agenda thereafter. The election of PS President François Mitterrand in 1981 led to the regularization of 143,000 irregular immigrants and the reinstatement of the right to family reunion, alongside the maintenance of the halt to labour immigration. The centre-left's approach was labelled the 'grand bargain', which involved strict control of inflows to promote immigrants' integration in France (Hollifield, 2014). Subsequently, President Mitterrand sought to split the centre-right electorate in favour of the FN by supporting anti-racist policies and the immigrants' right to vote in local elections. The 'grand bargain' strategy was recovered after the PS victory in the 1997 legislative elections, as Prime Minister Lionel Jospin announced a 'new republican pact'. The centre-left government deployed the 1997 regularization programme, which benefited 90,000 irregular immigrants, whilst the 1998 law on immigration control aimed to combine 'toughness with humanitarian flexibility' (Schain, 2008). After this brief review of the French republican paradigm and the PS's legacy on immigration control, the next section reviews the FN's evolution within the French political system throughout the 2010s.

The FN's electoral expansion under Marine's leadership

The FN is considered one of the most successful RRPPs in Western European political systems. Under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the FN attained its electoral peak in the 2002 presidential elections, after collecting 16.8 per cent of the vote in the first round. Le Pen's progression to the second round, to the detriment of the socialist candidate – Lionel Jospin, fostered a 'political earthquake' in French politics. However, the FN's candidate was unable to increase his electoral share in the second round and was defeated by the centre-right candidate Jacques Chirac, who obtained 82.2 per cent of the vote (Carvalho, 2014). In the 2007 presidential elections, many of the FN's voters shifted their support in favour of Sarkozy, and Le Pen observed his lowest score at the polls since the early 1980s with just 10.4 per cent of the vote. In the aftermath of the election, Le Pen (2007) commented: 'paradoxically winners on ideological grounds, we have temporarily lost in the electoral arena', indicating the increasing hegemony of the 'Lepenisation of minds' across the French political elite. In 2011, the FN's leadership was transferred to Le Pen's daughter – Marine Le Pen, after she won an internal poll.

The new leader intensified a 'de-demonisation' strategy which involved the de-radicalisation of the FN's electoral programme and the suppression of anti-Semitic references to enhance this RRPP's credibility and respectability. Consequently, the FN intensified its opposition to the EU and its islamophobia by presenting itself as the defender of the French republic against the Islamic threat and subsequent communitarianisation of French society under religious beliefs. This trend was evident in Marine's claim that 100 per cent of the meat sold around Paris was halal or her comparison of Muslim street prayers to Nazi occupation (Mondon, 2014). Research on the FN's electoral manifestos presented between 2002 and 2012 associates this strategy with the acknowledgement of abortion and civil union contracts, the inclusion of a larger set of socio-economic topics, and the downgrading of anti-immigration rhetoric (Ivaldi, 2016). The FN's de-demonization strategy was boosted by Le Pen's expulsion in August 2015 due to his anti-Semitic rhetoric. Effectively, the FN's electoral support observed a steady expansion since Marine took over the leadership. In the 2012 presidential election, the FN candidate amassed 18 per cent of the vote in the first round, which represented 2.7 million more votes than the 4.5 million obtained by her father in 2002 (Carvalho, 2014).

Notwithstanding Marine's success at the presidential ballot, the FN only obtained two parliamentary seats after collecting 13.6 per cent of the vote in the first round of the 2012 legislative elections. In the 2014 elections for the European parliament (EP), the FN was, for the first time ever, the most voted-for party at the national level with 24,9 per cent of the vote (Ivaldi, 2016). A new historical peak was observed in the 2015 departmental elections, as the FN obtained 22.23 cent of the vote.¹ In the 2015 regional elections, the FN achieved 27.73 per cent of the vote, against the 23.4 per cent obtained by President Hollande's party, and was the most voted-for party in six of the twelve regions. However, the FN's electoral share in the second ballot expanded by a meagre 2 points, following an increase in turnout and a lack of mobilisation of centrist voters, which prevented the FN from winning a single regional presidency (Jaffré, 2017). In face of the FN's successes in 2015, President Hollande ranked Marine as his major political challenge in acknowledgement of the FN's salient electoral threat (Davet and Lhomme, 2016). The next sections examine the FN's influence during President Hollande's term.

