



Transformations in the Contemporary French Political Landscape: Between Electoral Strategies and Ideological Realignment

Crystal Cordell Paris

ABSTRACT This paper analyzes some of the key transformations in French electoral politics and political rhetoric today. Focusing on the question of the evolving Left voting bloc in the wake of globalization and both sociological and ideological evolution in the electorate on the left and right, the different electoral strategies and ideological discourses of the Left are examined. Special attention is paid to the shift in the working class vote and the tensions within the French Left today over how to restore a coherent voting bloc. On one hand, some suggest that a new, diverse Left coalition must be formed; on the other hand, some advocate a return to a popular and republican conception of the Left electorate that aims to challenge the Right and extreme Right on pivotal issues such as security and authority. Finally, some of the key notions employed in these debates are analyzed in light of alternative discourses within the Left that make reference to an ethics of care.

KEYWORDS cultural insecurity, French politics, Front National, sexual clash of civilizations, Socialist Party, working class vote

Over the past decades, much ink has been spilled over the question of to what extent the left-right divide in France is becoming unrecognizable, in part due to a convergence in left and right positions and discourses. While some data certainly suggest that there has been a weakening of the reference to left and right ideological poles among French voters (Finchelstein 2011), other evidence points to the robustness of left-right identification in France and in Western Europe generally (Mayer and Boy 1997; Brechon 2011). The answer to the question depends in part on how the question is formulated. When voters (n= 960) are asked to choose one of the following options: “To understand the positions of politicians and parties, the notions of right and left... are outdated/still valid”, 58 % choose the “outdated” option, while 35 % choose the “still valid” option (7 % non-respondents) (Les marquers 2011). While voters self-identifying with the centre and the extreme Right express preference for the “outdated” option more frequently than the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) and Left/extreme Left sympathizers, the only category of political sympathizers in which a majority of respondents consider the Left–Right divide to be “still valid” are those identifying with the Parti socialiste (PS) (Table 1).

Table 1: The relevance of the notions of Right and Left according to political orientation (in %)

Question: *With which of these two opinions do you agree the most?*

“To understand the positions of politicians and parties, the notions of right and left ...

	Sympathizers						
	French population	Left Sub-total ¹	<i>Parti socialiste</i>	<i>MoDem</i>	Right Sub-total ²	<i>UMP</i>	<i>FN</i>
...are outdated”	58	51	44	76	57	56	63
...are still valid”	35	45	50	22	39	41	31
No opinion	7	4	6	2	4	3	6

Source: Ipsos for the Fondation Jean Jaurès, August 2011

However, when voters are asked to position themselves on a left-right point scale, a large majority self-identifies with the Left or the Right. For example, in 1995, following the second round of the presidential election that saw the victory of Jacques Chirac (*Rassemblement pour la République, RPR*), 73 % of respondents in a Cevipof-Sofres poll (n= 4038, 2% non-response rate) self-identified with either the Left or the Right, with 25 % identifying with the centre (“4”), when presented with a left-right scale of 1 to 7. One might recall that between 1964 and 1995, the proportion of respondents identifying with the centre decreased (36 % in 1964), as did the proportion of non-respondents (from 10 to 2 %) (cf. Mayer and Boy 1997). In 2008, the European Values Survey (10 point scale, 47 countries, face-to-face interviews and standardized questionnaire containing about 250 questions³) yielded fairly stable results when compared with the 1995 poll: 65 % of French respondents identified as left or right, with 28 % responding “5” and 8 % not responding (n= 3071).

One might reasonably conclude that voters prefer to show themselves to be critical of, rather than validate, a potentially “outdated” classification, but they would rather not classify themselves outside of a certain representation presented as generally accepted (the question asked in the 1995 survey was: “French people are habitually classified on a scale that goes from left to right. Where would you, personally, classify yourself on this scale?”). They also have a greater tendency to *identify* themselves with the “centre” than to *vote* for centre parties.⁴

1 Extreme Left, *Parti communiste* (Communist Party), *Front de gauche* (Left Front), *Parti socialiste* (Socialist Party), *Les Verts* (The Greens).

