Economic Voting and the National Front:

Towards a Subregional Understanding of the Extreme-Right

Vote in France

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ABSTRACT

Since its electoral breakthrough in the mid-1980s, the extreme-right *Front national* has been a controversial yet undeniably influential political and cultural force in France. Between the 2007 and 2012 French presidential elections, the percentage of vote share received by the party increased from 10.44% to 17.9% nationally, a record high. Despite this and other recent extreme-right victories across Europe, the literature on extreme-right voting is empirically contradictory and surprisingly limited in both breadth and scope. In order to form a more complete understanding of extreme-right voting, this paper examines the contributions of unemployment, immigration, and crime to the change in vote share received by the *Front national* between the last two presidential elections. I conduct the analysis at the subregional level of the French *département*. The analysis shows that the change in the *départemental* unemployment rate has a positive, statistically significant effect on the change in the *Front national* vote, and that this effect is even larger in areas that have high percentages of immigrants relative to the rest of the country.

I. INTRODUCTION

 This paper seeks to explain the rise in electoral support for the French extreme-right on the subregional level of the *département* between the 2007 and 2012 presidential elections. The aim of such an effort is to further and deepen the extant corpus of academic literature on extreme-right voting in recognition of a) the resurgence of the European extreme-right in recent decades and b) the ability of extreme-right parties to shape policy and the national political agenda in their favor even when not in power or coalition. While significant work has been done exploring extreme-right voting on cross-national levels, there has been relatively little work done on intranational, subregional levels, particularly in France since the 1986 electoral breakthrough of its premier extreme-right party, the *Front national* (henceforth the National Front, or "FN"). It is in this vacuum of literature that this paper steps in, employing ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis to the task of assessing what changing factors between the 2007 and 2012 presidential elections account for the increase of FN vote share expressed by the 96 *départements* of Metropolitan France (the French mainland plus Corsica). Using the change in FN electoral support as measured by the percentage of vote share received in each French *département* as the dependent variable and the change in each *département*'s unemployment rate as the primary independent variable, I will operationalize the change in *départemental* unemployment rates' effect on the dependent variable first independently and then in consideration of other control variables such as the change in the percentage of immigrants in each *département*'s *région*, the change in reported crimes in each *département*, and various interaction variables constructed in consideration of hypotheses present in the reviewed literature. Reviewing and grounding my work in the context of this literature, my

paper is ultimately valuable insofar as it contributes to an academic landscape rife with debate and contradiction, and advances the understanding of extreme-right voting on intranational, subregional levels. Ultimately, I ascertain that the change in regional unemployment has a positive, statistically significant effect on the change in the FN vote, and that the variable's effect is magnified even further by its interaction with high levels of immigration. Such a conclusion is consistent with other scholars' findings and lends qualified empirical support to Matt Golder's "materialist hypothesis," part of which asserts that unemployment increases the vote for extreme-right parties when immigration is high. My analysis aims to contribute meaningfully to one of the most interesting and increasingly topical subfields of political science, that of extreme-right voting. I proceed with a background on the National Front, a literature review, and the full presentation of my data, research design, and results, followed by my conclusion.

II. BACKGROUND

Since its founding in 1972 by the party's ideological leader and former president Jean-Marie Le Pen, the National Front has gone from receiving 0.75% of the national vote in the *primer tour* (first round) of its first presidential election in 1974 to a record 17.9% in the first round of the April 2012 presidential election, the party's most recent.[11] Now under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen's daughter Marine Le Pen, the National Front has established itself as one of Europe's flagship extreme-right parties and a force not to be trifled with in the French electoral arena.[17] How has it accomplished this? What does the party stand for? And what does the electoral success of the National Front mean for

France? To answer these questions it behooves one to examine the party before and after

1986, the culminating year of its electoral breakthrough.

Receiving such a small percentage of the vote in its first election and failing to

qualify to run in the following presidential election of 1981 due to not receiving the

recently increased minimums of mayoral support needed by an aspirant political party, the

National Front appeared positioned to languish on the periphery of French politics. Yet by

leveraging popular discontent with the economy—still suffering the protracted effects of

the previous decade's global oil crisis—and effectively shoring up support amongst its

mostly blue-collar base, the National Front "broke out" electorally between 1983 and 1986,

first achieving 10.95% of the vote and 10 seats in the 1984 elections to the Parliament of

the European Union and then 9.65% of the vote in the 1986 French legislative elections,

which placed 35 FN party members in the French National Assembly.[8a] Acting in the FN's

favor was the recent change in the French electoral system imposed by then President

François Mitterrand from a simple plurality, or "first-past-the-post" (FPTP) system to one

of party-list proportional representation. Pursuant to Duverger's law, a principle in

political science that postulates the establishment of a two-party regime in a system of

plurality voting and multipartism in a system of proportional representation, the change to

France's electoral system in 1986 removed "barriers to entry" for startup parties like the

National Front and allowed more dynamicism in the electoral space.[7, 30] While the

reinstatement of the majoritarian, two-ballot system in the 1988 legislative elections cost

the National Front 34 of its seats in the National Assembly, the party exploited its past

success, burgeoning popularity, and infighting amongst France's mainstream rightwing

parties to achieve 9.8% of the first round vote in the 1988 legislative elections (and 1 seat

in parliament) and 14.4% of the vote in the first round of the 1988 presidential election.

Since 1988 it has subsequently enjoyed electoral support in the first round of French

presidential elections in the range of a "normalized" 10% - 15%.[30]

While it has only once passed through to the second, final round of a presidential

election (in 2002 before suffering the landslide 82.2% victory of Jacques Chirac's

Rassemblement pour la République [Rally for the Republic] party), the National Front has

nevertheless become a dominant presence in French politics and society and, as its rise

between 2007 and 2012 foreshadows, looks poised to even further entrench itself therein.