President Hollande's U-turn on his electoral pledge

After President Hollande's victory in the presidential elections, the French centre-left's success was later confirmed in the 2012 legislative elections, where the coalition between the PS and the Greens obtained 300 seats out of the 577 available in the National Assembly. Within the French semi-presidential system, this result represented a lack of checks and balances on the new President's ability to implement his political programme with the support of a Prime Minister of his preference. However, Hollande was considered an accidental candidate lacking an overall plan, only considering himself a potential French president after the expected centre-left candidate Dominique Strauss-Khan was forced to retreat from the PS primaries in 2011 (Gaffney, 2015). By his mid-term, President Hollande was considered to lack 'essential leadership skills' and was ranked as the most unpopular French President in the history of the fifth republic (Kuhn, 2014). During the 2012 electoral campaign, Hollande criticized President Sarkozy's legacy on immigration for promoting the division of the French people and proposed granting the right to vote in local elections to foreign citizens. At the same time, the PS candidate promised a strict approach to labour inflows and to reduce the number of annual inflows (Evans and Ivaldi, 2013).

Under pressure from Marine's result, Hollande adopted a more restrictive tone in the electoral campaign in between rounds and claimed 'there are too many irregular immigrants in France', an unusual remark for the leader of a centre-left party (Le Monde, 2012). President Hollande's

management of immigration became intrinsically linked to the agency of Manuel Valls (initially appointed as Interior Minister in 2012 and then Prime Minister after the PS's disastrous results in the 2014 local elections). Valls' appointment to the cabinet sought to appease right-wing voters, since this member of parliament (MP) was nicknamed the 'Sarkozy of the left' after he was part of the 14 socialist MPs who supported the Burqa ban proposed by President Sarkozy in 2010 (Kuhn, 2014). During the PS's presidential primary,ⁱⁱ Valls proposed the deployment of a strict quota system according to immigrants' origins, which challenged the absolute equality imposed by the French Republican paradigm as well as the right of any individual to have a normal family life (Nouveau Observateur, 2011).ⁱⁱⁱ At the Interior Ministry, Valls supervised the abolition of the *Gueant circulaire* (administrative act) concerning the settlement and access to the labour market by foreign students in France as well as the law on the criminalization of solidarity towards irregular immigrants.

These policy developments initially suggested a shift from the highly restrictive approach pursued during former President Sarkozy's term (Carvalho, 2016b). A new *circulaire* was published to clarify the access criteria for the regularization of irregular immigrants on an individual basis included in the legislation. Even so, Valls ensured that a broad regularization programme was not considered by the centre-left executive, which marked a break with the PS's past approach to irregular immigration (Hollifield, 2014). While an expansion of the number of regularized immigrants was observed from 2013 onwards,^{iv} the interior minister preferred to emphasize the increase in forced removals of irregular immigrants in comparison to 2012 (Proteau, 2013). Against a public letter signed by 75 socialist MPs demanding the fulfilment of the President's electoral pledge, the Interior Minister dropped the concession of right to vote in local elections to foreigners because it did not constitute a mean to promote integration, which he ranked as the greatest challenge of French society. This decision appeased the FN whose rejection of this proposal was long established in the 1980s during the Presidency of François Mitterrand and restated during the 2012 electoral campaign.

Valls' approach to the Roma camps

Few months after the legislative elections, the French socialist executive issued a new *circulaire* on the dismantlement of Roma camps that sought to combine 'humanism' with 'firmness'. This document guaranteed abidance by the republican paradigm of absolute equality and non-discrimination during the implementation process. This action extended

former President Sarkozy's repressive approach, emboldened by the Grenoble speech in 2010 (Carvalho, 2016b), and constituted another U-turn from Hollande's electoral pledge to adopt a new approach to the Roma camps. A month later, the Interior Minister boasted that the Roma's vocation was to return to Eastern Europe because 'these populations have a way of life that is extremely different from our own'. He also added that it was 'illusory' to think that the Roma could be integrated into French society, (Liberation, 2013). Valls' statement transgressed the republican paradigm expressed in the government's document and deepened the stigmatization and racialization of the Roma (Simon, 2013). Moreover, the Interior Minister's statements indicated the influence of the FN's cultural xenophobia while Marine highlighted the similarities between Valls and Sarkozy's tenures at the interior ministry and attacked their approaches towards the Roma due to their support of free movement within the EU (Le Parisien, 2013).

