

# **Demographic Change and Progressive Political Strategy in France: Defining a Coalition for 2012?**

Terra Nova task force, initiated by Alain Richard with Olivier Ferrand and Bruno Jeanbart. Alain Bergounioux, Gérard Le Gall, Romain Prudent (rapporteur) and Etienne Schweisguth participated in the task force.

Text translated by Daniel Mendelsohn  
Charts and tables translated by Alice Bonnet and Iris Delahaye

# Table of Contents

## Introduction

### 1. The Left : the last legs of a well worn electoral machine

#### 1.1. The demise of the labor coalition

The electoral strategy of the left has always rested on the shoulders of the working-class

Vanishing workers: a shrinking working-class

The less the electorate leans toward the left: the less they vote accordingly

Fragmentation of the working-class

#### 1.2. The grounds for divorce: changing values

#### 1.3. A similar trend in other Western democracies

### 2. A modern coalition in a process of structural renewal

#### 2.1. The new electoral face of the left

Graduates

Young people

Minorities

The female vote

Non-denominational voters

The Urban vote

#### 2.2. Limitations of the left-wing electoral alliance

The elderly, indispensable for electoral success?

The working-class: gone forever?

Middle Class Uncertainty

#### 2.3. Electoral stakes : the new face of the French left

A profound upheaval at the heart of the electorate

The identity of the new left : the France of tomorrow

The central problem: the new left, a minority voting block

### 3. Defining an election strategy for 2012?

#### 3.1. The "France of Tomorrow" Strategy

#### 3.2. Complementary strategy "Middle Class"

#### 3.3. Complementary strategy "Working Class"

#### 3.4. The strategy of the impossible: shifting the elderly vote

## **Note on Contents**

In Europe, as in North America, mainstream left parties are in crisis. Of course, there are ideological reasons. But sociological factors matter too: the historical coalition of the left was centered on the working-class and is now on its last legs. In France, a new coalition is emerging: “the France of tomorrow”. This is a younger, more diverse, more feminine, more educated, urban and secular electorate. In short, a culturally progressive electorate. Those people are “outsiders” in a socioeconomic system; as new entrants they have been sacrificed to protect the “insiders”. Those people need the State in order to break the glass ceiling.

The left must now rely on this new “natural” electorate. As it is still evolving, it does not represent a majority yet. So, which new electoral strategy should the left work on for 2012?

This report is the work of a task force, which was initiated by Alain Richard with Olivier Ferrand and Bruno Jeanbart. Alain Bergounioux, Gérard Le Gall, Romain Prudent (rapporteur) and Etienne Schweisguth participated in the task force.

Jenny Andersson, Anthony Giddens, Hervé Le Bras, Ernst Stetter and Vincent Tiberj were interviewed.

This sociology exercise has run simultaneously in several countries, on the initiative of the Center for American Progress (United States) and the Foundation Ideas (Spain). Restitution will take place in Madrid, on the 7th of April, 2011.

## **Executive Summary**

In Europe, social-democracy is in crisis. It governs in only 6 countries out of 27. It has failed to benefit politically from the great crash of 2008.

How can we explain this political disaffection? There is, of course, the ideological crisis. Social-democracy brought a model, the social market economy, centered on the Welfare State. This model does not match anymore with the new historic conditions of a globalized world. It has to be renewed.

But there is another reason for the social-democracy crisis. This is about electoral sociology: the historical coalition which carried the left for almost a century, based on blue-collar workers, is now on its last legs. It is true in France, as in the rest of Europe and in the United States.

### **1. The Left: the last legs of a well-worn electoral machine**

- **The demise of the Labor coalition**

In 1936, with the rise of the Popular Front, in 1936, a new dynamic was unleashed and the blue-collar workers began to rally collectively behind the left (socialist, but mostly communist). The victory of François Mitterrand, who captured the Presidency in 1981, is intimately linked to the attraction of large numbers of middle-class voters. During the second round of the elections, the blue-collar workers were 37% of the working population and voted 72% in favor of Mitterrand compared to a national average of 52% (+20 pts.).

This historic base of the left is disappearing for two reasons.

First, the blue-collar working class is shrinking. After a century of growth, the working-class shrank rapidly from the late 1970s, and now represents 23% of the active population – that is to say a drop in 40% of the electoral base of the left. The shrinking effect has been amplified, from a subjective point of view, by the rapid erosion of class consciousness. Only one quarter of blue-collar workers see themselves as authentically working-class.

To find an explanation for this phenomenon it is useful to identify the internal reorganization at play at the heart of the working-class. The role of unskilled labor has declined precipitously while the number of skilled laborers has risen in response to technological progress and innovation. The latter, whose numbers continue to rise, have become enthusiastic members of consumer society and see themselves as members of the middle-class. The modern workplace has also evolved. Workers in industry only represent 13% of the active population and two of every five workers find themselves employed by the tertiary sector in areas such as transportation, warehouse jobs, retail, or service positions such as office temps or cleaning staff. Those workers work in isolation and instability and are in sectors where there is no tradition of union representation and collective action.

Secondly, blue-collar workers vote less and less for the left. The decline has not stopped since the end of the 1970's, and has looked like an electoral hemorrhage recently. On the first round of the 2002 Presidential elections, the difference in terms of votes for the left between blue-collar workers and all voters demonstrated a sharp downward trend moving from +15 points in 1981 to 0 in 2002. There is no more distinctive working-class vote. Even worse, the Socialist Party candidate, Lionel Jospin only attracted 13% of the working-class vote, lower than his national score (16%). On the second round of the Presidential election, blue-collar workers vote for the left went from 72% in 1981 to 50% in 2007: for the first time in contemporary history, blue-collar voters, who did not vote for the left on the first round failed to do so in the second round as well.

- **The grounds for divorce: changing values**

Historically, the left has shared a set of economic and cultural values with the working-class. Their demands regularly overlapped: legislation limiting working time, paid holidays and a statutory minimum wage, social protections, nationalization of large enterprises, price controls. And both shared a conservative moral outlook.

The breaking point erupted on the cultural front. The student movement that erupted on the streets of Paris in May 1968 sent shockwaves outward and led to the first real rupture between the left and its traditional working-class base.

The split along cultural lines was profound as scenes of total incomprehension between the students and their blue-collar cousins would attest on numerous occasions. Sexual freedom, access to birth control and loosening of restrictions on abortion, and thumbing one's nose toward traditional family values became the order of the day.

A parallel consideration to the shifts noted above is the decline of blue-collar workers relative to the whole population. Under assault for years through rising unemployment, instability, social fragmentation and a collective identity crisis – their reaction has primarily been withdrawal: fear of immigration –and immigrants; outcries against welfare cheats and the wastefulness of public assistance; calls for a “moral” society.

Despite this discrepancy in cultural values, the working class continued to vote on the left, because it represented its socio-economic values. But the exercise of power, from 1981, had to make the left become realistic, which disappointed the expectations of workers. From the turn of rigor in 1983 to "the State can not do everything" by Lionel Jospin in 2001, politics appeared powerless to meet their aspirations. Thus, economic determinants lost their salience to the labor vote. Cultural factors, "hysteresis" by the extreme right, become prominent in the choice of voting and explain the shift toward the National Front and the right.

## **2. A modern coalition in a process of structural renewal**

- The new electoral face of the left

If the historical foundation of the left has lost much of its luster, a new coalition is emerging, with a very different profile.

1. Graduates. They vote to the left more than the national average (+2 points in 2007). Having a degree leads to a stronger tendency to lean left: the more educated you are, the more you will vote for the left; the less educated you are, the more you will tend to vote for the right.
2. Young people. They are the heart of the left electorate today: +11 points over the average on the second round of the presidential election, in 2007 (58% vs 47%). There is a strong correlation between voting preference and age and the young are far more

likely to vote to the left than the elders who tend to lean right as they grow older. The elderly massively vote right: they gave 30 points more to Nicolas Sarkozy than to Ségolène Royal (65-35). The younger you are the more idealistic you are; as you advance in age, you become more conservative. New generations vote more and more left.

3. Minorities. Multicultural France votes overwhelmingly for the left. There is an almost automatic tendency for individuals with an immigrant background, especially the second generation, to vote left – on the order of 80-20. We find the same proportions in popular neighborhoods, and still 62-38 in deprived areas.
4. Women. We live through an historical reversal. Female voters were conservative. They turned progressive. In 1965, if the female vote was not taken into account, François Mitterrand would have won the election against De Gaulle. In the election that brought Mitterrand to office in 1981 the female vote for the left accounted for a mere 49% compared to 56% for males a 7 point gap. In 2007, for the first time, women supported the left in greater proportions than men with 49% of the vote, about 2 points higher than men. The overall trend was confirmed during the 2010 regional elections with a 7 point gap (58 to 51).

The new coalition has not much in common with the historical coalition anymore: only young people belong to both. The identity of the historical coalition was about class. The new one is structured around the vision of the future. The new left looks like the France of tomorrow: younger, more feminine, more diverse, more educated, but also more urban and more secular (less catholic). It is in tune with the political left through its values.

Contrary to the historical electorate of the left, unified by socio-economic issues, the “France of tomorrow” is above all unified by their progressive cultural values: it wants change, it is tolerant, open, supportive, optimistic and forward-looking. This is especially true for graduates, young people, and minorities<sup>1</sup>. It opposes an electorate that defends the present and the past against change, which considers that “France is becoming less and less France,” “it

---

<sup>1</sup> The French of immigrant origin are rather conservative about customs (rejection of homosexuality in particular) but they are structurally very progressive on issues of immigration and integration.

was better before"--an electorate worried about the future, more pessimistic, more closed, more defensive.

The economic factor also plays a role, because "France of tomorrow" unifies above all the "outsiders" of the society, those who try to enter the system, particularly the labor market, but succeed with difficulty: the youth, women, minorities, the unemployed. As new entrants they have been sacrificed to protect the "insiders". These "outsiders" need help from public policies to overcome the barriers that stand in front of them: they need a State that helps liberate them, break the glass ceiling. They are supported by more integrated citizens (graduates), supportive of these "excluded» because of their cultural beliefs.

- **Limitations of the left-wing electoral alliance**

The New Left that emerges in France is the same as that emerging across Europe. It closely resembles the coalition that brought Barack Obama to office in 2008. But with an important difference: it is not a majority.

The new electoral coalition of the left has three structural weaknesses:

- Limited demographic dynamism. Minorities are a growing population but still low in numbers: only 5% of the French have two immigrant parents. It can be estimated that "French diversity" is 15%. Nothing like the United States, where minorities are now 36 percent of the population. And young people are a declining population in France, while the opposite is true in the United States.
- An electoral coalition that is still building. The New Leftist vote, election after election, is more and more to the left. This is great news for the left, for the future. But it highlights a current weakness of the coalition: it is not enough. This is true for graduates who still vote only moderately for the left. And young people vote less left than in the United States. They gave 16 points more to Ségolène Royal than Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 (58/42), while Barack Obama has a 34 points lead against John McCain (66/32). But it is mostly among women that the French left has not yet gelled: they only gave 2 points more to Ségolène Royal than men in 2007 (48/46) and +5



points left in the regional elections of 2010 , while they give 13 points more to Barack Obama (56/43) in 2008.

- A high abstention rate. Young people and minorities vote less than the national average, respectively -7 points for 18-24 years old citizens and -4 points for deprived areas (-34 in poor neighborhoods) in 2007. Their involvement collapses for low-intensity political elections (European, regional, cantonal).

With this New Leftist coalition, a radical reshaping of the French political landscape presents two electoral blocs:

- The right-wing electorate, focused on seniors

The right-wing electorate has changed little in the last few decades: seniors, independents (craftsmen, shopkeepers), farmers, Catholics. It also has become more distinctive: its propensity to vote right has been strengthened. These voters are opposed to the values of the left in all its aspects, both socioeconomic and cultural, and sometimes dramatically as for farmers or senior citizens (on cultural values).

The seniors are the core of the right-wing electorate. As we said, they vote overwhelmingly to the right. They had a record participation rate over 90% in 2007. And it is an important category in population growth: it represented 27% of the population in 2005; it will represent 38% in 2030. A major problem is coming: can the left win without the votes of senior citizens?

- The intermediate electorate, caught in an uncertain and unstable no man's land.

This electorate includes all elements of the workforce: blue-collar workers and employees (white collar workers), which was the historic coalition of the left; associate professionals; upper middle class. Historically, the wage hierarchy determined political orientation: the more you were at the bottom of the ladder, the more you voted left, and vice versa. Workers, employees, intermediate professions, upper middle classes were arranged in a straight line of policy, from the left to the right. Today, class logic has blurred. All these categories come roughly to the same balance of forces between right and left. Their vote is uncertain. It could

even be reversed if trends continue: upper middle class would vote more for the left (as graduates) and workers would vote more and more for the right.

The intermediate electorate is divided on values: a part is connected to the left, the other to the right. The relevant way of reading it is the opposition between working class and middle class. The working-class (blue-collar workers and employees) have socioeconomic values that bind them to the left (strong and protector State, social security) and conservative cultural values (order and security, denial of immigration and Islam, rejection of Europe, defense of traditions) that attract them to the right. The division is reversed for the middle class (middle management and upper middle class): they have left cultural values and right socio-economic values.

The intermediate electorate poses two challenges for the left. First, has the working class definitely moved away? Second: because of their mobility, these voters are a battleground electorate for the right/left struggle. What strategy should it define to convince them?

### **3. Defining an election strategy for 2012?**

The election of 2012 will unfold during a period of profound change in the French political landscape: former hierarchies are collapsing but have not disappeared yet, and a replacement structure is under construction but has yet to be fully deployed. The field is wide open.

#### **1. The "France of Tomorrow" Strategy**

The unavoidable course of action is to lean on the new "natural" electorate: the France of tomorrow.