Through the process of "partisan realignment," over the course of its history the National

Front has expanded from urban to rural areas, embedded itself in local politics, acquired

voters from other right-wing factions, and obligated parties on both the right and left to

adjust their policies in order to undermine the FN's ostensible monopoly on "portraying

and defining" contentious national issues like those pertaining to immigration, such as

asylum, naturalization, the rights of family unification and marriage for immigrants, and

the issuance of tourist visas.[30] As Martin Schain, a scholar of immigration and politics in

Western Europe, points out, "the electoral breakthrough of the National Front… ensured

that, in decision-making on immigration, the electoral context could not be ignored [by

other political parties]."[31] The result, he continues to explain, has been the emergence of

more restrictive policies throughout France on an abundance of these issues, including

many passed by governments on the left. In this way, the sheer presence of the FN since its

breakout in the mid-1980s has been sufficient to color the ideological agenda of the nation

and the tangible policies through which such an agenda has—and continues to be—

expressed. At various times in its history, the National Front has been able to do this with

little to no official representation in government; such is their political clout. The principle

that obtains not only in France but throughout Europe is that "fringe" parties, even when

they remain electorally as such, enjoy a gravitational pull in public and political discourse

disproportionate to their actual legislative agency. As extremist parties emerge,

consolidate, and grow, they are capable of leveraging more mainstream parties' fear of

losing voters in order to shift national policy formation closer to their preferential lines.[30]

But what are these policies, exactly? What does the National Front stand for?

Broadly, the National Front—like many other extreme-right parties in Europe—is

socially conservative, nationalist, eurosceptic, *souverainist*, economic protectionist, and

anti-immigrant.[23, 13] The party advocates a "zero tolerance" platform with respect to law

and order issues, and has been embroiled in controversy for much of its existence due to

the polemical policies it promotes and the provocative statements that continue to be

issued by party figureheads.[13a] Indeed, the FN of today is regarded as a more moderate

incarnation of the party once known for its unabashedly xenophobic, World War II

revisionist, and anti-Semitic platform—Jean-Marie Le Pen has been found guilty twice of

denying the Holocaust, first in 1991 and then in 2008.[†, 9, 16] Despite downplaying the most

inflammatory components of its rhetoric and engaging in a "a self-conscious process of

dédiabolisation (decontamination)" under the aegis of Marine Le Pen, the FN nonetheless

staunchly defended its core positions in the first round of the 2012 presidential election,

where it placed third after the ultimate victor François Hollande's *Parti socialiste* (Socialist

Party) and then-incumbent president Nicolas Sarkozy's *Union pour un mouvement*

[†] In February 2012 a Paris court upheld its 2008 ruling that Jean-Marie Le Pen was guilty of "'the contestation of crimes against humanity,'" having said in 2005 that "'in France, at least, the German Occupation wasn't particularly inhumane, even if there were some excesses—inevitable in a country of 550,000 square kilometers.'" He was fined and given a three month suspended sentence.[16]

populaire (Union for a Popular Movement).[10] Media coverage of the run-up to the election

details support being found in the FN's mantra "a France for the French," its anti-immigrant

stance in a republic where many are "fearful [of] 'foreigners'… overrunning the country and

straining France's generous social model," and its anti-European Union platform, upon

which it blames the economic and political union for the "unemployment, immigration, and

insecurity" plaguing the country.[20, 26]

Contextualizing the National Front's unprecedented electoral success has been a

larger wave of extreme-right victories breaking upon the shores of the European continent.

Propelled forth by the European Sovereign-Debt Crisis and its attendant economic woes,

European Union President Herman Van Rompuy has recently "criticized what he calls the

'winds of populism' blowing across Europe, fanned by 'extremist movements.'"[20] Indeed,

Geert Wilders' anti-immigrant and anti-Islam Dutch Freedom Party, the Austrian Freedom

Party (FPÖ) under Jörg Haider, the upstart British Freedom Party and the associated

English Defence League, the anti-immigrant and Flemish-secessionist Belgian Vlaams Blok,

the radically nationalist Hungarian Jobbik party, and Greece's ostensibly neo-Nazi Golden

Dawn party are only a handful of the influential extreme-right parties that have

commanded public and political attention in Europe in recent years and decades.[27, 32, 33, 30, 29, 28] As political scientist Pia Knigge wrote in 1998, "Right-wing extremism in Western

Europe is, of course, not a new phenomenon. For the most part of the post-World War II

era…support for extreme right-wing parties has been marginal. These parties, if existent at

all, remained largely outside the political arena. Yet, starting in the 1980s, a new pattern or

trend appeared to manifest itself in this regard. New extreme right-wing parties emerged

rather systematically throughout the major Western European countries."[17] All virulent in

rhetoric yet electorally and legislatively successful to varying degrees, these parties

nevertheless represent a clear trend in European politics and a cause for concern amongst

mainstream parties forced to respond to their contributions to the national and continental

conversation. As there exist some institutions—such as the guerrilla English Defence

League—that are not actually designed to be functioning political parties as much as

vehicles of political agency and activism, it should be noted that in contrast the French

National Front *is* an established and legitimate political party. Like many other parties

across Europe, scholars such as Matt Golder have categorized the FN as a populist extreme-

right party. Quoting Canovan (1994), Golder asserts that these parties are differentiated

from parties of the mainstream right insofar as their popularism makes them "advocates of

direct democracy [that] 'claim legitimacy on the grounds that they speak for the people:

that is to say, they claim to represent the democratic sovereign, not a sectional interest

such as an economic class.'"[12] Other characteristics agreed upon by scholars that separate

the extreme-right from the mainstream right include distinguishing factors such as

embedded notions of inequality and social hierarchy (often expressed in terms of ethnic

and cultural nationalism) and a base of support drawn mostly from the lower-, working-,

and middle-class.[3, 30] Quoting Christopher Husbands, Robert W. Jackman and Karin Volpert

(1996) specify that "'What unites all of these parties is their particular commitment to

some sort of ethnic exclusionism—a hostility to foreigners, immigrants, Third World

asylum-seekers, and similar out-groups—as well as aggressive nationalism or localism."[14]

Finally, and most crucially for this paper, extreme-right parties have and share a

willingness to work within extant political frameworks in order to achieve their goals.[30]

Parties like the National Front are neither revolutionary nor are they ephemeral, "'flash'"

parties, as Michael S. Lewis-Beck describes short-lived parties that aim to disrupt and disband, rather than participate in the political process over the long-term.[22] These last characteristics are of paramount importance because it is only within the confines of an electoral infrastructure both utilized and considered legitimate that we can thoroughly examine the factors that contributed to the rise in FN vote share between the 2007 and 2012 presidential elections, as we will do after reviewing a selection of relevant literature.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

