

*The Normalization of the Right in Post-Security Europe*<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

European right wing parties have gained increased political traction in recent years. Since the 2008 global financial crisis and ensuing austerity programs which it mandated, nationalist ideas and policy proposals typically associated with the right have become part of center right, and in some instances left, political discourse. This paper explores the “normalization of the right.” It develops a concept of a “post-security” state to elaborate the context in which the contemporary European right has advanced. Using a variety of data sources, this paper first, surveys the current rise of the right across Europe, second, it analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of prevalent approaches to the right, and then provides a more in depth analysis of the trajectory of the right in France. Employing a historical approach to the study of the right, it argues that the breakdown of the institutions of “practical security” in part driven by expanding European integration and exacerbated by the financial crisis have provided a political climate in which right wing solutions to political issues appear normal.

What is Normalization?

European right wing parties and their ideas have gained increased political traction in recent years. As the global financial crisis was unleashed in the fall of 2008 and became a full fledged European sovereign debt crisis by spring 2010, right parties began to accumulate significant electoral successes. Parties, such as the Sweden Democrats, which had been marginal political players in their respective nation-states have won seats in Parliament, and in some instances become part of governing coalitions. In the April 2011 Finnish legislative elections, the right nationalist True Finn Party came in third place and achieved the same percentage of votes as the Finnish Social Democrats.

During this period, nationalist rhetoric and policy proposals that are usually the purview of the European populist right have become part of center right, and in some instances left, political discourse. For example in October 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel told a gathering of the youth members of the Christian Democratic Union party that Germany's attempt to build a multicultural society had "failed, utterly failed." Although Merkel went on to say that immigrants were still welcome in Germany, the phrase "failed, utterly failed" resonated in Germany and across Europe. David Cameron, British Prime Minister, seconded Merkel's assessment of multiculturalism in early February 2011 in a lecture on Islamist extremism delivered at the Munich Security Conference. A week later, French President Nicolas Sarkozy declared during a television interview that, "clearly yes"—multiculturalism was a failure. Nationalist appeals to identities and practices are not new, but for the most part, they have remained in the interstices of the European project. Whereas cultural conflict in the past arose from below, it now appears to be descending from above. Until recently, heads of state,

especially heads of state that are committed to the European project, have not led the national identity charge. The events of 9/11 in the United States and subsequent terrorist activities in Europe made it legitimate to argue that unassimilated immigrants and specifically, Muslims were dangerous.

The economic events that began in the United States in fall 2008 and soon traveled to Europe made it legitimate to argue that Europe was a dangerous economic and political project. The European financial crisis trailed the United States by a few months. The struggle between national interest and plans to conserve European Monetary Union (EMU) began in spring 2009 with the Hungarian debt crisis. The conflict between national and European interests continues to plague attempts to adjudicate the full blown European sovereign debt crisis that emerged in 2010 when Greece began to head towards default. In the spring of 2009, pundits and politicians spoke of a weakening European project and a potential failure of the eurozone. Editorials with titles such as, “Europe’s Gone Missing,”<sup>2</sup> “Eastern Crisis that Could Wreck the Eurozone,”<sup>3</sup> and “A Continent Adrift”<sup>4</sup> were common in major international newspapers. As early as January 2009, the French supply side economist, Éloi Laurent (2009) warned that the *euro* could not be allowed to fail and that member states needed to take action soon.

In spring 2009, policy makers and politicians did not view the eurozone as in danger. Public commentary had little effect upon them. Democratic deficit, the lack of

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles), March 26, 2009 (Accessed *lat.com* 3/29/2009).

<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Munchau, *Financial Times* (London), February 22, 2009 (Accessed *FT.com* 2/24/2009).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Krugman, *New York Times* (New York), March 16, 2009 (Accessed *nytimes.com* 4/18/2009).

accountability to ordinary citizens of EU institutions, had long been a subject of discussion in EU academic debates. Yet, no one seriously thought that the EU challenged democracy.<sup>5</sup> When faced with fiscal deficits and potential defaults, neither politicians nor commentators saw a serious challenge to European democratic practices or sentiments. Ideas that were inconceivable in spring 2009 are conceivable today.

A week before the July 21, 2011 Brussels summit when news emerged that Italy was on the verge of default, the cover of *The Economist* (July 16-22, 2011) captured the shift in public perception. A gold one *euro* coin teetered on the edge of a black cliff, the edge shaped as the Italian boot against a background of bold red. The print read: “On the Edge, Why the Euro Crisis has just got a lot worse.” A week later, Nobel Economist Amartya Sen writing in *The Guardian* linked the preservation of the eurozone to the preservation of European democracy and argued, “It is . . . worrying that the dangers to democratic governance today, coming through the back door of financial priority, are not receiving the attention they should.”<sup>6</sup> Two weeks after the Brussels summit, with global equity markets crashing, politicians as well as pundits began to view Europe as not only a threat not only to itself but also to others. Robert Samuelson, writing in the *Washington Post* warned “The Big Danger is Europe.”<sup>7</sup> Walter Russell Mead writing in the *Wall Street Journal* argued that maybe it is time for Europe to consider downsizing back to the

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<sup>5</sup> Schmitter (2000) captures the irony of this position.

<sup>6</sup> Amartya Sen, “It Isn’t Just the Euro: Europe’s Democracy itself is at Stake.” *The Guardian* (London), June 22, 2011, (Accessed [guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk) 7/15/2011).