It is impossible today for the left to try to restore its historic coalition. The attempt to do so would require the left to abandon its cultural values, that is to say, to break with social democracy. The Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) has attempted such a failure under the leadership of Wouter Bos. Defining itself as a class party, the party of the working classes, not values, he accompanied his cultural conservatism with an effort to position Labour as "anti-immigration, anti-Europe" and "anti-tax", tilting from social democracy to social-populism. It was an electoral defeat: the PvdA ended at 13% in local elections, leading to replacement of Wouter

Bos by the mayor of Amsterdam Job Cohen, who repositioned the party in the social democratic movement.

The real question is: can the left win only by maximizing its natural electorate? The answer is probably yes, because there is some leeway.

The left needs to mobilize its electorate. The regional elections of 2010 showed that the left vote among women, youth and graduates is growing more strongly than among average voters. To accelerate this trend, the left must campaign on its values--a cultural emphasis on investment in the future, promoting empowerment and fighting for the acceptance of Islam, for an inclusive national identity and for Europe.

The left can also try to improve vote participation. The young and minorities are not systematic abstainers, they vote intermittently. Thus, the goal is to mobilize them. It needs a field campaign (door to door, phoning, activism on social networks and neighborhoods ...) based on the Obama model.

Under the assumptions of the report, such a strategy could bring 2.5 millions additional votes to the left. That is enough to erase the 2.2 million vote gap Nicolas Sarkozy built in 2007. However, the result would remain tight.

## 2. Complementary strategy "Middle Class"

It is difficult for the coalition "France of tomorrow" to be a majority. How to expand? The electorate to win - the electorate in the middle - is divided in two: middle and lower classes.

The strategy to expand into the middle class is justified in three senses. It is most consistent with the strategy of "France of tomorrow": it allows for campaigning on cultural values, on which the middle classes are in synch with the left, and which are the priority of the new Leftists. This is an available electorate: professionals in the service sector, the most numerous part of this group (23% of the total electorate, against 15% for upper middle class) and expanding. In the regional elections, they voted 14 points more for the left than during the Presidential election (+ 7 points on average), which is the most dramatic shift to the left in the

period. Finally, it relies on a natural tendency: the middle classes are in the process of shifting to the left.

### 3. Complementary Strategy “Working Class”

For historical reasons, the left cannot resign itself to losing the popular classes. The left must therefore focus its campaign on economic and social priorities, where they are in synch, and avoid cultural values, particularly on immigration and Islam.

Such a strategy has many advantages. It is in line with the economy, which puts answers to the economic crisis at the heart of the priorities of the French. And these classes are still a very important part of the electorate: 23% for blue-collar workers and 30% for employees (who are increasing); together they represent more than half of the electorate.

But it is a difficult strategy. It goes against the tide: working-classes have been moving right. And it is complicated to articulate with the central electoral strategy "France of tomorrow": it requires the left not to campaign on cultural issues, while they are the main topic of this new strategy. Even for socio-economic issues, the proposals are not the same—on the one hand, the demand for protection of weakened "insiders" (protection and social rights), on the other, the request for assistance from outsiders. This strategy also now faces a major obstacle: the new National Front. In the process of de-demonization and increasing acceptability, Marine Le Pen's National Front has made a turnaround on socioeconomic issues, evolving from a neoliberal posture (anti-state, anti-staff, anti-tax) to a program of social and economic protection similar to the Left Front. For the first time in over thirty years, a party appears in resonance with the values of the working-class: cultural protectionism, economic and social protectionism. The National Front has positioned itself as a working-class party, and it will be difficult to counter.

However, it is possible to identify within the working-class sub-categories that would be easier to attract to the left. There are the young blue-collar workers: they are of foreign origin (North African) and therefore sensitive to cultural issues related to immigration and integration, but they are relatively few in this period of accelerated deindustrialization. There are also employees, especially women (77% of employees are women, 5.8 million voters). They vote abnormally right: +7 points compared to male employees in 2007. It is a blind spot

of leftist political discourse, whose imagination is associated with male workers in factories. Employees are however sensitive to the orientations of the left: part-time, often poor, experiencing harsh working conditions in the absence of strong trade union coverage, distressed because of often difficult personal situations (single with children). These employees have a precarious lot in common with "outsiders" excluded from the labor market, which are at the heart of the left's new electorate.

#### 4. The strategy of the impossible: shifting the elderly vote

Some motivate this strategy with a simple idea. Ségolène Royal scored very low with seniors in 2007: 35%. With only 43%, she would have won the presidential election. With an outgoing president who has annoyed them, a more suitable candidate on the left should be able to recover some of this lost ground among the elderly.

But nothing is less certain. Seniors have frontally opposed values of the left. They have always voted right and their vote for the right is increasing. With the slight shift to the left of this group during the regional elections (+3 points from the average trend), the left would take back less than 500,000 votes out of a differential of 2.2 million in 2007.

But possibly the profile of the leftist candidate could "limit the damage". Seniors are very sensitive to the credibility and authority of the candidate. Moreover, "triangulation" on security issues would make sense. This electorate is very sensitive to this issue and the security question has been cleaned of other cultural associations, becoming more and more consensual in all constituencies: the left could then appropriate those votes without alienating its core constituency.

\*\*

Sociological determinants are far from being the only factors explaining the vote.

There are political factors: the profile of the candidate and his project; the unity of his political camp. There are also situational determinants: the level of rejection of the ruling party and the outgoing candidate, the events that impact perceptions of the electorate.

But the relation between short-term and political factors with sociological determinants is essential to building a winning strategy. In this respect, the left in 2012 has crucial choices to make.

DRAFT

## Introduction

Since the end of the 1990's, European social-democracy has been declining. It is today in crisis. It governs in only 6 countries out of 27. It has failed to benefit politically from the great crash of 2008.

How can we explain this political disaffection? There is, of course, the ideological crisis. Social-democracy had a model, the social market economy, centered on the welfare state. This model made Europe successful during the *Trente Glorieuses* (thirty glorious years) by combining economic growth, full employment and social cohesion with the creation of a vast and ever wealthier middle class. Since the 1980's, this model has weakened, and it is today incompatible with the new historic conditions of a globalized world. The Left is searching nothing less than an ideological renewal: it has to invent a new model of development, consistent with its values, while being adapted to the XXI<sup>st</sup> century. So developing a new project is a core element for the political renewal of the left.

But there is another reason for the social-democracy crisis. This is about electoral sociology: the historical coalition who carried the left for almost a century, which was based on the working-class, is now on its last legs. Another coalition is emerging, but this modern coalition has not matured yet. The left is in crisis because it is stuck between those two coalitions with different values. This is the case in France, as in the rest of Europe, and more widely in the western world.

## 1 – The Left: the last legs of a well worn electoral machine

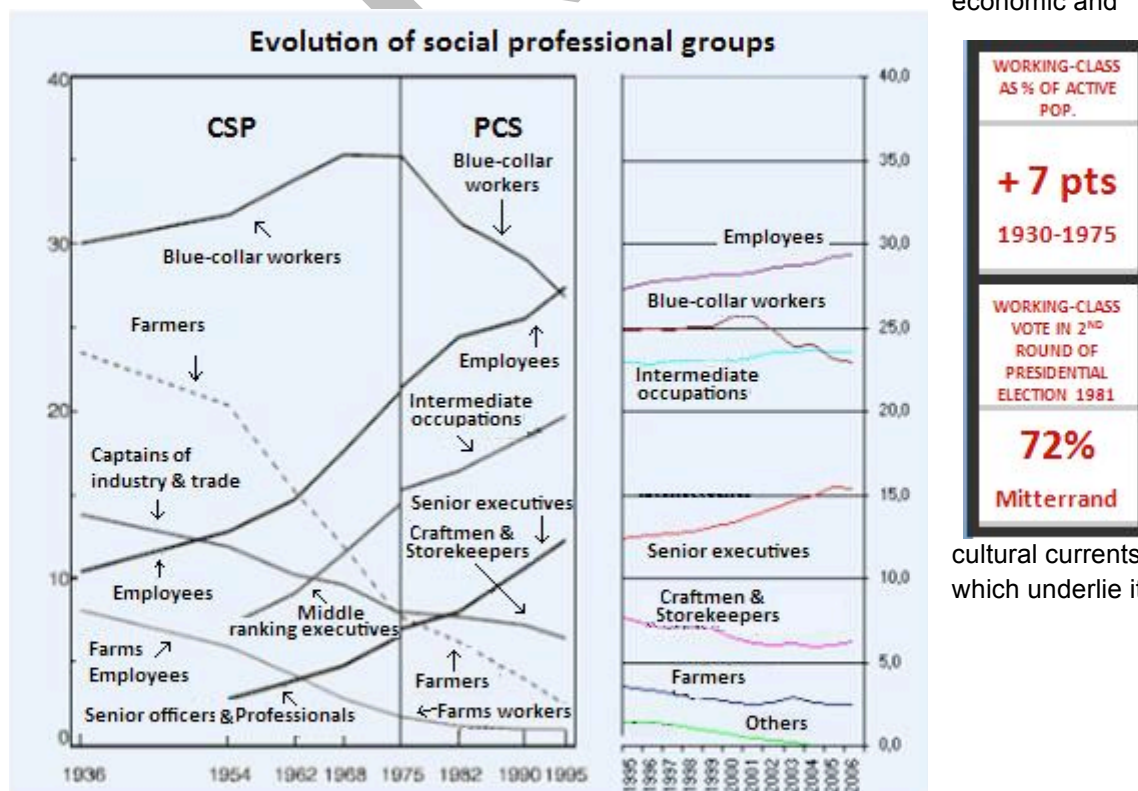
For thirty years, in France as in other Western democracies, the electoral strategy of the left has undergone a fundamental makeover as its historic anchor, the working- class, has lost its identity. The current dilemma can be explained by the growing gulf between the left's agenda and the working-class.

### 1.1 - The demise of the labor coalition

#### *The electoral strategy of the left has always rested on the shoulders of the working- class*

The left was organized progressively over the course of the 19th century in opposition to the interest of conservatives and the champions of modern capitalism. At the political level this drove a party line in which the cause of individual liberty and equality were made paramount through the promotion of the Republic over the Monarchy, democracy over aristocratic privilege, and secularism over organized religion. Social policies aimed to distribute opportunity at all levels, refusing to remain passive while society shed its feudal past to usher in new class based divisions.

Workers became emblematic of the new society: born in the countryside, peasants through and through, they arrived in the cities in search of factory jobs. In the absence of social restrictions imposed by the family or village, they begin little by little to transgress previously held mores on politics or religion. Under no scrutiny from their peers they can live free in the city. At the factory, they become part of a well organized work unit where they become conscious of the economic inequalities produced through capitalism. Their only possession is the power to withhold labor and it is through this realization that they discover the victim of the new order while paradoxically discovering a new empowerment to denounce injustice as the force at the heart of the capitalist machine. While the left remains a focal point for diverse interests – the well-to-do and champagne socialists, professors and public servants “the shock troops of the Republic”,...the worker is the central component of the structure and serves as a moral compass for discerning the future progression of capitalism and the economic and



cultural currents which underlie it.



The propensity of working-class voters for parties of the left rose dramatically and maintained a steady arc from the turn of the 20th century to 1980.

In the beginning, explains political scientist Mattei Dogan<sup>2</sup>, the working-class population was remarkable for its political diversity. Political stripes ranged from membership in revolutionary parties, protest or reform movements, or even conservative organizations (sometimes Catholic sometimes not). At the dawn of the 20th century, Dogan points out, “at least two-thirds of registered [working-class] voters belonged to parties other than the socialists. And, “In 1928 and 1932 the numbers of socialist and communist voices remained smaller than the percentage of factory workers” in the overall population.

It was with the rise of the Popular Front that a new dynamic was unleashed and the working-class began to rally collectively behind the left. Post-World War Two, during the elections of 1958 and 1967-1968, opinion polls conducted by Ifop, a pollster, began to reflect the new reality and a breakdown of national voting emerged: the working-class was more likely to vote left than other members of the population (+8 pts. and +14pts. respectively). The “alignment” of the working-class voter with the left was reinforced during legislative elections in 1972: the working-class gave 22 supplementary points to the left when compared to the rest of the population and 68% of the working-class vote went left. The figure was 69% in the following legislative elections in 1978<sup>3</sup>.

Electoral dynamics were reinforced by demographic trends and the resulting expansion of the working-class population. In 1936, a full century after the industrial revolution began this population already represented 30% of the active population and by the end of the 1970s had reached 37%<sup>4</sup>.

The left was swept into power in 1981 and captured the Presidency on the force of this twin dynamic as well as an ability to attract large numbers of middle-class voters (see below). During the second round of the elections, the working-class voted 72% in favor of Mitterrand compared to a national average of 52% (+20 pts.).

### ***Vanishing workers: a shrinking working-class...***

Anyone present as the 1970s drew to a close will have witnessed the demographic shift that resulted in dramatic reductions in the working-class population which had until that point been expanding rapidly.



The combined effect of successive oil shocks in 1974 and 1979 shook a number of industrial sectors to their core (steel and metalworking, etc.). By 1982, the working-class population descended to below 34% of active adults, its level at the dawn of the 1950s. It was the end of France's post-war boom known as *les trente glorieuses* (thirty glorious years) and the beginning of a period of decline sometimes called *les trente piteuses* (thirty dismal years). Aside from a brief blip at the dawn of the new millennium, the trend has been almost continuously downward: the economy shed over a million working-class jobs from the beginning of the 1970s and by 2006 only 23% of the active population could be classified as working-class<sup>5</sup>.