The interior minister's approach to the Roma camps opened cracks within the Socialist government, but President Hollande threw his support behind Valls and commented that: 'The question that must be asked is whether France is meant to welcome all the most vulnerable' (Valerio, 2013). Whereas Hollande (2012) had publicly criticised his predecessor in the past due to the racialization of the Roma, now, the French Socialist President contributed to legitimize the cultural xenophobia inherent to Valls' discourse. The Socialists' policy of clamping down on bogus inflows was left in disarray after the Leonarda Affair, when a Kosovan Roma was detained by police during a school trip and deported with her family to Kosovo. After intense public protests, Hollande announced on TV that Leonarda could return to France to finish school but not her family, despite immigrants' right to family reunion and her being a minor (Gaffney, 2015). Unsurprisingly, the President's proposal fostered alienation among left-wing supporters, disdain from its opponents, and was publicly rejected by Leonarda and her family leading to the collapse of the French President's popularity (Kuhn, 2014). The government's approach to the Roma and the divisions within the Socialist camp suggest that the FN's influence started to attain a significant level in the first half of President Hollande's term. The next section reviews the FN's influence on the centre-left President's proposals on immigrant integration.

The Socialists' consensus on the 'integration crisis'

At the official inauguration of the History of Immigration Museum in December 2014, President Hollande delivered his single speech on immigration and emphasized immigrants' past contributions to France, the low proportion of inflows in relation to France's population, defended free movement and the Schengen system, and concluded that: 'the success of integration will determine our national destiny'. The Socialist president announced the creation of a 'Passport for Talents' (an entry visa for highly skilled immigrants), the expansion of the duration of residence authorisations from one to two years, and the liberalisation of the naturalisation procedures to improve immigrants' integration (Hollande, 2014). Nonetheless, these liberal policy developments were followed by the reiteration of the supposed 'integration crisis' that became hegemonic in French politics in the aftermath of the 2002 political earthquake (Carvalho, 2014). According to President Hollande (2014), every immigrant would 'have to learn French and receive civic training on Republican values, its rules, usages, rights and duties'. This rhetoric reinforced the perception of French sovereignty as being under threat from the settlement of foreign citizens within national territory, as the FN proposed.

Moreover, the Socialist President restated the fusion between immigration control and immigrant integration deployed by the preceding centre-right President, as integration became a prerequisite for obtaining an entry visa or a residence authorization rather than being a long-term objective to be promoted through the concession of long-term residence authorisations (Simon, 2013). Unsurprisingly, the 2016 immigration law replaced the 'Contract of Welcome and Integration' introduced by Sarkozy with the 'Republican Integration Contract', which indicated a mainstream party consensus on the supposed 'integration crisis' denounced by the FN. Notwithstanding the paramount concern with immigrant integration among the French mainstream parties, polls conducted in the late 2000s suggested that French national sentiment was shared by 52 per cent of the respondents from the immigrant population (reaching around two thirds for North African immigrants), whilst national affiliation increased to 79 per cent of the respondents who obtained French citizenship through naturalisation (Simon, 2013, p.214). By contrast, the fight against discrimination on education and on access to the labour market received a brief reference, whilst immigrants' residential segregation was not addressed in the President's speech. The legacy of President Hollande's discourse on immigration was undermined by the publication of the tell-all book.

Five months earlier, the French President commented that: 'I think there are too many arrivals, immigrants who shouldn't be there'. Hollande then added: 'we teach them to speak French and

then another group arrives, and we have to start all over again. It never stops. So, what do we do? We work in one neighbour, we provide them habitation... and then, there are others who arrive, poorer than the other' (Davet and Lhomme, 2016). Therefore, inflows had to be stopped because they undermined immigrants' integration, whilst left wingers' accusations of betrayal were justified by their misunderstanding of the mutations in French society. The President's misgivings help to understand the ambiguous management of immigration by the socialist executive in the first half of his term and the subsequent political dealignment into the far-right's grounds after unexpected exogenous events like the 2015 terrorist attacks. Parallel to this, the contradiction between his private statements and public discourse the Socialist president's vulnerability to the 'Lepenisation of minds', whilst the restatement of the fusion of immigration control with immigrant integration indicates the FN's significant influence. References to the FN's ideological contagious effects resurfaced within the context of the asylum crisis observed in Europe in 2015 (Feltesse, 2017).