<sup>7</sup> Robert Samuelson, *Washington Post* (Washington, DC), August 9, 2011 (Accessed [wp.com](http://wp.com) 8/10/2011)

national level.<sup>8</sup> A recent *New York Times* (September 12, 2011) *Room for Debate* feature devoted to “A Europe Divided?” reveals that even some “experts” remain divided on the future of Europe.

*Normalization of the right* is the analytic term that I develop to capture the twin phenomena of the electoral surge of the European right and the mainstreaming of nationalist ideas and practices. The *normalization of the right* has evolved in tandem with two global processes—the diffusion of terrorism and financial crisis. In *Illiberal Politics in Neoliberal Times* (Berezin 2009), I argued that the accelerated pace of Europeanization which included the creation of the European Monetary Union [EMU] fostered the emergence of a re-vitalized European right and ultimately promoted center-right political coalitions. But *Illiberal Politics* did not anticipate the 2008 financial crisis which by spring 2010 had become a full blown European sovereign debt crisis. Since 2008, visions of a united, economically competitive and socially cosmopolitan Europe have blurred in the wake of the financial crisis. The sovereign debt crisis underscores the connection between the *normalization of the right* and the European project and also points to the fragility of that project.

Building upon Berezin (2009), this chapter argues that the global financial crisis has exacerbated economic fissures and cultural fault lines in the European project and brought into focus institutional problems that nations formerly adjudicated. The sovereign debt crisis is forcing Europe to recalibrate itself as a *post-security polity*. Nation-states, the bedrock of pre-EU Europe, institutionalized a form of “practical security” that lent collective emotional security to citizens. Political security was located

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Russell Mead, “Europe’s Less than Perfect Union,” *Wall Street Journal* (New York) August 9, 2011. (Accessed *wsj.com* 11/2/2011).

in citizenship laws and internal and external defense ministries. National social welfare systems produced economic security and social solidarity as a by-product. Linguistic, educational and even religious policies created cultural security because they enforced assumptions, if not realities, of similarity and identity. In contrast to the “old” Europe where security, solidarity and identity were guaranteed, the *post-security polity* privileges markets, fosters austerity that threatens solidarity, and supports multicultural inclusion at the expense of nationalist exclusion.

This chapter develops a historical approach to the study of the right and argues that the breakdown of the institutions of “practical security,” driven by expanding European integration and exacerbated by the financial crisis, has provided a political climate in which right wing solutions to political issues appear *normal*. This chapter explores the relation between the rise of the nationalist right and the weakening, if not outright imploding of the European Project. It describes and theorizes the effect of financial crisis and ensuing austerity measures on the flourishing of non-democratic political sentiments in contemporary Europe. Sentiments, rather than practices, more accurately capture events in contemporary Europe as all European nation-states, with the exception of the European Union, are procedurally democratic.

The analysis in this chapter is two pronged. First, it explores the developing political salience of the European right that began in the early 1990s. The political trajectory of the French National Front—one of the oldest and most continually relevant European right parties—is a core component of this story. Second, the chapter situates the French right and the right more generally within the current European context.

## Analyzing the Right

Extremist political parties and movements have been a constituent feature of European politics since the early twentieth century. With the exception of the 1920s and 1930s, these parties and movements have remained for the most part extreme and at the margins of normal politics. The spectacular disaster of World War II overshadowed the fact that, even in the 1920s and 1930s, the Italian fascist regime was tepid. Mussolini met his downfall through his alliance with Hitler; and Spain's Franco prudently avoided war and alliances (Berezin 2009, pp. 17-22). The right was outlawed in various European countries after World War II, but it did not disappear. Former fascist parties regrouped, changed their names and generally existed in the interstices of European political life. In 1988, the journal *West European Politics* published a "special issue" devoted to "Right Wing Extremism in Western Europe." With the exception of the French National Front, the parties and movements that it discussed were not meaningful political actors even as few as ten years after its publication.

Social scientists developed an analytic response to the right that emerged in the 1990s. Political scientists (for example, Eatwell 2003; Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2007) tend to divide the available literature on the contemporary right along the analytic axes of *supply* and *demand*. *Supply* variables describe the availability of a right party, and *demand* variables speak to voter characteristics and preferences. Berezin (2009, pp. 40-45) develops an alternative framework that uses *institutions* and *culture* as analytic axes. This framework captures nuances and contextual complexities that *supply* and *demand* tend to miss. Institutional approaches assume rational calculation. The legal system underlies institutional approaches. The cultural classification encompasses meaning in



the broadest sense. *Organizations*, *agenda setting* and *labor markets* provide further specification of the institutional category. In contrast to institutional approaches, cultural approaches to the right assume non-rationality, that is to borrow from Max Weber actions oriented towards values and beliefs, and include theories based upon *post-materialist values*, *ressentiment* and *legacies*.

*Organization* theories have an implicit notion of efficiency built into them as they prioritize party strategy. The choice theoretic versions of these theories assume that marginality is a mark of strength and not weakness (Meguid 2008; Givens 2005; Norris 2005). Political scientists examine the logic of right party coalitions and focus upon the right's ability to become strategic players in electoral politics. *Organization* theories do a good job of explaining the regional success of right wing parties because they can point to the intersection of local level bargaining and political strategy. *Organization* theories do a less good job of explaining right-wing success and failure in national elections.

*Agenda setting* approaches assume political rationality and posit that the right garners political legitimacy by bringing marginal issues into the electoral arena ahead of mainstream political parties (Schain 1987). *Agenda setting* theories confuse issues of perception and timing and conflate causes with effects. For example, the French state placed immigration on its agenda before the National Front identified it as a political issue (Schor 1985).