The shrinking effect has been amplified, from a subjective point of view, by the rapid erosion of class consciousness. In 2010, scarcely 6% of the active population saw themselves as authentically working-class, representing only one-quarter of the actual number (as opposed to 23% in 1966— two-thirds of the actual total)<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Mattei Dogan, “Les clivages politiques de la classe ouvrière”, in Léo Hamon, *Les Nouveaux Comportements politiques de la classe ouvrière*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Florent Gougou, Les mutations du vote ouvrier sous la Ve République, Revue FondationS

<sup>4</sup> L'évolution sociale de la population active, Baudouin Seys, Département de l'édition, Insee, 1996, [http://www.insee.fr/FR/FFC/DOCS\\_FFC/ip434bis.pdf](http://www.insee.fr/FR/FFC/DOCS_FFC/ip434bis.pdf) (Table created by Insee based on this article)

<sup>5</sup> “Working-class” in a broad sense : factory workers, now representing only 13% of the active population as well as the tertiary (also warehouse workers, drivers, retail workers, etc)

<sup>6</sup> Investigation of the Middle Class, Ifop for la Fondapol, November 2010

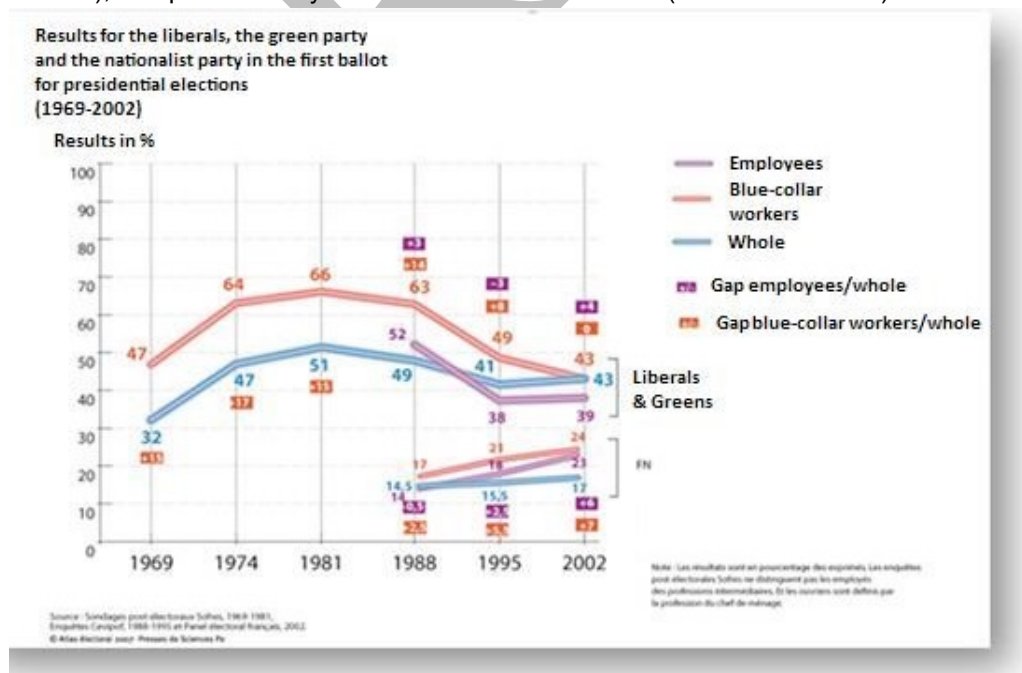
To find an explanation for this phenomenon it is useful to identify the internal reorganization at play at the heart of the working-class. The role of unskilled labor has declined precipitously while the number of skilled laborers has risen in response to technological progress and innovation. The latter, whose numbers continue to rise, have become enthusiastic members of consumer society and see themselves as members of the middle-class. The modern workplace has also evolved and “two of every five workers find themselves employed by the tertiary sector in areas such as transportation, warehouse jobs, retail, or service positions such as office temps or cleaning staff. These jobs are characterized by isolation and instability and are in sectors where there is no tradition of union representation and collective action<sup>7</sup>” With worker alienation on one side and upward mobility on the other and rapidly evolving workplaces everywhere the working-class identity is being assaulted from three sides at once and is in danger of disappearing completely.

### *... the less the electorate leans toward the left: the less they vote accordingly*

The declining significance of the working-class in proportion to the rest of French society became more noticeable at the dawn of the 1980s and voting patterns began to shift away from their traditional support of the left. At the close of the 1970s the writing was already on the wall; the identity of the working-class and its influence on voting patterns was clearly on the wane. In 1978, in the second round of legislative elections the French working-class was far more likely to vote for the left-wing candidate, by 22 points compared to the rest of the population. By 1980, this figure was 20 points representing a loss of 2 points.

From this date onwards, the process of erosion accelerated to the point of rupture that has been observed in recent years as demonstrated through the graphic below. During the first round of the Presidential elections, the differential between the working class and the rest of French society in terms of votes cast for the left has shown a downward trend moving from +15 points in 1981 (66% to 51%), +14 in 1988 (63% to 49%), a mere +8 in 1995 (49% to 41%), and falling to 0 in 2002 (43% to 43%).

In 2002, the left fared no better with the working-class than with the rest of the population and the very idea of an authentically working-class vote was called into question. Even worse, the Socialist Party candidate, Lionel Jospin, attracted only 13% of the working-class vote, lower than the national average of 16% (-3 points). The current figures represent a drastic reorientation of voting patterns in the years between 1981 and 2002 and this is particularly true for the working-class: -23 points (from 66% to 43%), compared to only -8% for the entire electorate (from 51% to 43%).



<sup>7</sup> Nonna Mayer, Que reste-t-il du vote de classe ? Le cas français, Lien social et politiques, no. 49, 2003

Confirmation of the previously observed trends arrived during the 2007 presidential elections. In the first round of voting the working-class favored the Socialists' candidate Ségolène Royal as much as the rest of the population but in the second round of voting they split their vote evenly: 50-50 between Nicolas Sarkozy and Ségolène Royal. While the working-class voted for Royal more than the national average (+3 points) what was truly shocking was that large numbers of working-class voters who had refrained from voting for the Socialists' candidate during the first round (often done in France to express sympathy with a marginal candidate with no real chance for election to be switched to the more serious candidate during the second round) failed to do so in the second round as well.



The left has been placed in a critical electoral situation with the loss of the working-class vote. Analyses of the for 2007 election showed participation rates of up to 70% by the working-class (compared to a national average of 84%), and if left working class support had matched those of 1981 Ségolène Royal would have emerged victorious in her presidential campaign with 51.5% of votes (see the table below).

2007 presidential results - Hypothesis for a persistent vote of the working classe population 1981 (recorded votes)							
	Mitterrand 1981			Royal 2007		Turnout rate	Proportion in working population
	2nd round	deviation from the mean		2nd round	deviation from the real mean		
Whole	52%		Whole	51,52%		83,97%	
Asked people's occupations			Voters' occupations				100,00%
Farmers, farm workers	32%	0,62	Farmers	22%	0,43	88,14%	2,70%
Storekeepers, craftsmen	36%	0,69	Retailers, craftsmen	25%	0,49	88,14%	6,00%
Industry, large retailers, professionnals, senior executives	45%	0,87	Executives, intermediate occupations	49%	0,95	88,14%	15,40%
Middle ranking executives, employees	62%	1,19	Intermediate occupations	51%	0,99	88,14%	23,60%
			Employees	53%	1,03	88,14%	29,30%
Blue-collar workers	72%	1,38	Blue-collar workers	66%	1,38	70,00%	23,00%

### ***Fragmentation of the working-class***

At the heart of these trends is clear evidence that the working-class is no longer the homogenous entity that was observed in the 1950s. As was touched on above we have observed the existence of:

- low skill workers, fearful of redundancy, living a social reality divergent from that of more qualified, and consequently better integrated, peers;
- isolated workers who labor under conditions that bear little resemblance to the collective atmosphere of the factory floor or workshop and are consequently faced with limited capacity for collective bargaining;
- second- or third-generation laborers preoccupied with a lack of social mobility and concerned over foreign competition. These tendencies are much less marked among recently arrived immigrants or naturalized citizens.

These divergences can have important consequences on the outcome of elections. One example is the rise of the far-right National Front over the period 1988-2002, and the party's strong ties to the working class<sup>8</sup> :

<b>Graph 3. Votes for Le Pen, 1st round according to the number of ties in the working-class population (%)</b>			
	0 tie	1 tie	2 ties
Pres. 1988	13% (1 777)	16% (963)	17% (361)
Pres. 1995	12% (1 780)	18% (991)	22% (377)
Pres. 2002 Le Pen	16% (1 589)	18% (936)	26% (305)
Pres. 2002 Le Pen + Mégret	16% (1 589)	22% (936)	29% (305)
1. tie = being a blue-collar worker, having a blue-collar father			

Multiple working-class identities, with distinct political options, form and re-form. Are we witnessing a return to the days of the Popular Front when, as Mattei Dogan clearly indicated, a more heterogeneous reality held sway at the heart of the working class.

## 1.2. The grounds for divorce: changing values

Historically, as outlined above, the natural constituency for the left has been the working-class and the success of the left-working class alliance has always rested on a shared set of economic and cultural values. Instability and the rise of Fascism resulted in the brief but crucial period of French national unity under the Popular Front government in the 1930s. This unity was further solidified in the post-war years when left and working class demands regularly overlapped: legislation limiting working time, paid holidays and a statutory minimum wage, social protections, nationalization of large enterprises, and price controls. At the time, both shared a conservative moral outlook – the only concession being made during the 1945 elections when women were finally given the right to vote. The rather unorthodox views of Léon Blum, one of the movement's leading lights, toward the role of women and the family were never going to sit well with the rank and file of the French left<sup>9</sup>.

The student movement that erupted on the streets of Paris in May 1968 sent shockwaves outward and led to the first real rupture between the left and its traditional working-class base. While there was still agreement on economic aims (new demands for social justice, outcries over lack of spending power), the split along cultural lines was profound as scenes of total incomprehension between the students and their blue-collar cousins would attest on numerous occasions. Sexual freedom, access to birth control and loosening of restrictions on abortion, and thumbing one's nose toward traditional family values became the order of the day. Expecting the average factory worker or miner to sign on to such an agenda was clearly a step too far and the political arm of France's left found itself out of sync with the moral aspirations of its traditional base. Economic arguments trumped moral ones however and served as the glue to hold the movement together as demands for a "rupture" with the capitalist system steadily rose in volume. This allowed not only for the maintenance of a coalition on the left but saw it go from strength to strength and it wasn't until after the shock of the 1970s petroleum crisis that the movement began to lose steam.

### The 1980s: a path of no return?

At the level of the economy and social protection the French left can lay claim to a remarkable track record and legacy of reform. Notable successes include legislation for retirement at 60, a 40-hour working week, increases in the minimum wage, and nationalization of key industries. Ensuring these

<sup>8</sup> Nonna Mayer, *Que reste-t-il du vote de classe ? Le cas français*, Lien social et politiques, n°49, 2003

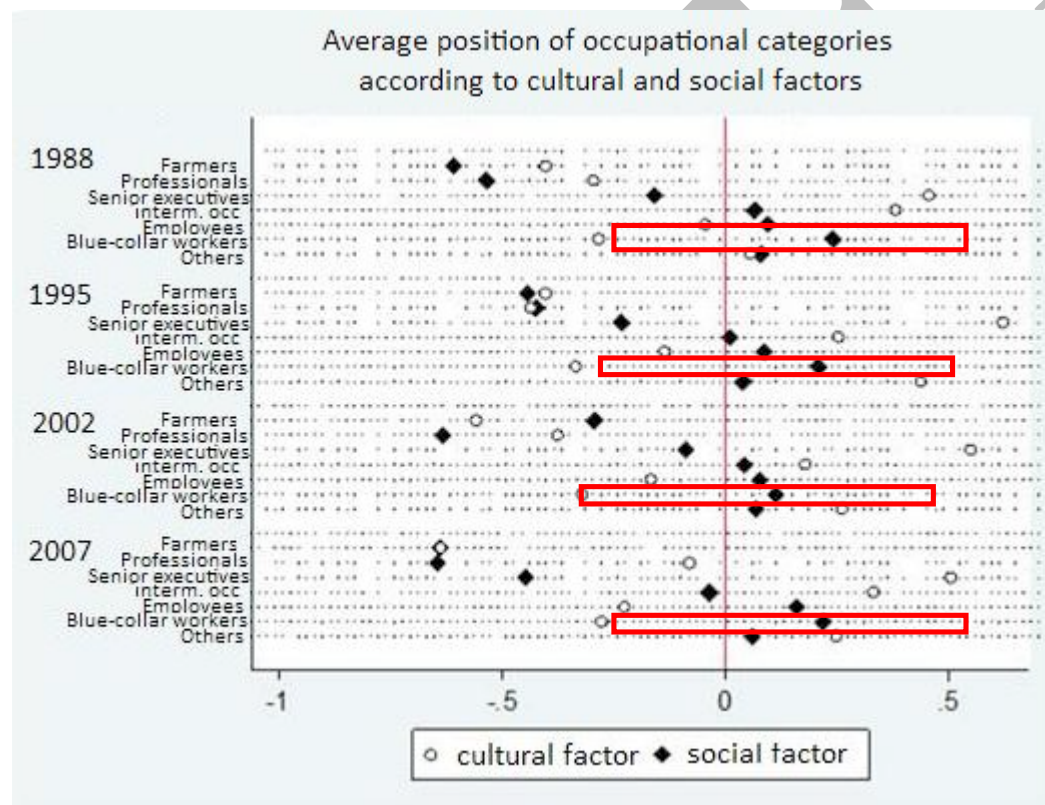
<sup>9</sup> In *Du Mariage* (1907), Léon Blum denounced the forced celibacy of females before marriage and favored more flexible marital relations.



gains are retained is another proposition altogether and presents a test that the left would seem to be failing. The politics of austerity, which began in 1983, have alienated a large segment of the base. The working-class has been particularly hard hit by the arrival of globalization, the restructuring of enterprises, and high unemployment leaving many with no real hope for the future. When the former Socialist leader of France, Lionel Jospin glibly remarked, “the state can’t do everything” in response to the closure of factories owned by Renault it was viewed by the working class as a sign of political impotence. Henceforth, economic considerations figured less prominently in the political allegiance of most members of the working-class.