The socialist executive's inaction on the asylum crisis

In the face of an increasing number of asylum seekers at the external EU borders arriving via the Mediterranean Sea or through South-eastern Europe, the German Prime Minister Angela Merkel unilaterally opened the national borders to refugees from Syria stranded in Hungary. At the same time, the EU Commission drafted a quota system to distribute 160,000 asylum seekers stranded in Italy and Greece between all member-states. While the French Interior Minister initially suggested that the EU commission's plans were partially inspired by his government's proposals, Valls publicly disavowed his colleague and rejected any reference to a quota system (Leclerc, 2015). Moreover, Valls demanded that EU member states assumed their responsibilities to separate irregular immigrants from genuine refugees. The French government's response to the asylum crisis indicated the divisions regarding the management of inflows within the Socialist's government, the lack of solidarity at the European level, and disregard for France's heritage as the birthplace of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. In parallel, Marine accused the French government of submission towards the EU plans and rejected the commission's proposal because it would enhance human trafficking into the continent (FN, 2015a)

President Hollande also initially supported the rejection of the quota-system proposed by the EU commission and commented: 'people who come because they think that Europe is a prosperous continent, even when they are not hired by companies... they must be escorted back, that's the rule' (AFP, 2015). Whereas Franco-German cooperation was regarded as

indispensable to overcome EU crises in the past, France abandoned Germany on asylum, and the bilateral relationship between Hollande and Merkel was strained to levels unobserved in the past (Gouzy, 2015). Furthermore, the French President failed to challenge and indirectly condoned the FN's framing of the asylum crisis as a wave of irregular immigration with economic purposes orchestrated by the EU Commission (FN, 2015a). Thereby, the association of asylum seekers and bogus irregular immigrants became hegemonic in the French political debate, providing evidence of the RRPP's ideological victory (Lemarié et al., 2015). At the FN's summer university, Marine depicted immigration as a 'burden' to the French society and directly blamed Chancellor Merkel for inciting inflows to address Germany's demographic deficit, 'reduce wages and to continue to recruit slaves through mass immigration' (Faye, 2015b)

However, a U-turn was observed on France's approach to the asylum crisis after the widespread circulation of a photo of a drowned Syrian boy lying on a Turkish beach in early September, an event interpreted by Hollande as an opportunity to resume Franco-German cooperation on this topic (Gantzer, 2017). As such, Hollande announced that 24,000 refugees would be taken in within two years, a number perceived as evidence of France's lack of generosity by both the centre-right and the left (Feltesse, 2017). After accepting to participate in a meeting with the Socialist mayors who organised a solidarity movement to welcome the asylum seekers, President Hollande failed to follow through. This action suggested a lack of commitment to his previous goal, leaving his policy adviser perplexed and questioning himself over the potential 'Lepenisation' of the French President's mind (Feltesse, 2017). In his tell-all book, Hollande justified his restrictive approach towards the refugees, stating that it was due to the diversity of the immigrants' origins and the economic purposes of the newcomers. On a different occasion, Hollande stated that his restrictive approach was a means of preventing accusations of 'exploiting refugees to boost the far right' (Davet and Lhomme, 2016).

President Hollande's initial comments suggested full agreement with the FN's framing of the asylum crisis, whilst this RRPP's electoral inroads that were evident at the 2014 EP elections and the 2015 departmental elections were directly associated with his restrictive approach to this European crisis. Months after the 2015 regional elections wherein the FN campaigned on a promise to deport all asylum seekers (Faye, 2015b), the embattled Franco-German cooperation on asylum was further hampered by Valls' direct critiques of Merkel's strategy on German soil in consonance with Marine's discourse.^v The French Prime Minister added that 'Europe could not accommodate more refugees' and closed the door to the further distribution

of refugees (Lemaître, 2016). Rather than disavowing his subordinate's comments, President Hollande acknowledged them as the French official position and placed further strain on the bilateral relationship with Germany (Davet and Lhomme, 2016). Therefore, the FN's significant influence on immigration control at the domestic level contained salient repercussions into the French foreign policy at the EU level and hampered France's bilateral relations. By the end of 2016, France only welcomed 7,000 Syrian asylum seekers, in a demonstration of policy inaction which provides further evidence of the FN's significant influence on immigration control during President Hollande's term.