*Labor market* explanations of the rise of the right assume that inefficiencies in the post-industrial labor market and subsequent unemployment due to structural obsolescence lead to the propensity to vote for a right wing party. Kitschelt's (1995) influential political economy model of right wing success argues that the new

occupational structure of post-industrial society has pushed traditional left/right parties towards an undifferentiated center and left an ideological void that “extremists” fill. He assumes that the right is a proponent of free market capitalism—an assumption that as Ivarsflaten (2005) pointed out does not fit the French case.<sup>9</sup>

*Labor market* theories assume economic rationality; *ressentiment* theories assume emotional rationality, i.e., fear of immigrants lead to support for the right (Betz 1993). *Ressentiment* posits that losers in the competition over scarce social goods and material resources respond in frustration with diffuse emotions of anger, fear and in the extreme case, hatred. While *Labor market* theories are structural and *ressentiment* theories are psychological and emotional, they share the assumption that an observed correlation between unemployment and immigration is causal with respect to right wing ascendance.

The relation between xenophobia and immigration policy has dominated *labor market* and *ressentiment* approaches to the European right (for example, Schain 1996). The fall 2005 and 2007 riots in the *banlieues* of Paris demonstrate that increased numbers of unemployed and disenfranchised second and third generation immigrants are genuinely problematic (Mucchielli 2009). Xenophobia is a contingent, not a necessary, response to the social problems that immigrants pose. *Labor market* theories establish a correlation between the presence of the right and unemployment. They fail to account for why a hyper-nationalist movement should be the outcome of the fear of unemployment. Widespread unemployment could as easily trigger a re-invigorated European left as an emergent European right.

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<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Holmes (2000) argues that the “fast capitalism” of globalization, has given rise to right wing impulses across the European continent.

Cultural approaches draw inspiration from Inglehardt's (1977) concept of "post-materialist values" and *New Social Movements* theory. These theories describe the right as protest parties and movements with anti-system goals that are not easily identified as left or right (for example, Kriesi 1999). Cultural theories sometimes echo mass society theory from the 1940s as they focus on persons who due to the dislocation of advanced capitalism become anomic and feel an attraction for political parties and movements that offer certainty.

*Organization* and *agenda setting* approaches, based on different forms of means/end rationality, are formal theories that fail to capture the content of politics as they are equally applicable to left, right or center parties. *Labor market* and *ressentiment* approaches identify correlations among social phenomena but fall short of explaining the social mechanisms behind those correlations. Post-materialism describes the instability of political preferences but does not account for left/right variation or account well for extreme nationalism.

#### Legacies That Matter: Situating the Right in the New Europe

*Legacy* theories that suggest that the past will repeat itself are empirically weak as contemporary right parties and movements do not map neatly onto inter-war right parties and movements.<sup>10</sup> Yet, legacies do have analytic power if properly deployed. A robust account of the *normalization of the right* requires a historical approach—meaning an account that situates the right in broad patterns of social, economic and political change.

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<sup>10</sup> Art's (2006) study of how German and Austrian politicians used national memory to influence public debate displays a sophisticated use of legacy theory. Analysts tend to invoke legacy only to dismiss it (Capoccia 2005, pp. 83-107).

The legacy that matters is not whether a country had a fascist party or regime in the past-- but the legacy of the particular national iteration of the relation between people and polity. The institutional matrix that embeds a people in a national polity includes the legal system, the structure of the welfare state, citizenship pre-requisites, education, the labor market and even the location of religion. Institutional configurations vary from nation state to nation state across the European continent. They share an important similarity. European nation-states in the post-war period were secure states in that the relation between people and polity although different across Europe was stable within national states (Eichengreen 2007).

The social science literature on the contemporary European right is party centric and assumes deep party commitment. Analysts focus on variables, defined either as actor preferences or structural factors, and pay less attention to national and international context. For this reason, the social science literature only partially illuminates the transient commitments that drove the right in the 1990s and does not account well for the current *normalization of the right*.

*Illiberal Politics in Neoliberal Times* (Berezin 2009) located the emergence of right populism in the accelerated process of Europeanization that included political, economic and cultural integration and failed to account for the conflict between culture and institutional re-alignment. Market liberalism—the Archimedean principle of the new European project—challenged the social safety nets that had been firmly put in place during the postwar period. This social and political fact lay behind the cultural strife and broad based national yearnings that are emerging across contemporary Europe. If right populism was simply a response to economic liberalization in various national states,

then Europeanization should have provided an opening to the left. The opposite has occurred. The traditional European left has weakened in the years since 1992.<sup>11</sup>

Theories that overlook the historical legacy of post-war trans-European security miss the relation between Europeanization and the right of the 1990s. If analysts fail to grasp this prior relation, the current normalization of the right appears puzzling. Yet, the normalization process is as an extension of what had preceded it in the period between 1990 and the current financial crisis.

Right populism, its more respectable cousin national affirmation, and European integration gained momentum during the 1990s--a temporal coincidence that matters. The accelerated pace of European integration dis-equilibrated the existing mix of national cultures and legal norms that governed nation states. An unintended consequence of dis-equilibration was the weakening of the national social contracts that threatened to make the national space unfamiliar to many of its citizens. Unfamiliarity has practical consequences as it produces a feeling and fact of insecurity. Right populist parties and movements, a label of classificatory convenience rather than strict analytic precision, as these parties and movements have as many differences as commonalities, thrived in the European climate of insecurity. Until the beginning of the European financial crisis, the right was singularly effective in bringing the emotion of fear to the foreground of political discourse.