2 *Union pour un mouvement populaire* (Union for a Popular Movement) and *Front national* (National Front).

3 Cf. http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/firmShowpage?v_page_id=9002471901798834.

4 In the 1997 parliamentary elections, the center party *Union pour la démocratie française* (UDF, founded in 1978) obtained 14.2 % of the vote; in 2002, 4.8 %. In the 2007 parliamentary elections, following François Bayrou’s strong showing in the presidential elections (18.5 % in the first round), UDF and *MoDem* (*Mouvement démocrate*, the center party founded by Bayrou in 2007) candidates won 7.6 % of the vote; in 2012 parliamentary elections, the *Centre pour la France* (*MoDem*, *Nouveau Centre* and allied parties) obtain 1.7 % of the vote, following François Bayrou’s weak showing in the presidential elections (9.1 % in the first round, behind Marine Le Pen’s 17.9 % and Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s 11.1 %).

Beyond the methodological caveats of which one must always be attentive, the present situation is nonetheless better characterized as a period of “realignment” or “recomposition” than as a period of partisan de-alignment pure and simple. No one in France has failed to notice the major shift in the sociology of the electoral landscape: blue-collar workers⁵ are considerably less loyal to the Left than in the “Glorious Thirty” period (1945–1975) and are being actively and rather successfully courted by the extreme Right. In the first round of the 2012 presidential election, Marine Le Pen captured the largest part of the *vote ouvrier*, ahead of François Hollande (PS), Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Front de gauche) (Huelin 2013). In the 2014 European election, Marine Le Pen’s Front national scored ahead of all the other parties, picking up just under 25 % of the vote and 21 additional seats (it had only three previously) in the EP⁶. As for the Departmental elections (March 2015), the Front national had a second place showing in the first round with 25.2 % of the vote, ahead of the Parti socialiste by over three points and trailing the UMP-Centre allied parties by over four points. In the December 2015 Regional elections, the extreme Right obtained nearly 28 % of the votes in the first round nationally, trailing the Right (31.7 %) by less than four points and the Left by just over six points (34 %). In the second rounds of both Departmental and Regional elections, the extreme Right was unable to turn their strong first round showing into second round victories. However, the second round results, favourable to the Right, were largely attributable to the withdrawal of Socialist candidates as part of the “Front républicain” strategy to block Front national candidates, resulting in significant vote transfers to the Right.

The Left coalition conundrum

The steady rise of the Front national has led to a certain amount of soul-searching on both Left and Right. In this article, we will focus on the Left, which, despite its many electoral victories in recent years, is quickly losing traction and is struggling to come to terms with the historic shift in its electorate, which began in earnest in the 1980s with a weakening of the loyalty of the working class to the Left⁷. As the Parti communiste weakened, the Front national strengthened, which led Pascal Perrineau to forge the term “gaucho-lepénisme”. While it is far from clear that the working-class vote can be considered as a sociologically homogenous category whose vote simply transferred over to the extreme right,⁸ it is well-established that a sizable proportion of that electorate began to identify with the extreme Right’s discourse.

This ideological shift corresponded to the resurgence of conservative values in Europe described by Piero Ignazi (1992) as a reaction against left-leaning postmaterialism, as analyzed by Ronald Inglehart (1997) toward the end of the 1970s. According to Ignazi, this shift

⁵ Together with employees, they make up roughly half of the voting age population in France.

⁶ Ahead of the UMP (20.8 %), the PS (14 %), UDI-MoDem (10 %), EELV (9 %), and Front de gauche (6.6 %).

⁷ In the 1978 parliamentary elections, 70 % of blue-collar workers voted for the Left. By the 1988 presidential election, the proportion of workers voting for the FN was above the national average.