A parallel consideration to the shifts noted above is the decline of the working-class relative to the rest of the population. Under assault for years through rising unemployment, instability, social fragmentation and a collective identity crisis – their reaction has primarily been one of withdrawal. The pride that came from belonging to the laboring classes has been largely replaced by an ugly resentment toward new arrivals in traditionally blue-collar sectors of the economy. The fear of immigration (and immigrants it must be said), outcries against welfare cheats and the wastefulness of public assistance; calls for a “moral” society, where we care for the marginalized and subscribe to shared values--these are the new rallying cries of the working classes.

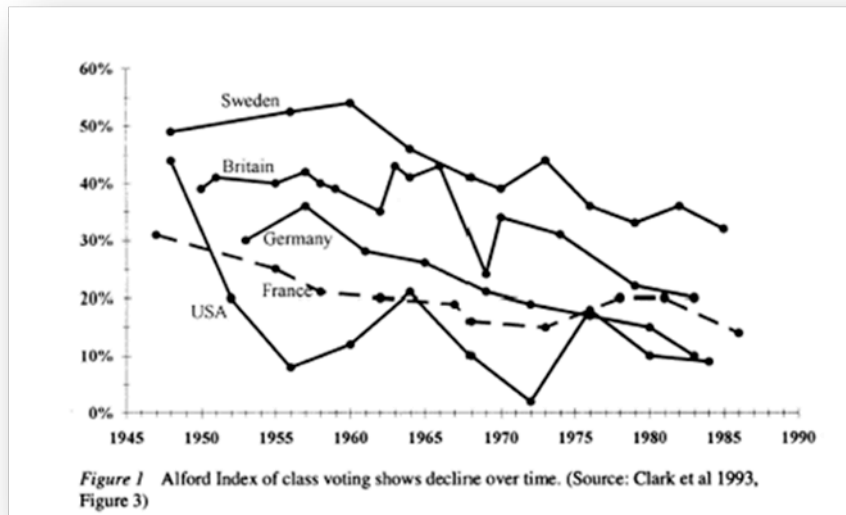
More and more the working-class is defining itself along cultural lines and is finding its values resonate most with parties further to the right of the political spectrum, a trend that is set to continue for the foreseeable future.(see graphic below<sup>10</sup>) :



<sup>10</sup> Source : V. Tiberj

### 1.3. A similar trend in other Western democracies

We find the same dynamic at play in the ensemble of Western liberal democracies. In Sweden, the social-democratic model par excellence, but also in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States the logic of class based voting (Alford Index) would appear to be on the wane. And in France the disparity between the working-class left and their professional cousins has in fact been shrinking since 1945 (see graphic below).



## 2 - A modern coalition in a process of structural renewal

The historical foundation on which the left coalition is based, as the voice of the working-class, has lost much of its luster. In its place, a new coalition is emerging, the outlines of which point to the France of tomorrow and provide a stark contrast to the bromides of the right as they claim the mantle of guardians of traditional French values.

### 2.1. The new electoral face of the left

#### *Graduates*

Graduates of institutions of higher learning can perhaps claim the most responsibility for adding some much needed dynamism to the electorate of the left.

This demographic has become a key component for creating a strong position on the political chessboard and the voting patterns of those belonging to this category demonstrate remarkable predictability. Even more than generational differences (see below) it would seem that having a degree leads to a stronger tendency to lean left.

As demonstrated by the graphic below which indicates the choices made by this group in the second round of the presidential elections, the evolution of voting patterns for graduates toward the left has been nothing short of spectacular: -5% when compared to the rest of the population in 1988, +5% in 1995, and 15% in 2007. Indeed, going forward the link between educational attainment and voting choices is clearer than ever.

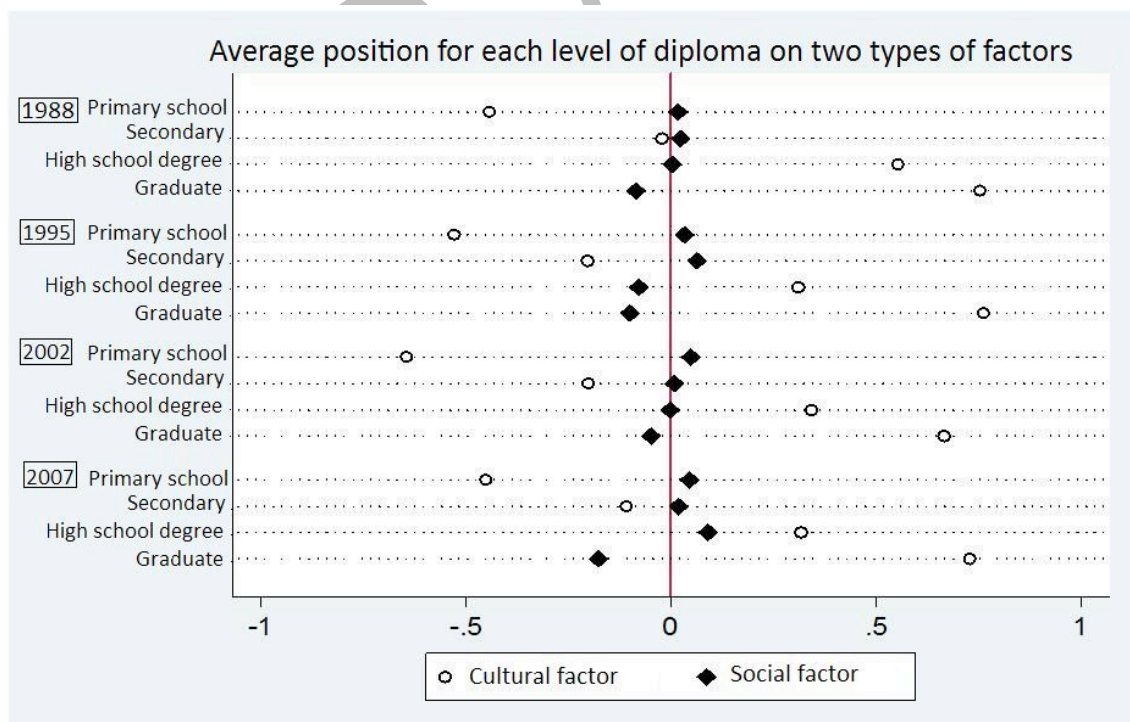
To be more specific, in 2007 Ségolène Royal scored highest among the most highly educated segments of the population (49%) and was less impressive among those with no history of higher education or a very weak one (45-46%).

Level of diploma	Votes for S. Royal - 2nd round
No diploma, Basic school-leaving diploma	46%
Vocational diploma	45%
High school diploma	47%
Undergraduate	47%
Graduate	49%



To find an explanation for the evolution we need look no further than the dynamics at play in the trend observed in the working-class where cultural values tend to prevail over other factors in voting decisions. The most recent presidential elections placed this dynamic at center stage as is clearly demonstrated by the graphic that appears below<sup>11</sup>. On economic or social questions the educated hold views as diverse as other segments of the population but when it comes to culture it is clearly the values espoused by the left that hold the greatest attraction (to the right on the graphic): respect for the opinions of others, tolerance, openness to cultural differences, tolerance toward immigration ...

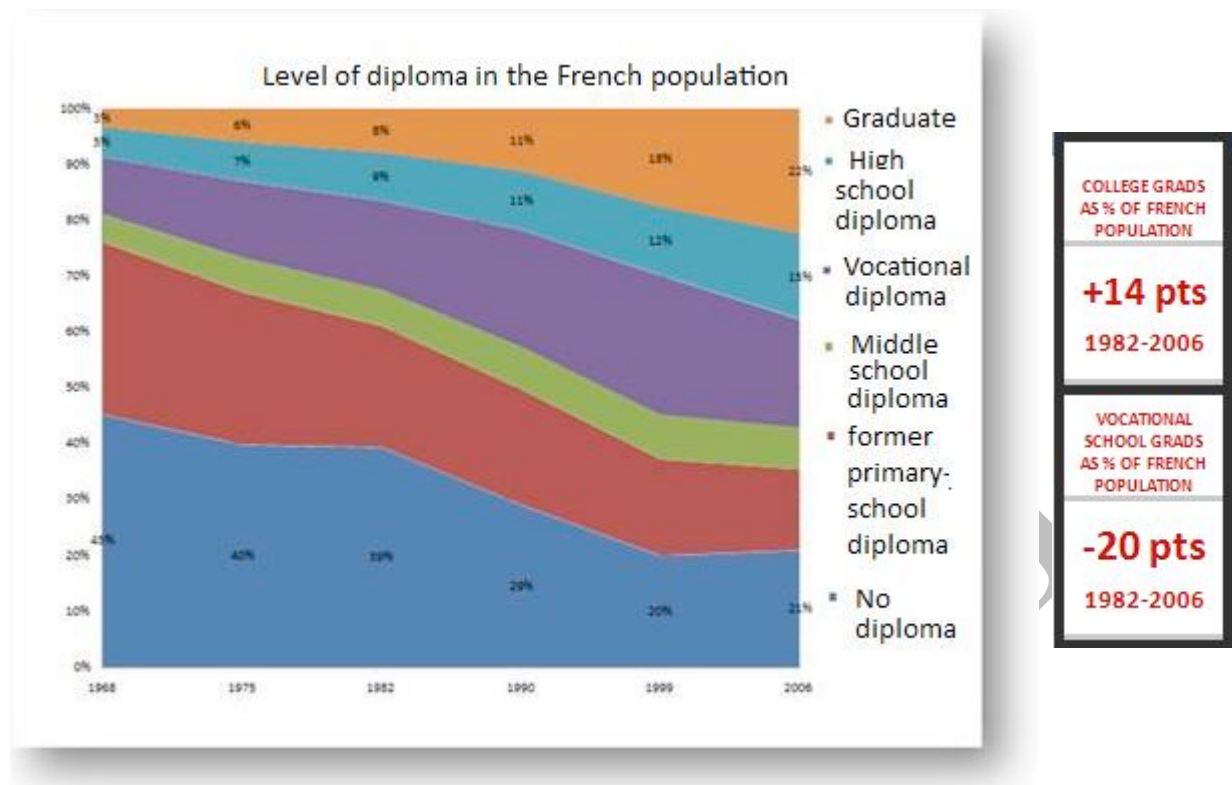
This evolution is significant for its electoral implications as the number of college graduates has continued to grow. As indicated in the graphic below<sup>12</sup>, the number of holders of a BEP diploma (the traditional certification for entry into the trades) has fallen from 83% of the population in 1982 to 63%



<sup>11</sup> Source : Vincent Tiberj

<sup>12</sup> Source : Vincent Tiberj

in 2006 (-20 points) while those holding advanced degrees has progressed from 8% to 22% (+14 points) over the same period.



This expansion shows no signs of slowing and it is actually predicted to accelerate. If current “stocks” of college graduates are at 22% today in the French population then the incoming “flow” is 40% of young people. This figure is set to rise rapidly and could reach levels as high as 60% following the example of other advanced nations. If this trend continues the future potential for growth in the left-leaning electorate is enormous.

### Young people

Young people have demonstrated an unwavering preference for the left in their voting habits. Between 1981 and 2007 left support has been remarkably stable for the 18-24 age group. In the second round of the presidential elections of 1981 their preference for the PS candidate was 21% superior to the average (+11 points) while the figure for 2007 was 24% (+11 points again). The youth vote has today become a key component of the left’s electoral strategy.

There is a strong correlation between voting preference and age and the young are far more likely to vote left than their elders who tend to lean right as they grow older. The table below contains figures from the 2007 presidential elections as well as the 2010 regional elections. While there is certainly a lean towards the right in the 25-34 age group this has much to do with the unique formative experiences they lived through in the early nineties when the left was mired in corruption and the Mitterrand era was drawing to a close. They voted less for the left than the 35-49 age group in 2007 (50% to 52%) and the pattern was repeated again in 2010.



### Tableau opinionway à insérer

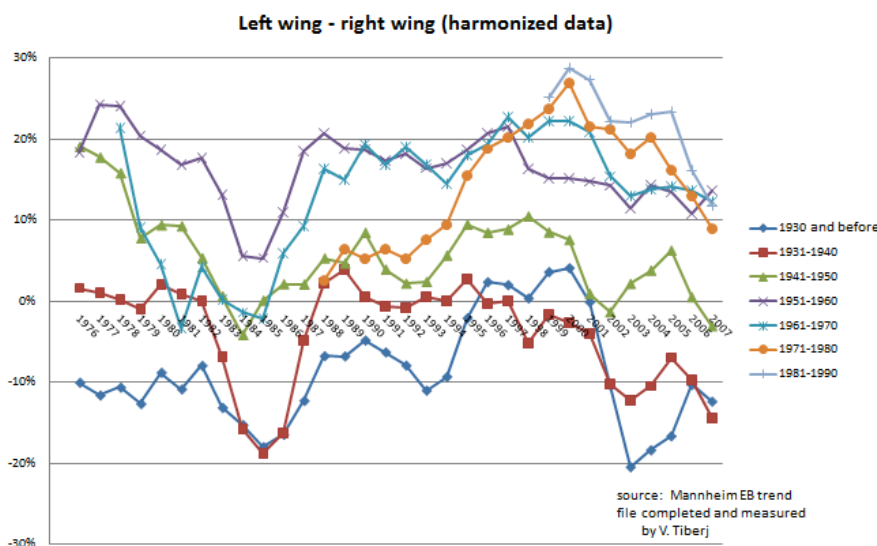
How to explain the correlation between voting and age group? Youth most certainly plays a role. The younger we are the more we are idealistic. As we advance in age, we become less so and have more



to lose and “defend” which leads to a gradual process of exclusion from the main currents of society as driven by the younger generation. The graphic presented above in which cultural values are crossed with various socio-economic groups clearly supports the argument that with each successive generation the more one advances in age the higher the tendency to vote conservative.