President Hollande's challenge to the French republican paradigm

In the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015, President Hollande convened a special congress of Versailles with all members of the upper and lower houses of parliament. Three days after the attacks, the Socialist president proposed a constitutional reform to enshrine the state of emergency (including controversial special powers like detention of suspects without judicial authorization) as well as the power to revoke the French citizenship of convicted terrorists who were born in France and held dual citizenship. Convinced of a right-wing shift in public opinion after the terrorist shock (Davet and Lhomme, 2016), the Socialist President informally co-opted a long-standing proposal by the French RRPP. The FN's 2002 electoral manifesto demanded: 'the application of withdrawal of nationality included in the nationality law for crimes such as terrorism, drugs traffic, and murders' (FN, 2001, p.29). Notwithstanding the inclusion of a similar mechanism in the French legislation since 1938,^{vi} President Hollande pushed forward with his highly symbolic constitutional reform weeks before the 2015 regional elections, in which the FN was expected to capitalize on the terrorist wave.

Moreover, President Hollande operated a U-turn from his past opposition to a similar unsuccessful initiative undertaken by his centre-right predecessor in 2010. In a televised statement, Hollande considered that Sarkozy's proposal to strip French citizenship from individuals with foreign origin that attacked French public authorities was 'detrimental to what is ultimately the republican tradition and fails to protect citizens' (Soullier, 2015). As Hollande recognised, the proposal transgressed the absolute equality imposed by French Republicanism, whilst the potential efficacy of representing a deterrent against further terrorist attacks committed by French nationals was very dubious. The French constitutional ombudsman for

citizens' rights - Jacques Toubon (former centre-right justice minister) warned against 'a fundamental division of French people into two categories' that enhanced the stigmatisation of the 3.2 million French citizens with dual nationality. Consequently, the President's proposal fostered the perception that dual citizenship was problematic, legitimising the FN's long-established opposition to dual nationality because it threatened national sovereignty (FN, 2001; 2012).

The President's informal engagement with the FN's proposition fostered the implosion of the Socialist party and the opposition of members of government, leading to the resignation of the Justice Minister Christine Taubira in January 2016. Consequently, the second article of the constitutional revision's project was rejected by 40 per cent of the PS members of the lower chamber of parliament. The potential enshrinement of the FN's pledge in the national constitution would represent evidence of this RRPP's very significant influence in the French politics. By March 2016, the constitutional reform was scrapped by the Socialist President due to the lack of consensus between the National Assembly and the Senate over its contents. Therefore, institutional veto players specified by the French constitution watered down the FN's very significant influence on President Hollande's management of immigration. Subsequently, eighteen months before the presidential election, President Hollande's approval rating among the general electorate dropped to 15 per cent, a drop that was especially steep among his centre-left voters. Nevertheless, the Socialist government's approach to Islam further realigned itself away from the Republican paradigm.

[The Socialist Prime Minister's drift into Islamophobia](#)

In the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo shootings in January 2015, Prime Minister Valls vowed on TV to tackle: 'A territorial, social and ethnic apartheid [which] has imposed itself on our country', which supposedly led French citizens to feel as 'second-class citizens' (Le Monde, 2015). Valls was implicitly referring to the three attackers' residence in socially disadvantaged urban areas. However, his rhetoric was ambiguous and could be interpreted as either the implicit denunciation of religious communitarianism or a reference to the process of urban segregation of ethnic minorities. In fact, geographical segregation was a recurrent theme of the FN's electoral campaigns, where it proposed the 'dismantlement of ethnic ghettos' and the tackling of the supposedly expanding 'communitarian ghettoization' (FN, 2001). An analogous relationship was thus observed between the Socialist prime minister's rhetoric and this RRPP's discourse. Nevertheless, Valls still accused the FN of promoting 'division and stigmatization'

that conveyed the ‘germ of civil war’ before the 2015 regional elections (Rovan, 2015). While the Prime Minister promoted the FN’s demonization among the electorate, his own informal co-option of this RRPP’s discourse increased the saliency and legitimacy of this RRPP’s proposals.

The Socialist Prime Minister’s drift into the cultural xenophobia that was previously observed towards the Roma resurfaced in June 2015, after framing the January shootings as evidence of a war of civilizations between France and the terrorists (Liberation, 2015). In his view, the French government led the defence of French society, civilization and values from the terrorist menace, placing identity politics at the top of the political agenda, as the President’s media adviser decried (Gantzer, 2017). This action legitimatised the FN’s (2001) long established framing of Islam as a ‘threat to French sovereignty and civilization’. The French Prime Minister’s stigmatisation of Muslim citizens deepened a year later, after proposing the ban of headscarves from universities and claiming that most French people thought Islam was incompatible with the Republic. In reaction to this, the head of the Observatory on Islamophobia expressed his exasperation: ‘We are fed up of being stigmatised... [and] of this populist discourse which is worse than [that of] the far-right’ (Guardian, 2016). For the first time during his term, President Hollande publicly expressed his direct opposition to the prime-minister’s proposal, a rejection espoused by other cabinet members in public, indicating the Socialists’ disarray regarding immigrant integration (Gantzer, 2017).