⁸ Attention to abstention as well as the differences between precarious and non-precarious workers helps to nuance the “simple transfer” thesis. Cf. Mayer (2014).

in the “cultural and political mood” of Western publics accounts for the rise of extreme-right parties (ERPs) in numerous West European countries starting in the 1980s:

This change in beliefs and attitudes has been partially expressed in the so-called neo-conservatism (and has been partially interpreted by conservative parties). But, to a large extent, it remained underground until the recent rise of ERP's. Such an underground melting pot of attitudes and sentiments includes the emergence of new priorities and issues not treated by the established parties, disillusionment towards parties in general, a growing lack of confidence in the political system and its institutions, and a general pessimism about the future. (Ignazi 1992: 6)

The “non-materialistic” neo-conservative agenda which presented itself as an alternative to the postmaterialist Left emphasized at once a “return” to traditional moral values, patriotism, authority, law and order; supported severe limits on immigration; and employed a discourse of rejection of minorities as a source of societal destabilization and economic drain (cf. Ignazi 1992: 19).

As for the Front national, it corresponds closely to the portrait of new right-wing parties described by Ignazi: refusing to ally with traditional conservative parties in France, it presents itself as an outsider to a system dominated by a ruling elite that does not take into account the problems of the “people”. Recent evidence for this type of discourse can be found in the second-round Departmental election⁹ tracts used by local Front national candidates. In a text beside which Marine Le Pen's photo appears, voters are reminded that the French are “turning away from the parties of the system that betrayed them so many times [...] You have an occasion to turn away from political parties that have abandoned you and to place your confidence in [FN] candidates who [...] will defend you on all the essential subjects: jobs, security, taxes; quality of life, social assistance, etc.” (Ignazi 1992: 21). Hence, while employing an explicitly anti-system discourse, the Front national is far from supporting the “total dismantling of the welfare system” and thus is able to appeal to lower and working classes (cf. Ignazi 1992).

In the wake of these ideological and electoral transformations, the French Left is divided over how, and to what extent, it is necessary to recapture the working-class vote. Some on the Left are anxious to turn the page and embrace a “new coalition” composed of young people, minorities, especially those living in poor suburban areas, women (of whom many have part-time contracts, low salaries, and are single mothers), and the highly educated. As essays published in 2007 and 2011 by the left-wing think tank Terra Nova (close to the Parti socialiste) have underscored, all of these categories are favourable to the Left, with the most marked difference in voting preference existing within the minority category¹⁰: about 80 % of second generation immigrants favour the Left rather than the Right¹¹ (but low voter turnout plagues this category as well) (Jeanbard, Ferrand and Prudent 2011; cf. also Ferrand 2011). According to the proponents of this strategy, shared socioeconomic interests can no longer be the glue that holds together the new left-wing voting bloc. Rather, “cultural, progressive values” are at the heart of “tomorrow's France”: tolerance, openness, solidarity, optimism but also *offense*,

⁹ Held on March 29, 2015.

¹⁰ Statistics are hard to come by, but the minority population is estimated at about 15 % in France, compared with about 30 % in the US for example.

¹¹ A similar analysis and electoral strategy was outlined by Terra Nova in 2007.

as opposed to the worried, pessimistic, closed, nostalgic right-wing voting bloc, that is on the *defence*. At the same time, this analysis cannot ignore the continued relevance of socioeconomic factors for the new Left coalition: these same categories, joined by the unemployed (10.4 % of the working-age population in France in 2014) and supported by the educated classes, would appear to need the protection of the state to overcome barriers to socio-professional integration. They are the “outsiders” left behind by globalization and by the “insiders”, those who are all too willing to preserve their privileges at the expense of the “outsiders”.

This picture poses a problem of coherence from the point of view of the Inglehartian theory of postmaterialism which it seems to echo in part. The cultural values referred to resonate with the post-materialist values of the new social movements, concerned with improving democratic practice, promoting gender equality and human rights, protecting lifestyle and ethnic minorities and raising awareness about the environment, thus superseding concerns for mere material well-being. The difficulty in fitting the “new Left coalition” thesis into the post-materialism framework arises of course because the component parts of that coalition, with the exception of the highly educated categories, are, empirically-speaking, *not* post-materialists: unemployed, poor, working under “precarious” contracts (CDD), they are faced with very material or “materialist” challenges in their day-to-day lives.