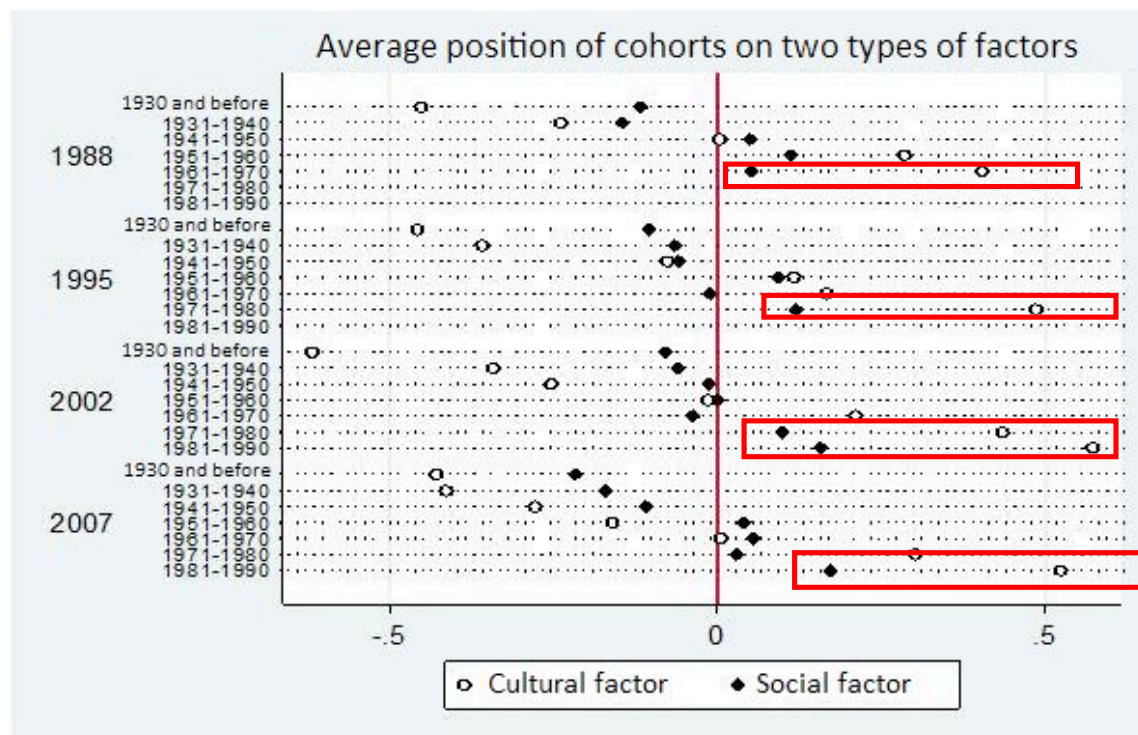
Nevertheless, generational differences still play a role in voting behavior, and can be observed more clearly than age-related variables. When someone joins the left at 20 years of age there is a significant possibility that they will have shifted their alliance by the time they reach 60. And yet, more often than not, youthful idealism remains and party membership continues. In fact, the graphic below shows a remarkable evolution: more recent generations are far more likely to vote for the left and the choice made at 20 remains the preference at 60. The generation born in the years 1930-1940 tends to vote consistently, whether at the beginning or tail end of the cohort, around 20% less for the left than the generation of 1980-1990. This phenomenon has led Vincent Tiberj to remark that the “newly arriving majority” is fundamentally of the left and as one generation replaces another the electoral potential of the left will continue to increase.

## The political majority that is coming up...



How can the youth vote be explained ? The following graphic<sup>13</sup> goes some way toward providing an explanation. For the last thirty years young people have favored the left more than their elders and while this tendency is partially tied to social and economic beliefs it is primarily an expression of cultural values. Culture has become a defining factor and anchors the young to the left.

<sup>13</sup> Source : Vincent Tiberj



The key role young people play on the left is nevertheless subject to certain limitations.

The first limitation: Demographic trends do not favor the young. The relative weight of this age group is set to decline due to the graying of the overall population and will go from 11.9% in 1950 to 7.8% in 2050. Nevertheless, the process is gradual and in 2012 the relative weight of the 18-24 age group will be 8.7% compared to 8.9% in 2007.

The second limitation: the rate of participation for young people is weaker and more erratic--2002 was notable for their high abstention rate which was cited as a reason for the poor showing of the left in the first round of the election. Mobilization was higher in 2007 and there was a 6% jump in the rate of inscription for the 18-24 age group (most of which was self-motivated and occurred in campaign offices) while for the 25-29 age group the figure was 5%. Despite all this youth turnout at the election was below the national average at 77% in the second round (-7 points).

The third limitation: the heterogeneous nature of the youth vote in the first round. While there is a tendency for convergence in the second round, in the first round diversity is the rule and voting for the socialists at this stage depends largely on circumstance and the specific offering of candidates. If socialist support was robust in 1988 following the "Generation Mitterand" campaign or in 2007 when Nicolas Sarkozy provoked ire through his efforts to attract the gray vote (+21% and 22% respectively) it was rather less so in 1981, 1995, and 2002 (-15%, -9%, and 19% respectively). The clear message is that the youth vote is progressive before it is socialist.

The final limitation: the youth vote defies easy categorization and is remarkably diverse. When we look at the behavior of voters under-30 in the second round of the 2007 presidential elections (53% voted for Royal, +6 points compared to the rest of the electorate), we soon realize that it was the most marginal segment of this group that voted most overwhelmingly for the socialists' candidate: 60% (+13%), compared to 48% for the more fortunate members of this cohort who find themselves in stable employment (+1 point). Young women deserve particular mention as a driving force on the left. The polarization of voting patterns is in fact more pronounced among young people: 56% of women

aged under 30 voted for Royal (+9 points) compared to 48% of men under 30 years (+1 points). These divisions were far less dramatic when the electorate is viewed as a whole--48% (+1) versus 46%.<sup>14</sup>

### Minorities

Multicultural France votes overwhelmingly for the left. In the absence of direct statistics reflecting this aspect of voter behavior, two elements allow us to confirm the trend.

The first comes from comparative surveys among the populations of deprived urban areas (ZUS)<sup>15</sup>, home to a disproportionate number of foreign-born individuals, which demonstrate that in 2007 there was a stronger tendency to vote left in these districts (+12 points in the second round of the presidential elections when compared to the national voting pattern), and in particular for the Socialists (+8 points in the first round of voting), than in neighboring areas of greater affluence.

In percentage of recorded votes	Deprived areas		Peripheries to deprived areas	
	1st round	2nd round	1st round	2nd round
Far left	8,3		6,7	
Liberals	42,6	62,2	34,5	50,6
S.Royal	38,5		30,3	
Center	14,8		18,5	
Right wing	23,6	37,8	31,2	49,4
N. Sarkozy	21,9		29,1	
Far right	10,6		9,1	

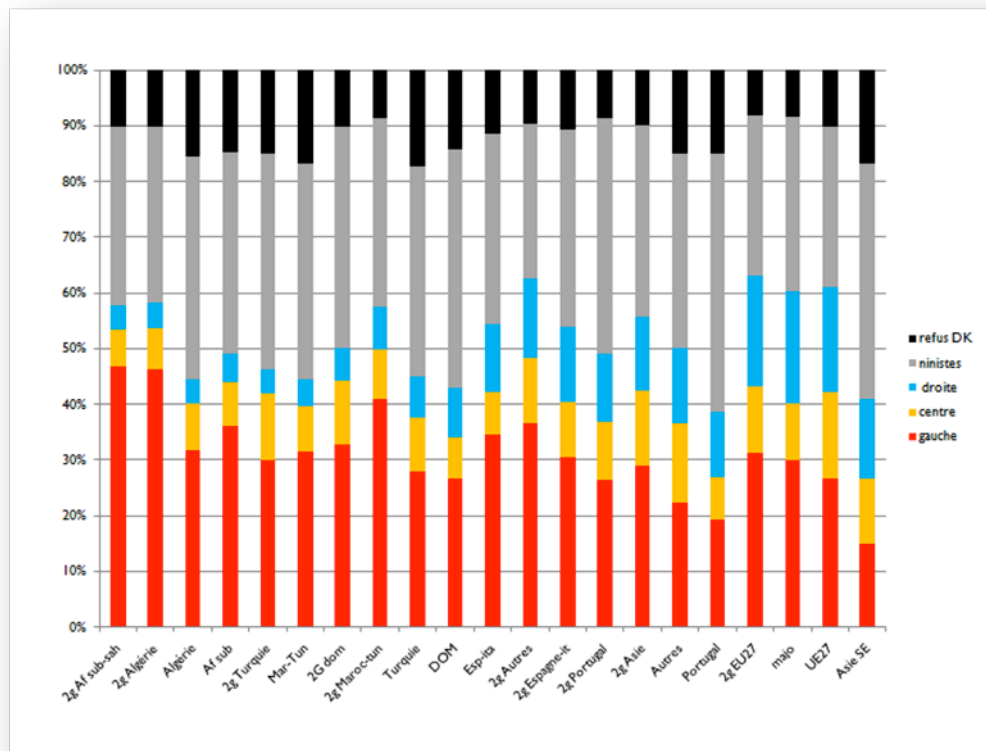
The second, is an almost automatic tendency for individuals with an immigrant background, (both first and second generation) to place themselves within the social current of the left as revealed by investigations which are summarized below<sup>16</sup>. The left-right polarization is extreme and of an order of 80-20, or even 90-10 and is constant regardless of country of origin. It is strongest for French citizens of African origin (regardless of ethnicity, i.e. North or sub-Saharan African) and is reinforced in the second generation when compared to the first (by around 10 points). The only exception to this pattern is Asian immigrants who lean toward the right as a result of strong anti-communist tendencies.

DEPRIVED REGION VOTING 2007
<b>+12 pts</b>
Leaning left in deprived regions and peripheries

<sup>14</sup> Enquête Jour du vote OpinionWay.

<sup>15</sup> L'élection présidentielle de 2007 et les violences urbaines de 2005 dans les zones urbaines sensibles françaises, Fauvelle-Aymar, François et Vornetti

<sup>16</sup> Source : Vincent Tiberj



This tendency to vote left is relatively homogenous among immigrant populations and is no doubt the consequence of shared experiences with discrimination and the will to defend their identity in the face of a political discourse that leans toward stigmatization.

Less engaged in the national political discourse this group has the sentiment of existing only as a political “object” as opposed to a political “actor” in public debates. It is also home to a large number of undecided voters.

Despite these challenges, multicultural France is an enthusiastic partner in elections. The participation rate for the second generation children of immigrants is equal to homegrown populations when all things are equal along socio-demographic lines<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, the difference in rates of participation between deprived urban areas and their more fortunate neighbors is negligible. Indeed, at the heart of the urban ghetto are some of the highest rates of participation and it is only in a small number of these, each possessing rather particular characteristics, that the rate of participation drops below the national average<sup>18</sup>.

The French immigrant population is expanding demographically and undergoing an identity makeover:

- In 2006, close to 150,000 immigrants became naturalized French citizens (see table below<sup>19</sup>), representing growth of 60% when compared to 1995<sup>20</sup> :

<sup>17</sup> Source : Vincent Tiberj

<sup>18</sup> L'élection présidentielle de 2007 et les violences urbaines de 2005 dans les zones urbaines sensibles françaises, Fauvelle-Aymar, François et Vornetti

<sup>19</sup> In Insee (2008) : [http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg\\_id=0&ref\\_id=NATCCI02122](http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=NATCCI02122)

<sup>20</sup> For this case in particular more recent figures would be desirable. cet égard en particulier,

Modes of acquisition for French nationality				
Mode of acquisition	1995	2000	2005	2006
By decree	40 867	77 478	101 785	87 878
Mode: naturalization	36 280	68 750	89 100	77 655
Re-integration	4 587	8 728	12 685	10 223
Public: over 18	28 826	52 825	63 784	59 569
Under 18s, benefiting from collective effect	12 041	24 653	38 001	28 309
By declaration	21 017	28 094	22 818	30 556
Foreigners married to French people	16 659	26 056	21 527	29 276
Foreigners' children under 18 born in France	1 124	1	0	0
Other declarations	3 234	2 037	1 291	1 280
Without formalities (by a majority)	///	8 570	2 966	2 553
By early declaration	///	35 883	27 258	26 881
At 13,14 and 15	///	17 593	19 855	20 301
At 16 and 17	///	18 290	7 403	6 580
By demonstration of the will	30 526///	///	///	///
Total	92 410	150 025	154 827	147 868

NOTE: /// = no results due to former formalities; ( e ) = estimation;  
Field of study: Main France  
Source: Ministère de l'immigration, de l'intégration, de l'identité nationale et du développement solidaire et Ministère de la Justice.

