



The University of Chicago

**Framing Immigration and National Sovereignty in The
French Far-Right: Marine Le Pen's Rhetoric and The
Dédiabolisation Strategy**

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May 2022

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts degree in
the Master of Arts Program in the Committee on International Relations

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Abstract

Over recent decades, Europe has been the site of a fervent consolidation of populist far-right parties. Much research has been produced on the etiology of emergence and consolidation in this party-political space. Hitherto, the majority of this scholarship has focused on two principal factors: political opportunity structures (e.g., the electoral system) and sociological undercurrents (e.g., dealignment and cleavages). In this thesis, I seek to lay the groundwork for a third explanandum of populist far-right success and failure: the discursive devices these leaders use to communicate with their core and potential constituencies. Namely, I aim to explore and evidence the strategic moderation and polarization of rhetoric and policy on the right of the party-political spectrum, leveraging the case of Marine Le Pen and the Rassemblement National (formerly the Front National) in France as a vehicle to explore so-called ‘diabolisation’ and ‘dédiabolisation’ on the populist right.

Given the many factors at play in shaping such a strategy, from the content to the tone and gestures employed to the locations of the public appearances, I have chosen to restrict my analysis to the *content* of Marine Le Pen’s speeches during her presidential campaigns of 2012, 2017, and 2022. Surprisingly, I find no evidence of Le Pen becoming less extreme over time (indeed, quite the opposite), casting some doubt on the credibility of the *dédiabolisation* hypothesis. More broadly, the results reveal a degree of thematic reshuffling in Le Pen’s discourse as her stance on immigration and national sovereignty evolves over time. Ultimately, this thesis offers a unique window into the process by which a populist far-right leader fashions their discourse over time.

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1 Introduction

Marine Le Pen just was for the third consecutive time running for the French presidential elections. It is hard to discuss French politics without mentioning her ability to shape the political landscape and continued electoral relevance. Marine Le Pen has proven an extremely resilient and controversial politician at the center of French politics, gathering 41,45% support in the 2022 presidential elections, an impressive and unmatched score for the French far-right. From the anachronistic and halcyon rhetoric of her father, the notorious Jean-Marie Le Pen, she is the latest iteration in a political dynasty who has reinvented her party in various ways.

The emergence and consolidation of radical right political parties across the globe have enjoyed extensive scholarly attention (e.g., Arzheimer, 2015; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2015; Krause and Giebler, 2019). A central debate across the literature exists on the reasons for the expansion of their electoral appeal beyond their natural constituencies. Broadly speaking, the discussion is split into two dominant narratives. In the first narrative, populist far-right popularity can be explained by exogenous factors imposed by the environment, such as a radicalization of the electorate – what Matt Golder calls a ‘demand-side’ explanation (2016). The second narrative corresponds to an effective and strategic intra-party organization and advantageous political system amounting to electoral performance (what Golder calls ‘supply-side’ explanation), which ultimately allows more resonance with the mainstream electorate.

Within this ‘supply-side’ explanation, this thesis focuses on a particular sub-phenomenon – understood as the ‘inclusion moderation thesis’ – which argues that the agency of party leaders plays an important role in repackaging radical right political parties’ policies and ideologies into more moderate tones to resonate with the more mainstream electorate. This theoretical stance adds depth to the supply-side explanation: a selective moderation or

normalization of far-right statements on certain topics is also essential and does not correspond to an structural or exogenous factor of influence. Discursive reframing and substantive rhetorical changes are often effective strategic tools for leaders seeking political credibility.

While it is well-known that political parties (under their leaders' stewardship) perform strategic shifts for a wide range of tactical and ideological reasons, this thesis hones in on a particular dimension of this empirical regularity. Namely, it aims to explore and evidence the strategic moderation and polarization of rhetoric and policy on the right of the party-political spectrum, leveraging the case of Marine Le Pen and the Rassemblement Front (formerly the Front National) in France as a vehicle to explore so-called 'diabolisation' and 'dédiabolisation' on the populist right. There is significant uncertainty and debate surrounding the conditions under which populist radical right politicians moderate their platforms on the one hand, and make them more extreme on the other. This thesis precisely examines the dynamics of this reinvention over the last decade to provide conceptual and empirical clarification on the phenomenon of *dédiabolisation* – the strategic moderation of rhetoric and policy by actors on the right of the party-political spectrum.

Most commentators have said that Marine Le Pen has become more moderate over time in her rhetoric, in comparison to her father. However, others disagree and point to other aspects of her rhetoric that seem to uphold its reminiscent radicalism. This monolithic characterization of the phenomenon cannot account for the underlying stratagems and inner variations across Marine Le Pen's three presidential campaigns. Rather, *dédiabolisation* can be analyzed in further depth on many different levels such as the *content and topics* chosen and emphasized by Marine Le Pen in her speeches, her gesticulation and tones conveying *ways* to express her political position, or the particular audiences she addresses. I choose to focus on the first dimension of Le Pen's discourse strategy, namely the selective emphasis and occurrence of topics and content in three distinct presidential campaign periods. I appreciate this is not, as

mentioned, the only facet of her political discourse strategy. As discussed in Chapter 5, this analysis invites attention to a number of questions in regard to whether populist radical-right leaders vary their rhetoric by the audience, or whenever their gesticulation and tones vary over time.

The takeaways are twofold. First, I show that rhetoric and policy shifts can be understood better when we disaggregate these oftentimes monolith concepts. Political topics such as ‘nationalism’ and ‘sovereignty’ are multivalent, taking on considerably different practical and semantic properties depending on the context, and are composites of multiple dimensions. Hence, analyzing *dédiabolisation* or *diabolisation* from a high level might obscure granular dynamics that reveal interesting political trade-offs perceived by salient actors. This is the conceptual takeaway of the thesis. Marine Le Pen’s well-established anti-immigration stance for instance is disaggregated in this thesis under 6 different ‘subframes’ or ‘subgroups’ that compose altogether and over time her rhetoric on the matter. Similarly, Marine Le Pen’s fierce advocacy for national sovereignty since 2012 has been conveyed (among other) through at least 5 different subframes, ranging from national and popular economic wellbeing to sovereign autonomy, and to critiques of the EU and the broader globalized order. This consistent disaggregation reveals a multitude of topics encompassed in the broader themes of immigration and national sovereignty and helps understand the importance of selective content in an effort to appeal to a broader electoral audience.

Second, the case of Marine Le Pen and the Rassemblement National shows that the trend of *dédiabolisation* that other analysts have observed (Shields, 2007,2012; Hewlett, 2012; Betz, 2013; Alduy and Wahnich, 2015; Alduy 2015; Gaboulaud and Lechevallier, 2015; Barisone and Stockemer, 2016; Stockemer, 2017; Igounet,2017; Bastow, 2018) changes shape considerably when her rhetoric is disaggregated into salient themes and sub-themes.

To investigate the discursive articulation of *dédiabolisation*, this thesis proposes an actor-centered research through a mix-method approach comprising of a critical discourse analysis of speeches by Marine Le Pen and a pilot survey that provides quantitative measurements of the inner variations of levels – or weight – of extremism between and within subframes. To bound the analysis while still leaving sufficient space for variation, I examine the last three presidential elections in France, namely 2012, 2017, and 2022. Specifically, by analyzing a corpus of Le Pen’s speeches, I seek to determine the discursive framing trends that relate to key issues for the Rassemblement National: immigration and national sovereignty. By developing a codebook of frames for each of these two themes, I am able to capture the changing (or unchanging) nature of the immigration and national sovereignty discourse promulgated by the party leadership, as well as the oftentimes overlooked variations of semantic formulations employed by Le Pen herself.

Thus, I argue that Marine Le Pen’s *dédiabolisation* strategy is not a monolithic movement toward a general moderation of her statements, nor a simple cosmetic embellishment of radical ideas. Rather, her rebranding strategy is more nuanced. In short, while consistent with the French ‘*dédiabolisation* thesis’ and the three structural narratives for PRR ideas’ resonance – nationalism, nativism, and populism – this thesis provides a further empirical analysis of the political moderation strategy of PRR parties, problematizing existing theoretical framework and providing variegated empirical evidence. This contributes not only to the broader efforts to understand populism, its emergence, and proliferation in the 21st century, but also provides rich empirical and theoretical insights to broader theories of semantic bargaining.

The results displayed in Chapter 4 provide three innovative findings regarding Marine Le Pen’s so-called *dédiabolisation* rebranding strategy. Between 2012 and 2022, Marine Le Pen has not become less radical in her statements regarding immigration and national sovereignty. In fact, 2012 has arguably been the least extreme campaign she ran. Moreover, a

consistent focus on national sovereignty and national autonomy confirms the continued importance of the topic in Marine Le Pen's political program over the three elections.

Most surprising, the overall in-depth analysis of her statements regarding immigration and national sovereignty related content was that Marine Le Pen's rhetoric has shifted from an initially Europhobe and blue-collar priority discourse to a more identitarian and protective narrative of the 'French people' in reaction to the exogenous threats of immigration and communitarianism. In other terms, while in number Le Pen dominates the theme of national sovereignty, it seems that the underlying subframes employed are evolving towards a general substitution of economic matters towards a more identitarian narrative of the French people.

As expected, Marine Le Pen does not remain constant in her political rhetoric on all accounts, both in terms of substantive arguments and in terms of levels of extremism. Furthermore, the results also shed light on *what* and *how* exactly are the thematic reshuffling conducted in her discourses. Marine Le Pen grows to prioritize a more extreme and radical position on anti-immigration and relocates her nationalist impulse for a sovereign and autonomous strong France around an identitarian, almost supremacist ideological discourse, leaving aside the more common and general themes of the economy, purchasing power, and Europe.

Structure of The Thesis

In the literature review, I provide an overview of existing accounts of PRR party emergence and consolidation. The key issue with those extant theories is that they pay insufficient attention to rhetorical and policy changes over time and over-emphasize *dédiabolisation* over alternative dynamics.

Following the literature review, unique to this project, I propose a mix-method approach to unpack Marine Le Pen's thematic coverage of the presidential elections of 2012, 2017, and

2022. For that, I coded, through the software NVivo, six distinct speeches selected throughout her three campaigns according to two themes of analysis: immigration and national sovereignty, themselves subdivided into frames and subframes. I supplemented my qualitative discourse analysis with a quantitative measurement of the level of intensity of each subframe. This allowed me to compare the variation in scores across subframes to the variation within subgroups and calculate an objective estimate of the score of extremism for each subframe and frame.

Then, I present my results, discuss the findings, and close with a discussion about the broader implications of my work and how it can be developed.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Defining Terms

Parties of the PRR have enjoyed a considerable degree of scholarly attention in the past few decades (Rydgren, 2007; Mudde, 2007; Golder, 2016; Muis and Immerzeel, 2017). The scholarship normally identifies three core ideological characteristics of PRR parties: nationalism, nativism, and populism (Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2018).

2.1.1 Nationalism and Nativism

Nationalism refers to an ideology of congruence between the ‘nation’ and the ‘state’: “the core goal of the Nationalists is to achieve a monocultural state” (Mudde, 2007:16). Nativism is closely associated with nationalism but puts an emphasis on the exclusion of non-natives (immigrants and ethnic minorities) from the benefits of citizenship. In other words, the difference between the two concepts is this: nationalism in theory allows people of different ethnicities and religions to co-exist as long as they are loyal to the nation and associated with the one culture. Nativism, by contrast, is an exclusionary ideology that says that *only* one particular group is the true people of a particular nation (or region). In this sense, nativism is characteristic of the anti-immigrant stances of PRR parties and differentiates the nationalist policies and rhetoric of these movements from other kinds of ‘liberal’ and ‘civic’ nationalism. Mudde (2007:19) defines nativism as “an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state”. Zhirkov (2014) finds that anti-immigration positions are the most consistent trait of radical right voters, and argues that nativism, therefore, is the “core” of PRR parties’ ideological agenda. Indeed, often associated with a rejection of ethnic and religious minorities like Muslims (Rydgren, 2017), anti-immigration sentiment is a strong predictor of radical right success (Ivarsflaten, 2007).

2.1.2 Populism

Finally, PRR parties have increasingly come to be associated with populist positions, to the extent that some scholars (Taggart, 1996; Rydgren, 2018) have argued that populism is now the defining characteristic of the party family. As mentioned, populism is defined as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde, 2004: 543).

Unlike nativism and nationalism, populism does not target non-natives or foreigners specifically, but rather political elites. According to the ideology, the elite is a parasitical class that enriches itself and systematically ignores the people’s grievances (Betz and Johnson, 2004). The immoral values of this elite stand in stark contrast to the wisdom and common sense of the people. Populism desires that power be placed in the unfettered hands of the people, and therefore calls for the increased use of referenda, popular initiatives, and direct executive elections.

Because populism involves activating the people’s resentment toward the existing power structure and the dominant values in society (Betz, 1994), the precise content of the populist message is context-dependent (Canovan, 1999), or what Mudde would call the “hollow” ideological center of populism (2009).

2.1.3 Radical (Far) Right and Extreme Right, a nuance

Far-right parties are either radical or extremist in their ideology (Mudde, 2009). Radicalism calls for “root and branch” reform of the political and economic system but does not explicitly seek the elimination of all forms of democracy. In contrast, extremism on the right is directly opposed to democracy (Golder, 2016: 478). The dividing line between them,

though, can be difficult to discern in practice, as parties often have incentives to hide their extremism to avoid legal repercussions. Radical parties are inherently “anti-system”, meaning that their radicalism must be understood with respect to the system in which they exist. Right-wing variants generally view inequality as part of the natural order and not something that should be subject to state intervention (Mudde, 2007). What far-right parties have in common is a desire to create a system that is strictly ordered according to the “natural” differences that exist in society, as well as a law-and-order system that severely punishes deviant behavior (Mudde, 2007).

Populism is central to the ideological appeal of many far-right parties (Betz 1994; Betz and Immerfall, 1998; Taggart 1995, 2000). Because it would be impossible to exhaustively describe every single definition of Populist Radical Right (or Far Right) political movements, I have chosen to use the term ‘radical right’ with ‘populist’ as a conditional qualifier (Rydgren, 2017), so as to better define the cases selected in terms of parties that have in common (1) a nativist and nationalism ideological core, and (2) anti-elite and people-centric tendencies.