As previously mentioned, the literature on extreme-right voting is diverse and contradictory, as well as incomplete. Diverse in terms of methodology, regional focus, and level of analysis, contradictory with respect to what it concludes upon tackling some of the most fundamental questions of the field, and incomplete in the sense that there is always more work to be done in order to clarify the aforementioned. Before introducing my own work and findings I will review and comment upon relevant literature with respect to the following:

Methodology/regional focus/level of analysis of the literature:

Although the particular strengths and weaknesses of my research design will be described in more detail in Section V, it is worth stating at this juncture that no scholars in the reviewed literature structured their work as I structured mine: as a "first differences regression" on an intranational, subregional level, which is to say as a model designed to detect meaningful relationships between the *changes* in the dependent and independent variables over time. Instead, utilizing a variety of research designs on cross-national,

subregional, and individual (survey) levels, authors explored the effects of economic factors like unemployment and inflation rates, social factors like the presence of immigrants, and political factors like electoral district magnitude and people's satisfaction with the current political regime on support for extreme-right parties. All work in the reviewed literature deals exclusively across and within the countries of Europe, and all results are the products of the each author's unique analytical models, data, and set of assumptions. Therefore, while a literature review is useful in contextualizing the work of this paper, the reader should keep in mind the aforementioned qualifications and recognize that the literature on extreme-right voting in Europe is, like all academic work, neither complete nor definitively conclusive.

Theoretical backgrounds and results of the literature:

When analyzing the effects of economic factors on extreme-right voting, most scholars working on any level of aggregate data choose at least the unemployment rate as an operationalizable variable. In "The ecological correlates of right-wing extremism in Western Europe" (1998), Pia Knigge employs a pooled time-series cross-sectional research design across six Western European countries between 1984 and 1993 in order to examine "the relative strength of three popular explanations of contemporary right-wing extremism: the impact of economic conditions (unemployment and inflation), social developments (immigration), and political trends (public's dissatisfaction with the political regime)." Using "latent public support for parties of the extreme-right rather than actual electoral outcomes" (i.e. intention to vote for an extreme-right party) as her dependent variable, Knigge finds that "rising levels of immigration and public dissatisfaction with the

political regime significantly facilitate right-wing extremism" and that, "contrary to the initial hypothesis…results suggest that a declining national economy (unemployment in particular) diminishes the electoral appeal of extreme right-wing parties." Basing her hypothesis that "as economic conditions worsen, Western European citizens are more likely to lend their support to extreme right-wing parties" on the work of Lewis-Beck (1988) and Powell and Whitten (1993), Knigge assumes that if conditions of "stable prices and low unemployment" are met, the incumbent party or candidate is rewarded. If they are not, voters instead support the opposition, embodied by "extreme-right parties in Western Europe…[that] have been excluded from participation in government—at least for the time frame considered in the present case (i.e., 1984—1993)."[17]

For Knigge, a vote for the extreme-right (or, specifically, the intention to support the extreme-right) is an act of "protest" against mainstream parties seen to have mismanaged the economy. A question can be raised here, however: would an incumbent extreme-right party face the same threat of getting voted out when the economy is underperforming? While not answered directly, both Knigge and Marcel Lubbers, writing in "Extreme-right voting in Western Europe" (2002), suggest that voters treat extreme-right parties differently than mainstream parties insofar as extreme-right parties are viewed as representative of an *institutionalized* opposition, and not just a nominal one. Going on and drawing upon theories of economic interests covered in Blalock (1967) and Olzak (1992), Lubbers writes that "in countries where competition for scarce resources intensifies due to worsening economic conditions or an increasing number of immigrants, social groups are more likely to perceive stronger competition over these scarce resources. Because people are not very likely to blame their own group (in-group) for these increasingly competitive

circumstances… they blame others (i.e., out-groups)." It is precisely this notion of blaming

"out-groups"—which immigrants compose and are placed into—that forms the basis of

extreme-right party platforms, leading Lubbers to encapsulate such sentiment in the dual

hypothesis that "*In countries where the unemployment level is higher and the number of

immigrants is larger, support for extreme right-wing parties is greater*."[24] Lubbers expands

upon this logic in another 2002 paper, "French *Front National* voting: a micro and macro

perspective," where he writes that, on the basis of "Realistic Conflict Theory," "manual

workers are more likely to vote for the Front National because manual workers may

perceive a stronger competitive threat from ethnic minorities than other occupational

categories, as immigrants first and foremost operate in the same labor market segment as

manual workers do (Thave 2000)." Here, being—or simply perceiving to be—threatened

by an [ethnically distinct] "other" is reason to support the extreme-right, the party that

categorically blames national out-groups for a country's woes, and thus Lubbers once again

ultimately hypothesizes that "as the unemployment level is an indicator of the economic

situation in a region (Olzak 1992), we expect again that *in regions where the unemployment

level is higher…or where unemployment increases strongly…people are more likely to vote for

the Front National*." Going on to analyze both individual level and "contextual" (i.e. regional

on the level of the *département*) predictors of National Front voting, Lubbers supports

Knigge in finding "no direct effect of unemployment" on the regional level, although he does

find "small indirect effects such that higher unemployment levels evoke a more

unfavorable attitude towards ethnic out-groups, a stronger identification with France and a

stronger authoritarian attitude, which in turn increases the likelihood of a vote for the

Front National." While also finding that "the number of ethnic immigrants does have a

direct effect [on support for the FN]" insofar as "the more immigrants [that] live in a region, the stronger the support for Le Pen," he concedes that "breaking down the regional level of analysis has sometimes led to different outcomes," and that "…when there is no control for compositional effects, [the] findings are not very valid."[25]