Moreover, as the political sociology literature suggests (cf. for example Gaxie 1978; Braconnier and Dormagen 2007), voting itself is an act that often depends on a minimum level of social integration that is encouraged by a feeling of “political competence”, a decent level of income, and interaction within an active social and political network of associations, unions and parties. These are precisely the conditions that are lacking in many of the underprivileged neighbourhoods lying at the outskirts of France’s major cities. Thus the thesis underlying the Terra Nova electoral strategy seems to rest on shaky ground: can post-materialist or “progressive” values of openness and tolerance bind a disparate coalition of “outsiders” to a socialist or “republican” political vision? The limits of this analysis can be seen not only in the low levels of political involvement observed in poor urban areas or among the youth in general (here one could also point to practical difficulties encountered by students studying in a different voting district than where they are registered). They can also be seen in the symptomatic reactions expressed by adolescents in these same areas during the obligatory moment of silence in schools on January 8, 2015, declared a national day of mourning by President François Hollande, following the attacks against Charlie Hebdo and a Kosher supermarket that killed seventeen people. Here the term “offense” used in the 2011 Terra Nova report finds an echo to some extent: indeed, outsiders who feel excluded are likely to be on the offensive. What is unclear is how that attitude is compatible with values of tolerance, openness, solidarity, or sentiments of optimism. Following the January and November 2015 terrorist attacks in France, it also appeared that the difficulty of building such a coalition on the Left came not only “from below”, but also “from above”, from within the institutional party and trade union structures themselves. Just as the Parti socialiste was divided between those who were opposed to the Front national’s exclusion from the January 11, 2015 unity march in Paris and those who were favourable to it, after the November 13, 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, President Hollande’s call for “national unity” was rejected by some on the extreme Left, including the Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste, as well as by the Confédération générale du travail (CGT), one of France’s main labour unions.

The modification suggested to Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris (2003) can perhaps shed light on some of the divisions within the French population, which have become all the more evident in the wake of the rise of radical Islamism. According to Inglehart and Norris, the divide between Islamic societies and democratic, "Western" values is rooted not so much in disagreements about political values as in societal attitudes, and in particular attitudes concerning gender equality, reproductive rights, and sexual freedom. Citing data from the World Values Survey (1995–2001), the authors argue that matters concerning homosexuality, divorce, abortion and gender equality are the decisive fault line of the "sexual clash of civilizations" between Islamic and Western societies.

In France, there is certainly evidence of a sexual clash of civilizations. The controversy over measures taken by right-wing governments to ban religious symbols from public schools¹² (signed into law by President Jacques Chirac in 2004), including especially the headscarf worn by some Muslim girls and women, can be seen as a sign of such a clash. The strong opposition to the 2013 bill extending marriage and adoption to same-sex couples¹³ signed into law by socialist president François Hollande can be seen as another such sign. The divisive effect of the caricatures of Mohammed published on several occasions in *Charlie Hebdo* – some, but not all, presenting a sexual connotation – might be seen as another such sign. At the same time, it is important to recall that the opposition to "Marriage for all" was largely spearheaded by Catholic groups (cf. Raison du Cleuziou 2014). Cardinal André XXIII, the archbishop of Paris, called on Christians to mobilize and to contact their elected representatives to express their opposition to the bill. Clearly, when it came to gay marriage, a societal reform which had been announced in the platform of the candidate François Hollande, Muslims and Catholics alike found themselves aligned in a sexual clash of civilizations with Western progressivism (Devecchio 2014). Indeed, during the debate leading up to the parliamentary vote, *Charlie Hebdo* published controversial cartoons dealing with the subject, one of which is entitled "Mgr. Vingt-Trois a trois papas" (referring to Cardinal André XXIII) and portrays the trinity engaging in sodomy. The same Cardinal publicly expressed his opposition to the caricatures of Mohammed published by *Charlie Hebdo* in September 2012, recalling that in a democracy, one can have recourse to the law to ensure that freedom of expression is not abused.¹⁴ Following the January 2015 attacks, the archbishop of Paris stated: "A caricature, even of bad taste, a criticism, even gravely unjust, cannot be put on the same plane as a murder. Whatever the cost, the liberty of the press is the sign of a mature society" (cited in Guenois 2015).