- If the previously observed pattern holds true then we can expect the arrival of between 500,000 and 750,000 newly naturalized French citizens onto election rolls between 2007 and 2012 who will be participating in the next presidential elections as first-time voters.
- This group of first-time voters will be composed of around 300,000 children of first-generation immigrants, who were born and raised in France. In 2000, of those individuals born and raised in France and aged between 0 and 65, 2.3 million were the children of two immigrant parents or in 5% of the cases one immigrant parent; one million of these children were young children or adolescents under 17 years of age<sup>21</sup> while around 300,000 had reached the age of maturity and acquired French citizenship, along with the right to vote in 2007<sup>22</sup>. Another 300,000 individuals will reach maturity in subsequent years and will be eligible to vote in 2012.
- Today, 6 to 7% of the French citizens are Muslims and 23% of the French have at least one immigrant parent.
- The number of children born to non-native mothers continues to rise and is somewhat higher than the average: "In 2006, children born to non-native mothers represented 12% of the total. This is slightly less than in 2005 (12.4%) but still represent a slight increase over figures from 10 years ago: in 1996 the proportion was 9.6%"<sup>23</sup>. In absolute terms: foreign-born mothers gave birth to over 100,000 children in 2008 breaking previous records and confirming the trend toward more children observed since 1981<sup>24</sup>. As more children of immigrants become

FIRST-TIME  
NATURALIZED  
CITIZEN VOTERS  
+  
**500,000 -  
750,000**  
2007-2012

<sup>21</sup> Les immigrés en France : une situation qui évolue, Chloé Tavan, Insee, 2005

<sup>22</sup> Dans l'hypothèse d'une égale répartition de la population par année de naissance.

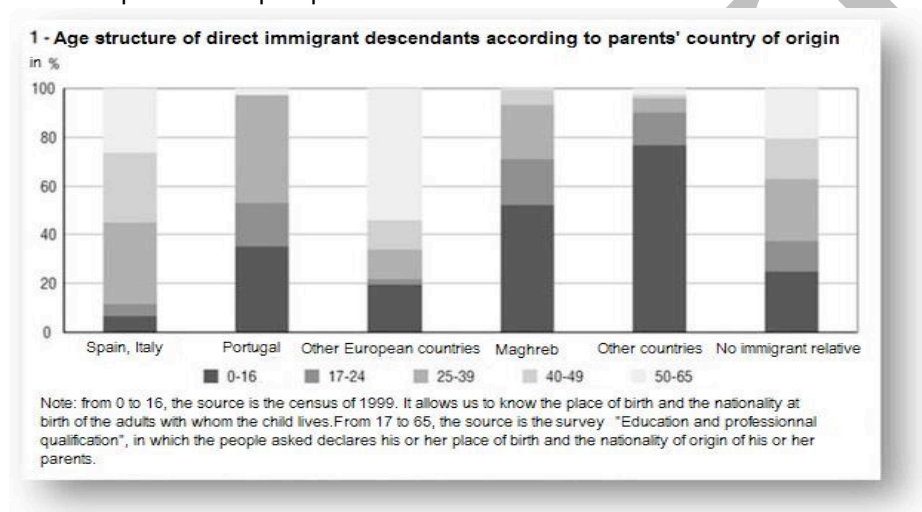
<sup>23</sup> Bilan démographique 2006 : un excédent naturel record, Lucile Richet-Mastain, Insee

<sup>24</sup> Bilan démographique 2008 : plus d'enfants, de plus en plus tard, Anne Pla, Insee



naturalized French citizens the trend for the foreseeable future will be continued diversification of the electorate.

- While those born on French soil make up the majority of naturalized citizens, the non-negligible number of foreign-born naturalized citizens must also be considered. Their numbers have also risen from 2.15% of the population in 1982 to 2.67% in 2004 (1,940,000)<sup>25</sup>.
- This new group of voters, whether first or second generation immigrants, is of a different complexion than previous waves of immigrants who are drifting away from the body politic through the combined effects of age and death. The most noticeable difference is that they are less likely to come from the Europe (Italy, Spain, Poland) than North Africa. Belief systems have changed as well and new immigrants are far more likely to be Muslim than Christian. The effect of these and other criteria makes this wave of immigration particularly sensitive to identity politics and discrimination. The graphic below<sup>26</sup> presents a breakdown, according to age of the children born to immigrant parents, and by the country of the parents' origin to allow for a comprehensive perspective on the issue.



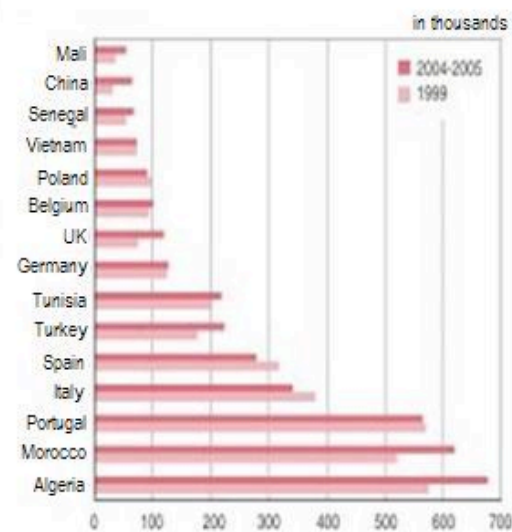
Source: Insee, *Recensement de la population, 1999 et enquête Formation et qualification professionnelle, 2003*

- The trend is set to become more pronounced in the future: in 2004-2005 the number of immigrants from Portugal, Italy, and Spain had declined somewhat since 1999 whereas the reverse was true for immigration from Algeria, Morocco, Turkey, and Tunisia over the same period:

<sup>25</sup> Insee, 2004

<sup>26</sup> Les immigrés en France - Édition 2005, Collection "Références", Insee

**Graph 1 - Immigrants according to their place of birth in 1999 and 2004-2005**



Field of study: Mainland France

Source : Insee, recensement de 1999, enquêtes annuelles de recensement de 2004 et 2005.

The political stakes could not be higher: multicultural France has become the most dynamic component of contemporary society and harnessing its electoral and demographic forces is the key to the future success of the left.

### ***The Female Vote***

If the future President François Mitterrand had hit the campaign trail in 1965 he would have scarcely needed to take women into account when planning his election strategy. Women were absent from economic life and were consigned to their role as homemakers and guardians of traditional family values. If anything they formed a natural constituency of the right. In the election that brought Mitterrand to power in 1981, the female vote accounted for a mere 49% of his support compared to 56% for males. While the “gender gap” had become part of the landscape in other democracies and led women to favor left-wing candidates—the left was more likely to defend social services in the United States or champion equality in Sweden—the idea was slow to catch on in France and the only real trend for female voters was an aversion to the National Front.

In the years between 1980 and 2007, running parallel to the massive arrival of women on the labor market, the old polarization along gender lines was gradually smoothed over and ultimately reversed.

In 2007, for the first time in the history of French elections, women supported for the left in greater numbers than the national average coming out in favor of the socialists’ Ségolène Royal with 48% of the vote, 2 points higher than men.

As noted previously, the new dynamic was largely driven by younger women. The polarized nature of the female electorate according to age was rather more pronounced than in its male counterpart. For females, 56% of under-30s supported the left-wing candidate compared to an average of 48%; for males, the corresponding figures were 48% for under-30s and an average of 46%.



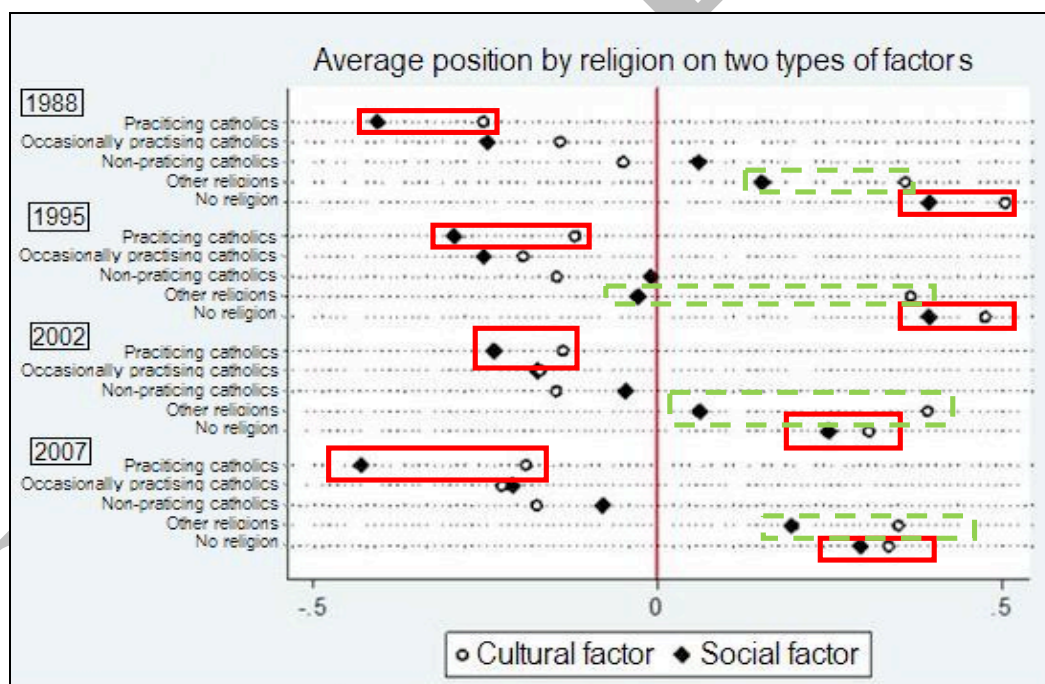
The overall trend was confirmed during the 2010 regional elections and represents considerable potential for the future of the left and its electoral strategy. Women have become key to the success of the left. Female voting for left-wing candidates rose to 58%, representing an increase of 10 points over 2007 while for males the pattern was more modest with 51% and a 5 point gain.

Women have become more numerous than men in the French population and represent 51.5% of the total. This trend is set to continue for the foreseeable future. While men are indeed more numerous in younger age groups women are far more numerous at the opposite end of the age spectrum as a result of superior life expectancies<sup>2728</sup>.

A final point of consideration should be the rapidity with which the female vote has shifted from the right to the left, and the fact that women now represent the majority of left-wing voters.

### *Non-denominational voters*

Voters who define themselves as practicing Catholics are inclined to favor the right whereas those who define themselves as generally “religious” vote more for the left. The moral compass of religion has lost none of its power to shape social and cultural values and has remained stable in terms of influencing voter behavior as shown by the graphic below<sup>29</sup> :



While the secular vote tends to favor the left, the same trend is observed for believers in faiths other than Catholicism, and those who tick the box marked “other religion” next to beliefs. The latter are 80% Muslim and vote overwhelmingly for the left.

These current conditions create demographic dynamics that are favorable to the left as can be seen in the graphic that follows<sup>30</sup>, the “non-denominational” vote



<sup>27</sup> Women account for 53.7% of the 65-74 age group and 63.3% of those over 75.

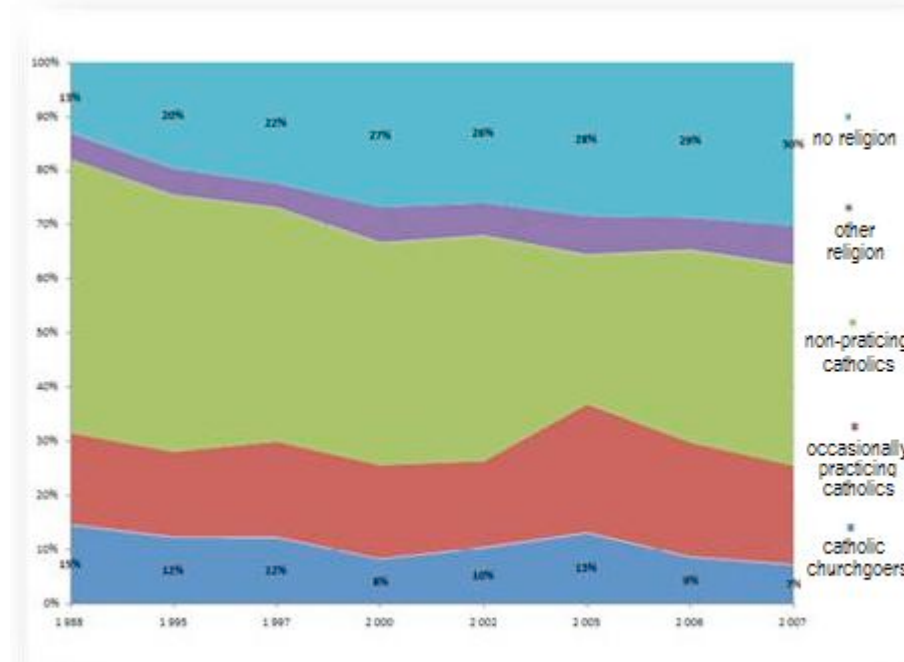
<sup>28</sup> Projection de la pyramide des âges interactive, Insee 2011 : <http://www.insee.fr/fr/ppp/bases-de-donnees/irweb/projpop0760/dd/pyramide/pyramide.htm>

<sup>29</sup> Source : Vincent Tiberj

<sup>30</sup> Source : V. Tiberj



(composed of both casual and devoted believers) has become as widespread as its Catholic counterpart. Inter-generational transmission of faith will reinforce the trend and perhaps overturn it as the number of Catholic baptisms continues to decline and the age factor reduces the number of Catholics.



### Urban Voters

Residents of major cities are far more likely to vote left than their counterparts in the countryside. The arc of voting tends to run along lines that correspond directly to population density so that large metropolitan areas are overwhelmingly governed by the left. Meanwhile the French Senate bears almost no resemblance to urban patterns and remains one of the last bastions of conservatism because of the excessive weight accorded to rural votes in the system that determines its composition.

In 2007, the indicators were clear : Ségolène Royal took 50% of the vote in the largest cities and only 43% in the countryside<sup>31</sup>.

The current dynamic is favorable for the future of the French left as the country continues to urbanize, going from 73.3% metropolitan in 1982 to 75.5% in 1999, the most recent year for which census data are available.