In "Economics and the French Voter: A Microanalysis" (1983), Michael S. Lewis-Beck reveals that an aggregate level regression model examining the effects of economic conditions on voting in legislative elections in a previous paper of his (Lewis-Beck and Bellucci [1982]) "[indicated] that increases in the unemployment rate…significantly [enhanced] the vote share of the Left." Inserting these findings into a larger discussion, he asserts that it is "not really surprising" that the unemployed should vote for the left, because such a vote might be made "on strict policy grounds…that is, voters may believe that the Left, perhaps because of its working class base, is more likely to initiate programs that will reduce unemployment." Ultimately, his 1983 work concludes that on an individual level, "the more economic malcontents there are, the more Leftist votes are expected." This is at odds, however, with the previously discussed literature that predicts an increase in vote share for the right—specifically the extreme-right—in bad economic times. Such a contradiction reveals not only the underdeveloped causal scenario within Lewis-Beck's own work (wherein he admits that, "If one thinks about it, there are many reasons why French citizens might not take their personal economic situation into account when deciding how to vote," such as if they "fail to perceive their deteriorating economic circumstance," and, even if they do, decide to blame others instead of elected officials), but also the amount of contradiction present throughout the literature on extreme-right voting.[21] What are we to make of these varying conclusions? As Matt Golder writes, "The

problem is that economic voting theories focus on how incumbent political parties are rewarded or punished for their economic performance. They do not explain why voters who wish to punish incumbent parties should vote for extreme-right parties over any other opposition party."[12] Despite the educated guesses of some scholars, Golder is correct in saying that we have no unambiguous, theoretical scenario that predicts where on the ideological party spectrum we should expect voters to turn in rejection of an incumbent party's handling of the economy.

Throughout the literature, and particularly with an eye trained on the postulated effects of the economy (through the avatar of unemployment) on extreme-right voting as we have had so far, one can observe the conflating of economic tensions with social ones such as the presence of immigrants. Indeed, recall that Lubbers put the two together in one hypothesis when he claimed that support for extreme-right parties is higher in countries with high unemployment and a high number of immigrants. Many authors concur, and overwhelmingly the literature suggests that higher immigration is associated with higher levels of support for extreme-right parties. This speaks to the fact that, in the words of Paul Hainsworth, immigration is the extreme-right's "issue *par excellence*," or the issue through which all other measures of support for extreme-right parties are channeled.[14] Hilde Coffé, author of "Fertile grounds for extreme right-wing parties: Explaining the Vlaams Blok's electoral success" (2007), agrees, adding that "if any single issue dominates today's extreme right-wing platforms, then it is certainly the issue of immigration." Coffé supports such a statement by reviewing some of the same theoretical justification covered by Lubbers, such as theories of economic interest and conflict theory. Illustrating the inconclusiveness of all aspects of the literature on extreme-right voting, Coffé ultimately

claims only that "the presence of immigrants *may* facilitate [extreme-right parties']

electoral growth" (italics mine), citing opposing theories to the "higher immigration, higher

extreme-right vote" scenario like those discussed by W.D. Chapin (1997) and Pascal

Perrineau (1997), which claim that people who live in close contact with immigrants may

actually develop more positive feelings towards them than those who do not. Citing P.

Martin (1998), Coffé also describes a dissenting theory wherein "a negative relation

between the presence of immigrants and extreme right voting may also occur if people who

are hostile towards foreigners leave places where many immigrants live and concentrate in

jurisdictions with fewer foreigners." She couches both claims, however, by saying such

theories have "limited empirical support."[4a]

     If, then, it is more widely accepted that immigrants *do* contribute to higher levels of

support for extreme-right parties, what is the nature of such a relationship? The situation,

according to scholars like Schain and Lubbers, is that immigrants are seen as repositories—

the ultimate "out-groups"—for the woes of a voting community willing to scapegoat them

in lieu of blaming members of their own "in-group." Extreme-right parties play into this in

obvious ways, as immigrant issues provide an easy, visible foundation upon which a great

deal of their platform is erected. One only needs to read media coverage of an extreme-

right party's campaign or attend a rally in order to see the co-option and propagation of

such an issue in action. Lost in the "immigration as the extreme-right issue '*par excellence*'"

mix, however, are the more nuanced, causal explanations of extreme-right voting, which is

one of the reasons why political science that tries to break down such a phenomenon into

smaller, quantifiable pieces is so valuable. On a rhetorical level, however, immigration

dominates, and let us not be mistaken that indeed immigration *is* a significant component

of extreme-right voting. But what is really going on here? In "Explaining Variation in the Success of Extreme Right Parties in Europe" (2003), Matt Golder writes, "Although the success of [extreme-right] parties is commonly associated…with high levels of unemployment and immigration, the causal story remains ambiguous. Do voters support extreme-right parties because immigrants negatively affect their material well-being or because immigrants pose a threat to their national identity, culture, and way of life more generally?"[12] Furthermore, does there exist some "immigrant threshold" wherein "immigrant size turns into immigrant rejection," as Gallya Lahav questions in "Opposition to Immigration: Self-Interest or Public Interest?" (2003)?[19] To that point, is it always the case that higher levels of immigration produce higher levels of support for the extreme-right, or could it be—as Coffé and Lahav write of some suggesting—that proximity to immigrants actually decreases extreme-right voting because immigrants are humanized and stereotypes eroded, pursuant to theories like Perrineau's aforementioned "contact hypothesis?"[4a, 19, 15] While it is outside the scope of this paper's research to pursue these questions in detail, they nevertheless serve to inform and fill out the complexities of issues such as immigration, and certainly merit further study.

Critiquing many of the authors hitherto discussed in methodological terms and recognizing the inconsistencies in much of the same literature that we have reviewed (such as the fact that "Knigge [1998] claims that unemployment reduces the support for extreme-right parties, whereas Jackman and Volpert [1996] conclude the opposite"), Matt Golder's "Explaining Variation in the Success of Extreme Right Parties in Europe" (2003) examines the "effect of electoral institutions, unemployment, and immigration" on the success of extreme-right parties across 19 countries and over 165 elections. Among the author's

various findings is that "immigration has a positive effect on [extreme-right] parties irrespective of the unemployment level, [and] unemployment only matters when immigration his high." Procedurally enabling the latter finding is the construction of an interaction variable between immigration and unemployment designed to analyze what he calls the "materialist hypothesis," which states that, "Unemployment increases the vote for extreme-right parties when immigration is high. Unemployment does not affect (or lowers) the vote share received by extreme-right parties when immigration is low." Highly emphasizing this interaction variable, Golder criticizes authors like Jackman and Volpert for not including it in their models, for to not do so is to "…assume that unemployment causes individuals to vote for extreme-right parties in an unconditional way," which he views as fallacious due to the fact that "the economic voting literature provides no evidence why higher levels of unemployment would cause people to vote for extreme-right parties over any other."[12] As we have discussed only various *theoretical* reasons that could—or do not—compel a person to vote for either the right or left under conditions of high unemployment (without concluding anything substantive), it should be noted here that Golder uses the word *evidence*, which—he is correct in saying—is present neither here nor in the literature reviewed in his work.