Here we can see the limits of the "sexual clash of civilizations" theory. It is insufficient to distinguish between morally or sexually conservative and progressive civilizations, especially to the extent that the same "civilization" can and often does contain within it

¹² French Law no. 2004-228 of 15 March 2004 concerning, in application of the principle of *laïcité*, the wearing of symbols or clothing demonstrating religious affiliation in state primary and secondary schools.

¹³ French Law no. 2013-404 of 17 May 2013 opening marriage to same sex couples.

¹⁴ According to Cardinal André XXIII: "One cannot say anything under the guise of the liberty of expression. I think that what characterizes a democracy is that one can have recourse to legal means in order to obtain reparation." Cited in Caricatures Mahomet (2012).

both elements, as is the case of North American societies, for example, where issues such as gay rights are highly polarizing. In the end, the decisive distinction remains the political one: democratic societies and institutions where the rule of law is upheld integrate pluralism within them; they channel and mediate the sexual clash of civilizations, as they do other value clashes (state intervention vs. liberalism, strong vs. weak redistribution, authority vs. tolerance, meritocracy vs. positive discrimination, liberty vs. order, etc.) that are characteristic of all pluralist societies. States, societies, groups or networks that reject pluralism and that use violence (terrorist attacks, state-sponsored assassinations, etc.) as a means of squelching it are indeed to be distinguished qualitatively – politically – from democratic societies. At the same time, the sexual political dimension of Islamic fundamentalism has no doubt been underestimated. Political ambitions are often intertwined with cultural preferences and ideologies, and the difference between sexually egalitarian societies and sexually discriminative and segregated societies is one of the most striking cultural and political differences observable today. The mass sexual assaults perpetrated against women on the night of December 31st, 2015 in Cologne and other European cities, reminiscent of the Tahrir Square (Egypt) rapes and sexual assaults (cf. Kingsley 2013), and the divided reaction to those assaults on the Left in France and elsewhere, between strong defences of women’s rights and minimizations of the cultural dimension of the attacks,¹⁵ further highlight the importance of this question. For in this public form of sexual violence, the intended consequence of which is to exclude women from full and equal participation in the public sphere, there is a manifest crystallization of the opposition between pluralist and non-pluralist societies.

Thus it appears that the value of pluralism (which is related to but goes beyond tolerance) introduces a fracture within the coalition that some on the Left see as securing the electoral future of the French Socialist party.

Insecurity and Identity *versus* Care

The “new coalition” strategy is far from garnering unanimity on the Left, however. Indeed, it has provoked much opposition within the centre-left in particular, which has levelled against its proponents the charge of working-class abandonment. Rather than focusing on an imported form of multiculturalism based in part on the idea of reasonable accommodation (cf. Bouchard and Taylor 2008; Kymlicka 2001) that is destined to run up against French secularism, some advocate a return to the historic left electorate, the working classes, and more generally, a return to seeking out the vote of “the people” (cf. Bouvet 2012). This latter term is used to emphasize an approach that conceives of the left electorate not as limited

¹⁵ The debate between Eric Fassin, Caroline Fourest and Valérie Toranian, which aired on the Arte program “28 minutes” on January 15, 2016, is emblematic of that divided reaction. Fourest and Toranian argued for the necessity of recognizing the cultural dimension of the attacks against women both in Cairo and Cologne, while Fassin suggested that the incidents of sexual violence should be interpreted as a manifestation of class violence rather than a form of violence specifically directed against women. Retrieved January 22, 2016 (<https://nos-medias.fr/video/debat-de-gauche-sur-les-viols-de-cologne-sont-relativises-sur-arte>).

to a restrictive understanding of class while minimizing different identities characterized by particularistic demands for recognition and rights, but rather in a broad sense that goes back to the Third French Republic and encompasses the ideals of republicanism and secularism. The notion of social unity thus appears as an alternative to that of a diverse coalition. This approach can certainly be seen as an electoral strategy in its own right; polls consistently show that the most prominent concerns of the majority of French voters are economic ones, i.e. ones that define to a certain extent class interest: unemployment and purchasing power, which topped the charts in the 2013 Ipsos survey (n= 1016) “France 2013: Les nouvelles fractures”,¹⁶ with 56 % and 41 % of respondents citing them as key concerns, ahead of religious fundamentalism (17 %) and immigration (16 %) (Table 2). These results can be compared with those found in the 2011 Ipsos survey, in which 45 % and 37 % of respondents cited unemployment and purchasing power as top concerns, respectively (Table 3).