2.2 Existing Explanations of Radical Right Success

A large body of scholarship has attempted to provide an explanation for the rise of the populist radical right (e.g., Mouffe, 2005; Furedi, 2005; Goodwin, 2011; Funke et al., 2015; Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Rodrik, 2016). Muis and Immerzeel (2017) offer a useful distinction between demand- and supply-side explanations, which focus, respectively, on grievances and electoral identification that make far-right parties appealing to voters; and on political structure and opportunities, and favorable internal strategic policy that enable PRR parties to succeed under certain circumstances.

2.2.1 Demand-Side Theories

On the demand side, Inglehart and Norris (2019) concentrate on cultural changes as the main driver of PRR support, drawing on the empirical finding that what characterizes their voters is a set of intolerant and authoritarian attitudes as well as low levels of trust in the political institutions. Their ‘cultural backlash’ thesis posits that PRR parties succeed by appealing to voters who feel ‘left behind’ by the diffusion of liberal, post-materialist values and the increasing diversity of contemporary societies: it is “an authoritarian reaction among social conservatives who perceive that some of their most cherished core values are being eroded” (Inglehart and Norris, 2019:43).

Other authors have put an emphasis on economic trends, such as globalization and unemployment, identifying economic factors as concurrent to or even more important than cultural changes as drivers of PRR parties’ support (e.g., Bolet, 2020; Abou-Chadi and Kurer, 2021). In this approach, leaders play a role in strategically framing pre-existing grievances and manufacturing new grievances. Oftentimes, far-right leaders exploit perceptions that migrants compete with the native population for jobs and welfare, and that outside forces have stripped their countries of economic opportunity and security (Scheve and Slaughter, 2001; Dancygier, 2010).

2.2.2 Supply-Side Theories

Although most of the early literature on far-right party success focused on demand-side explanations, the last decade has seen increased attention being paid to supply-side factors. While sufficient demand is now considered a *necessary* condition for far-right success, many scholars claim that there is not enough variation in demand to explain cross-national and

subnational differences in far-right support (Eatwell, 2000; Carter 2005; Givens, 2005; Norris, 2005; van der Brug et al., 2005; Mudde, 2007,2010; Art, 2011; Bustikova,2014).

Advocates of the supply-side theory have documented multiple enabling factors for PRR parties' success. The first factor is the configuration of the party system: where parties are not strongly polarized and fail to offer distinctive alternatives to voters - and especially when parties converge on pro-globalization stances - PRR parties fill that gap in the electoral market (Kriesi et al., 2012). The second factor concerns the media, and the degree of attention they dedicate to issues that are key to PRR parties' success, such as immigration and law-and-order (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007), as well as the attention they dedicate to PRR parties themselves (de Jonge, 2019). The third factor is a country's cleavage structure (Golder, 2016). Where parties become unable to connect to voters on the basis of some key social identities, such as class and religion, large parts of the population become alienated from the political system and its traditional actors (both parties and individuals). Since it is recognized that traditional cleavage structures have progressively weakened across Western European countries in a broad process of dealignment, this argument may help explain the success of PRR parties across Europe in recent decades.

2.2.3 Insertion-Moderation Model

Both the demand- and supply-side arguments provide significant leverage in understanding the variable success of PRR parties across different geographies and time periods. It is worth noting that they are not mutually exclusive explanations and should be viewed as complementary frameworks. In particular, the supply model emphasizes the role of the party machinery and the competence of PRR leaders in shaping their parties' success. These broad frameworks are useful to understand why PRR parties' embrace of "rightist and populist" values resonates with voters in an era of growing political skepticism and distrust, but do not

get us very far in terms of understanding *how* these actors grow their electoral base once established as major political players. To do so, we must go deeper into the supply-side framework and center our focus on the agency of PRR parties and their leadership.

As Muis and Immerzeel argue, “we cannot reduce PRR parties and movements to the passive consequences of socio-economic processes and external political conditions [...] Instead, they are largely shapers of their own fates” (2017:915). In this perspective, the literature suggests that it is *not* radicalism per se that accounts for PRR parties’ increasing influence in European politics, but rather the ability of PRR parties and leaders to ‘package’ extremist or protectionist ideas in a way that resonates with a broader public of non-extremist voters that guarantees their electoral success (see, Mudde, 2007; Bos et al., 2010; De Vries, 2016; Pareschi and Albertini, 2018). The importance of some degree of moderation, whether only strategic or ideological, could be explained through rational choice theory: according to Downs’ model (1957), party competition is centripetal, as parties will compete for the largest share of voters by converging towards the ideological preferences of the median voter. In this perspective, Duina and Carson (2020) argue that far-right parties in Europe have an incentive to develop a more progressive identity, tempering the common conservative outlook expected of such parties. The authors go on to add that this moderation has so far only been selective: in some cases, PRR parties “have combined the rejection of ‘others’ coming from outside the country – as threatening, demanding, or otherwise negative – by articulating an open and inclusive mindset on the domestic front” (Duina and Carson, 2020:6).

Several observers noted this process of ‘policy differentiation’ of PRR parties (Akkerman, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Spierings et al., 2015; Dudink, 2016; Daenekindt et al., 2017), especially in relation to single issues, such as gender (Akkerman, 2015; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2015; Siegel, 2017), LGBT+ rights (Siegel, 2017; Dudink, 2016; Spierings, 2020), and pro-welfare economic positions (Harteveld, 2016). It is important to note, however, that PRR parties

need to be careful to balance this moderation with ideological distinctiveness: as Wagner (2011) has argued, there are also incentives for parties to take ideologically extreme positions on some issues that are salient to voters. This is the case of radical right and immigration: “it is through controversial statements on immigration that far-right parties often gain attention” (Wagner, 2011:68).

This inclusion-moderation thesis (Tepe, 2019) provides further insight regarding how radical political leaders can access greater electoral popularity. While this sub-supply-side argument – the moderation model – sits well with this thesis’ discursive analytical intent, it fails too to provide a comprehensive account of *how* a moderation method is pursued. This is where my innovative theoretical analysis comes to complement such a gap.

2.3 The Front/ Rassemblement National and Dédiabolisation

The word *dédiabolisation*, which could be translated into English as ‘de-demonization’, is at the center of Marine Le Pen’s strategy and at the center of this thesis. Despite the fact that Marine Le Pen has used the term since 2007, her *dédiabolisation* strategy gained prominence during the internal campaign for the Front National presidency in 2011. She used the term to distinguish herself from her internal rival, Bruno Gollnisch, whom she characterized as the representative of an old generation of activists with extremist doctrines (Almeida, 2013). The key debate in the scholarly conversation on the FN/RN’s rhetoric and Marine Le Pen’s personal strategy of *dédiabolisation*, revolves around whether it is a real ideological shift or nothing more than a cosmetic embellishment (see Alduy and Wahnich, 2015; Bastow, 2018; Betz, 2013; Stockemer, 2017). By analyzing the strategic selection of content in Marine Le Pen’s electoral appearance, the thesis precisely addresses this disagreement to provide further depth in the empirics. On the one hand, Le Pen explicitly tries to distance herself from the old-fashioned

policies of her father's era. On the other hand, her rhetoric remains virulent and prone to changes and variations over time.

Many scholars have investigated continuities and discontinuities in positions advocated by the FN/RN under Jean-Marie Le Pen and since 2011 under his daughter Marie Le Pen (see Hewlett, 2012). In his book *The Front National in France* (2017), Daniel Stockemer argues that the 'new' Front National under Marine Le Pen is characterized ideologically by a shift to the left on economic positions. However, on cultural issues, *dédiabolisation* is mostly about a change in language, while the party's ideology is communicated within the Republican discourse¹ and some of the most extremist aspects like anti-Semitism have been suppressed. In sum, according to the author, "the new FN president has succeeded in giving her party a more moderate and less radical image" (Stockemer, 2017: 5). In particular, according to Stockemer and other more 'skeptical' authors (Alduy, 2015; Barisone and Stockemer, 2016), the change in *presentation* of its message has allowed the RN to carve out political space for itself as a prominent contender in French politics. In a similar vein, according to Igounet (2017), there was no rupture between these two periods but rather an 'update' of the party's positioning. According to the historian, Marine Le Pen has not revolutionized her father's discourse, she has mainly changed her vocabulary by replacing "foreigner" with "immigrant" or "preference" with "priority". But immigration and its related notions are still present within the rhetoric of the National Front. (Igounet, 2017:33).

Other authors make the case for a clearer ideological break since 2011. James Shields argued that Marine Le Pen did very visibly try to distance herself and her party from her father's legacy, for instance by promoting a more liberal approach on issues such as abortion and homosexuality (Shields, 2007, 2012). This perspective aligns more closely with the idea of a

¹ This marks a distinction from the previous leader. In 1989, Jean-Marie Le Pen made a speech in his hometown La Trinité-sur-Mer in which he depicted the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man as the origin of French decadence on the grounds that it denies the fundamental differences on which societies are built. Jean-Marie Le Pen, 'Discours à la Trinité-sur-Mer', 26 August 1989.

real progressive and “Mariniste” impulse that cut the cord with the radicalism of the original party, reformulating an agenda whose conceptions of the people and its mission are more egalitarian (among the French, not as a universal right) and secularist.

3 Methodology

3.1 Case Selection & Corpus

The rise of populism across western societies and beyond can be illustrated by a plethora of diverse situations, by disparate governments, regions, or individuals. This thesis has chosen to use the case study of France to understand the underlying method of populist radical right positioning for two main reasons. (1) The historical persistence and steady growth of popularity of the far-right in the French electoral landscape offers a consistent subject for empirical research. Because I am interested in understanding how PRR political movements reframe certain of their constitutive positions to expand their electorate audience and political credibility, it is important to analyze an established PRR movement to be able to comprehend the discursive strategies employed at different periods, and among evolving and resilient audiences. A newborn PRR movement will seek to gain as much support as it can to survive the political competition and therefore focuses on promulgating, elaborating, and accentuating its policies to its perceived core constituency. In other words, an emerging populist far-right leader will not face the same dilemma in keeping its faithful extremist supporters while needing to moderate certain of its statements to appeal to the more mainstream audience, nor will it need to make radical efforts in repositioning its concerns to change the opinion of the mass in its regards. In contrast, a party that is deeply ingrained in the minds of society for decades will need to use more subtle and strategic methods to change the popular perception and vote of the society that might have pre-given and well-established opinions on the said PRR party. This is the case of the Front National renamed in 2018 as Rassemblement National. (2) Given that French is my mother tongue, I was able to access and analyze the original versions of primary sources/data taken directly extracted from official websites of either the French Senate, the party's official platform, or Marine Le Pen's campaign websites. Therefore, the language barrier and issues of

inaccurate translations were absent in my research, which is essential when using a discursive analytical methodology.

The corpus is composed of six speeches given by Marine Le Pen during her presidential campaigns in 2012, 2017, and 2022. Concerned with a systematic rigidity of the analysis over the long period of time considered, only public appearances similar in context and audiences were selected for each period. The presidential campaigns generally last from January to May, with the newly elected president taking his/her new functions directly after. It is important to note that the French presidential elections of 2022 were ongoing at the time of the redaction of this thesis. This imposes a necessary bias since rhetoric and policies naturally evolved over time and we only have partial visibility over Marine Le Pen's rhetoric in this 2022 campaign. Nevertheless, this is not a detrimental problem because politicians rarely execute U-turns or drastic policy shifts in the middle of election campaigns because manifestos and campaign strategies are typically decided before the election period.

For each period of the campaign analyzed, two speeches have been selected: one from the large Zenith Meeting, and one from a less extensive rally in a significant and symbolic location in France (respectively Nantes, Lyon, and Aigues-Morte). In France, the Zenith is an auditorium with a very large audience capacity. When a political candidate makes a public appearance in a Zenith (there is a total of 17 in the country), the audience is far-reaching and generally represents all classes and social groups of the candidate's electoral pool. The Zenith meeting is essential in a presidential campaign as it represents the entire campaign's agenda: it is an opportunity for leaders to comprehensively lay out their manifesto, which is why this is a constant occasion compared across the campaigns. The other speeches that compose the corpus are smaller in scale and in national resonance because they mainly target a specific regional section of the electoral (those that live where the rally takes place).

Overview of Corpus

Date	Location	Summary / main emphasis	Audience	Length
3/25/2012	Nantes	The terrorist attacks led by Mohammed Merah on March 22 nd , 2012, radically structures Le Pen's discourse. The emphasis is put on the abandonment by the elites of the security of all as a priority; the rise of violence and the urgent need to regulate illegal immigrants.	Citizens of the city	6140 words 1h08 min
4/17/12	Paris (Zenith)	Le Pen covers all of her program in this Zenith meeting, as an opportunity to outline her priorities ranging from economic patriotism, the European economic and border policy imposition and the need for a change among the 'governmental oligarchy' in tight relations with the CAC 40 leaders.	All encompassing	6794 words 1h11 min
2/05/2017	Lyon	The terrorist attacks of 2015 and 2016 are the structuring factors of this speech. Insecurity is depicted as constant, and the 'savage globalization' is the main source of insecurity. Radical Islamism is portrayed as everywhere taking over the customs and values of France, the Republique is under attack and Le Pen appeals to the parental concern for their children and future generation to leave in a doomed, dispossessed and noncultural country.	Citizens of the city	6061 words 1h02 min

4/17/17	Paris (Zenith)	The ‘savage globalization’ is repeated again many times, but an emphasis on the economic scourge of the EU and other international financial markets is importantly present <i>as well</i> as immigration. The notion of a France dispossessed of its laws, of its sovereignty and autonomy and of its economic wellbeing are also prominent topics mentioned.	All encompassing	5985 words 1:35 min
2/05/2022	Reims (Zenith)	Le Pen’s primary theme is the loss of autochthonous French culture and social customs. The nation is portrayed as ‘polytraumatized’, suffering an unprecedented social collapse in regard to its culture, values, independence and distinction. The notion of freedom is central to her campaign in 2022 (her campaign slogan was ‘Libertés’, or ‘Freedoms’), and Le Pen exploited this idea in the Zenith.	All encompassing	8483 words 1h03 min
3/05/2022	Aigues-Morte	The French alienation by a constant security chaos, and immigration is portrayed as a scourge. To her, the French people does not recognize and cannot recognize their nation anymore.	Citizens of the city	6082 words 55 min

3.2 Content Discourse Analysis

The principal research method for the main empirical investigation consists of an actor-centered Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of speeches by Marine Le Pen. The importance of individuals in the electoral process becomes evident from the dense literature considered, as symbols crystallizing a worldview but also as political tacticians. Therefore, an analysis of

political discourse and communication of those political figures would demonstrate the tension between moderation and radicalism, fundamental to my case. Indeed, in order to fully comprehend the policymaking of PRR parties and their overall normalization or radicalization strategy, a consistent content analysis of essential speeches and communications can bring forth a new light on the *way(s)* such strategy is undertaken beyond recognizing its pervasive existence in the European political landscape.