In his paper, Golder finds empirical support for the synthesis of unemployment and immigration (in the form of an interaction term based on his "materialist hypothesis") increasing the vote share for extreme-right parties, observing that, "Unemployment only increases the vote share of populist [extreme-right] parties when there are large numbers of foreigners in the country." It should be noted here that Golder is careful to distinguish populist extreme-right parties from neo-fascist ones in his work, for the interaction term is

only statistically significant with respect to the former.[12] As Golder and others designate the National Front a populist extreme-right party, no further discussion on the distinction suits our purposes. Discussing Golder's "materialist hypothesis" as well as its inverse in the form of Perrineau's "contact hypothesis" (more immigrants, less support for the extreme-right), David Jesuit and Vincent Mahler write in "Electoral Support for Extreme Right-Wing Parties: A Subnational Analysis of Western European Elections in the 1990s" that most work pursuing either hypothesis has been "based on national-level studies" and note, "Of the relatively few empirical studies that have been conducted at the regional level, none has found an unambiguous link between immigration and [extreme-right voting]." The authors cite the example of Terri Givens in "The Role of Socio-Economic Factors in the Success of Extreme Right Parties" (2002) finding a link between a high number of immigrants and support for the extreme-right in Austrian and French regions but not in German states before additionally citing Cass Mudde's observation that there is an "'absence of a clear cut relation between the number of immigrants and the electoral success of [extreme-right parties] in certain territorial units.'" Reviewing well-worn components of economic voting literature such as the theory of incumbent punishment during economic downturns and the question of why voters would then turn to the extreme-right over the left (whose social democratic parties, it is pointed out, "have always been the parties of full employment"), Jesuit and Mahler deem Golder's "materialist hypothesis" the approach that is most "consistent with the political rhetoric of the extreme right, which often blames negative economic condition on foreign migrants."[15]

To singularly credit Golder with this insight would be to err, however, because although he may have been the one to formalize and popularize the ideas encapsulated in

his "materialist hypothesis" he is not the first to highlight a nexus between extreme-right voting and the conditional presence of immigrants and high unemployment. Citing the "well chosen words of Nonna Meyer" who said that "'behind the very real "crispation" over immigration is hidden the drama of unemployment,'" it was Michael S. Lewis-Beck who continued on to state in "French Electoral Theory" (1993) that "unemployment appears to depend for its effect upon the level of immigration. In [*départements*] with few immigrants, [a] high unemployment rate does not really increase FN support. However, as the number of immigrants increases, the impact from unemployment intensifies. In other words, the presence of unemployment, by itself, does not yield significantly more FN voting… It is unemployment coupled with immigration that motivates National Front support." Claiming that "the psychological mechanism for such an 'interaction effect' seems straightforward," Lewis-Beck asserts that voters in regions with a high number of immigrants believe that immigrants "'cause' unemployment, an attribution encouraged by a popular [Jean-Marie] Le Pen slogan, 'two million unemployed = two million immigrants….'" "Thus, for these voters," he continues, "the unemployment problem is 'solved' by a ballot for the National Front, which proposes harsh immigration controls." He further credits Perrineau (1988) for "survey evidence that FN voters do indeed overwhelmingly make this psychological attribution," strengthening his argument. In "French Electoral Theory" (1993), Lewis-Beck looks at the three social cleavages of class, religion, and ideology (basing his first of two research designs on individual level survey data) and then seeks to evaluate the "issue-base of FN support" by analyzing immigration, crime, and unemployment—the issues he says are consistently judged *très important* by both surveys and journalistic accounts—on the aggregate level of the French district (in his case, the *département*). Measuring these issues

up against the dependent variable of FN vote share received in the 1986 French parliamentary elections per *département*, he says his aggregate level work is designed to avoid survey data's inherent problem of only revealing "...what voters *said*, not what they *did*." Operationalizing the effects of the number of immigrants, crimes against persons per 1,000 inhabitants, and the unemployment rate (all per *département*) on the dependent variable and including an interaction term unemployment X immigration, Lewis-Beck finds strong, positive correlations for immigration and crime, a "surprisingly weak" but still positive correlation for unemployment, and strong support for the interaction of unemployment and immigration, whose positive coefficient is highly statistically significant. Ultimately, he says his model reveals that, "Constituencies with high crime rates, and a pronounced immigrant presence in the midst of elevated unemployment, are fertile ground for National Front recruiters."[22]

While crime has been largely absent from the literature and research designs we have reviewed thus far, Lewis-Beck's inclusion of the variable speaks to its relevance to the issue of extreme-right voting. In "Fertile grounds for extreme right-wing parties: Explaining the Vlaams Blok's electoral success" (2007), Hilde Coffé agrees that "the relationship between crime and extreme right performance has rarely been studied empirically," yet calls crime a "central topic" of extreme right-parties, particularly for the party of her focus, the Belgian Vlaams Blok. Despite its relative lack of scholarship, Coffé hypothesizes that "crime has a significant effect on the success of the extreme right parties." Interestingly, however, in her study she finds that crime does not determine the electoral success of the Vlaams Blok on a municipal level.[4a] Although the two aforementioned authors examine it, further study of crime's effect on electoral support for extreme-right parties merits the

consideration of all scholars due to the variable's rhetorical centrality amongst such factions.