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<sup>11</sup> This perception a standard feature of journalist's accounts such as Steven Erlanger "Europe's Socialists Suffering Even in Downturn," September 29, 2009, (*NYTimes.com*, accessed 9/29/2009) is working its way into academic literature. See for example, the essays in Cronin, Ross and Shach (2011); Bowyer and Vail (2011); Mudge (2011).

France and the National Front: A Paradigmatic Case of the Normalization *of the Right*

## Winning the Battle of Ideas

The political trajectory of the French National Front provides insight to the current ethnocentric turn in European politics and political rhetoric. In the years between 1997 and 2007 the period during which the National Front appeared to be a political threat, its political positions and those of its leader, Jean Marie Le Pen often intersected with public opinion and mainstream policy. Events of that period provide context for current French attitudes towards Islam, national identity, and globalization. They also suggest a model of how social scientists might view other national iterations of similar processes.

In the early 1980s, while the French media establishment was vociferously criticizing Le Pen for his anti-immigration positions, the French state was quietly designing laws that restricted immigration. The right publicized the issue of immigration, but the policy practices in France, and in European states more generally, around immigration did not map onto whether a government was left or right. In June 1993, the French state revised the French Code of Nationality to rescind automatic citizenship for the French-born children of immigrants and to require new citizens to assimilate to French culture (Weil 2002). In March 1998, Jean-Marie Le Pen's *National Front* shocked the French public and political establishment when it gained 15% of the votes in the French regional elections (Perrineau and Reynie 1999).

A year later, the National Front split in two and analysts predicted the end of the party. The downward trajectory only applied to the National Front's electoral possibilities—not to its ideas which were gaining wide acceptance. The National Front's

issues were becoming increasingly French issues even though the party appeared to decline. Europeanization as an iteration of globalization, which Le Pen labeled as the “new slavery of today” became a particularly salient French issue during this period.

The first round of the 2002 French presidential elections temporarily revived Le Pen who came in second place with 16.86% of the vote. His presence on the ballot shocked the nation and returned Jacques Chirac, the sitting president, to office with 82% of the vote. In 2002, just about everyone who took note of such things in France, the media, the political science community, and the candidates themselves, failed to observe that Le Pen’s ideas if not his person had been gaining strength—particularly his attacks on Europeanization, globalization and his defense of social solidarity and increased public security. April 21, 2002 displayed that Le Pen’s ideas and problems were French issues, not National Front issues—so that ordinary citizens, and not only cadres of party militants, voted for him in the first round of the Presidential election.

French fears and anxieties around the issues of Europeanization and globalization that Le Pen had articulated reached their climactic moment when French citizens rejected the European constitution on May 29, 2005. Between the 2002 and the 2007 Presidential election, Le Pen’s ideas on crime, immigration and national identity as well as Europe became a normal component of French public discussion. In 2003, Nicolas Sarkozy who was then Minister of the Interior pushed an internal security law through the National Assembly that vastly increased the powers of the French police. During the 2005 riots in the poor suburbs on the outskirts of Paris, Sarkozy enforced his tough image when he called the rioters “thugs” and threatened to “clean the neighborhoods with a Karcher” (a high speed German water hose). In fall 2003, the Stassi Commission convened and

recommended the banning of religious symbols in public--for all practical purposes this meant the Islamic headscarf.

Sarkozy continued to capitalize on Le Pen's narrative in his 2007 presidential campaign. On April 22, 2007, Jean-Marie Le Pen received only 11% of the vote in the first round of the Presidential election. This was the lowest score that he had received since he first ran for President in 1974. Once again, Le Pen and the National Front's political efficacy seemed to have evaporated. Le Pen's issues, globalization, Europe and the need to develop viable policies that integrate second and sometimes third generation immigrants into French society did not disappear. As Le Pen proclaimed on the evening of his defeat, "We have won the battle of ideas: nation and patriotism, immigration and insecurity were put at the heart of the campaign of my adversaries..." In the French case, the ramifications of European integration moved the right's issues into the mainstream of French politics and diminished the political capacity of the extreme right.

#### Looking towards 2012: A Post-Crisis Presidential Election

In June 2007, as newly elected President of France, Sarkozy went to Brussels to renegotiate the European Constitution which his party had supported in 2005. Upon his return to France, Sarkozy proclaimed that he had succeeded in eliminating a clause in the new treaty that supported "free and undistorted competition" and that this signaled "the end of competition as an ideology and dogma."<sup>12</sup> Sarkozy's comments uttered from political expediency rather than conviction reflected the ambivalence towards Europe and globalization that characterizes all segments of French society.

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<sup>12</sup> "The Sarko Show," *The Economist* (London) June 30, 2007, p. 59.



In anticipation of his presidency of the EU in the second half of 2008, Sarkozy commissioned Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, a lawyer specializing in international mergers and acquisitions, to draw up a plan that would “convey our vision of a Europe that is capable of combining economic growth, innovation and a high level of social protection.”<sup>13</sup>

Cohen-Tanugi (2008) produced *Euromonde 2015: Une stratégie européenne pour la mondialisation* [*Euroworld 2015 : A European Strategy for Globalization*] that included a survey on “Perceptions of Globalization and France’s Relative Specificity.”

Respondents were asked whether they viewed globalization as a “good opportunity” or a “threat to employment and companies in (our country). Sixty four per cent of the French respondents viewed globalization as a threat--the highest percentage among all of the national respondents sampled. French attitudes have shifted little. In a recent survey (Fondapol 2011) on *European Sentiment Among the French (Le sentiment européen chez les Français)*, 52 per cent of respondents viewed “globalization as a menace.” In the same poll, 62 percent of respondents associated “unemployment” with Europe as opposed to 40 per cent that associated “prosperity” with Europe.