Inspired by Krippendorf's (2004) methodology, I operationalize CDA through content or thematic analysis. This constitutes identifying keywords, trends, themes, or ideas in the data that directly mention immigration and national sovereignty, before undertaking any analysis. This project is not a study of isolated words but of the structures of the text in its entirety (Van Dijk, 2000), because using units such as words or expressions risks invalidating the overall logic, or semantic validity, of the speeches (Krippendorf, 2004). I produced a set of coding criteria (or 'codebook') to group the frames I observed in each speech. Themes for the coding were identified by synthesizing the frames used by others in the relevant literature. I qualitatively coded the corpus using NVivo coding software and utilized a synthesis of Marc Helbling (2013), Joshua Kay (2019), and Naomi Dewulf (2017) 's coding frames. A hand-coding method was used given the relatively small-n of my project, as well as the inability of computed automatic coding software to comprehend the overall context and sense of each sentence in its broader discursive meaning.

3.3 Framing Analysis

Framing theory is a useful framework to conduct this analysis. Several scholars have suggested different ways to categorize the discourse employed by PRR parties, which I leverage to develop an original and granular set of coding criteria. Helbling (2013) defines frames as

“schemes of interpretation” through which political actors define a particular problem. Helbling distinguishes between three types of frames. The first type corresponds to identity-related frames, which interpret immigration either in terms of a threat to or as an enrichment to a country’s identity: the polar opposites, in this case, are ‘nationalist’ and ‘multiculturalist’ frames of immigration. Secondly, he distinguishes ‘moral-universal’ frames, which refer to general moral principles such as fairness and equality. Finally, there are ‘utilitarian’ frames, which present immigration as connected either to economic gains and losses, or to concerns about crime and security.

While Helbling’s study looks at immigration framing across different political parties in different countries, Froio’s 2018 focuses on the French far-right online sphere. The author finds that across different far-right blogs, the dominant frame varies between ‘race’, ‘culture’, and ‘religion’. Moreover, ‘culture’ frames differ from ultra-republican frames, which portray Muslims as a threat to the French values of equality and freedom, for instance, with regard to gender equality (Spierings and Zaslove, 2015; Brubaker, 2017; Moffitt, 2017), and anti-republican frames, which reject those very ideas and portray Muslims as culturally inferior (Igounet, 2017; Kauffmann, 2016). Similarly, ‘religion’ frames differ between ‘ultra-secularism’, which portrays Islam as a threat to French ideals of secularism (*laïcité*), and ‘conservative Catholicism’, which portrays Islam as an enemy of the French Catholic tradition. Most importantly, parties like the RN must use convincing ideological frames and conditions; both old members and new recruits must be convinced by the party’s values and beliefs and must see the necessity of engagement (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2007).

My codebook is also inspired by Naomi Dewulf’s (2017) thematic analysis of Marine Le Pen’s discursive populist tendency since her ascendance as party president in 2011. Concerned by the evolutive capacities of populist ideas, the author identified four frames relevant to identifying key longitudinal patterns in populism moderation. The frames are

Nationalism; Sovereignty (with the European integration and globalization efforts to curb national autarky), Immigration; and the markers of Radical-Right Populism (namely anti-elitism, popular supremacy).

Eventually, Joshua Kay (2019) developed a combination of four distinct framings of immigration in European PRR parties, namely nativist, economic, security, and liberal framings, to provide a more comprehensive account of the similarities and differences of European PRR parties in their policymaking.

Synthesizing these existing approaches to the thematic content of PRR parties' discourse, I developed two sets of coding criteria for the themes under analysis here: immigration and national sovereignty. The immigration codebook comprises five frames whereas the national sovereignty codebook comprises four. Each frame is disaggregated into subcategories which I used as granular metrics on which to score each speech. The theme of immigration was disaggregated into 5 frames: Economy, Security, Republican Values, Nationalism, and Populism; each further subdivided into respective subframes. The theme of national sovereignty was disaggregated into 4 frames: Economy, Security, Nationalism, and Populism; each was also further subdivided into respective subframes. Every time one of these frames was identified within a text, I coded it as appearing within the relevant subcategory. Coding was done to clearly visualize patterns of issues' salience hierarchization and strategic moderation or emphasis, over time.

3.4 Beyond Frames: Scoring Intensity

A discursive analysis is useful to distinguish thematic and semantic tools used by Marine Le Pen to express her programmatic priorities. Nevertheless, one thematic can be

articulated as more or less extreme. Take for instance the two following statements, directly extracted from the corpus:

Statement 1: *“Their ultraliberal ideology is dismantling our public services which are gradually disappearing from our countryside but also from our suburban communities.”*

(Marine Le Pen, Zenith Paris, 2017)

Statement 2: *“Dispossessed of our factories, relocated, of our public services, closed, of our family doctors who have no successors. Dispossessed of our jobs, destroyed by unfair competition, dispossessed of our history, dispossessed of our memory, and finally, dispossessed of our hope.”* (Marine Le Pen, Lyon, 2017)

Both statements address the economic scourge of the EU’s economic policy imposition on the nation's public services and productive powers. Nevertheless, it is clear that statement 1 is less extreme, or dramatic, than statement 2 regarding the conditions created by European economic policies. The first statement posits that ultra-liberalism and uncontrolled laissez-faire shatter the economic structures of the state that enable the more urban areas to access certain services. In contrast, statement 2 is more radical and argues that the French people are not the owner of their own economic powers (factories, employment, etc.) and even establishes that the French people have lost their memory, national savoir-faire, and is a hopeless people because of the EU’s integrated economic framework.

The coding of frames and subframes is important to notice and follow the rhetorical shifts within one single narrative provided by Marine Le Pen. However, it is in itself insufficient to assess the variations of extremism of her rhetoric. A weight, or score of extremism associated with each subframe would be able to fill this gap and quantify their occurrence in her speeches.

Because of such inner variations *within each frame and subframe*, I supplement my qualitative discourse analysis with a quantitative measurement of the level of intensity of each subframe. Because I was concerned with the inner variations of extremism in each statement

within subframes and not only between them, I included between three and five statements for each subframe. I conducted a pilot survey composed of a total of sixty-three statements of Marine Le Pen, directly extracted from the corpus, and asked a population of nine individuals to rank each on a scale of 1 to 10 to assess the divergence of the intensity of each statement. The group of respondents has been assembled and instructed on how to grade each statement for scoring their extremism with the aid of exemplar statements. I worked through those templates with them, talked about each respondent's score individually, and helped them if they had difficulties or doubts. Gathering the data from those nine individuals allowed me to calculate an aggregate average that determines the most approximate score of extremism for each subframe for each electoral period and over the whole timeframe considered. I was able to compare the variation in scores across sub-groups to the variation within subgroups and calculate an objective estimate of the score of extremism for each subgroup and group. Due to the restricted scope of this research project, the survey is not ideal but corresponds to a pilot questionnaire sufficient to grasp an objective measurement, that can easily be used and extended for a future longer research project.

Equation Outline

To calculate the intensity of Marine Le Pen's rhetoric across the two themes mentioned above (immigration and national sovereignty), I devised a scoring method to apply consistently across the six speeches. Each statement of substantive interest was categorized into one of the subframes mentioned above.

Let A be the Average of each theme (immigration and national sovereignty); n the number of statements considered; j the subframe considered; S the score of extremism; and K the number of subframes considered.

The weight of a subframe (W) for each speech was calculated as follows:

$W = (\text{Number of occurrences of pertinent statement}) * (\text{The corresponding extremism score of the subframe it belongs to})$

To calculate the average (A) of extremism per theme (immigration and national sovereignty) we apply the following equation:

$$A_t = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^K n_{jt} S_j}{\sum_{j=1}^K A_{jt}}$$

3.5 Coding Criteria

Immigration - a multifaceted scourge

Frame	Code	Sub-frame	Score of Extremism ²
Economy	WGE	Unemployment, decompression of wages (more appealing to pay immigrants).	4
	SRV	Stifling, straining of public services (health, housing).	6
Security	TSN	Immigration creates tensions and is chaotic for the functioning of a saturated society.	7
	VIO	Hosting policies for immigrants also allows the easy entrance to criminals.	5
	TER	Muslim immigration leads to the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism and terrorism.	8
Liberal Republican values	EQL	Immigration challenges the principle that everyone must be expected to conform to the same cultural expectations - French Republicanism.	6
	WOM	Immigrants are sexist: Protection of women in face of the rise of radical Islamism.	7

² average calculated from the aforementioned pilot survey, and following the equations presented earlier.

	JEW	We must defend the rights of Jews. Immigrants are anti-Semitic.	9
	SEC	Secular values undermined by rise of immigration culture and religious obligations.	6
Nativism	ETH	Immigration causes <u>ethnic dilution – multiculturalism.</u>	10
	NAT	Prioritization of the French people.	6
Populism	GOV	The establishment ignores the problems triggered by the massive immigration.	8
	FLT	It is not the migrant's fault, the system's policy that is at fault (Sarkozy; Hollande; Macron).	5

National Sovereignty

Frame	Code	Sub-frame	Score of Extremism
Economy	EMP	Globalization incites delocalization and employment opportunities elsewhere.	4
	OWN	EU dispossesses the French people of their ownerships.	9
	PWR	Loss of French purchasing power.	5
	SOL	Porous borders provide incentives for fiscal evasion, weakening of tax contribution, and erosion of national economic solidarity.	3
Security	MAF	Mafia and organized crime spread within the nation due to externally imposed freedom of movement within the EU.	8
	BOR	Borders protect the nation and workers.	7
Nationalism	PRO	Economic patriotism and French production first.	4
	UNI	Globalization and EU erode national unity.	7
	HER	Need to preserve the heritage eroded by global culture.	4
	DIS	National distinctiveness.	7

Populism	SND	Importance of “secondary class” of workers and their wellbeing.	5
	AUT	Reconquest of national autonomy.	6
	EST	Anti-establishment, incumbent government does not have the nation's primary interests in mind.	8
	BRX	Distant European governance.	5

3.6 Social Conservatism: An Absent Theme

It is important to note why questions of social conservatism, usually salient and key thematic for populist ideologies, have not been chosen as a category of analysis in this case study. This category of analysis – social conservatism being a central component to the matrix of far-right political movements – was not best represented in the French case. Indeed, while an analysis of social questions such as gender equality, LGBT issues, or the causes of other commonly discriminated groups, is relevant in the context of understanding the normalization of conservative ideas in an increasingly tolerant European society, Marine Le Pen strategically *chose* to remain quiet on those specific matters. As a woman, a divorced mother, and a political leader who elected a homosexual man (Florian Philipot) as her right-hand man from 2012 to 2017, she conveyed an image of a “modern woman”, and projects somewhat liberal and progressive principles on many dimensions of social conservatism. Nevertheless, Marine Le Pen typically chooses to refrain from clearly defining her position on topics such as feminist and LGBT themes, same-sex marriage, or abortion. Marine Le Pen's balancing act was therefore to support conservative nativist policies while at the same time looking in touch with recent social developments, particularly feminist ones.

This strategic ambiguity was illustrated in 2013 during the demonstrations against gay marriage³. In contrast with more conservative figures of her party, Le Pen chose not to go to these demonstrations and remained silent (Alduy, 2015: 61). This explains why, it is very rare to find a public appearance or speech where she explicitly comments on those social issues, even though they are uniquely foundational to her conservative engagement to protect French values.

I nevertheless kept searching for statements that corresponded to this thematic category across the corpus but in vain. I ultimately contended that it does not seem to undermine this thesis's contentions in any way to confirm that this thematic is strategically avoided by Le Pen's public communications. Nevertheless, it can be found indirectly in its rhetoric on immigration. Indeed, issues of familial structure, gender equality, and sexual minorities' rights were directly related to the salience of immigration for the party. For instance, the RN has historically argued against immigration from Muslim countries on the perceived basis that Islam is inherently homophobic. This, the RN contends, makes this form of immigration incompatible with French societal values.

³ This policy, passed and implemented in 2013 in France, is called in French '*Mariage pour tous*', or marriage for all.