Table 2: The Preoccupations of the French (in %)

Question: *Among the following domains, which, in your opinion, are the three most preoccupying ones in France today?*

	French population	Sympathizers					
		Left Sub-total ¹⁷	<i>Front de gauche</i>	<i>Parti socialiste</i>	<i>MoDem</i>	<i>UMP</i>	<i>FN</i>
Unemployment	56	68	69	66	55	55	38
Purchasing power	41	41	54	39	46	35	40
Future of retirement pensions	27	25	26	28	21	29	25
Taxes	27	18	16	19	39	34	29
Health and the quality of care	24	33	27	37	16	18	12
Insecurity	20	8	12	8	9	26	37
Social inequalities	19	34	39	32	18	6	6
Public deficits	19	16	12	18	30	31	9
Religious extremism	17	10	10	10	20	21	29
Immigration	16	4	7	3	7	23	55
Housing	13	15	10	17	13	7	9
Educational system	9	11	7	9	14	10	4
Environment	9	15	11	11	10	4	4

Source: Ipsos/CGI Business Consulting for *Le Monde*, Fondation Jean Jaurès and Cevipof, January 2013

¹⁶ An Ipsos/CGI Business Consulting Poll for *Le Monde*, Fondation Jean Jaurès and Cevipof. January 2013. Retrieved October 13, 2014 (<http://www.ipsos.fr/decrypter-societe/2013-01-24-france-2013-nouvelles-fractures>).

¹⁷ Extreme Left, Parti communiste, Front de gauche, Parti socialiste, Les Verts.

Table 3: The most problematic domains in France – according to political orientation (in %)
 Question: *Among the following domains, which three seem to you to pose the most problems in France today?*

	French population	Sympathizers					
		Left Sub-total ¹⁸	<i>Parti socialiste</i>	<i>MoDem</i>	Right Sub-total ¹⁹	<i>UMP</i>	<i>FN</i>
Unemployment	45	48	49	47	39	43	29
Purchasing power	37	39	41	32	35	35	35
Social inequalities	31	41	43	37	20	20	23
Insecurity	24	18	19	20	33	34	30
Public deficits	21	18	18	28	25	31	9
Education	21	25	24	25	15	17	10
Retirement pensions	20	19	20	15	20	17	28
Immigration	19	10	9	16	32	25	49
Taxes	19	18	18	25	17	15	21
Health care	17	20	22	15	14	16	8
Justice system	14	13	11	8	17	13	26
Housing	13	13	11	13	12	12	13
Environment	8	10	7	6	6	6	6
Terrorism	7	4	4	4	12	12	11
No opinion	1	-	-	1	-	-	-

Source: Ipsos for the Fondation Jean Jaurès, August 2011

At the same time, the contemporary centre-left discourse (for example that employed by those close to Prime Minister Manuel Valls' political sensibility and to the movement *Gauche populaire*; cf. Baumel 2011) is not solely focused on materialism. The working-class abandonment thesis dovetails with the idea that the interests of the working class have evolved, becoming more complex as a result of globalization, and that the socialists in particular have not taken those transformations sufficiently into account. The salience of the globalization factor has of course been amply observed and analyzed within the political science literature, for example by Hanspeter Kriesi et al. in *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization* (2008).²⁰ The authors argue that globalization, of which European integration is a part, creates a new cleavage around the opposition integration–demarcation, which is then embedded into the traditional two-dimensional cleavage between pro-state protectionists and pro-market liberals (*socio-economic dimension*), between cultural progressives and cultural conservatives

¹⁸ Extreme Left, Parti communiste, Front de gauche, Parti socialiste, Les Verts.

¹⁹ Union pour un mouvement populaire and Front national.

²⁰ Cf. also Bornschier and Kriesi (2012).