My contribution to the literature:

Clearly, there are significant gaps to fill across the entirety of the scholarship on extreme-right voting. In addition to completing more research on crime's effect on support for the extreme-right, there is more work to be done on the unresolved issue of why voters would choose one party over another given a poor economy, as well as in forming a more complete understanding of what we mean when we discuss "the economy's" effect on extreme-right voting. Jesuit and Mahler, for example, admit that "there has been little effort to determine whether negative economic conditions other than unemployment, either alone or in conjunction with high immigration, are associated with support for [extreme-right parties]...such as higher poverty or income inequality."[15] Whilst incomplete, the sum of the extant literature is enough to aid and inform additional studies of extreme-right voting across any levels and regions of analysis. To this end, although my research draws theoretically on all of the reviewed literature, it specifically relies upon the subregional work of Michael S. Lewis-Beck in France and the cross-national work of Matt Golder, both of whom have particularly contributed to our understanding of the interactive effects of unemployment and immigration. Unlike the two authors' cross-sectional research designs, however, my work employs a "first differences" design in order to capture the effects of changing variables within a specific period of time. The advantages of this model will be elucidated in Section V. It is with all of the aforementioned in mind that we move on to a review of the incorporated data.

IV. DATA

Dependent variables: My dependent variable is the change in vote share received by the National Front between the 2007 and 2012 presidential elections (**FNchange0712** = % vote share 2012 – % vote share 2007) per *département*. Data for both years were collected from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services' European Election and Referendum Database, which were in turn sourced from the *Centre de données socio-politiques* at the *Institut d'études politiques de Paris* (Sciences Po).[8] The French *département* is one of three levels of government below the national level, between the *région* and the *commune. Régions* contains *départements* and *départements* contain *communes*. Mainland France (which, as mentioned previously, includes the island of Corsica) contains 96 *départements*, all of which are included in my data. Excluded are the five overseas *départements* of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, and Mayotte, which are also known as overseas *régions* and have the same legal status as both metropolitan equivalents.

Independent variables: My primary independent variable of interest is the change in the unemployment rate per *département* between 2007 and 2012 (**Unempchange0712** = % unemployment rate 2012 – % unemployment rate 2007). Other independent control variables involve the regional presence of immigrants, incidents of crime, and various interaction variables. Due to the unavailability of immigration data on the *départemental* level, the percentage of immigrants (*étrangers*, or non-French nationals) per *département* was coded as a variable ranging between 1 and 5; 1 associated with a "very low" percentage of immigrants in that *département*'s *région* (less than 3%), 2 with a "low" percentage of immigrants (3% to 4%), 3 with "medium" percentage of immigrants (4% to

5%), 4 with "high" percentage of immigrants (5% to 8%), and 5 with a "very high"

percentage of immigrants (more than 8%) for the years 2007 and 2012. The actual

variable, then, is the categorical change in the percentage of immigrants represented by

each *département*'s coded *régional* variable (**Immchange0712** = coded immigration

variable 2012 – coded immigration variable 2007). The crime variable is the change in

reported assault crimes (*atteintes volontaires à l'intégrité physique*) per *département*

between 2007 and 2011, the years for which data were available (**Crimechange0712** =

crime per *département* 2011 – crime per *département* 2007).

In addition to these variables, three interaction terms were created along with a

dummy variable. The dummy variable, **Immdummy**, represents *départements* with a high

percentage of immigrants relative to others in the base year of 2007. Each *département* was

coded either 0 or 1, the former if the *département*'s [*régional*] immigration level was

previously categorized as 3 or below ("low" immigration) and the latter if the immigration

level was 4 or 5 ("high" immigration). As evident in the summary statistics below, 36% of

French *départements* in 2007 were classified as having high immigration. This dummy

variable is the only measure of high immigration in the data set, for the summary statistics

show that the *régional* presence of immigrants only went down between 2007 and 2012, a

trend corroborated by journalistic accounts of immigration in France that reference the

time period at hand.[5] With respect to the interactions, the first two include the

aforementioned dummy variable: **ImmdummyXunempchange** operationalizes the effect

of changing unemployment on the change in FN vote share in *départements* with high

immigration, and **ImmdummyXcrimechange** operationalizes the effect of changing crime

on the change in FN vote share in *départements* with high immigration. The third

interaction term, **ImmXunemp**, measures the effect of changing unemployment in

départements with changing levels of immigration. All immigration data, to reiterate, are

measured on the level of each *département*'s *région*.

Unemployment and immigration data were collected from INSEE, the French

National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (*Institut national de la statistique et*

des études économiques), and crime data were collected from *La Documentation française*, a

subsidiary of DILA, the French Directorate of Legal and Administrative Information

(*Direction de l'information légale et administrative*).[1, 2, 4, 6, 18]

Table 1: *Summary and Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
VoteforFN2007	96	11.04792	3.144272	4.58	17.28
VoteforFN2012	96	18.94292	4.441674	6.2	27.03
Imm2007	96	2.885417	1.280377	1	5
Imm2012	96	2.71875	1.335374	1	5
Unemp2007	96	7.891667	1.600899	4.8	11.8
Unemp2012	96	9.722917	1.816154	6.2	14.4
Crime07	96	4513.115	5999.926	237	33670
Crime12	96	4875.115	6547.44	234	35750
FNchange0712	96	7.895	1.572506	1.62	10.92
Unempchange0712	96	1.83125	0.6207488	0.2999992	3.7
Immchange0712	96	-0.1666667	0.3746343	-1	0
Immdummy	96	0.3645833	0.4838397	0	1
Crimechange0712	96	1.09207	0.0992172	0.9008572	1.371169
ImmXunemp	96	-0.3302084	0.7695686	-2.900001	0
ImmdummyXunempchange	96	0.5864583	0.8725787	0	3.2
ImmdummyXcrimechange	96	0.3979343	0.5313959	0	1.3711569