4 Results

4.1 High-Level Results

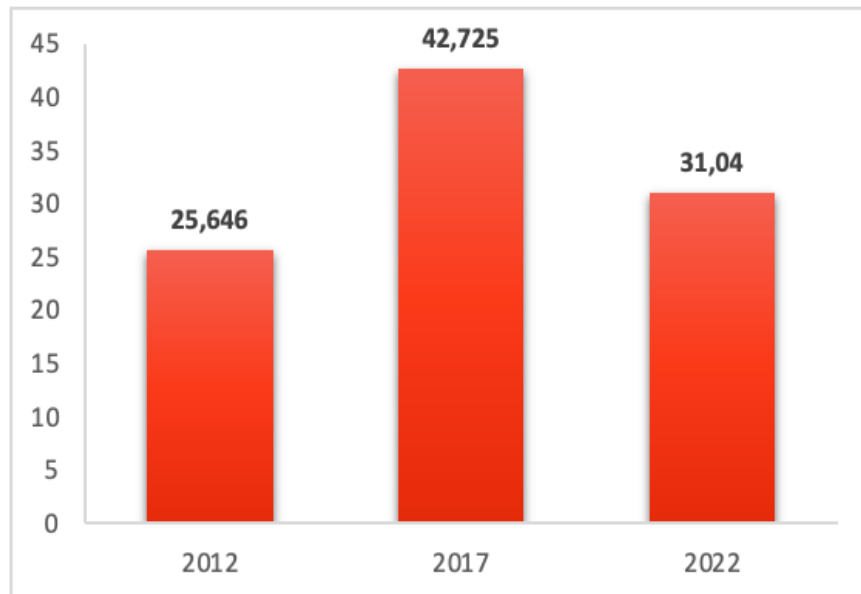


Figure 1: Total score over the three campaign periods

The overall empirics of the aggregate extremism of Marine Le Pen’s statements in 2012, 2017, and 2022 show that she has not become less radical, as predicted by her *dédiabolisation* approach. Her level of extremism, reflected in **Figure 1**, demonstrates a continuously rising score of extremism from 2012 to 2017 and a slight reduction from 2017 to 2022 that remains higher than the 2012 threshold. In other terms, over her three presidential campaigns, the first one has been arguably the least extreme one in terms of aggregate extremism score.

What these empirics mean concretely is that Marine Le Pen’s strategy of *dédiabolisation* has not been accompanied by a decrease in her political extremism in terms of content, on the contrary. As mentioned earlier, this thesis only addressed the content of her speeches over the selected period and leaves out the form and other factors shaping her rhetoric. Nevertheless, in terms of the matter covered, ‘*dédiabolisation*’ as a deradicalization of her stance is not captured by my measurement.

These results are hardly interpretable by one single factor. Over her three consecutive presidential campaigns, Marine Le Pen has had to face different sorts of exogenous crises that might have prevented her from fully exploiting her effort to *dédiabolise* her statements. For instance, the global economic crisis of 2008 shattered the French economy and the population's revenues in almost synchronization with the Syrian refugee crisis. Given those concurrent challenges to the well-being of the French general population, it might have been hard for Le Pen to remain credible to her existing electorate without retaining her radicality on economic and immigration issues. The same goes for the 2017 elections, structured by the Charlie Hebdo attacks perpetrated by the Islamic State. The amalgamation between security and immigration was offered to her on a silver plate in 2017. Eventually, the surprising announcement of Eric Zemmour's candidacy in the recent 2022 elections potentially had a reversal impact on Le Pen's spiking extremism since 2012. Indeed, embodying the most extreme version of a far-right populist leader, Zemmour stole the for a while the far-right spotlight to only help Le Pen appear more moderate, more credible, and more *acceptable* in the end. This can explain the apparent decrease of extremism in Le Pen's content in 2022 in comparison to 2017.

4.2. Macro Analysis: an apparent consistency

From a general perspective, the numerical counts of each statement and their corresponding theme of analysis – immigration and national sovereignty – seem to illustrate a consistent preponderance of the theme of national sovereignty over the three campaigns. Indeed, national sovereignty dominated as the most referred to category in Marine Le Pen's speeches in all her presidential campaigns, as the following graph illustrates. This is scarcely surprising given that Marine Le Pen projects herself as being the popular leader for the French people, for the nation, and for the nation's interests above all (Nadia Urbinati, 2019). She argues that she

embodies the real interest of the French people, and of their country⁴ (see Anastasiou, 2019). The fact that national sovereignty retained its dominance over immigration rhetoric thus supports her populist-nationalist self-identification (see Belhadi,2019).

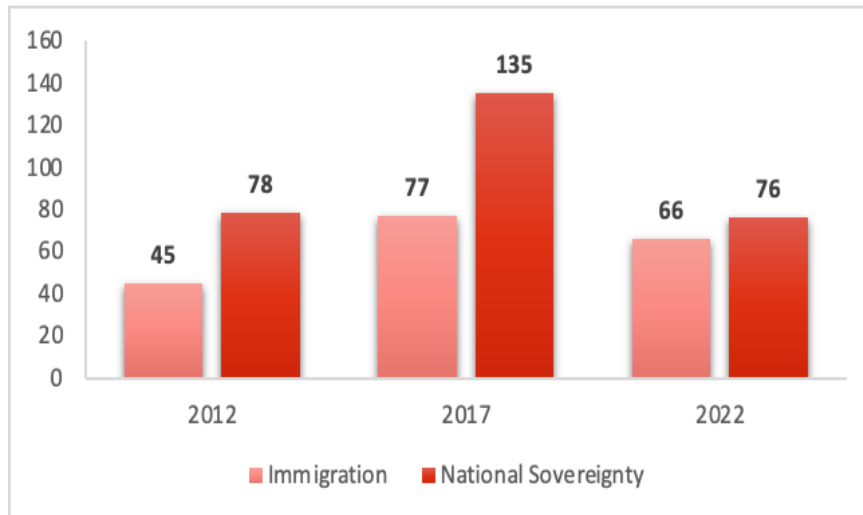


Figure 2: Comparison of instances of appearances

Nevertheless, only looking at the numerical recurrence of each theme in her speeches is misleading. **Figure 3** shows that once we look at the respective scores of extremism of immigration and national sovereignty, the difference between the two shrunk radically from 2017 to 2022: both converged to a common score of 31. In other words, the gap between the two categories erodes itself in 2022, which is only noticeable through the prisms of the score measurement.

This shows that although she relied more on the theme of national sovereignty, Marine Le Pen has not neglected the theme of immigration. **Figure 3** sheds light on her constant selective reframing of her anti-immigration position. Although less prominent, she nevertheless deployed more extreme or “heavy-scored” formulations when it came to immigration matters. The score of extremism in her speeches during her 2022 campaign shows that Marine Le Pen is equally extreme in both categories despite the numerical difference in appearance between

⁴ Anastasiou highlights the subordinated position of the people in Le Pen’s mind, which is “parasitically signified vis-à-vis the hegemonic signifier ‘the nation’” (2019)

the two themes. This indicates that whilst Marine Le Pen displayed a more radical position on immigration over the period, she dedicated more time and attention focus on national sovereignty.

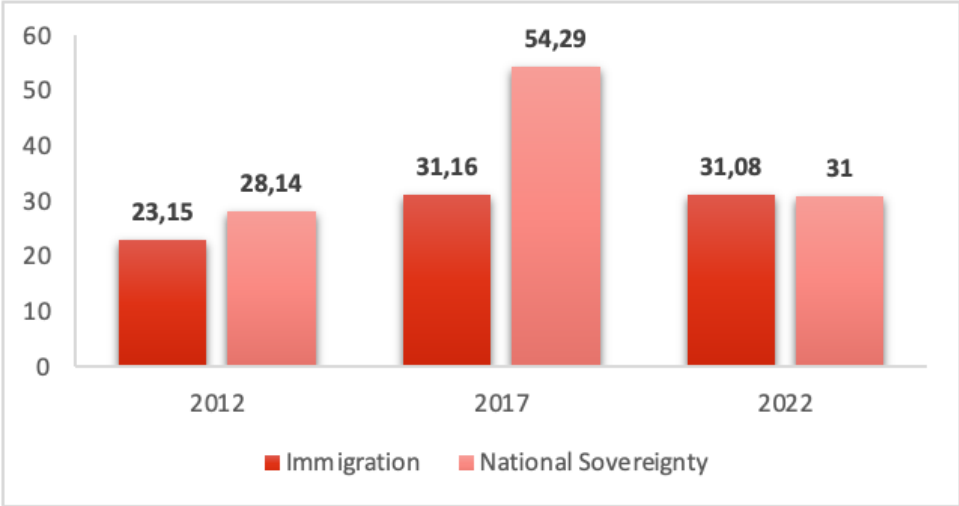


Figure 3: Comparison of scores

4.3. Granular Discourse Analysis

If we dig even deeper, micro-level analysis indicates that not only did Marine Le Pen not abandon her extremism since 2012, but it actually got worsened. Indeed, while in numerical terms, the theme of national sovereignty is dominant in Le Pen’s discourse, it seems that the underlying subframes employed are evolving toward a general substitution of economic matters towards a more identarian narrative of the French people. Classical economic and Eurosceptic narratives are declining to the benefit of more *identitaire* rhetoric of the nation’s distinctiveness and superiority. This latter argument is much more closely related to her anti-immigration stance which, as we saw above, became more intense over the period.

4.3.1 Le Pen's Immigration Discourse

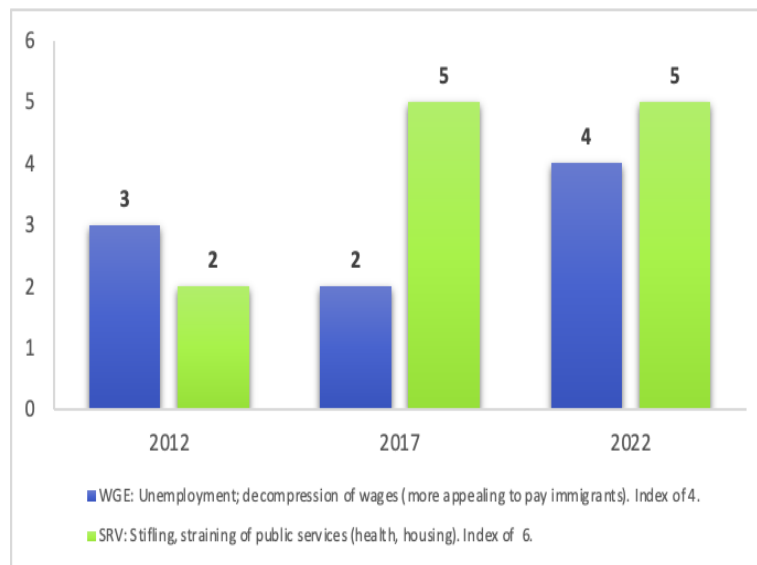


Figure 4: *Micro - Economy instances of occurrence*

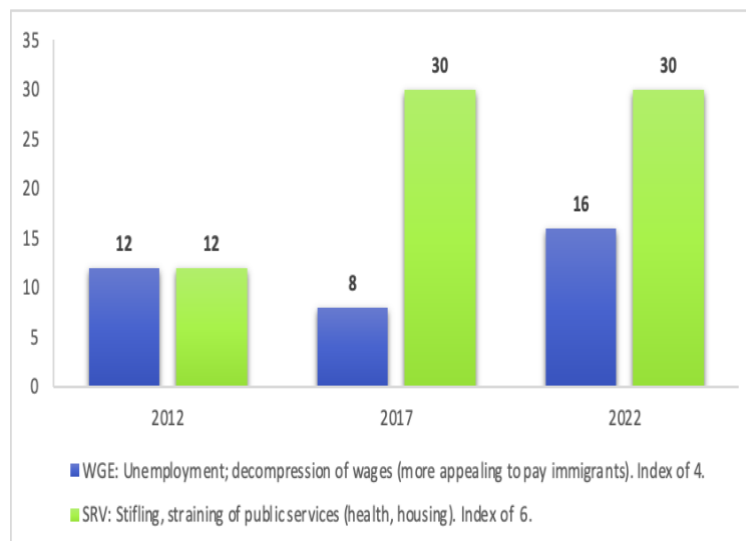


Figure 5: *Micro - Economy scores comparison*

In these graphs, we can observe a growing emphasis on the discriminated access to public services by the migrants at the expense of the national citizen, in comparison to the question of employment access and wages. In 2017, the migrant's straining of public services (SRV) frame took over the immigration-triggered unemployment (WGE) argument and remained higher through to 2022. Moreover, accounting for the scores of extremism of the unemployment (WGE) and strain of public services (SRV) subframes, substituting the former

with the latter, Marine Le Pen favored a more extreme position. For instance, she said in Paris in 2012: *“There is a close link between massive immigration and the serious social deficits of France. Mass immigration increases our difficulties. More immigration means more unemployment, more insecurity, more budget deficits, more debt, a crushing burden.”* (Paris, 2012). In 2022, she maintains that *“French workers without housing forced to live in their cars. These wage-earners of all levels directly competed by a socially malleable immigration, just like the pensioners who see their non-indexed pensions melting under the spoliating effect of the hosting policy and a galloping inflation.”* (Le Pen, Reims, 2022). Overall, her mentions of the economic impact of mass immigration have not decreased, but on the contrary, increased.

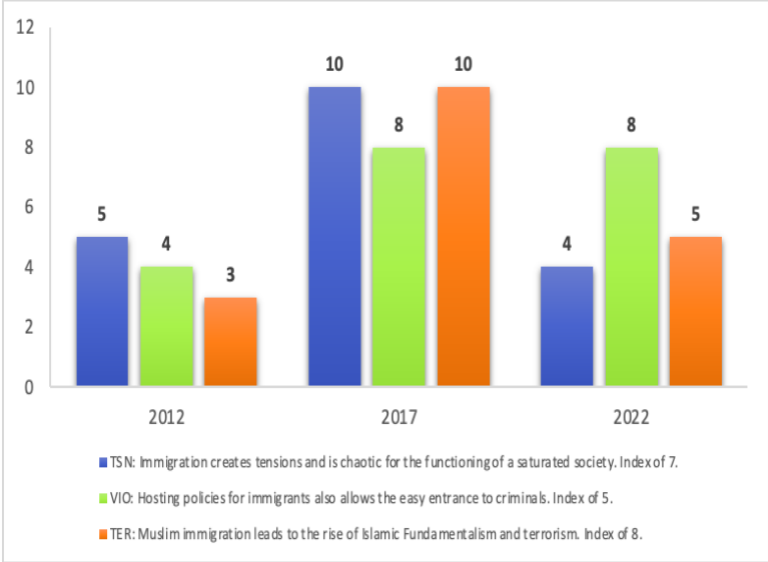


Figure 6: *Micro - Security instances of occurrence*

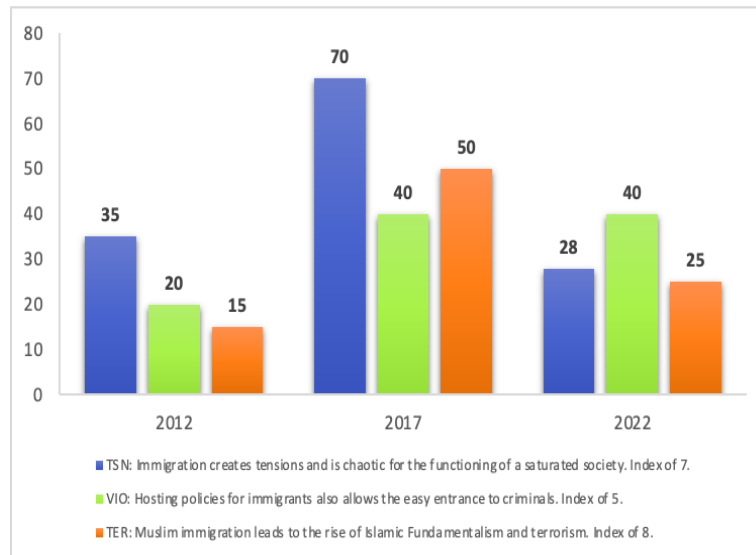


Figure 7: Micro - Security scores comparison

In 2017, there was a general rise in all three subframes related to the insecurities brought by mass immigration in France. This can be attributed to the context in which the 2017 campaign was held. The years 2015 and 2016 were traumatic years for the French nation, marked by consecutive terrorism attacks from militant Islam (see Kepel, 2016). Since 2015, France has remained in “alerte attentat vigilance”, and this greatly influenced the programs of the candidates at the time, the electorate’s mindset, and the elections as a whole (Brouard et al, 2018).