Area	Votes for S. Royal - 2nd round
Rural	43%
Less than 20 000 inhabitants	46%
From 20 to 100 000 inhabitants	44%
More than 100 000 inhabitants	50%
Paris area	50%



Population repartition according to living places	
Rural	25%
From 2 to 20 000 inhabitants	17%
From 20 to 100 000 inhabitants	13%
More than 100 000 inhabitants	28%
Paris area	16%



<sup>31</sup> Enquête Jour du vote OpinionWay

The 2010 elections confirmed previously observed trends and reinforced the continuing rise of the left in the major cities. Large cities voted 55% for the left and rural support, although lower, was still respectable at 52%. The latter figure indicates the remarkable second-wind the left has been given among rural inhabitants (+9 points) compared to previous elections. This has raised the possibility of further gains for the left in France's least populated regions.

## 2.2. Limitations of the left-wing electoral alliance

### *The elderly, indispensable for electoral success?*

The elderly are the heart of the right. In 2007, as in 1981, the socialists fared worst among the over-65s. Polling of this group uncovered scores a full 12 points below the average level of support for the left. This weakness was expressed in 1981 with voting figures that bore out an inverse relationship between age and support for the left. The effect was starker in 2007, exposing a generational rupture in the relationship between those aged under-60, who voted left, and those over-60 who voted right.



In 2007, the support of the elderly was decisive: over-65s voted for the Gaullist Nicolas Sarkozy by a resounding margin, giving him 65% of their vote compared to only 35% for the Socialists' Ségolène Royal, a staggering gap of +30 points. The gulf created by the roughly 2,500,000 votes for the right from over-65s swept him to victory by a margin of 2,193,000 votes. Without the participation of over-65s, Ségolène Royal would have captured the Presidency. To take the logic a step further if she had only taken 43% of the over-65s she would have won. Without such low support from the elderly, the election was over before it even began.

One French peculiarity is the plurality of left-wing parties and the elderly tend to support the largest, and most socially-democratic of them, the *Parti socialiste*. In the first round of voting in presidential elections, the social-democratic candidate has tended to receive average levels of support (and sometimes a bit higher) from the elderly in elections since 1981: +2 points in 1981; -1 in 1988; +2 in 1995; +3 in 2002; and -2 in 2007. In other words, while the senior vote is not particularly socialist, it can be progressive.

Perhaps no single factor has been more detrimental to the success of the left than its poor ability appeal to the elderly.

The elderly regularly set records for participation during election cycles: more than 90% of voters born in the 1940s turned out in 2007 during both rounds of voting.

The senior population is expanding dramatically and over-60s represented 27% of the overall population in 2005 compared to only 23% in 1950. By 2030 they are forecast to account for 38%.

The stakes for the future could not be higher and the real question is: Are the elderly indispensable for future electoral success?

If the answer is yes, then the left has at least three reasons to be confident it its ability to capture the imagination of senior voters.



As it stood, the poor showing of the Socialists among the elderly in 2007, its worst ever, represented a watershed moment for the left. Under new conditions the potential to regain lost ground is plausible.

Compared to 2007, all things being equal, regaining 8 points of the over-65 vote would be enough to ensure success (a shift from 35% to 43% would have been allowed the Socialists to win the last presidential election). This goal is no small matter: it is a major challenge to achieve a 16 point margin shift in a demographic strongly attached to the political right in both values and voting patterns. But if attained, the result would be a passage away from the fatal -30 point differential (35/65) to the more manageable -14 point differential (43/57) required to win elections.

As it stands now, the elderly are feeling betrayed by the politics to which they subscribed in 2007. President Sarkozy, at the very least, has them pulling out their hair as much for his private missteps as his public bluster, seen as unbecoming to a French leader. They did not hesitate to register their displeasure during the regional elections of 2010 in which the left made significant strides with the over-65s augmenting its score by 10 points over the 2007 figures. All told, the left received 45% of the over-65 vote. The relative propensity of the over-65s to vote for the left witnessed a general improvement, going from -12 points to -9 points when compared to the average for all voters.

At a more fundamental level, promising opportunities are arising in the cracks that have appeared during a process of generational renewal. Beyond the role of age on voting patterns already described (the natural constituency of the right rises along with increases in age), we can identify a strong generational effect (we vote similarly at 60 as we did at 20). Recent generations have found themselves more and more in sync with the left. The dynamic is clearly identifiable in comparisons between over-65s, and the generation aged 50-64 for whom the primary formative experience was the student movement of 1968. When placing themselves within a political current individually<sup>32</sup>, over 65s demonstrate a clear preference for the ideology of the right (37% compared to a national average of 19%); the inverse is true for the generation aged 50-64 who feel rather more in tune with the left or extreme-left (30% and 8% compared to a national average of 25% and 4%) and are put off by the right (a mere 13%). For voters who will turn 65 in 2012 the tendency should be to gravitate less toward the right than the generation they are replacing.

### ***The working-class: gone forever?***

Has the working class permanently deserted the left? The possibility is real.

While the working-class turned out 58% in favor of the left in the last regional elections, representing an 8 point improvement over the presidential elections, the differential in relation to the rest of the electorate was essentially the same: +4 points in the regional elections (58% against 54%), and +3 points in the presidential elections (50% against 47%). Thus, we can observe that the working-class vote has drifted away from the left at the same rate as the rest of the population. This current showing is far from the glory days of +22 points relative to non-working class voters in the legislative elections of 1978 and +20 points for the presidential elections in 1981.

Make no mistake, it is likely that the working class will continue to slip from the grasp of the left. We have already seen that working-class values no longer find their reflection in the left. Yet, until recently, no other political party was willing to pick up the slack. No other party was able to successfully integrate the working-class and its avowed preference for cultural values espoused by the right or even far-right (the fight against immigration, fear of Islam, social breakdowns...) along with the social and political agenda of the left. That was until the arrival of Marine Le Pen, and the newly energized far-right National Front (FN).

The "republicanization" of the FN under its new leader (abandoning its more extremist wing, anti-semitism, and nostalgia for Vichy France) has allowed the party to emerge from its ghetto on the loony fringe of the political spectrum. This new respectability and a renewed emphasis on the "national"

---

<sup>32</sup> Ifop for France-Soir – L'auto-positionnement des Français sur l'axe gauche-droite – September 2010

aspect of the party's agenda fits in well with working-class aspirations. Still firmly on the right and still quite "hard" on cultural questions but compatible with liberal democracy and with an eye on governing. All these strands have congealed to make the party acceptable to polite society and attractive to the working-class voter.

More than ever the makeover of the FN has had a destabilizing effect on political discourse concerning economic and social questions. Jean-Marie Le Pen, the party's founder, promoted a laissez-faire approach to social and economic questions. Key components of the party's agenda were promotion of free-enterprise (the cult of the shopkeeper and local artisan), limited government, and lower taxes (including the abolition of income taxes). His daughter has been at pains to distance the party from these policies and is promoting a kinder, friendlier, "social" agenda from which to challenge the left on its own turf: promotion of the welfare state, worker protections against competition, social equality and so on.

The FN now defines itself as a "nationalist" and "social" party: conservative in regards to cultural questions and progressive on economic and social ones. It has positioned itself as the champion of the working-class and for the first time in 30 years this demographic has found itself with a political party to match its own aspirations. In light of these observations it should be clear that preventing the FN from becoming the working-class party is probably a losing game. Moreover, the party has every chance of becoming a party of workers in the broader sense as salaried employees (white collar workers) demonstrate remarkably similar tendencies to their blue-collar colleagues.

The most recent opinion polls confirm that the rise of the FN has the potential to unsettle the presidential elections and a new class-consciousness has arisen with the National Front as its center of gravity. In February 2011<sup>33</sup>, an Ifop poll estimated potential support of 20% for Marine Le Pen in the first round of the 2012 elections. This stunning result is largely based on her resonance with her target constituency: 37% of working-class voters declared their intention to vote in her favor along with 32% of salaried employees. The Socialists received a more modest 16-17% (split between D. Strauss-Kahn and M. Aubry) of working class support and only 19-20% from salaried employees putting the left neck-and-neck with the Gaullist President. For both categories of voter, the *Parti socialiste* (PS), regardless of who is chosen to represent the party in the election is polling less well than Ségolène Royal in the first round of the 2007 elections (25% for the working-class and 24% for salaried employees).

---

<sup>33</sup> Survey Ifop-France Soir, 17 February 2011

## *Middle Class Uncertainty*

A thorough analysis of middle class voting patterns is never simple. While 65% of the French population is defined as middle class or upper-middle class<sup>34</sup> this demographic is littered with internal contradictions and there are numerous currents which demand exploration. Additional complexity arises due the shifting nature in the ways the group is defined by statistical agencies of the state: what was once defined in 1982 according to two typologies by sector, “manufacturing, retail, the professions, senior management” or status, “employee, manager” was later replaced by a system based on three professional classifications “Managers, knowledge workers”, “the professions”, and “employees” (white collar workers). To add to the complexity one must also add the trades, shopkeepers, and agricultural workers<sup>35</sup>.

There are nevertheless certain constants that are always relevant.

*The upper-middle class tends to vote for the left though the division between the well-off and lower ends of this spectrum has become blurred...*

During the second round of voting during the presidential elections in 1981 there was a sharp contrast between the behavior of “employees and managers” on one side and those employed in “manufacturing, retail, the professions, and senior management” on the other. The differential in voting for the left was 17 points and followed a clear internal class logic:

:

- Employees and managers had a stronger propensity to vote left +10 points when compared to the electorate as a whole (62% to 52%);
- Those employed in manufacturing, retail, the professions, and senior management displayed the opposite tendency -7 points (45%).

On the other hand, by 2007, middle-class preferences had converged. The differential in voting for the left fell to 4 points and the internal class logic became blurry:

- Employees were more likely to vote left (+6 points) compared to the overall electorate (53% to 47%);
- Professionals, +4 points (51% for the left)
- Management and knowledge workers, +2 points (49%).

*... but the lower-middle class is drifting away from the left...*

In 1981, François Mitterrand attracted was able to attract 62% of the vote from employees and management. In 2007, Ségolène Royal was only able to count on 53% of employees, a significant drop of 9 points, and 51% of management (tertiary sector), a decline of 11 points. A complete collapse of the working-class vote (-22 points) completed the picture and signaled the end of an era as the left's assumptions about voter demographics were shattered.



<sup>34</sup> Ifop-Fondapol, La France des classes moyennes, November 2010.

<sup>35</sup> En 2007, the left continued to lose terrain relative to 1981: only 22% of farmers (-10 pts) and 36% of tradesmen and small business owners (-11 pts) voted for the left in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round. Among farmers the younger generation was more likely to lean right. It is unlikely the left will reconquer these voters through the generational effect observed elsewhere.

This realignment of society was especially damaging to the left's electoral machine as it coincided with the movement of much of French economic activity to the tertiary sector. Consequently, there was an expansion in the population of professionals and employees. Whereas in 1982, 43.9% of the French population were managers or employees by 2006, 52.9% of the active population could be classified as professionals.

*...for the reason that employees...*

One element highlighting the specificities of the current realignment is that female employees are less likely than their male colleagues to vote left. They waited until the second round of voting and when they did vote it was only at 51% (58% for men). Female employees in the private sector were even less likely to vote for the left (only 51% of private sector employees voted for the Socialists in the second round of 2007 compared to 60% of their counterparts in the public sector<sup>36</sup>).

The behavior of female employees is surprising as we have already discussed the increasing tendency for the overall female electorate to vote for the left. The late arrival of women on the labor market means that they tend to be younger than average. Shouldn't this translate into a vote for the left, in line with the rest of their age group? In the United States, employees are some of the Democrats' most fervent supporters. So what gives?

The explanation can be found in the total failure of the left to address this growing segment of the population through an outdated communications strategy that still places the working-class on a pedestal. The mythology of the left has become so intertwined with the history of the workers movement that the party has had trouble responding to the social and economic realities faced daily by the typical female employee who lacks the support network of the factory floor and is often a single mother, non-unionized, in unstable employment, and without a historical class consciousness.

*... have joined the middle-class exodus to the suburbs.*

Living in small- or medium-sized town on the periphery of large urban areas, suburban residents have developed their own unique characteristics. More often than not they are middle class and dream of a comfortable home in a safe and clean neighborhood within easy commuting distance of work and served by high quality public services (most notably schools for their children). Most are prevented from realizing this dream by the invisible barrier of high property values and live in fear of slipping backward or watching their neighborhood deteriorate. New arrivals from deprived urban areas elicit groans of despair as they dread ghettoization and the social ills it could attract: insecurity and dangerous schools that could threaten the bright future they have planned for their children. They may flee urban areas altogether. They spend large amounts of time on ever longer commutes to and from work and have little contact with immigrants other than on public transport.

The profile of the individual above is typical of the type of voter that has been lost by the left. They feel abandoned and dispossessed which is why Jean-Marie Le Pen was able to register his strongest growth in support in the anonymous suburbs between 1995 and 2002. In towns of between 20,000 and 100,000 on the periphery of large cities Ségolène Royal faced her stiffest challenge and attracted a mere 44% of voters in the second round of the 2007 elections.

---

<sup>36</sup> Survey : Jour du vote, OpinionWay



## 2.3. Electoral stakes : the new face of the French left

### *A profound upheaval at the heart of the electorate*

These evolutions - the vanishing historical legacy of the left-wing coalition and the emergence of the “new” Left – are part of a seismic shift in the electorate

The Remaking of the French Electorate				
The New Left				
Category	Will Vote Left	Leaning Left	Participation Rate	Demographic Evolution
Graduates	+	++	++	++
18-24 years	++	+	--	-
Minorities	++	+	--	++
Females	+	++	=	=
Non-catholic	++	+	-	++
Urban	+	=	=	+
Swing Vote				
Category	Will Vote Left	Leaning Left	Participation Rate	Demographic Evolution
Working-class	=	--	-	--
Employees	+	--	-	+
Professionals	+	--	=	+
Senior Managers	=	+	+	+
Right				
Category	Will Vote Left	Leaning Left	Participation Rate	Demographic Evolution
Elderly	--	=	++	++
Small Business	--	-	+	-
Farmers	--	-	+	--
Catholics	-	=	+	--
In Red : the historic coalition				

The emerging face of the electorate can be divided into three blocks.