V. RESEARCH DESIGN

As mentioned in the literature review (Section III), my research is structured around a series of "first differences" OLS regressions designed to assess the effects of the changes in my independent variables on the change in my dependent variable, the change in FN vote share per *département* between 2007 and 2012. Although principally interested in the effect of the change in unemployment on FN vote share, embodied in the estimating equation $[\Delta\text{FNvoteshare}_{dr} = \alpha + \beta_1\Delta\text{Unemp}_{dr} + \varepsilon_{dr}]$, I will control for the other "confounding" independent variables mentioned above in Section IV, embodied and emphasized in the estimating equation $[\Delta\text{FNvoteshare}_{dr} = \alpha + \beta_1\Delta\text{Unemp}_{dr} + \beta_2\text{Immdummy}^{07}_r + \beta_3\Delta\text{Unemp}_{dr} \times \text{Immdummy}^{07}_r + \beta_4\Delta\text{Crime}_{dr} + \beta_5\Delta\text{Crime}_{dr} \times \text{Immdummy}^{07}_r + \varepsilon_{dr}]$. In advance of presenting and analyzing my results, it should be mentioned that they are constrained by the power and refinement of their underpinning data. Due to a lack of available data on the *départemental* level or lower, my immigration data are particularly coarse, measured (once again) as ordinal variables on the aggregate level of the *région*. Future research would benefit from utilizing data measured as continuous variables on the level of the *département*, for while summary statistics show that no *région*'s coded 1-5 variable increased between 2007 and 2012 it could very well be that the percentage of resident immigrants in certain *départements* did increase. An additional limitation to my research design is the use of assault crime as a proxy for crime in general, which was also due to a lack of other available data. Future research could benefit from distinguishing the effects of different types of crimes on electoral support for the extreme-right. Conceding these limitations, my research design is nonetheless strengthened by its "first-differences" configuration. This design measures the *changes*

between each variable, thus netting out problematic "compositional effects," or the

characteristics of each *département* that do not change. I hypothesize the following:

H1: *FN vote share and unemployment are positively correlated, thus the change in FN vote share will increase in* départements *with rising unemployment.*

H2: *FN vote share and immigration are positively correlated, thus the change in FN vote share will increase in* départements *with higher percentages of immigrants.*

H3: *FN vote share and crime are positively correlated, thus the change in FN vote share will increase in* départements *with rising crime.*

H4: *The effects of unemployment and crime on FN vote share are greater in* départements *with high percentages of immigrants, i.e. the interaction of immigration with these variables leads to larger FN vote share.*

VI. RESULTS

Table 2: *Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regressions*

VARIABLES	(1) FNchange0712	(2) FNchange0712	(3) FNchange0712	(4) FNchange0712	(5) FNchange0712
Unempchange0712	**1.091*****	**1.069*****	**1.083*****	**1.056*****	**1.255*****
	(.310)	(0.309)	(0.319)	(0.319)	(0.301)
Immchange0712		-0.336		-0.351	
		(0.270)		(0.274)	
Crimechange0712			0.328	0.489	0.174
			(1.411)	1.429	(1.272)
Immdummy					**0.791****
					(0.288)
Constant	5.897***	5.881***	5.554***	5.369***	5.119***
	(0.644)	(0.647)	(1.514)	(1.539)	(1.394)
N	96	96	96	96	96
r^2	0.186	0.192	0.186	0.193	0.241

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<.05, ** p<.001, *** p<0.001

In column 1 of table 2, the change in unemployment (Unempchange0712) has the hypothesized positive and highly significant effect on electoral support for the FN (expressed by FNchange0712). A 1 standard deviation increase in unemployment (.62) implies a (.62)(1.091) = .67 increase in FN vote share. Controlling for the change in immigration between 2007 and 2012 in column 2, the change in unemployment retains its high statistical significance and positive effect on FN vote share. Since the change in immigration is not significantly different than 0 it cannot be said to have an effect. Similar to column 2 except now controlling for the change in crime between 2007 and 2012, column 3 shows that the change in unemployment retains its high statistical significance

and positive effect on FN vote share. Since the change in crime is not significantly different than 0 it cannot be said to have an effect. Controlling for both the change in immigration *and* the change in crime in column 4, the change in unemployment still exerts a positive, statistically significant effect on the change in FN vote share. The significance, however, has fallen from the 1% level to the 5% level. Since the change in immigration and the change in crime are not significantly different than 0, the variables cannot be said to have an effect. Examining the change in unemployment, the change in crime, and the *départements* with regionally high percentages of immigrants (expressed by the dummy variable Immdummy) in column 5, both the change in unemployment and the immigration level dummy are found to be significant, the latter result which suggests that it is a large percentage of immigrants per *région per se* that meaningfully influences electoral support for the extreme-right, as opposed to the fluctuation of immigrants found to be insignificant in regression models 2 and 4. The change in unemployment is once again highly statistically significant at the 1% level. The immigration dummy variable is associated with a .791 (79%) increase in FN vote share and is significant at the 1% level.

Table 3: *Interaction Effects*

VARIABLES	(1) FNchange0712	(2) FNchange0712	(3) FNchange0712	(4) FNchange0712
Unempchange0712	**1.091***	**0.688**	**1.248***	**1.132**
	(0.310)	(0.225)	(0.293)	(0.350)
Immdummy		-1.495	-5.089	
		(1.163)	(2.933)	
ImmdummyXunempchange		**1.297*		
		(0.600)		
Crimechange0712		0.223	-1.729	0.584
		(1.308)	(1.338)	(1.454)
ImmdummyXcrimechange			**5.383*	
			(2.628)	
Immchange0712				-1.777
				(1.105)
ImmXunemp				0.725
				(1.105)
Constant	5.897***	6.1777***	7.210***	5.128***
	(0.644)	(1.373)	(1.421)	(1.612)
N	96	96	96	96
r^2	0.186	0.3	0.267	0.201

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<.05, ** p<.001, *** p<0.001

In table 3, I examine the regressions that include constructed interaction terms.

Note that column 1 is included as reference and is identical to column 1 in table 2. Column

2 of table 3 reveals the effect of a change in unemployment controlling for high

immigration, the change in crime, and the interaction between high immigration and

unemployment (ImmdummyXunempchange). Both the change in unemployment and the

interaction demonstrate positive coefficients and achieve statistical significance,

Unempchange0712 at the 5% level and ImmdummyXunempchange at the 1% level. The

significance of the interaction indicates that rising unemployment rates result in larger

increases in electoral support for the FN in *départements* within high immigrant *régions*, compared to those within relatively low immigrant *régions* (reflected in Unempchange0712). This supports the interaction component of Matt Golder's "materialist hypothesis" on a subregional level, and is the main finding of my analysis. The coefficient in column 2 suggests that, given a 1 standard deviation change in unemployment (.62), the interaction's (.68)(.62) + (1.3)(1)(.62) = 1.23 effect on FN vote share is 81% larger in magnitude than the observed effect in areas of low immigration, (.68)(.62) = .42. We can think of the coefficient as stemming from the equation: [*FN vote share = 6.2 + .68 (Unempchange0712) – 1.4 (Immdummy) + 1.3 (Immdummy) (Unempchange0712)*], where 6.2 is the constant term. Immdummy, capturing *départements* with a high percentage of immigrants not experiencing a change in unemployment, fails to achieve statistical significance, as does Crimechange0712.