We can therefore make sense of why all the subframes of the Security frame – social tensions (TSN), rise of violence (VIO) and increase in terrorist acts (TER) – have particularly been the focus of her statements in 2017, compared to 2012 and 2022. For instance, statements such as “*Behind mass immigration, there is Islamism. Behind mass immigration, there is terrorism. Behind mass immigration, there are costs and a social collapse.*” (Le Pen, Lyon, 2017) and “*The terrorists quickly understood the benefit they could get from our incredible impotence and sent their soldiers of hate through the flow of migrants to strike in the heart of our country*” (Le Pen, Paris, 2017) were most recurrent in her 2017 campaign. Nevertheless, social tensions exacerbated and/or brought by immigration (TSN) was the only subframe that

ended up, in 2022, below the original level of 2012. Violence (VIO) remained as high in 2022 as it was in 2017, and the terrorist menace of Islamism (TER) decreased in importance in Le Pen’s discourse, while still retaining a higher emphasis compared to its 2012 level.

The question of social violence and criminality (encompassed in VIO) has always been a central topic of Marine Le Pen’s narrative, which consistently advocates for a reinforcement of the security forces, the enhancement of prison capacities, and a stricter judicial policy regarding convicted immigrants and recidivists. For her to be able to maintain a certain level of emphasis on this question while attempting to appeal to a broader less extremist electorate, Marine Le Pen needed to lower other aspects of her security position regarding immigrants in order not to appear too extreme in her statements. Hence, she seems to have chosen to deprioritize and abandon the social tensions (TSN) and Islamist terrorism threat (TER) focuses although they remain important features of her position, offering more space for discourse around violence (VIO). It seems that a strategic reshuffling of the subframes in accordance with the respective context and programmatic position of her campaigns did not indicate a reduction of extremism, but rather a pragmatic play of her rhetorical field.

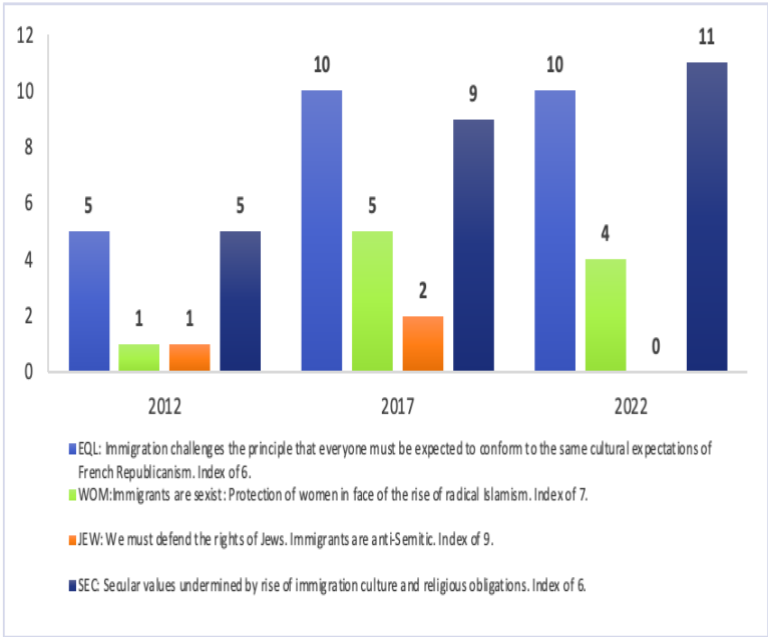


Figure 8: *Micro - Republican Values instances of occurrence*

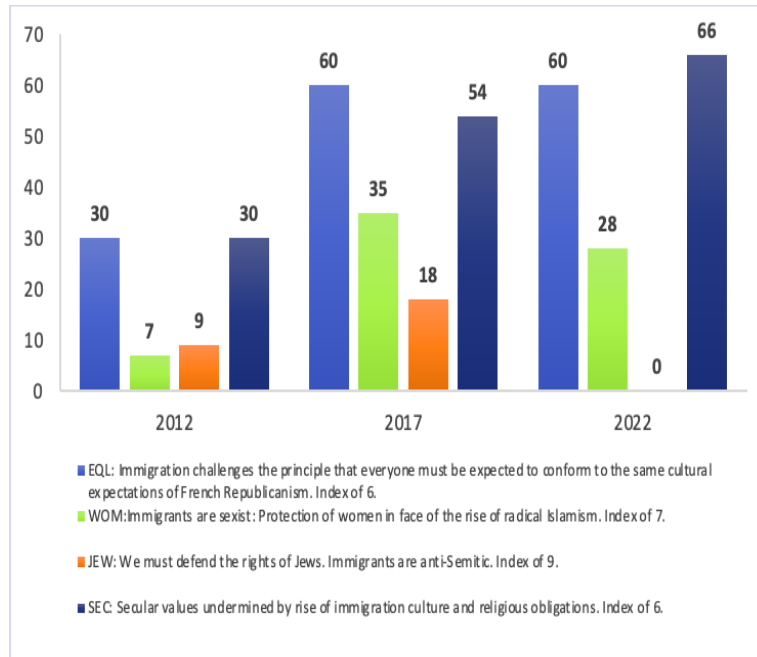


Figure 9: Micro - Republican Values scores comparison

What **Figures 8** and **9** illustrate is that all subframes Marine Le Pen deployed to address the impact of mass immigration on republican values ended up at a higher threshold in 2022 than in 2012, showing a steadily rising emphasis on the general frame of republican values of the Nation in her campaigns. We can see that statements related to the nation’s identity and its distinctive values, French republicanism and equality (EQL), and distinctive secular values (SEC), remained as high and even higher from 2017 to 2022. The portrayal of Muslims as sexist (WOM) decreased a little but remained higher in 2022 than it was in 2012. For instance, Le Pen maintained in 2022 that *“In France, we respect women, we do not call them out in the street with rude and insulting words, we do not forbid them the public space, we do not hit them, we do not ask them to hide under veils, because they would be impure.”* (Le Pen, Aigues-Morte, 2022). This indicates that national identarian protectionism has become increasingly dominant in her campaigns over time, and strategically replaced other more extreme subframes such as JEW which was absent in her last campaign altogether.

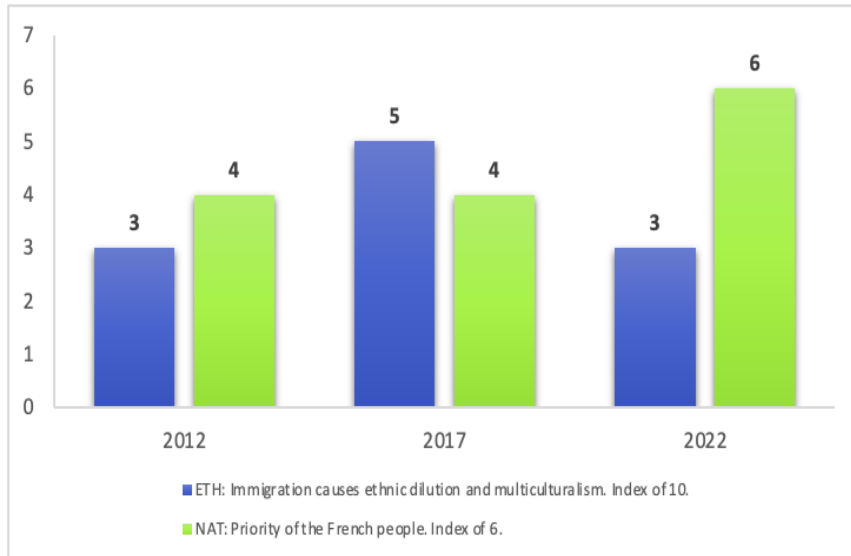


Figure 10: *Micro – Nationalism instances of occurrence*

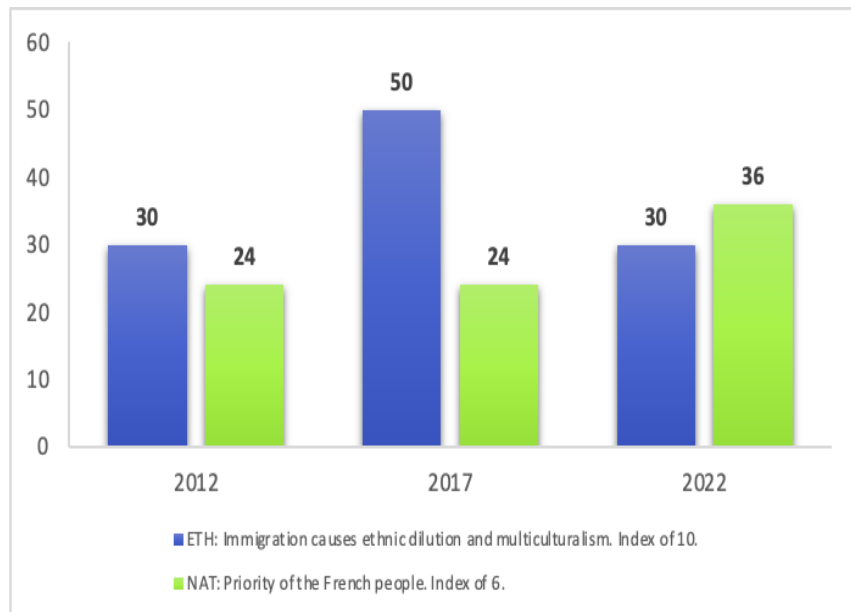


Figure 11: *Micro - Nationalism scores comparison*

In regard to the impact of immigration on the topic of Nationalism, there seems to be a gradual substitution of the immigration-driven ethnic dilution frame (ETH) by the French preference frame (NAT). Although related, both subframes are part of distinct dimensions. NAT refers to how immigrants supplant “natives” in access to services and privileges, whereas ETH is a more abstract notion of dilution of an ethnos. Marine Le Pen effectively substituted her more radical stance for a less extreme version of French superiority. ETH is a very evident

marker of extremism which sits ill with the *dédiabolisation* rebranding she is trying to portray. Therefore, it was strategically logical for her to lose the ETH subframe for a more moderate nationalist subframe (NAT) which conveys a similar position.

Furthermore, the rise of ethnic dilution statements (ETH) in 2017 can be explained by the general fear of terror attacks in the context of this specific election and the general tendency to fear Muslim individuals. Le Pen made sure that Islam would be the structuring word of her campaign, for she repeated “*With me, there would not have been Mohamed Merah, French thanks to the right of the soil of his immigrant parents, binational from the Maghreb, recidivist delinquent, the killer of soldiers and Jewish children*” (Le Pen, Paris, 2017) or “*The burkini is not a religious garment, it is an Islamist provocation to mark the occupation of all public space. It is a uniform, you have understood it well, a uniform whose presence they want to impose on us, like imams who preach hatred of Jews, homosexuals or who justify the stoning of women.*” (Le Pen, Lyon, 2017). In this context, it is arguably easier for a political candidate to convey racism and extremist ideas – that is, less public condemnation is expected in this specific terror context.

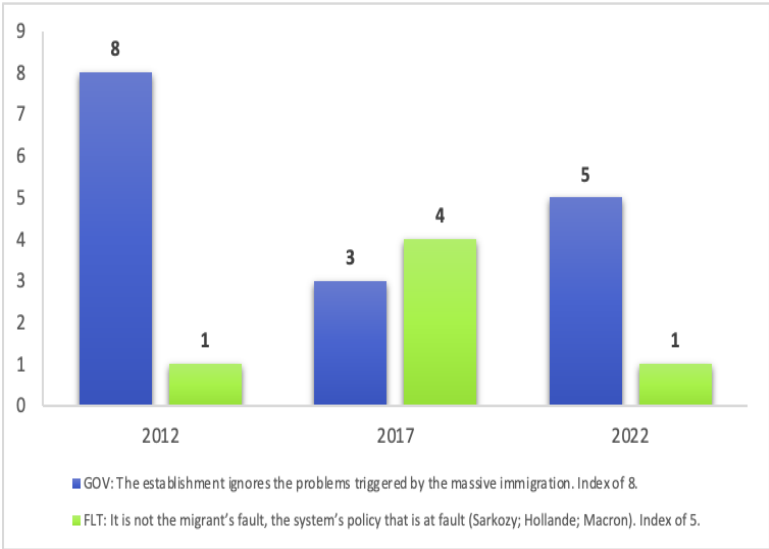


Figure 12: Micro - Populism instances of occurrence

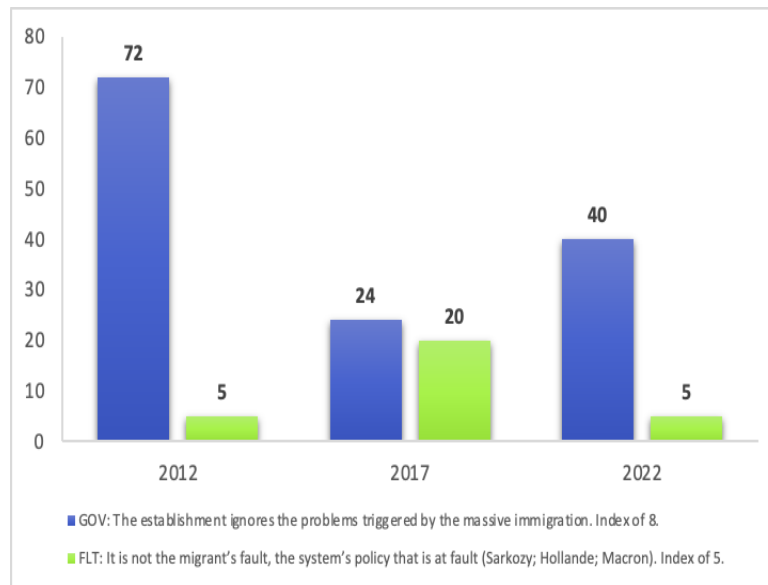


Figure 13: *Micro - Populism scores comparison*

A lot is illustrated in **Figures 12** and **13**. First, it is important to note that although both subframes anti-establishment (GOV) and incumbent policies' responsibility (FLT) correspond to the broader frame of populism, both do not weigh the same in terms of extremism intensity, GOV being more extreme on average than FLT.