The 2007 Presidential election was the high point of Sarkozy’s popularity in France. Support for his presidency among French citizens began a downward slope less than four months after he took office and has never been higher than 41 per cent since 2008. In response to his growing unpopularity, Sarkozy initiated a conversation on French national identity. In a joint address to parliament and congress, Sarkozy (2009) began with the financial crisis and government response to it, but then quickly moved on to France’s favorite *bête noire*—globalization. He was soon peppering the speech with

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<sup>13</sup> See Cohen-Tanugi, (2008) p. 205.

phrases such as “our common values,” “our common heritage,” and eventually arrived at the importance of upholding *laïcité*—the French iteration of the separation of Church and State. The national identity debate did not appreciably effect Sarkozy’s approval ratings and unleashed a barrage of criticism from the left.<sup>14</sup> Critics from the left and within his own party accused Sarkozy of fanning the flames of cultural conflict and of providing an opportunity for the National Front to re-emerge as a force in French politics.<sup>15</sup>

In preparation for spring 2010 regional elections, the National Front launched a “No to Islamification!” campaign that echoed the government discussion. The Socialist Party was the big winner in the regional elections, but the National Front did better than expected. In the second round, the Socialist Party came in first with 49% of the vote and Sarkozy’s UMP party came in second with 33% of the vote. The National Front came in 3<sup>rd</sup> with 9% of the vote. The Socialist Party’s position was somewhat weaker than its numbers suggested because its vote combined Socialists and Europe Écologie—a coalition of Greens and environmentalists. The National Front’s position somewhat stronger than its numbers suggested.

In 2010, national identity was not the foremost preoccupation among the French. According to a *TNS Sofres* (2011b) poll (see Table 1) that mapped the concerns of the French in 2010, 74 per cent of the respondents listed “unemployment” as their principal worry. The figure remains constant even when the data is disaggregated for gender and age. The second concern was “retirement” and the third was “health.” Gender and Age

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<sup>14</sup> Sarkozy’s popularity experienced a small up tick in April 2011 due to his support of Libya.

<sup>15</sup> A variety of public opinion polls converge on the point that Sarkozy’s national identity campaigns coupled with his attack on the Roma further weakened him politically (Eric Nunes, “Ce que Nicolas Sarkozy a fait du discours de Grenoble,” *Le Monde* (Paris) 7 July 2011 (*LeMonde.fr*, accessed 8 August 2011)).

does affect what comes in second and third place with women placing health ahead of retirement and men placing “buying power”. From age 18 to 34, “buying power,” “school” and the “environment” figure in the list. Among those aged 35 and older, “health” and “retirement” remain in second or third place depending up birth cohort. In July 2011, the Ministry of Labor announced that unemployment in France had reached a high of 9.5%.<sup>16</sup> The French Socialist Party as well as the National Front immediately and publicly blamed Sarkozy’s failed policies for the rise in unemployment.

The unemployment statistics suggest that Sarkozy miscalculated the current priorities of the French (TNS Sofres 2011c). In addition to the unemployment rate, Sarkozy’s role in negotiating the European sovereign debt crisis combined with his long standing association with European Union politics and globalization contribute to his weakening political position. In the five years between the 2002 and 2007 Presidential election, national, European and global events turned in directions that moved the National Front’s positions closer, than they had been in the past, to mainstream public opinion and official politics. While this benefited Sarkozy in 2007, it is not so clear who will be the beneficiary in the 2012 French Presidential election.

#### Marine Le Pen: Seizing the Economic Moment

In January 2011, the French National Front elected Marine Le Pen to replace Jean-Marie Le Pen as head of the party. A lawyer who has held several local elected offices, Marine Le Pen is articulate and a frequent commentator on French national

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<sup>16</sup> Samuel Laurent, “Chômage: cinq ans d’annonces, cinq ans d’insuccès,” *Le Monde* (Paris) 28 July 2011 (*LeMonde.fr*, accessed 28 July 2011).

television. In December 2010, she set off a fury in the French and international media when she claimed that Muslims who knelt to say their daily prayers on the street in certain neighborhoods of Paris evoked a “state of occupation.” The word “occupation” used in the political sphere always suggests the German occupation of France during World War II. The press and public officials widely accused Marine Le Pen of comparing French Muslims to Nazis. Accusations aside, Marine Le Pen and the National Front will be a force in the 2012 Presidential elections. Her goal is to make the National Front sufficiently respectable so as to attain national, rather than simply local, offices. She made this objective clear in her investiture speech: “Dear friends, this is the moment that will date the irresistible rise towards power of our movement. From this Congress [forward] will begin an unprecedented effort to transform the National Front.”<sup>17</sup>

Marine Le Pen’s investiture speech focused squarely on economic issues. She argued that “the Europe of Brussels . . . by-passes or goes against the will of the people” and unleashes the “destructive principles of ultra-liberalism and free exchange” that has made France’s economic growth the worst that it has been in twenty years seem less extreme given current economic realities. Instead of more Europe, Le Pen advocates “economic patriotism and social patrimony.” She poses a 2012 “grand alternative” and not the “monitoring and patching of a system that is collapsing before our eyes.” Instead, she argues, “For the French, the choice in 2012 will be simple, clear and even binary: the choice will be globalization that is de-regulation, alignment with the lowest social bidder, demographic submersion, the dilution of the values of our civilization. . . [or] the choice will be the Nation.”

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<sup>17</sup> All citations to this speech given January 16, 2011 are from <http://www.frontnational.com/?p=6295#more-6295>.