Like column 2, the model in column 3 of table 3 includes Unempchange0712, Immdummy, and Crimechange0712, but instead of the interaction between high immigration and the change in unemployment it contains an interaction between the dummy for high immigration and the change in crime, ImmdummyXcrimechange. Both this interaction and Unempchange0712 were found to have positive coefficients and be statistically significant. Given a 1 standard deviation change in crime (.099), the interaction's (-1.729)(.099) + (5.383)(1)(.099) = .361 effect on FN vote share is about 53.2% larger in magnitude than the observed effect in areas of low immigration (represented by Crimechange0712), (-1.729)(.099) = -.171. The above is pursuant to the following equation: [*FN vote share = 7.2 – 1.729 (Crimechange0712) – 5.089 (Immdummy) + 5.383 (Immdummy) (Crimechange0712)*] where 7.2 is the constant term. The coefficients of

Immdummy (representing *départements* within high immigrant *régions* not experiencing changing crime) and Crimechange0712 (representing *départements* with changing crime within low immigrant *régions*) are not statistically significant and thus cannot be said to be different than 0.

As we have seen in columns 2 and 3 of table 3, separate regressions show that the interactions between changing unemployment and high immigration (ImmdummyXunempchange) and changing crime and high immigration (ImmdummyXcrimechange) each achieve statistical significance and contribute to rising FN vote share independent of one another. Thus an additional regression model, not shown above, was designed to test these two statistically significant interactions together. However, the data does not have sufficient variation for both interactions to be estimated. Despite such insufficient variation, I nonetheless maintain that the change in unemployment (Unempchange0712) and the change in crime (Crimechange0712) represent two distinct effects, as there exists a -.22 correlation coefficient between the two variables. Given the above, we can view the statistical significance of the interaction between high immigration and the change in crime in column 3 of table 3 as an interesting, yet nonetheless complementary finding with respect to our primary result of interest, the statistically significant interaction between high immigration and the change in unemployment uncovered in column 2 of table 3.

In column 4 of table 3 a regression including Unempchange0712, Crimechange0712, Immchange0712, and a constructed interaction variable between the change in immigration and the change in unemployment (ImmXunemp) reveals that only the change in unemployment attained significance (at the 5% level). This finding may reflect the

coarse nature of the immigration variable, which does not vary much. Thus again I view column 2 of table 3 as the main specification.

Principally, and in summation, the data show that the interaction between changing unemployment and high regional levels of immigrants exerts the highest effect on FN vote share, causing it to rise by a vector of 1.23 per 1 standard deviation increase in unemployment. The variable ImmdummyXunempchange captures this effect. To lesser degrees the change in unemployment in general, the interaction between high immigration and crime, and high immigration in general also contributed to the rise in FN vote share. The variables Unempchange0712, ImmdummyXcrimechange, and Immdummy capture these effects. A review of the stated hypotheses in Section V reveals that H1, H2, and H4 were correct. H3, which postulated that rising crime by itself would contribute to the French extreme-right vote, was not corroborated by the data. As previously stated, however, the interaction of changing crime with high *régional* immigration did have a positive, statistically effect on electoral support for the National Front.

VII. CONCLUSION

As the data show, interactions matter. Such a conclusion builds upon the work of Michael S. Lewis-Beck and Matt Golder, and particularly supports an amended version of Golder's 2003 "materialist hypothesis" on a subregional level. The amendment we must make refers to the fact that while Golder concludes that "immigration has a positive effect on [extreme-right] parties irrespective of the unemployment level, [and] unemployment only matters when immigration his high," our data show that unemployment does not *only* matter when immigration is high, and instead exerts a positive and statistically significant

effect on FN vote share regardless of the *régional* level of immigration.[12] Its effect is simply enhanced by an interaction with high immigration, by approximately 81% over *départements* within low immigrant *régions*. Interestingly, the most salient interaction term discovered by Michael S. Lewis-Beck to affect FN vote share in 1986, that between immigration and crime, was not ours, and—while still positively correlated—he called the effect of our strongest motivating force, the interaction between immigration and unemployment, "surprisingly weak."[22]

Considering our results in the light of the reviewed literature, it appears that subregional motivators of extreme-right voting largely conform, in microcosm, to those observed on the cross-national aggregate level in Europe. This was at least the case in France between 2007 and 2012. What continues to elude scholars, however, is not a more varied picture of extreme-right voting across different tiers of analysis; it is a more universal consensus as to what drives the phenomenon in the first place. Certainly, there is work to be done to improve the former: as Jesuit and Mahler observed that most work in the field has been "based on national-level studies," it has been my goal to progress subregional studies through the analysis of France between its past two election cycles.[15] However, my findings ultimately come up against the more intractable and permanent problems of the theoretical and empirical contradiction found rife throughout the literature on extreme-right voting. While I contribute the fact that unemployment, a relatively high regional presence of immigrants, the interaction between high immigration and unemployment, and the interaction between high immigration and crime increase the extreme-right vote, authors such as Pia Knigge still maintain that unemployment does not matter, for example, and others maintain that even if it does, there is no acceptable

theoretical justification for why voters should turn to the extreme-right over any other party in times of economic downturn.[17]

It goes without saying, then, that future research and analysis is necessary. My work would specifically benefit from being redone with more refined immigration data, so as to more accurately represent the *départemental* electoral reaction to changing levels of immigrants. Additionally, the effects of different expressions of crime and declining economic conditions (such as property crime and levels of poverty) could be tested so as to achieve a more nuanced understanding of those two phenomena. Overall, such future work would not only serve to advance the scholarly community's comprehension of extreme-right voting, it would illuminate extreme-right parties' channels of electoral support for the edification of all who are affected by their policies, both directly and indirectly. As France's economic and demographic geography continue to evolve, further scrutiny of the regional motivators of the National Front vote and the electoral successes they portend would benefit politicians, policymakers, and private citizens alike.

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