(tradition, nation) (*cultural dimension*). But embedding integration–demarcation into the traditional cleavages upsets and transforms the traditional Left–Right divide: left–wing, progressive statistes are divided between anti-globalization protectionists and pro-integrationists; right-wing cultural conservatives are divided between neoliberal pro-integrationists and nationalist cultural protectionists.

Within the “Gauche populaire” movement, the notion of “cultural insecurity” is increasingly used to describe the transformations caused by globalization (cf. Bouvet 2015; Guilluy 2014). One might interpret this term as a rhetorical translation of the notion of cultural protectionism. In the same way that *cultural protectionism* is the reaction adopted by the “losers” of globalization, *cultural insecurity* is a feeling of anxiety or fear ascribed in particular to the working and lower-middle classes (the term “fragile populations” is preferred to “losers”), concerned to protect their “cultural identity”.²¹

The use of the identity–insecurity pairing is revealing. “Insecurity” is a privileged theme of the Right; its overwhelming presence in the media during the 2002 presidential campaign, and particularly in the weeks and months leading up to the first-round, is largely considered by political scientists to be one of the most salient factors explaining Jean-Marie Le Pen’s presence in the second round of that election (16.86 % in the first round, ahead of Lionel Jospin’s 16.18 %). The Front national candidates’ ideas concerning insecurity and delinquency appealed to a majority of voters in rural areas and small cities, in addition to older voters in urban areas (Mayer 2002: 514). The Left’s perceived weakness on this issue systematically results in a loss of votes, particularly within the 60+ category. Many on the centre-left do not want to concede defeat to the Right/extreme Right when it comes to insecurity.

Thus, “cultural insecurity” is a way of recasting the security issue, just as “cultural identity” is a way of recasting the theme of “national identity” brought to the fore during Nicolas Sarkozy’s presidency, at the behest of a large swath of the Left (and of the media). It also represents an alternative to the notion of “social insecurity”, developed notably by sociologist Robert Castel, which focuses on the question of poverty and the evolving status of the working classes in a corporatist welfare state (cf. Esping-Anderson 1990) that conditions many social benefits on retaining an employment contract and in which workers are made ever more vulnerable by the decline of industry and the increase in competition in the globalized economy (Castel 2005; Emmenegger et al. 2012; Häusermann and Schwander 2012). Finally, it is a way of transforming the left-wing discourse about respect for and tolerance of minority “identities” into a discourse that aspires to the traditional “republican” ideal of universalism.

If the preservation of a (single) cultural identity is the objective, it is reasonable to suppose that the notion of (state) authority is not far in the background. Indeed, the question of

²¹ Cf. the *Le Figaro* interview of Laurent Bouvet (January 12, 2015), “Only the return of politics can abate cultural insecurity”. An excerpt: “Globalisation and its multiple effects, unceasing technological changes, environmental and sanitary threats, Islamism and the terrorism that flows from it, population flows and immigration [...] create a general and multi-faceted fear; an indecipherable world that offers fewer and fewer opportunities to those who are exposed to economic and social difficulties which result from globalisation.”

authority was one of the focuses of the 2013 Ipsos poll, which suggested that a large majority of the French in general (not right-wing sympathizers only) considered that order and authority were lacking in French politics and too often criticized (Tables 4 and 5), against a backdrop of criticism of François Hollande for demonstrating insufficient authority just a few months into his presidency (Barbier, Charles-Gaffiot and Jeanbart 2012). Authority is, of course, another value that voters inevitably identify with the Right, about which we heard much during the campaign for UMP²² president in the autumn of 2014 (notably from Bruno Le Maire, who arrived in second place behind Nicolas Sarkozy, with 29.18 % of the vote), and which gave the title to Eric Ciotti's 2015 book denouncing the lack of state authority under the Hollande government (Ciotti 2015).²³

Table 4: Agreement with a series of affirmations about authority – detail (in %)

Question: *Do you agree or disagree with the following affirmation: We need a real leader in France to restore order.*

	Sympathizers						
	French population	Left Sub-total ²⁴	<i>Front de gauche</i>	<i>Parti socialiste</i>	<i>MoDem</i>	<i>UMP</i>	<i>FN</i>
Very much agree	53	29	37	26	41	79	86
Somewhat agree	34	43	37	44	43	19	11
Subtotal Agree	87	72	74	70	84	98	97
Somewhat disagree	10	18	15	20	15	2	3
Very much disagree	3	9	11	9	1	-	-
Subtotal Disagree	13	27	26	29	16	2	3