Current European financial realities lend cogency to Marine Le Pen's economic ideas. Even politicians on the left acknowledge that "economic protectionism" is popular among the French and the *euro* is not.<sup>18</sup> On March 10, 2011, Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy outlined a "Euro pact," quickly re-titled from the "competitiveness pact," which was one of their proposed long term solutions to the European debt crisis. Marine Le Pen responded to their proposal immediately on her web site. She advocated replacing the "Euro pact" with the "Peoples' Pact." She argued that her proposal has two "simple objectives:" first, "the people and social politics should not be sacrificed on the altar of the *euro*;" and second, that the economy would be re-launched with an effective monetary policy—which for Le Pen means leaving the EMU. The "Euro pact" that Merkel and Sarkozy proposed in February advocated the abolition of wage indexation and the adjustment of the pension system to account for demography. In another political world, it would be the classic left, and not the classic right, that would be arguing against this pact.

As of yet, no analyst or politician, and perhaps not even Marine Le Pen herself, believes that France can exit the *eurozone* and revert to the *franc*, the political resonance of her arguments are apparent. In April 2011, the National Front posted its "economic project" on its Web page.<sup>19</sup> Its core proposal is "free money" in face of the "failure of the euro." The document begins by invoking Martin Feldstein, Harvard Economics Professor who as early as 1999 described the *euro* as a "risk." The National Front ascribes many economic ills to the *euro* from unemployment, to national debt, to

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<sup>18</sup> Antoine Schwartz, « Le gauche française bute sur l'Europe. » *Le Monde Diplomatique* June 2011, no.667, p.1

<sup>19</sup> Front National, *Project Économique du Front National: Les grandes orientations* (avril 2011).

declining purchasing power. It argues that Sarkozy's decision to save the *euro* "at all costs" is ideological and represents nothing more than "social rampage." In contrast, the National Front's position on the *euro* is "pragmatic" and requires a "gradual exit" from the European Monetary Union (EMU).

On July 21, 2011, Sarkozy went to Brussels for a European summit and entered into a pact to save the *euro*. This meant a second bailout for Greece. Upon his return, Sarkozy wrote a public letter to members of the French Parliament to explain his decision.<sup>20</sup> He reminds French deputies and citizens that European Union was born out of the wars and disasters of "Old Europe" and that France as a founding member of Europe should view Europe as one of its children. Sarkozy argues that he is certain that the Europe that will emerge from the financial crisis will carry on, "the dream of those who after surviving the totalitarian nightmare of the last century wanted to leave us [the French] a heritage of peace and prosperity." Sarkozy argues that bailing out Greece represents "our common responsibility in the face of History." Marine Le Pen denounced Sarkozy's letter immediately on the National Front Web site.

The current National Front party slogan is "With Marine, it is the moment." Sarkozy's personal unpopularity, his association with the European bail outs and neo-liberalism coupled with the vagueness of the French left have provided Marine Le Pen and the National Front with a political opening. But this is an excessively parsimonious explanation of a broader and deeper political and social phenomenon. The fault lines that make Marine Le Pen a viable political candidate were present in 2005 when French citizens voted "no" on the European constitutional referendum (Berezin 2006). The

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<sup>20</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, « La lettre de Sarkozy aux parlementaires. » *Le Monde* (Paris) 26 July 2011 (Accessed *LeMonde.fr* July 27, 2011).

significance of the 2005 referendum was not lost on Marine Le Pen who commemorated the fifth anniversary of the referendum on her Web site in a post, entitled “The Spirit of 29 May.” Sarkozy and his party the UMP were not celebrating nor was any other French political party. Commemoration was a savvy political move on Le Pen’s part. In May 2010, the bailout of Greece was front and foremost in the public mind. At that moment, the 2005 “no” vote on the European constitution could hardly have seemed like a bad idea.

#### Financial Crisis and Austerity across the French Political Spectrum

In 1985, Socialist Prime Minister, Laurent Fabius made the frequently cited remark, “M. [Jean-Marie] Le Pen raises real problems, but gives bad answers.” The polling firm *TNS Sofres* regularly tests public opinion on the National Front. A recent poll (TNS Sofres 2011a) reveals several trends that are favorable to the National Front. The poll results suggest that the valence between the “real problems” and “bad answers” is shifting. Between January 2010 and 2011, there was an upward trend in agreement on several classic dispositions of the right. Among these were: the defense of traditional values, the presence of too many immigrants in France, the fact that Islam was given too many rights in France, that the police did not have enough power.

When respondents were asked if they agreed with the National Front’s social criticisms but not the solutions that they proposed, 32% of the sample agreed while 55% supported neither their criticisms nor their solutions (TNS Sofres 2011a, Table 2). The more disturbing figure is emerges when the polling sample is disaggregated. Among “right sympathizers” the figures are 45% in agreement and this figure jumps to 48%

among members of Sarkozy's Party, the UMP. Public perception of Marine Le Pen follows a similar trajectory (TNS Sofres 2011a, Table 3). When asked if she is a "patriot of the right attached to traditional values" as opposed to an "extremist nationalist xenophobe," 37% of entire sample viewed her as a "patriot." When the sample is disaggregated, the figures change in ways that favor her: 56% of the right and 46% of the UMP see her as a "patriot."

Even a cursory perusal of the National Front's web site reveals that the majority of their recent political tracts and posters emphasize economic issues. A sampling of poster and brochure titles demonstrate this point: "France in Permanent Insecurity!" "With Sarkozy, it is a new tax every month !;" "Euro: the Winning Countries are those that Leave." A flyer entitled "Financial Crisis: The French Victims of Globalization!" attributes increased unemployment, precarious employment, housing shortages, increased national debt and the tightening of credit to Sarkozy's failure to abandon the "ideological straightjacket" of globalization. The 2012 Presidential election is the first major French election since the financial crisis and the sovereign debt crisis. Marine Le Pen is seizing the economic moment. The National Front has shifted the focus of its public discourse from cultural issues to economic issues just as national leaders discuss multiculturalism while negotiating trans-European austerity measures.