The attacks on the Bataclan and Charlie Hebdo, among the other attacks, were not carried out by migrants, but by criminals who infiltrated the French territory using the same entry points as legal migrants (i.e., planes, cars, and trains). Knowing this allows us to make sense of the evolution of this Populist frame over the three campaigns. As a fervent advocate of populism, Marine Le Pen has consistently adopted an anti-establishment rhetoric (Belhadi, 2019: 149–174). But given the nature of those who conducted the attacks which structured her 2017 campaign, being anti-establishment would not resonate as much with the general public, given its awareness of the situation. Instead of putting the fault on the migrants themselves, which generally are the scapegoats of the French far-right, Marine Le Pen substituted her anti-establishment argument of an ignorant government of the scourge of migrants and migrations, for a specific anti-establishment target of the *policy* in place. That is, rather than derogatory statements about migrants which would have resonated less with the public opinion of the time,

Marine Le Pen adapted her populist anti-establishment accusation for a time given. For instance, she asked how “*With such a vision of France, do you expect immigrants and their children to want to assimilate into the nation?*” (Le Pen, Nantes, 2012), ensuring. that “*not all migrants are delinquents, Islamists, or terrorists, of course*” (Le Pen, Paris, 2017). Therefore, GOV reduces drastically in 2017, which allowed Marine Le Pen to focus more on the incumbent system rather than on the demonification of the migrants. She would then return to a more fervent anti-immigrant position in 2022.

It is also important to note that the anti-establishment frame (GOV) is much more extreme in intensity than the incumbent policies’ responsibility one (FLT). Therefore, Marine le Pen has kept her radical populist position regarding mass immigration and has strategically played with the two subframes in varying contexts.

4.3.2 Le Pen’s National Sovereignty Discourse

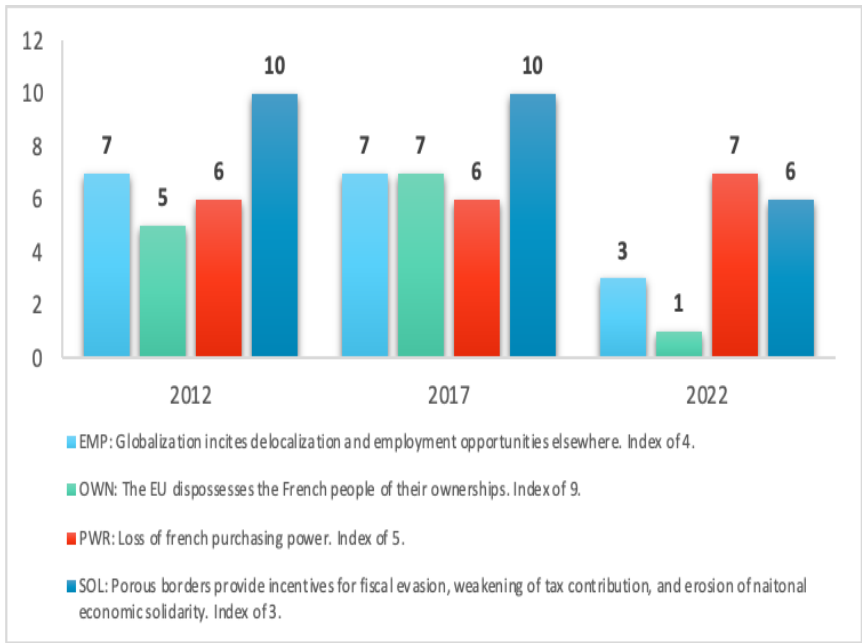


Figure 14: Micro - Economy instances of occurrence

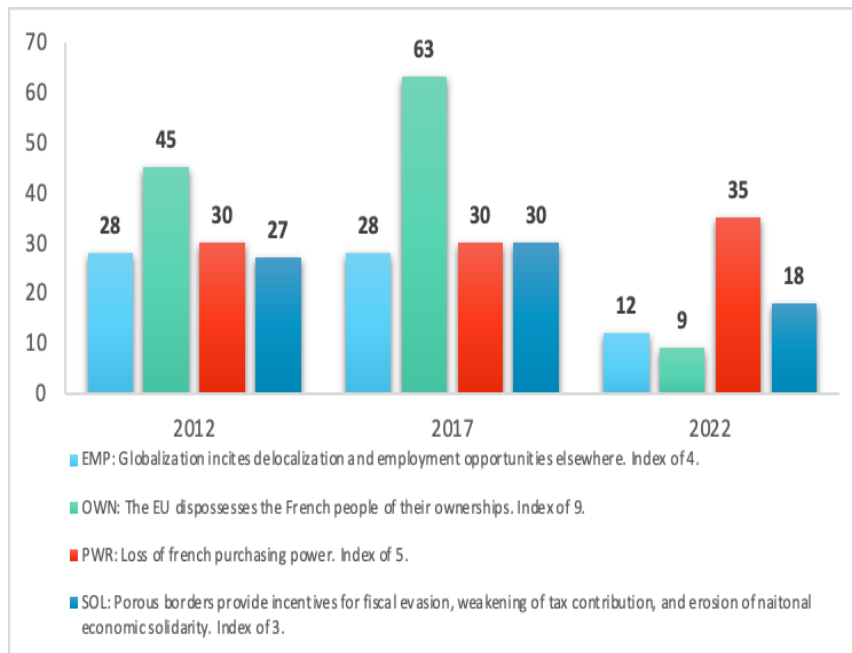


Figure 15: Micro - Economy scores comparison

Out of the four subframes of the economic frame for national sovereignty, only one – French purchasing power (PWR) – remained higher than its level in 2012. This is indicative of a general decline of the economic Euroscepticism rhetoric from 2017 to 2022.

Moreover, only two subframes were mentioned more frequently from 2012 to 2017: French ownership capital (OWN) and French purchasing power (PWR) – that is the overall wealth of French citizens taking into account taxes, VAT, etc. The frame French ownership (OWN) possesses a very high score of extremism of 9 out of 10, and the frame French purchasing power (PWR) has remained an important factor of her program over the three campaigns. French purchasing power is a popular theme in France, and it seems logical and beneficial to maintain its relative centrality in her statements. A common policy among her three presidential programs has been for instance the reduction of the VAT on fuel and other necessities; the increase in salaries; the annulation of income taxes for those under 30; and the lowering of the price of freeway tolls. However, the “classic” post-economic crisis and Euroscepticism subframes such as employment (EMP) or erosion of national solidarity (SOL) (tax evasion, delocalization, etc.) are importantly reduced in her speeches since 2017, which

illustrates a voluntary abandonment or neglect of the purely economic rhetoric prominent in the years following the global economic crisis. These findings are rather intriguing and innovative given the historical ‘LePeniste’ emphasis on classical socio-economic issues over the years. For instance, Le Monde was headlining recently that Le Pen was successful in 2022 specifically because of her focus on purchasing power⁵. My findings do not seem to support the same observations.

One can make sense of this reshuffling of subframes to address the French economy in correlation with the Covid-19 pandemics and other crises European countries have had to collectively endure. The classic euro-crisis and post-economic-crisis narratives of 2012 and 2017 became less prevalent in 2022 for what I understand to be two reasons. First, the European Central Bank has proven to be a tremendous asset in the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. It has provided a life-saving financial inflow for most businesses and was able to greatly mitigate the economic and financial damage (see Echarte Fernández, 2021; Smits, 2021). Second, Euro-skepticism and the European crisis have always been about internal division among national priorities and the self-interests of members, and the benefits of a regional coalition. The immigration crisis triggered by the 2011 Syrian crisis has greatly intensified since 2015 for all European countries, which have had to share the common humanitarian and migratory burden of the historically high income of refugees (Bauböck, 2017). This has triggered a form of unification through adversity among the members of the EU.

⁵ See the recent article “Election Présidentielle 2022 : Sur Le Terrain, Marine Le Pen Fait Du Pouvoir d’Achat Son Sujet Principal de Campagne.” Le Monde.fr, 19 Mar. 2022, www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2022/03/19/election-presidentielle-2022-sur-le-terrain-marine-le-pen-fait-du-pouvoir-d-achat-son-sujet-principal-de-campagne_6118290_823448.html

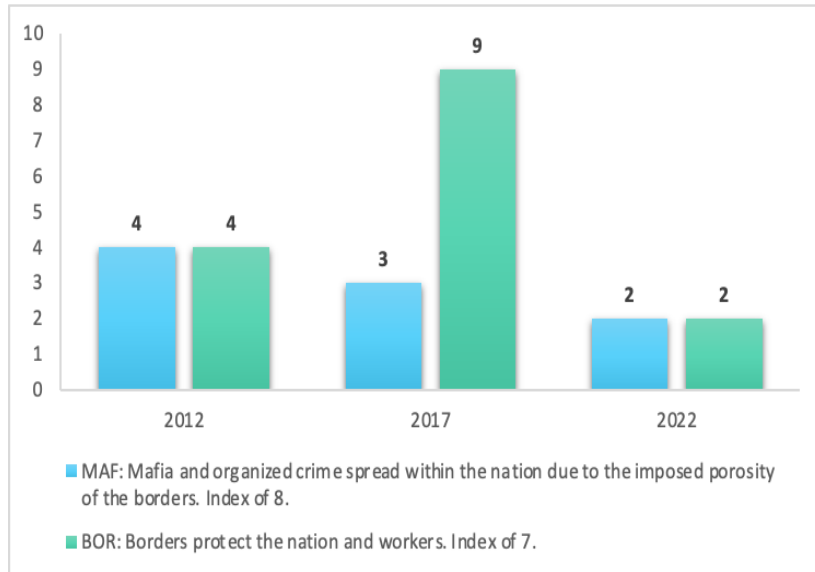


Figure 16: *Micro - Security instances of occurrence*

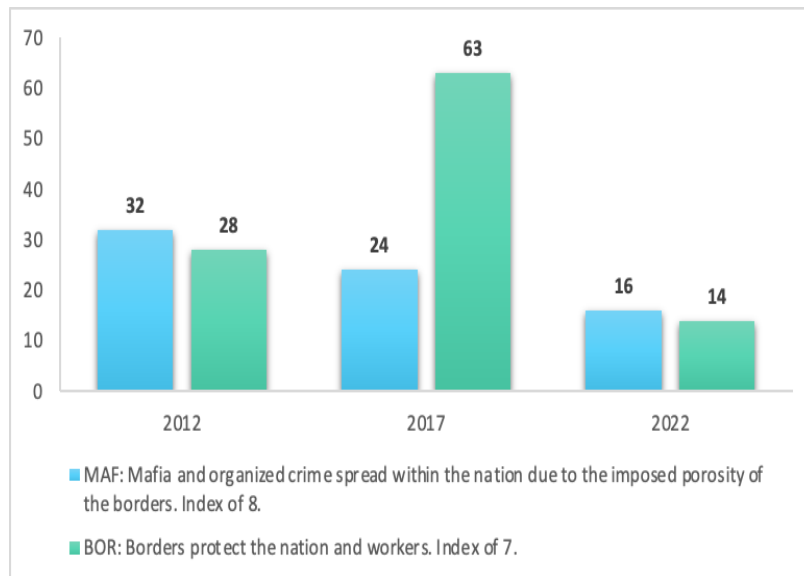


Figure 17: *Micro - Security scores comparison*

We can observe a decrease in the security-driven rhetoric of National Sovereignty over the three campaigns of Marine Le Pen. Given the terrorist crisis that structured the 2017 elections, the importance of borders as protection for national security naturally dominated her national security narrative at the time, and then lowered again in 2022. For instance, in 2017 Le Pen fiercely repeated that France was “*a country open to all winds, a society undermined by an endemic violence where the law of the strongest will dominate. That of the kingpins, the mafias, the feudalities*” (Le Pen, Lyon, 2017). Overall, the threat of organized crime and mafia

activities enhanced by the EU’s porous borders policy decreased in her rhetoric over time. This might be because scarcely any event of international criminal networks has dominated the French landscape, even in the Southern region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur (PACA) whose notable high level of criminality was rather local than part of an international criminal network. The region of PACA coincides also with her strongest pool of electoral support in France, which means Le Pen would have no interest in targeting disproportionately its inner dynamics (bin Zaid and Joshi, 2018).