The Socialist prime-minister leaned further towards the FN’s islamophobia after Valls granted his full public support to the French right-wing mayors who banned full-body swimsuits from beaches. According to Valls, the detainment of Muslim women that dressed ‘burkinis’ was a ‘question of law and order’, whilst the education minister – Najat Vallaud-Belkacem associated the local bans with the ‘liberation of racist speech’ (Le Monde, 2016). The ban was overturned by the French Council of State due to its violation of civil liberties, whilst President Hollande ruled out a national ban on burkinis due to the stigmatization of Muslim citizens in opposition to his Prime Minister’s stance (Le Point, 2016). Notwithstanding the President Hollande’s overt criticism of his Prime Minister, the tell-all book quotes President Hollande as saying in December 2015 that: ‘It’s true [that] there is a problem with Islam’ and criticizing the mainstream left for not understanding that ‘Islam comprises a risk’ in reference to religious radicalisation (Davet and Lhomme, 2016). These statements reinforced Hollande’s political ambiguity whilst the public dismay provoked by this publication buried his chances of re-election and alienated the overwhelming support of Muslim voters obtained at the 2012 ballot.

In short, the FN's influence on immigrants' integration persisted at significant levels by the second half of President Hollande's term,

Conclusions

This research suggested that FN's influence on immigration attained a significant level during President Hollande's term despite this RRPP being excluded from the national government or the diminished size of the FN's parliamentary representation. Therefore, this case study suggests that the intensity of RRPP's influence should not be equated with these parties' access to national office or their representation in the national parliament. Exogenous events such as the Charlie Hebdo shootings and the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015 intensified the FN's influence on immigration as the Socialist President decided to informally co-opt the RRPP's long term proposal to strip bi-nationals of French citizenship in disrespect of the national Republican paradigm. The very significant intensity of the French RRPP's was nonetheless watered-down by institutional veto players due to the lack of consensus between the chambers of parliament over the Socialist President's constitutional reform. Hence, studies on RRPP influence ought to acknowledge the observation of salient domestic constraints on the scope of this political process.

In addition to the informal co-option of the FN's discourse and proposals, this investigation associated this RRPP's influence with the observation of policy inaction over the Socialist government's management of the asylum crisis in 2015. Moreover, this investigation also highlighted the dissemination of the FN's influence on immigration control at the domestic level into the Socialist government's management of international relations, in particular towards Germany and the EU commission. In sum, the significant intensity of the FN's influence on immigration during President Hollande's term presented an indirect character and was considered disproportional in relation to this RRPP's electoral support within the French party system. RRPP's influence on policy developments can also be observed during the terms led by centre-left parties and superseded the mere discourse or cultural levels. The observation of this political process was closely associated with the FN's growing electoral threat from 2012 to 2017 and the Socialist executive's willingness to informally engage with this RRPP's discourse and proposals, which was boosted by the exogenous events in 2015. Further analysis should explore the effects of the FN's influence over the French foreign

policy during the 2015 asylum crisis to expand the scope of the available research on RRPP literature

Bibliography

AFP (2015) Hollande rejects EU migrant quotas but backs better distribution, *The Guardian*, 19 May

Alonso, S. and Fonseca, S. (2011) Immigration, left and right. *Party Politics*, 18 (6), p. 865-884

Akkerman T (2012) Comparing radical right parties in government: Immigration and integration policies in nine countries (1996-2010). *West European Politics* 35(3), 511-529

Akkerman, T.; de Lange, S. and Rooduijn, M. (2016) *Radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. Into the mainstream?* Oxon: Routledge

Bale, T., Green-Pedersen, C., Krouwel, A., Luther, K. R., & Sitter, N. (2010). If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them? Explaining Social Democratic Responses to the Challenge from the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe. *Political Studies*, 58(3), 410–426.

Czaika, M., & De Haas, H. (2013). The Effectiveness of Immigration Policies. *Population and Development Review*, 39(3), 487–508.