During the first day of the October 2010 strikes to protest the raising of the retirement age, the French Socialist Party organized a grand march through the center of Paris. The official party organizers gave out stickers with sayings such as "retirement is life, not survival" and "60 years is freedom." Plastered on street posts throughout central Paris was a poster that a group called the *New Anticapitalist Party* designed and



distributed. The poster displayed a picture of Sarkozy and François Hollande, the Socialist Party candidate for President, on a 500 euro note. Referring to the politicians and the bank note, the poster proclaimed in bold letters “GET OUT! (Dehors): Because they are worth nothing.” While many political analysts speak of an electoral alliance among parties of the right, Marine Le Pen’s moment may include co-opting fringe parties of the left. The National Front has always been popular among the French working classes (Viard 1997). Marine Le Pen is increasingly the preferred presidential candidate among French workers who feel abandoned by the Socialists and the center right.<sup>21</sup> While it is unlikely that Marine Le Pen would actually win a French Presidential election, analysts are beginning to think about a repeat of 2002 when her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen came in second place to Jacques Chirac in the first round.<sup>22</sup>

#### Timing Matters: France in the European Context

Animus towards Europe became a National Front issue in the late 1990s. The vote to reject the European constitution in 2005 made it apparent that antipathy towards Europe at worst, or ambivalence at best, was widespread among the French. The European sovereign debt crisis confirmed that anti-Europe sentiment was more wide spread than public opinion polls suggest (Berezin 2011). When national leaders asked European citizens to support bail outs of financially troubled eurozone members,

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<sup>21</sup> Alexandre Piquard, “Marine Le Pen, candidate préférée des ouvriers,” *Le Monde* (Paris), 4 April, 2011 (*LeMonde.fr*, accessed April 24, 2011)

<sup>22</sup> Françoise Fressoz and Thomas Wider, “Pour la présidentielle, ‘un scénario de type 2002 ne peut être exclu,’” *Le Monde* (Paris), 2 November 2011 (*LeMonde.fr*, accessed November 2, 2011)

collective popular resistance emerged. Euro-enthusiasm was restricted to the governing elite—and even the elite are far from united in this project. The first stage of the European crisis occurred in March 2009 when Hungary seemed on the verge of financial collapse. Politicians discussed the resistance to bailing out Hungary as an issue of national “protectionism.” The more severe and ongoing debt crisis began in May 2010 when Spain, Ireland and Portugal followed in Greece’s footsteps. Angela Merkel with the support of German public opinion balked at bailing out less solvent European Monetary Union [EMU] members. PIGS was the unfortunate acronym used to describe Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain—all of which were getting dangerously close to state bankruptcy.

The European sovereign debt crisis fanned the flames of cultural conflict because it legitimizes nationalism by making it appear as a rational response to potential economic disaster. The spring 2009 European Parliament election was an important harbinger of political direction. The center-right dominated; the left did extremely poorly; and far right politicians won seats. It is not only the extreme right that is questioning a commitment to a neo-liberal Europe and urging a retreat to the nation. Between July 2009 and April 2011, there were 14 Parliamentary elections and 1 Presidential election in European Monetary Union [EMU] member nations.<sup>23</sup> There were identifiable trends in the results across Europe. First, voters tended to desert parties that had previously led in voting. For example in Ireland, the Fine Gael overturned the dominance of the Fianna Fail a longstanding conservative party. The left performed

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<sup>23</sup> The data for this section come from the following web sites:

[http://www.nsd.uib.no/european\\_election\\_database/country/france/presidential\\_elections.html](http://www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database/country/france/presidential_elections.html)

and <http://www.parties-and-elections.de/>

better in countries that had required bailouts and austerity measures and which had been sites of mass protest such as Greece and Portugal. The trends present in these elections suggest that France is not alone in its retreat to national identity and the presence of a revitalized right. The two salient features of European elections since the spring of 2009 have been first, their tendency to overthrow parties that had been in power for some time, and second, the electoral gains of a nationalist right.

On June 9, 2010 Geert Wilder's Party of Freedom came in third place in the Dutch parliamentary elections. Much of Wilder's agenda focuses upon free market liberalism—as long as it remains Dutch and not European. Wilders and his party are now minority partners in the current Dutch coalition government. Four days after the Dutch election, a Flemish nationalist party that wanted to secede from French speaking Belgium captured the largest portion of the votes in a parliamentary election. On September 19, 2010 a Swedish right populist party, the Swedish Democrats, received 5.7% of the vote which made the party eligible for a seat in the Congress. The party's leader, the 31 year old, Jimmie Åkesson is now a member of the Swedish Parliament. The Swedish Democrats decorated their campaign mailings with blue and yellow flowers—the colors of the Swedish flag. "Safety and Tradition" was their motto. "Give us Sweden back!" was their *cri de coeur*.

The Finnish election of April 2011 is perhaps the most startling as a nationalist right replaced an entrenched socialist party.<sup>24</sup> The populist party True Finns received 19% of the vote in the Parliamentary Election. This percentage provides a sharp contrast to the 4.1% that they received in the 2007 Parliamentary election. In 2011, the True

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<sup>24</sup> Arter (2010; 2011) describes this party and election in the context of Finnish electoral politics.