Figure 18: Micro - Nationalism instances of occurrence

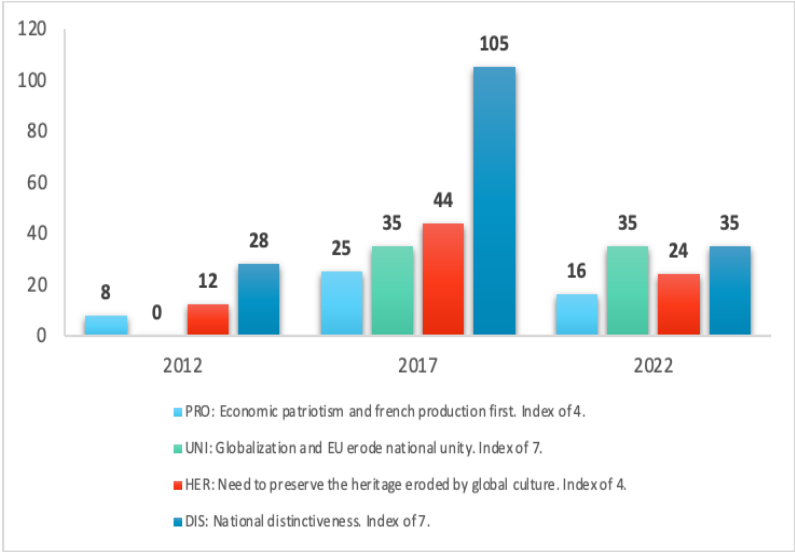


Figure 19: Micro - Nationalism scores comparison

Figures 18 and 19 represent the nationalist arguments made by Le Pen, dominantly in reaction to the exogenous pressure of the EU integration and globalization. The relevant subframes are related to the economic patriotism and French production priority, the concern for the unity and the distinctiveness of the French nation, and the perpetuation of its culture and heritage in an age of multiculturalism and global community.

Here again, we can first notice that, for the Nationalism frame, all subframes are higher in 2022 than they were in 2012. Moreover, 2017 remained the apex of extremism in all subframes of Nationalism, given the acts of terrorism that dominated French political discourse at the time. This indicates a very clear increased extremism of Marine Le Pen's stance on the frame of Nationalism overall.

In 2017 and 2022, the subframes of national heritage (HER) and national distinctiveness (DIS) are the most prevalent. This correlates with our prior observation of a general erosion of the economic crisis rhetoric dominant in 2012. For instance, in 2012 Le Pen said "*We face an endless deepening of inequalities and precariousness, the splitting up of our labor law by companies, the transformation of our country, France, into a vague region locked in the prison of the European Union, to which all my opponents want to add an additional padlock. The end of indivisibility, sovereignty, and equality in the French nation.*" (Le Pen, Paris, 2012). But in the last two campaigns, she emphasized rather the notion of national distinctiveness in the world and the need to preserve its heritage: "*I will inscribe in the Constitution, the defense and the promotion of our historical and cultural heritage, we will give back to the French language its letters of nobility, we will protect our national buildings, but also our strategic companies, from the capture and the foreign speculation*" (Le Pen, Lyon 2017). Overall, this tendency can be explained by the fact that the subsidence of economic rhetoric is presumably driven by the abatement of severe macroeconomic and fiscal challenges following the 2007/8 crisis.

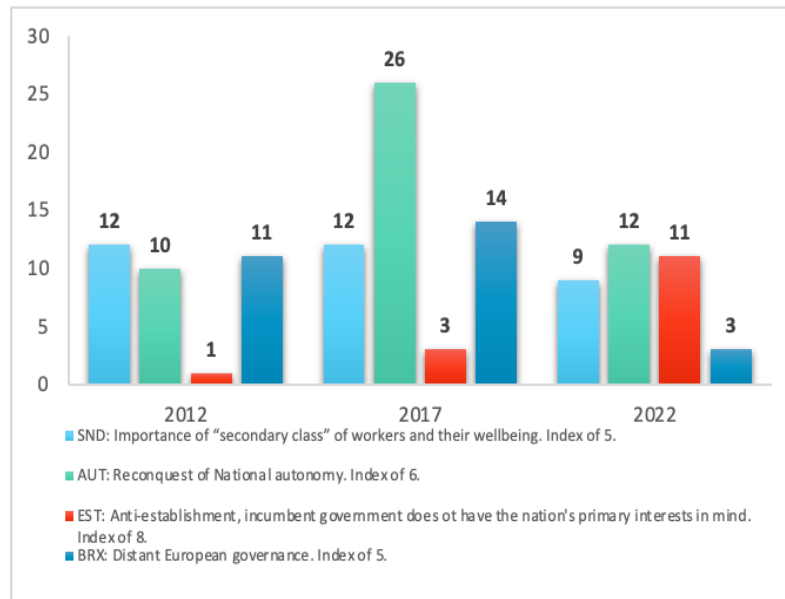


Figure 20: Micro - Populism instances of occurrence

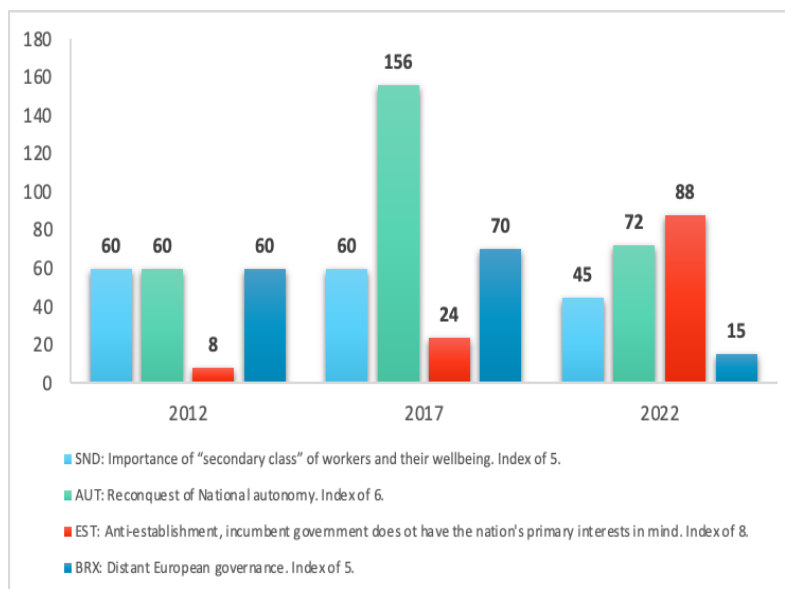


Figure 21: Micro – Populism scores comparison

From **Figures 20** and **21**, three main findings are important to note. Overall, the only two subframes of the broader populist frame of national sovereignty that did not decrease in terms of extremism were: the reconquest of national autonomy, or rather the erosion of the national French autonomy (AUT); and the anti-establishment critique of the incumbent government under Nicolas Sarkozy and Emmanuel Macron (EST). The direct concern with the well-being of the nation’s autonomy and government apparatus is here again prevailing under the populist frame. First, the growing emphasis on an anti-Macronist discourse in the 2022

elections (encompassed in the subframe EST) can be explained by two factors. Macron's leadership is the perfect illustration for Le Pen to further critique the elite. As a former banker and clear establishment figure, Macron does not sit well with sharing the financial and social burden of the general population. He is "*the young prodigy of finance*" (Le Pen, Aigues-Morte, 2022). Moreover, Macron was Le Pen's primary opponent for the second time in the 2022 elections⁶.

Second, the distinctively sharp rise in 2017 of the French autonomy frame (AUT) can be linked to the repercussions of the terrorist attacks prior to the elections period. The European hosting policies, considered an unlawful imposition by Le Pen, is in part responsible for the attacks, for "*the European Union inflicts us with the double penalty: the absence of physical borders and the irresponsible Schengen Treaty. So, we have erased our physical borders and turned our countries into train stations for all the world's migrations*" (Le Pen, Paris, 2017). The establishment of a proper national autonomy in regard to its hosting policies would have arguably avoided these events, refusing entry to dangerous immigrants.

Eventually, the sharp fall in 2022 of the anti-European, anti-Brussels elites (BRX) is again explained by the extensive help of the European bank in mitigating the economic impacts of the Covid-19. The overall anti-European integration discourses have since the Covid-19 pandemics lost a lot of their impetus among the electoral audience and therefore among the political candidates⁷.

It is important to note that although the anti-incumbent establishment subframe (EST) of national sovereignty and the anti-government blame (GOV) of immigration were distinct, they conveyed a similar anti-establishment position from Marine Le Pen. The former portrayed

⁶ This is confirmed on April 10th when both Macron and Le Pen were selected for the final runoffs of the presidential which takes place on April 24th.

⁷ See this article by Le Monde for a clear explanation : "L'Union Européenne Loin Des Préoccupations de l'Extrême Droite." *Le Monde.fr*, 6 Apr. 2022, www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/04/06/l-union-europeenne-loin-des-preoccupations-de-l-extreme-droite_6120869_6059010.html

current political leaders as self-interested and putting the well-being of the French population in the background, whereas the latter was more focused on incumbent immigration policy and the ignorance of the leaders to the damages of mass immigration to the French people. Both were aligned in their criticism of the existing government, yet they did not reproach the exact same wrongdoings of the current political leadership. For instance, statements like *“I would distinguish myself from the cohorts of liquidators who, for forty years, have not ceased to weaken, to impoverish our country of the instruments which constituted the conditions of the exercise of its sovereignty”* (Le Pen, Paris, 2012) would belong to the EST subframe, whereas *“My opponents claim to control the borders, to go back on the right of the soil, to prevent immigration, to fight against unfair competition. They are lying to you. This is because immigration is not a problem for them. It is a project that they are concocting behind your back”* (Le Pen, Lyon, 2017) would be under the GOV subframe. Yet both retained an important place in her rhetoric over the three campaigns.

Eventually, the more classical economic crisis and euro-skeptical narratives were the ones that decreased between 2017 and 2022, mirroring the general trend identified above about the diminution of economic narratives. The concern for second-class workers’ economic wellbeing economic well-being (SND) and the critique of a distant European government (BRX) both eroded over time and were substituted by more nationally focused themes of prosperity, autarkic self-sufficient France as self-sufficient.

5 Discussion

5.1 Key Empirical Findings

There has been a lot to unpack from different levels of analysis, provided both by the qualitative discursive coding, and the quantification score of extremism of each statement. Overall, these empirical findings allowed me to make three important claims regarding Marine Le Pen's *dédiabolisation*.

First, the analysis indicates that Marine Le Pen's rhetoric (at least over 2012–22) does not match the existing *dédiabolisation* accounts and hence offers scant support for centripetal party shifts predicted by the bipartite Downesian (1957) model. It also does not align with the insertion-moderation hypothesis that some authors have posited within the supply-side explanation (Tepe, 2019). The overall extremism score average of Marine Le Pen's three campaigns has never been as low as in 2012 which indicates an increase of extreme statements in 2017 and 2022.

Second, even if the macro picture shows us that Marine Le Pen has retained her position as a fervent nationalist advocate for an independent, powerful and sovereign nation, the way she posits her statements in this regard has drastically evolved to converge towards an identarian exclusive narrative of the French exceptionalism. Marine Le Pen increasingly contends that anti-immigration measures are needed to preserve France's distinct identity and culture.

For instance, in 2017, Marine Le Pen's speeches contained a relatively high number of statements that referred to national sovereignty: 135 statements, compared to 78 in 2012. On the surface, it only shows that Marine Le Pen emphasized this category over Immigration (a total of 77 statements) during her 2017 presidential campaign. But once one goes deeper to analyze which frames and subframes Marine Le Pen used in her speeches that year, it appears that those relating to national distinctiveness, uniqueness, and superiority are the most prevalent.

Overall, national autonomy (AUT) (26 occurrences), and national distinctiveness (DIS) (15 occurrences) are the two most prevalent frames out of 4, which are a distant European government (BRX) and national heritage protectionism (HER). Out of the four more recurrent subframes that compose this enormous number of 135, 3 out of 4 communicate identarian notions of French nationhood. All of those are more closely influenced by immigration dynamics than globalized, regional, or economic factors.

Lastly, her rhetoric on immigration-related issues has actually not only retained its level of extremism but has effectively increased. Marine Le Pen has gotten even more radical in her position regarding immigration. Indeed, the analysis shows that Le Pen's immigration-based rhetoric was equally radical in 2022 as in 2017, despite the fact that the presidential election in 2017 took place in the wake of several terrorist attacks in France not least in Nice on July 14th, 2016. Further, the fact that she chooses to employ identarian subframes instead of economic and classical nationalist ones, supports the argument that her anti-immigration rhetoric has come to dominate her entire narrative over the campaigns.

5.2 Alternative Explanations

The lessons learned from this empirical research allow us to engage with the debate over the extent of Marine Le Pen's *dédiabolisation* that I outlined in the Literature Review.

As mentioned, two sides animate this debate. On one hand, some scholars (e.g., Shields, 2007, 2012) argue that *dédiabolisation* is a veritable rebranding strategy used by Marine Le Pen to distance herself from the extremist picture her father left on the political party. As a modern woman and mother, she constantly strives to embody a new image for the party, even changing its name altogether in 2018 from *Front National* to *Rassemblement National*, and shies away from racist and homophobic overtures. In this sense, *dédiabolisation* is, regardless

of its success or failure, a real programmatic phenomenon whereby the RN has sought to normalize and centralize its policy position.

On the other hand, another group of scholars led mainly by Alduy (2015), Igounet (2017), and Stockemer (2017), has argued that *dédiabolisation* is a dupe, a mere rhetorical embellishment, and nothing else. In this perspective, Marine Le Pen only has in mind to amass a minimum winning coalition of voters and has not truly shifted the party's identity away from the ideology espoused by her father. In this sense, she restructures her rhetoric around more attractive formulations but maintains her programmatic positions. *Dédiabolisation* accordingly is nothing more than a sort of mirage.

My results are interesting insofar as they do not wholly confirm either one of these perspectives. Instead, the results suggest that the extent of *dédiabolisation* in Le Pen's public appearances and speeches is much more limited than previously thought. Moreover, the headline statistics generated through the discourse analysis suggest that Le Pen's position – at least on two important issues – has become more extreme. Furthermore, *dédiabolisation* understood as a cosmetic embellishment of a programmatic rigidity on the Le Pen stance is also inaccurate given the plethora of thematic tradeoffs noticed over the three campaigns. As we have seen, Marine Le Pen does change her narrative *and* her argumentation regarding national sovereignty emergencies, regarding immigration urges, and altogether regarding who to blame. While scholars of the cosmetic embellishment theoretical stance are correct that Marine Le Pen does not effectively *dédiabolise* her positions, that is she conserves - and as we have seen actually augments – her radicality, she does not keep the same argument, does not emphasize the same angle in her argumentation over the three campaigns. Her radicality is constant and rising, but it is not monolithic and varies with context and topics.