Carvalho, J. (2014) *Impact of Extreme-Right Parties on Immigration Policy. Comparing Britain, France and Italy.* Oxon: Routledge.

Carvalho, J. (2016a). The influence of extreme-right parties on immigration policy in Italy and France in the early 2000s. *Comparative European Politics*, 14(5), 663–685.

Carvalho, J. (2016b). The impact of extreme-right parties on immigration policy in Italy and France in the early 2000s. *Comparative European Politics*, 14(5), 663–685.

Carvalho, J., & Ruedin, D. (2018). The positions mainstream left parties adopt on immigration: A cross-cutting cleavage? *Party Politics*, published online on 15 June, available at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1354068818780533>

Carter, E. (2005). *The extreme right in Western Europe. Success or failure?* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Czaika, M., & De Haas, H. (2013). The Effectiveness of Immigration Policies. *Population and Development Review*, 39(3), 487–508.

Chrisafis, A. (2016) French PM calls for ban on Islamic headscarves at universities. *The Guardian*, 13 April

Cole, A.; Meunier, S. and Tiberj, V. (eds.) (2013) *Developments in French Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave

Davet G. and Lhomme, F. (2016) ‘Un président ne devrait pas dire ça...’. *Les secrets d’un quinquennat*. Paris: Stock.

Evans, J. and Ivaldi, G. (2013) *The 2012 French Presidential Elections. The Inevitable Alternation*. Palgrave Macmillan

Faye, O. (2015) Face à la crise migratoire, Marine Le Pen martèle son intransigeance. *Le Monde*, published on 7 of September

Feltesse, V. (2017) *Et si tout s'était passé autrement*. Paris: Plon

Front National (2001) *300 Mesures Pour La Renaissance De La France*.

Front National (2012) *Droit de vote des étrangers : PS et UMP main dans la main!* Paris: Communiqués FN, 18 of September,

Front National (2015a) *Quotas de migrants: l’Union européenne plus criminelle que les passeurs*. Paris: Communiqués FN, 13 of May

Front National (2015b) *Quotas de migrants voulus par l’UE : derrière leur agitation médiatique, Valls et Sarkozy soumis à la politique d’immigration massive*. Paris: Communiqués FN, 17 May

Gaffney, J. (2015) *France in the Hollande Presidency. The Unhappy Republic*. Palgrave Macmillan

Gantzer, G. (2017) *La politique est un sport de combat*. Paris: Fayard

Gouzy, J. (2015) *La vie politique en Europe et dans le monde, L’Europe en Formation*, 2015/3 (n° 377), p. 151-172.

- Hainsworth, P. (2008). *The Extreme Right in Western Europe*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Hollifield, J. (2014). Immigration and the Republican Tradition in France. In J. Hollifield, P. Martin, and P. Orrenius, (eds.), *Controlling immigration : a global perspective*. Stanford : Stanford University Press, pp. ????
- Hollande, F. (2012) Letter to Collectif National Droits de l'Homme Romeurope. Paris, 27th of March
- Ivaldi, G. (2016) A new course for the French radical right? The Front National and 'de-demonization' in Akkerman, T.; de Lange, S. and Rooduijn, M. (2016) Radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. Into the mainstream? Oxon: Routledge, pp. 225-246
- Jaffré, J. (2017) Le Front National face a l'obstacle du second tour. Paris: Foundation pour l'innovation politique.
- Kuhn, R. (2014). Mister Unpopular: François Hollande and the Exercise of Presidential Leadership, 2012–14. *Modern & Contemporary France*, 22(4), 435–457.
- Leclerc, J. (2015) Les ambiguïtés du gouvernement sur les quotas de migrants. *Le Figaro*, 18 of May
- Lemaître, F. (2016) « Nous ne pouvons pas accueillir plus de réfugiés », selon Manuel Valls. *Le Monde*, 13 of February
- Le Monde (2015) Manuel Valls évoque « un apartheid territorial, social, ethnique » en France. 20 of January
- Le Monde (2016) « Burkini » : Manuel Valls désavoue Najat Vallaud- Belkacem. 25 of August
- Le Nouvel Observateur (2011) Primaire PS. Comparez les projets des candidats sur l'Immigration. 20 October
- Le Pen, J. (2007) La revanche des legislatives. Saint- Cloud; 24 April 2007; available at: http://www.frontnational.com/doc_interventions_detail.php?id_inter=78; consulted on 21/03/2009
- Le Point (2016) Burkini : Hollande ne veut 'ni provocation ni stigmatisation'. 25 of August
- Liberation (2013) Pour Valls, «les Roms ont vocation à rentrer en Roumanie ou en Bulgarie. 24 of September