Finns received the same percentage of votes as the Social Democrats (19%) and a percentage point less than the Liberal Conservatives (20%). Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* on May 9, 2011, Timo Soini, head of the True Finns, explains why he does not support bailing out Europe.<sup>25</sup> He writes, “At the risk of being accused of populism, we’ll begin with the obvious: it is not the little guy who benefits. He is being milked and lied to in order to keep the insolvent system running.....I was raised to know that genocidal war must never again be visited on our continent and I came to understand the values and principles that originally motivated the establishment of what became the European Union. This Europe, this vision, was one that offered the people of Finland and all of Europe the gift of peace founded on democracy, freedom and justice. This is a Europe worth having, so it is with great distress that I see this project being put in jeopardy by a political elite who would sacrifice the interests of Europe’s ordinary people in order to protect certain corporate interests.”

#### The Political Power of Exogenous Events: Scarcity and Insecurity

Since the Maastricht Treaty became operational in 1992, two visions of Europe have dominated social science analysis, European policy initiatives and public discussion. The first vision is primarily institutional. It argues that Europe and its expansion to include ever more countries is a technical solution to competition from global markets.<sup>26</sup> In practice, this vision captures the neo-liberal dimension of the European project. The

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<sup>25</sup> “Why I Don’t Support Europe’s Bailouts,” *The Wall Street Journal* (New York) May 9, 2011 (*WSJ.com*, Accessed August 4, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Moravcsik (2005; 2006) is a leading proponent of this position.

second vision is primarily cultural. It focuses upon the creation of a European identity.<sup>27</sup> Public opinion polls such as *Eurobarometer* continually attempt to measure European identity. Much empirical research has suggested that ordinary Europeans tend to think in national rather than European terms (for example, Diez-Medrano 2003; Fligstein 2008; Favell 2008).

The European sovereign debt crisis and the European public's response to it challenges both visions of Europe. If the European project were simply a better set of institutional arrangements, then the bailouts of member nations would not be problematic. If citizens of European Union member states identified as European, then one would expect a willingness to bail out fellow Europeans in financial difficulty. But as this chapter has argued just the opposite has occurred. Even in nation-states that formally agreed to the bailouts such as Finland, nationalist opposition is strong. National attachment and sentiment has never been absent from European public opinion. Analysts and policy makers chose not to emphasize it or to argue that it was not consequential. Nationalist sentiment was behind the widespread resistance to a European Constitution. In contrast to national elections, voter turnout for European Parliament elections is historically low and declines every election period.

European Union, as conceived in the early 1990s, was a project of plenty---more nations, more people, more money, more regulations---not a project of scarcity. This current global crisis, especially in European iterations, is a crisis of scarcity and contraction. The potential consequences of scarcity are multiple but they highlight one of the central contradictions in the European project as it expanded in the last twenty years

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<sup>27</sup> The essays in Checkel and Katzenstein (2009) introduce this topic which has been over-theorized and under-empiricized.

that theories and practices of europeanization, globalization, post-nationalism and “new world order” ideas failed to account for.

The European right was the first to label immigrants, market liberalism and Europeanization as security threats. In the presence of plenty, the right seemed recidivist at best, racist at worse. But exogenous security shocks made it possible for even mainstream politicians to resort to language and policies that previously had been the exclusive domain of the right. The combined shocks of the 2008-2009 financial crisis and the 2010 sovereign debt crisis made it easier to argue that some nations were less virtuous than others and undeserving of financial aid. It also made it possible for the right to plausibly argue, as Marine Le Pen does in France and Timo Soini does in Finland, that Europe as a concept *and* European Union as an institution are dangerous.

The European sovereign debt crisis expedited the *normalization of the right* which had begun to gain ground in the late 1990s. It pushed mainstream politicians to the center right, as opposed to comfortably in the center. Politicians, to borrow from Mair (this volume) were “responsive” rather than “responsible.” It is difficult to imagine that the EU as a political institution will disappear. Yet, its future trajectory, particularly monetary union, is uncertain. Instead of the optimistic dream of a multicultural, united Europe, we can expect nostalgia politics and cultural conflict coupled improbably with free market enthusiasm. If the familiar sources of social, economic and cultural security not only seem, but actually become tenuous, fear and pessimism will become dominant political emotions. A collective sense of insecurity weakens the social largesse and empathy that lie at the core of democratic sentiment and normalizes ideas that many

Europeans previously viewed as unacceptable and right wing. How that will play out politically remains to be seen.

## Tables

Table 1: Preoccupations of the French 2010-Rank Order

	All	Gender		Age				
		Men	Women	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	>65
Unemployment	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Retirement	2	2	3	--	--	3	2	2
Health	3	--	2	--	--	2	3	3
Buying Power	--	3	--	--	2	--	--	--
Environment	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	--
School	--	--	--	3	3	--	--	--

Source: TNS Sofres (2011b).

Table 2: Attitudes towards the French National Front

Question: Regarding the National Front, do you agree with:

	All	Right	UMP	FN
1) <b>neither</b> their social criticism <b>nor</b> their solutions	55	34	45	16
2) their social criticism <b>and</b> their solutions	7	16	6	58
3) social criticism <b>but not</b> their solutions	32	45	48	32

Source: TNS Sofres (2011a).



Table 3: Question: How do you perceive Marine Le Pen today?

	All	Left	Right	UMP	FN
1) an extreme right xenophobe and nationalist	46	61	32	39	3
2) a patriot of the right attached to traditional values	37	28	56	46	94
3) no opinion	17	11	12	15	3

Source: TNS Sofres (2011a).

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