5.3 Dédiabolisation Versus Thematic Reshuffling

Coming back to my initial question, this paper addresses the well-known phenomenon of *dédiabolisation* attached to Marine Le Pen's political rebranding strategy. Earlier in the paper, I posed the question of if and how Marine Le Pen undertakes a strategic rebranding of her political position since she took over her father's position as head of the party in 2011. In short, I wanted to know if Marine Le Pen actually neutralizes and centralizes her political stance to distance herself from the anachronic racist and homophobic discourse of Jean-Marie Le Pen. The existing literature does not seem to argue as we have seen on the reality of the phenomenon whatsoever. Furthermore, this paper also asked what Marine Le Pen is actually doing, what the underlying strategic mechanisms conveyed through her theories over time, and what these mean for her political positioning.

This thesis expected at the start some content variations in Marine Le Pen's narrative across her three presidential campaigns in order to expand her electoral appeal beyond her natural constituencies. There seems to be some thematic reshuffling in Marine Le Pen's discursive strategy across the many presidential elections she ran. Rather than radically departing all of a sudden from her dad's premises, nor entirely condoning and perpetuating them, it seems that some more intricate rhetorical and discursive ploys are at play in her electoral strategy. The empirical findings confirm that trend of *dédiabolisation* changes shape considerably when her rhetoric is disaggregated into salient themes – that of immigration and national sovereignty – and sub-frames. Subtle inner-thematic tradeoffs through the periods of 2012, 2017, and 2022 interesting's compose this so call *dédiabolisation* strategy, and substantively do not mean a deradicalization of her political stance regarding immigration and national sovereignty. We have seen that Marine Le Pen grows to prioritize a more extreme and radical position on anti-immigration and relocates her nationalist impulse for a sovereign and

autonomous France around an identarian, almost supremacist ideological discourse, leaving aside the more common and general themes of the economy, purchasing power, and Europe.

In this sense, the results have not only confirmed the movements of her rhetorical modeling hypothesized at the beginning of this paper but have even extended it to shed light on the reorganizational mechanisms that structure her discourse differently across periods.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

Given the time and length restrictions of this thesis, I had to deploy certain scope conditions to delimit the analysis (rendering it more tractable).

As a first, through my pilot survey, I was able to associate subframes with a corresponding score of extremism and eventually compare the variation in scores across subgroups to the variation within subgroups. Nevertheless, due to the restricted scope of this research project, the survey is smaller in scope, with a total of n=9 individuals answering the questionnaire. It was sufficient enough to provide the research with a general quantification of each statement and subframe and to sufficiently grasp an objective measurement, but it would be desirable to expand this survey template to more respondents, and potentially include more statements than those selected in the corpus, in future works. These future longer research projects can easily use the survey developed in this research paper and extend it.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to analyze if, and if so how, Marine Le Pen's rhetorical narrative shifts according to the immediate audience. In other words, depending on who she directly addresses in her speech, Marine Le Pen is likely to reframe her arguments, exemplify her position, and emphasize certain aspects of society or of her program in a way that resonates directly with the public. Discourses that are destined for a specific audience, a section of the French population, be it farmers, blue-collar workers, or the wealthier middle-

class portion of the citizens, it might be interesting to see if and how her *dédiabolised* strategy fluctuates. This unconsidered angle in this paper can provide further intelligence and information regarding the new understanding of *dédiabolisation* we provide here.

In the same vein, I posited at the beginning of this thesis that *dédiabolisation* could not be understood as a monolithic phenomenon measured or analyzed under one single dimension. I chose to analyze it under the scope of content and topic variations across time, but other channels can participate in the phenomenon, such as her tones, gestures, the other candidates' influence on her own program, the audience, and so forth. Future works could tackle these and complement my analysis to get a more holistic and accurate conceptualization of *dédiabolisation*, and of Marine Le Pen's rhetorical strategy. For instance, in order to analyze the change or immutability of the *ways* Marine Le Pen expresses her position, future works could apply a score of extremism not to the subframe to which a statement belongs, but to the statement itself. Then, further in-depth data could provide us with the variations in the tones, and the ways employed to convey a theme or an idea over time. As noted, content alone does not explain *dédiabolisation* nor Marine Le Pen's rhetorical strategy, and tones, among other factors, are crucial elements to convey one's position.

Additionally, future research projects could benefit from comparing the RN statements to the center-right parties in France. For instance, during the more recent 2022 presidential election, Marine Le Pen was engaged in fierce opposition to Valérie Pécresse, although the results of the first round have been dramatic for Pécresse. The latter was the official candidate on behalf of the *Soyons Libres* political party (*Let's be Free*), a French liberal-conservative and Europhile political party, classified as center-right on the political spectrum and affiliated with the party *Les Républicains* (*The Republicans*). In the broader conversation of normalization and centralization of PRR parties which this thesis is part of, comparing far and central right narratives and rhetorical strategies can be a very good way to unveil the divergences and/or

convergence between the two parties. This can be done by using the same mix-method developed in this research paper and can be applied to coding central right speech in the same considered periods of elections.

Eventually, although this thesis has decided to focus on three presidential election periods for the sake of temporal and comparative clarity, it would be interesting to investigate the *dédiabolisation* mechanisms of Marine Le Pen in other electoral times. Future research projects can focus for instance on European or regional legislative elections, or even select less decisive or paramount moments that might attract less public scrutiny, to assemble a corpus of speeches that do not enter a particular electoral plan. All those alternative approaches could provide even further empirical evidence and insight as per the mechanisms of *dédiabolisation* and what this phenomenon entails for Marine Le Pen's political presence on the French political scene.

6 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, the aims of this thesis were to provide conceptual clarity around the notion of *dédiabolisation* and to provide a detailed empirical analysis of this political moderation strategy, problematizing the existing theoretical frameworks and providing variegated empirical evidence. This contributes not only to the broader efforts to understand populism, its emergence, and proliferation in the 21st century, but also provides rich empirical and theoretical insights to broader theories of semantic and rhetorical bargaining. The thesis focused on the thematic undercurrents of Marine Le Pen's *dédiabolisation* strategy and showed that this *dédiabolisation* is more nuanced than previously thought. The results confirmed that her message varied over time and that her thematic focus and extremity ran counter to the *dédiabolisation* hypothesis. Hence this thesis goes beyond a monolithic understanding of *dédiabolisation* and populist leaders' moderation more broadly, and offers a unique window into one of the many processes by which a populist far-right leader fashions his/her discourse over time.

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8. Appendix

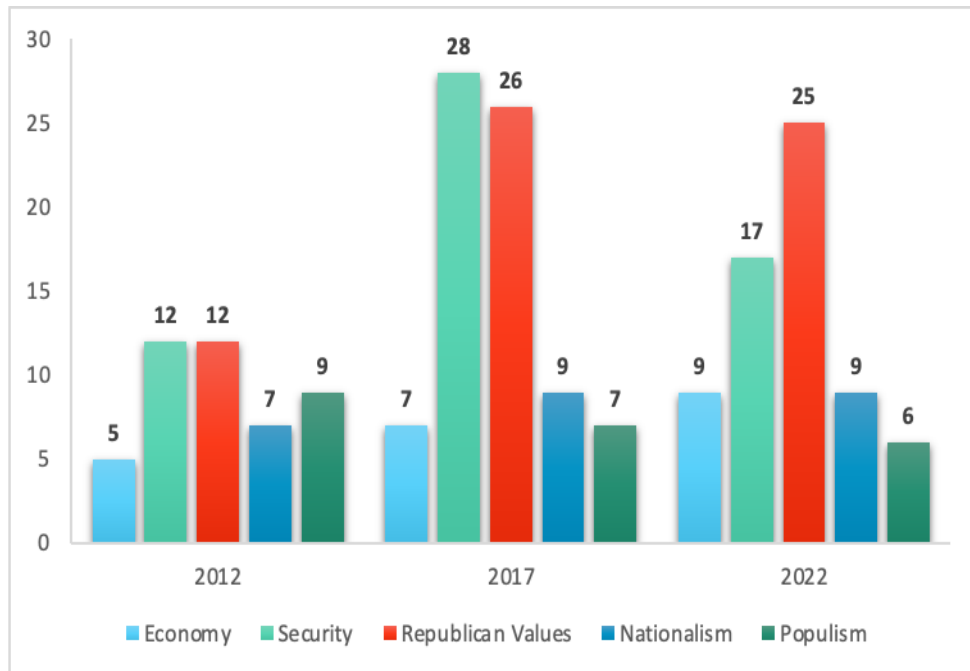


Figure 22: Immigration combined appearances

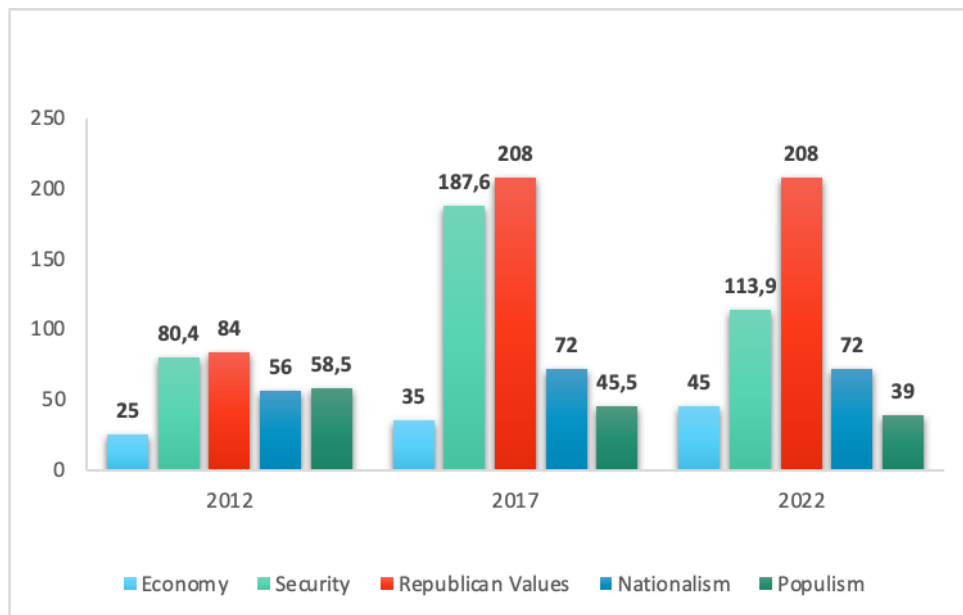


Figure 23: Immigration combined scores

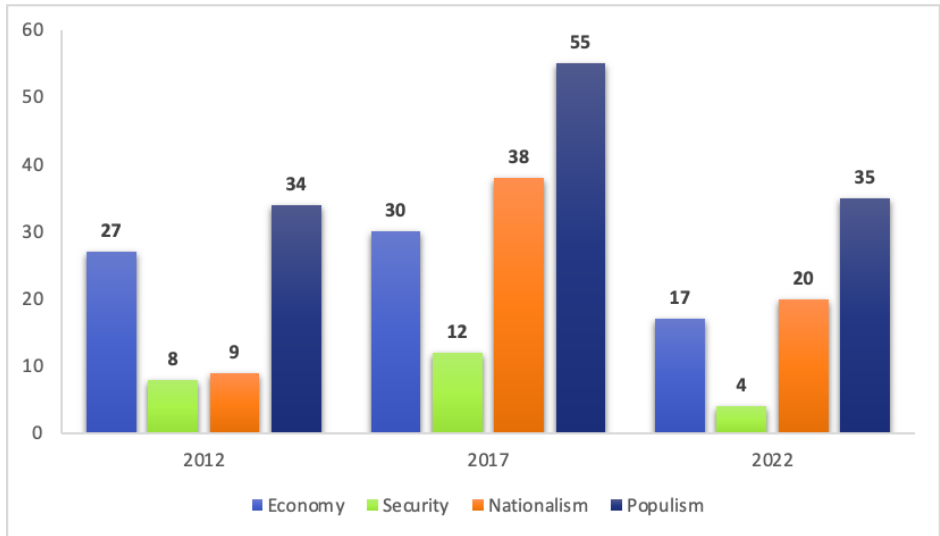


Figure 24: National sovereignty combined appearances

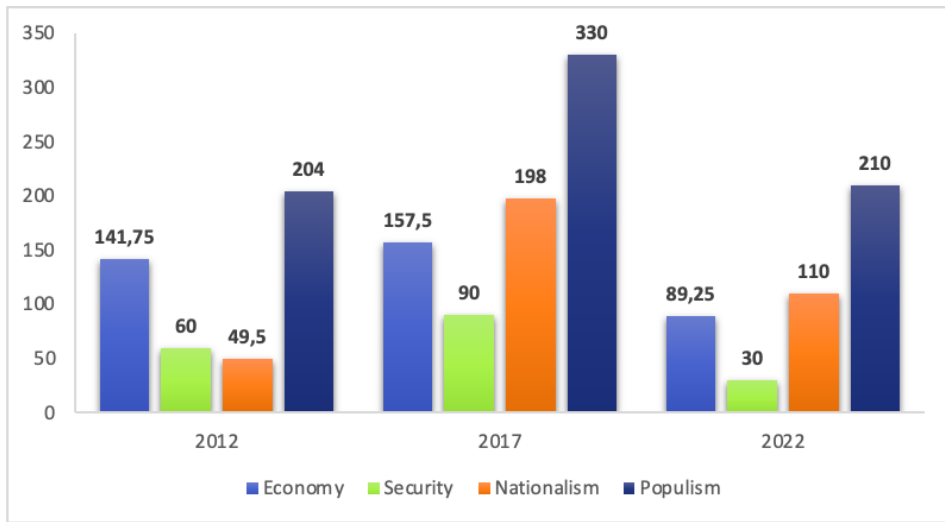


Figure 25: National sovereignty combined scores