- Liberation (2015) Le jour où Manuel Valls parla de ‘guerre de civilisation’. 28 of June
- Le Parisien (2013) Manuel Valls : «Les Roms ont vocation à revenir en Roumanie ou en Bulgarie». Published on 24 September
- Minkenberg, M. (2001). The radical right in public office: Agenda-setting and policy effects. *West European Politics*, 24(4), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380108425462>
- Mondon, A. (2014). The Front National in the Twenty-First Century: From Pariah to Republican Democratic Contender? *Modern & Contemporary France*, 22(3), 301–320.
- Mudde, C. (2013), Three decades of populist radical right parties in Western Europe: So what?. *European Journal of Political Research*, 52: 1–19
- Noiriel, G. (2011) Immigration, collective memory and national identity in France. University of Coimbra, 12 of April
- Nouvel Observateur (2011) 'Primaire PS: comparez les projets des candidats sur l'Immigration'. 20 November
- Page, E. (2008) The origins of policy in Moran, Michael, Rein, Martin, Goodin, Robert (Ed.) *The Oxford handbook of Public Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.207-227
- Rovan, A. (2015) Valls agite le spectre de la guerre civil. *Le Figaro*, 12 of December
- Schain, M. A. (2006). The extreme-right and immigration policy-making: Measuring direct and indirect effects. *West European Politics*, 29(2), 270–289.
- Schain, M. (2008b). *The politics of immigration in France, Britain, and the United States : a comparative study*. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan
- Simon, P. (2013) *Contested citizenship in France: the Republican Politics of Identity and Integration*, in Cole, A.; Meunier, S. and Tiberj, V. (eds.) (2013) *Developments in French Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 203-217
- Soullier, L. (2015) Quand Hollande et Valls conspuaient la déchéance de nationalité au nom de grandes valeurs. *Le Monde*, 4 of January
- Tsebelis, G. (2002) *Veto Players. How political institutions work*. Princeton : Princeton University Press.

Valerio, I. (2013) François Hollande en soutien à Manuel Valls sur les Roms : ‘Est-ce que la France a vocation à accueillir tous les plus vulnérables ?’. *Europe 1*, 26 of September

van Spanje, J. (2010). Contagious Parties: Anti-Immigration Parties and Their Impact on Other Parties’ Immigration Stances in Contemporary Western Europe. *Party Politics*, 16(5), 563–586.

Vincent, E. (2012) La circulaire sur les évacuations de campements roms publiée. *Le Monde*, 29 of August

Weil, P. and Dupoutre, J. (2015) Refusons l’extension de la déchéance de la nationalité !. *Le Monde*, 3 of December

Williams, M. (2006). *The Influence of Radical Right-wing Parties in West European Democracies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

ⁱ In opposition to past bipolarisation, the FN imposed the triangulation of political competition in the second round (it contested 60 per cent of the cantons in the second round, while the centre-left competed on 66 per cent).

ⁱⁱ Valls only obtained the support of 5.63 per cent of the PS voters in the first round of the 2011 primary elections, which indicated his unpopularity across the centre-left party’s members.

ⁱⁱⁱ Effectively, similar proposals were presented by Sarkozy in 2005 and 2008 but were vetoed on Republican grounds by President Chirac and a Senate’s commission chaired by Pierre Mazeaud (Carvalho, 2014).

^{iv} Overall, this reform expanded the rate of regularized immigrants by 30 per cent between 2012 and 2017.

^v Remarkably, Valls commented: ‘A few months ago, the French media questioned: "where is the French Merkel?" Or those who wanted to give the Chancellor the Nobel Prize. Today, I see the results’. These statements followed the aftermath of the Cologne sexual attacks during the New Year’s Eve that were erroneously associated with asylum seekers (Lemaître, 2016)

^{vi} Article 23-7 of French civil code states: ‘The Frenchman that behaves in fact as the national of a foreign nation can, if he holds the nationality of this country, be declared, after obtaining the opinion of the Council of State, to have lost the French status’ (Weil and Lepoutre, 2015). Effectively, President Hollande deprived five individuals of French citizenship in 2015 without public outcry (Davet and Lhomme, 2016).