Source: Ipsos/CGI Business Consulting for *Le Monde*, Fondation Jean Jaurès and Cevipof, January 2013

However, within the more radical left wing of the *Parti socialiste*, the discourse is very far-removed from security, identity and authority. Prominent socialist politicians, positioned toward the left of the Left, like Martine Aubry and Anne Hidalgo, have developed the theme of “care”, for example. In the programme adopted in 2010 by the *Parti socialiste* ahead of the 2012 presidential elections, a programme marked by the influence of Martine Aubry in particular, the ideal of a “society of well-being”, and “care” were opposed to a society concerned with “having”. In this ideal, the state would be the guarantor of respect, care and support (cf. Blanchard, Joignot and Landrin 2010). Anne Hidalgo similarly invoked the notion of a “benevolent (*bienveillante*) city” during the 2013 municipal campaign in Paris, out

²² The party changed its name to Les Républicains in May 2015.

²³ The author is a member of parliament (Les Républicains) and president of the Departmental Council of the Alpes-Maritimes.

²⁴ Extreme Left, *Parti communiste*, *Front de gauche*, *Parti socialiste*, Les Verts.

of which she emerged victorious, emphasizing the importance of public services for families, for example.

Table 5: Agreement with a series of affirmations about authority – detail (in %)

Question: *Do you agree or disagree with the following affirmation: Authority is a value that is too often criticized today.*²⁵

	French population	Sympathizers					
		Left Sub-total ²⁵	<i>Front de gauche</i>	<i>Parti socialiste</i>	<i>MoDem</i>	<i>UMP</i>	<i>FN</i>
Very much agree	40	26	31	25	41	55	52
Somewhat agree	46	55	45	59	45	40	32
Subtotal Agree	86	81	76	84	86	95	84
Somewhat disagree	12	14	16	13	13	4	16
Very much disagree	2	5	8	3	1	1	-
Subtotal Disagree	14	19	24	16	14	5	16

Sources: Ipsos/CGI Business Consulting for *Le Monde*, Fondation Jean Jaurès and Cevipof, January 2013

The ideal of a society of care is not hostile to reasonable accommodation; it is compatible in many ways with the “new coalition” strategy, but is couched in terms that are associated with a differentialist feminine ethics (cf. for example Gilligan 1982; Ruddick 1989; Garrau and Le Goff 2010; Laugier, Molinier and Paperman 2009). According to this perspective, a specifically feminine ethics consists of anti-individualistic concern for others. Public policies are presented as “caring” rather than just, and the importance of authority and hierarchy in general is minimized in favour of collaboration and consensus. In light of the explicitly differentialist character of many theories of care, it is perhaps not surprising that female Socialist politicians in France have employed a discourse of care. At the same time, the resonance of that discourse seems to be more effective at the local level than at the national one.

To conclude, one might venture to say that, of the different discourses available to it today, it seems probable that the mainstream Left will opt for one that is capable of rivalling the Right on the issues that, given an increasingly insecure environment, at once economically, geopolitically and culturally, appear to be the most pressing: security, order and authority. However, the fundamental challenge of building not only a coherent electoral coalition on the Left, capable of uniting extreme left party sympathizers and Vallsian Socialists, but also a coherent ideological platform – concerned with protecting individual liberties and pluralism, promoting social justice and gender equality, and adopting progressive societal and environmental reforms – remains to be achieved.

²⁵ Extreme Left, Parti communiste, Front de gauche, Parti socialiste, Les Verts.

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Author

Crystal Cordell Paris is an affiliated researcher at the Centre d'études sociologiques et politiques Raymond Aron (CESPRA-EHESS Paris) and teaches at the Institut d'études politiques, Middle Eastern-Mediterranean campus. She is a specialist in political philosophy and is the author of *La philosophie politique* (Paris: Ellipses, 2013).

Contact: crystal.cordellparis@sciencespo.fr