- The “new” Left coalition.

The new coalition has little in common with the historical legacy of the left, an alliance between the working-class and the lower-middle class, which formed in the 1960s-70s and on which François Mitterrand rode to power in 1981. The makeup of the alliance has shifted, with the sole exception of the youth vote which has remained constant, and is now composed of groups with no history of support for the left (women, graduates, city-dwellers) or marginal populations (minorities, not-Catholics)

The coalition is highly partisan. One stream votes in an extremely partisan manner (the gap between the vote of youth, minorities, and non-Catholics and the rest of the population is 10 points). And they vote more and more for the left: the dynamic is reinforced rather than weakened. This is particularly true for women (an evolution of 10 points toward the left between 2007 and 2010, from 48% to 58%, or 3 points higher than the rest of the population) and for graduates

- The conservatives

The conservative base has changed little over the years and consists of: the elderly, small business owners (trades, and shopkeepers), farmers, and Catholics. They have become more partisan and the propensity to vote right tends to harden over time.

- The swing vote or *no man's land*, unpredictable and unstable

This group is composed of a cross-section from all areas of the economy. It has become a refuge of last resort for the left's historical base (blue-collar workers, employees, middle class). Students are notably absent as they have remained loyal to the left.

In previous eras, occupation was a defining factor in political orientation, those at the lower end of the economic ladder tended to vote left and the inverse was true at the top. The working-class, employees, the middle class (tertiary), and the upper-middle class were all arranged in a neat line that ran from left to right.

Times have changed and the lines between different categories have blurred resulting in a collapse of working class support for the left, less enthusiastic support from employees, and a rising tide of support from the middle classes. The effect of the shift has created a more level playing field where the traditional right/left dichotomy no longer really applies and each candidate is judged more on merit. Class-based voting no longer follows clearly defined lines and these can be crossed or even wiped away at the slightest shift in the wind. This is as true for the well-off and graduates who tend to lean left as it is for the plumber in the suburbs who tends to lean right.

As indicated in the table below, these three electoral voting blocks are each characterized by their own unique characteristics:

The electorate of the modern left is composed largely of individuals who place themselves within the movement's socio-economic dynamic as much as its political action system. They are naturally inclined to vote left as they find in the party a vision that fits in comfortably with their own set of cultural values. In the past voters tended to focus more on the social or political agenda of the party but this is no longer the case. Graduates and city-dwellers hardly figure in the social and economic policies of the left's political arm but are nevertheless some of its most ardent supporters, particularly young people and minorities.

The core of the right is fundamentally opposed to the value system espoused by the left, sometimes in radical ways as with farmers and to a lesser degree, the elderly.

Swing voters are partisans of the culture wars: one segment rallies to the left; the other the right. For the working-class, the socio-economic values of the left hold the most appeal. They support a strong State sector, quality public services, and decent pensions ... culturally however they feel more at home on the right. Public insecurity, fears over immigration and the rise of Islam, and defense of traditional values are all themes that resonate with the working-class and find no echo on the left. The dynamic is reversed for the middle class (professionals and the well-off); they prefer the culture of the left but the economic policies of the right. This tension is particularly acute for the upper-middle class and varies according to the statute of the population this designation covers: senior management expressed stronger support for the economic policies of the right and knowledge workers expressed stronger sympathy for the cultural program of the left.



Category	Socio-economic Values	Cultural Values
<b>The New Left</b>		
Graduates	-	++
18-24 years	+	++
Minorities	+	++
Female	+	+
Non-catholic	+	+
Urban	=	+
<b>Swing vote</b>		
Working-class	+	-
Employees	+	-
Professionals	=	+
Senior Managers	--	++
<b>The right</b>		
Elderly	-	--
Small Business	--	=
Farmers	--	--
Catholics	-	-

## The identity of the new left : the France of tomorrow

The roots of the left can be found in the historical narrative of class consciousness: the “exploited” proletariat arrayed against the robber barons and the interests of capital; the salaried workers, blue- or white-collar, defending their interests against those of management and the well-off. The existence of a class structure based entirely on socioeconomic variables is as old as time and has not gone anywhere and continues to echo through the behavior of employees and the working-class in the voting booth where they continue to favor the left. Nevertheless, former certainties have blurred and certain trends are on the path to extinction.

Much of left’s current identity crisis is being shaped through its relationship with the future and it is through this dynamic that the future face of the movement will emerge. To invest in the future, or defend the past? That is the question. The new Left represents the France of tomorrow: younger, more female, multi-cultural, better educated, more urban. It is a work in progress and is held together through shared cultural values. The buzz words are: Change, tolerance, openness, solidarity, optimism, action.

The France of tomorrow is fundamentally opposed to conservatives, and objects to their tired refrains along the lines of, “France is becoming less and less France” or “remember the good old days”. The new left stands in stark contrast to the right’s core constituency who are fearful of the future, pessimistic, small-minded, and unwilling to share their hard won gains. This group is composed of the elderly, Catholics and citizens fearing the loss of their livelihood (farmers, tradesman and shopkeepers, and more recently, blue-collar workers and salaried employees).

The “socioeconomic values” axis is also in play as the France of tomorrow has an open door policy and welcomes “outsiders” and those who wish to come in (particularly to the labor market) but find themselves bumping up against cultural obstacles: young people, women, minorities, the long-term unemployed. France presents these marginal populations with a particularly harsh playing field as the entire system is heavily tilted to favor those already entrenched in the labor market and in order to preserve the status quo, newcomers must pay the price. To overcome these barriers, “outsiders” deserve public policies that correspond to their aspirations, and social services that favor

emancipation from a cycle of poverty and public assistance. The strongest support for these policies comes from the educated middle class, through their natural propensity to favor the “underdog”.

The vision for a more “social” future for the French Republic has no shortage of detractors. The spirit of individual freedom and reduced government, of personal responsibility rather than solidarity is alive and well in the heart of traditional France. Support for this vision is most widespread among the elderly, small business owners and tradesmen, farmers, Catholics ... Newer arrivals are fearful “insiders” (both blue- and white-collar) who fear an erosion of their hard-won rights, primarily job protection through France’s *CDI* statute and generous benefits packages. They have called for State intervention to serve their own interests, such as protection against pension reform and prefer a protectionist regime to a dynamic one. Their cries are more along the lines of “keep me safe” than “help me to succeed”. Whether “insider” or “outsider” it would seem that in matters socioeconomic, the preference of both sides is for a strong State but the vision of what the State should be is not the same.

## The central problem: the new left, a minority voting block

The sketch of the new left drawn in the previous paragraphs bears some similarities to the coalition that allowed Barack Obama to capture the White House in 2008 with one crucial difference: the French left was unable to mobilize enough voters to become a majority in 2007.



Beyond the specific conditions that make each election cycle unique we can identify three clear structural weakness that have reduced the left’s chances for success.

The first is related to the demographic limitations of the target constituency.

Minorities represent a rapidly growing segment of the population but are starting from a relatively low base. Children of immigrants represent only 5% of the French population whereas in the U.S. minorities represented 15% of voters in 1988 and had climbed to 26% by 2008<sup>37</sup>. Already, more than one baby in two born on American soil has minority parents and projections show that sometime after 2040 the non-white population will have become the majority...

The number of young people in France is dropping while in the U.S. the opposite is true: the total population reaching the age at which they can vote was barely 1.19% in France while in the U.S the figure was 1.46%, a gap of .23%.

In millions	US	France
Total population (2010)	308	63
People coming of age (/year)	4,5	0,75
People coming of age (%)	1,46%	1,19%

The second difficulty: the new coalition lacks sufficient numbers.

The left was particularly effective at mobilizing minorities: 62-38 support for Ségolène Royal in deprived urban areas (ZUS), and scores of 80-20 were not unheard of in working-class neighborhoods. This pattern should be familiar to any observers of President Obama’s successful run where he recorded similar numbers (80-20). Here similarities with the US end however, as the youth vote is rather more likely to support the left in the US than it is in France: Barack Obama defeated his opponent John McCain by 34 points (66/32) whereas in France the gap was only 16 points for Ségolène Royal against Sarkozy in 2007 (58/42). However, the most glaring deficiency is with female voters: Ségolène Royal actually scored 2 points better with men in 2007 (48/46) whereas candidate Obama was able to command a 12 point difference over his opponent by appealing to women (56/43).

The final difficulty is the poor rate of participation in elections. Young people and minorities tend to vote less than the rest of the population: 77% for the 18-24s (-7 points compared to the avg.) and 80% for inhabitants of ZUS (-4 points). In traditionally working-class neighborhood the turnout has been

<sup>37</sup> New Progressive America, Ruy Teixeira, March 2009

particularly disappointing at only 50% (-34 points). In elections which are already suffering low rates of voter turnout the gulf becomes even greater: falling to as low as 10% during regional or *cantonale* elections. It is not unheard of for the entire electorate to stay home during a particularly banal election. The pattern can also be observed in the U.S.

Demographic weaknesses, low participation, insufficient margins over the right—these are reasons why the new Left coalition is not yet the majority.

### **3 – Defining an election strategy for 2012?**

The election of 2012 will unfold during a period of profound change in the French political landscape: former hierarchies are collapsing but have yet to disappear, and a replacement structure is under construction but has yet to be fully deployed. The field is wide open.

#### **3.1. The “France of Tomorrow” Strategy**

The path of least resistance for the left in 2012 will be to energize its base and implement a strategy to get out the vote of its core: electorate. Young people, minorities, females, and graduates all represent potential variables that give some margin for maneuver.

##### *Rallying the left*

We have already observed that young people tend to favor the left: they already vote left but the future depends on strengthening this trend and defining the choice more clearly. The strategic objective is to accelerate this process and in the 2010 regional elections there was evidence of success in this area: young people (+8 points, 63/34) and women (+10 points, 58/42) made the most dramatic progress over and above the rest of the electorate (+7) and produced results that would not be unfamiliar to supporters of President Obama.

To assemble the required support for the next election the left will have to harness the resonance its values hold for the public at large—socioeconomic yes, but cultural even more so. From now on, increased emphasis should be placed on investment in the future, the promotion of equal opportunities, and on a more open discussion of diversity and the creation of a more inclusive French identity.

The next priority will be to boost turnout. Abstainers make up a significant proportion of the voters needed to ensure the success of the left (young people, minorities), and their turnout rate is clearly inferior to the average. Registration of voters will also be critical in the working-class neighborhoods where, despite the legal requirements to do so, many do not. Mobilization will depend on education and a campaign to convince the target population that their vote really matters. Doing this will depend on an American-style grassroots campaign (door-to-door, calls...).

Could simply getting out the vote create conditions for victory in 2012? Absolutely.

American campaign strategists believe that a strong campaign to get out the vote has the potential to boost turnout in their camp by up to two points. When applied to France (36 million voters in 2007) this percentage could, at least in theory, boost the number of PS voters by 700,000.

Energizing the rank-and-file members of the party will be crucial, and our intentionally conservative working hypothesis projects a repeat of the results of 2007 with one notable exception: amelioration in turnout for the base. Based on the principle that prevailing conditions would suggest an increase in the numbers of these voters this could have a huge impact on the result of the election.

This trend was clearly observed during the recent regional elections where the youth vote rose by 1 point over the 2007 figure (+7 to +8). Thus it would be highly plausible to suggest that given the overall trend toward the left among this group and taking into account the lag of France in this area when compared to other countries, notably the U.S., a projection of +2 points by 2012 is hardly out of the question. Based on a total youth vote of 4 million this figure would suggest that the number voting for the left will record a net increase of 160,000 over 2007 figures.

The minority vote is already so substantial for the left that there is little room for improvement. For this group of voters, boosting turnout is the primary goal.

In contrast, the female vote represents a huge potential for the left. Accounting for half the voting population (18 million in 2007), their support of the left leaped by +10 points during the regional elections when compared to the presidential one, 3 points higher than the national average. A further 4 points would boost the left's chances considerably in 2012 through the addition of 1,440,000 supplementary votes.

Finally, graduates strengthened their support for the left, voting 1 point above the national average. The potential for the left is difficult to evaluate: graduates have a natural affinity for the cultural values of the left but distaste for their economic policies. If the support they demonstrated during the regional elections remains stable, and taking account of their numbers (8 million), they could add a further boost of 160,000 votes to the mix

#### Evaluation of the "France of Tomorrow" electoral strategy

	Nicolas Sarkozy	Ségolène Royal
<b>Ecart de voix total en 2007</b>	+2.193.000	
<b>Prevailing trends - youth</b>	-80.000	+80.000
<b>Prevailing trends - minorities</b>	0	0
<b>Prevailing trends - women</b>	-720.000	+720.000
<b>Prevailing trends - graduates</b>	-80.000	+80.000
<b>Growth in Rate of Participation</b>		+700.000
<b>TOTAL</b>		+ 2.460.000
<b>Adjusted Total Gap</b>		+267.000

Under these hypotheses, and all other factors being equal, Ségolène Royal would have beaten her rival Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007. The key elements of this strategy are the female vote (it represents close to 60% of electoral growth) and increased turnout based on a strong campaign to get out the vote (28%).

It should be noted that these hypotheses are meant to be conservative and are "flavored" by the bitter experience of the 2007 presidential election in which the left was soundly defeated. If we were to update our model to account for a more accurate measurement of the growth in support for the left, as recorded in the 2010 elections (and the increasing gap over the national average), then it would not be an exaggeration to suggest a shift of more than 5 million votes.

### 3.2. Complementary strategy "Middle Class"

Focusing solely on strengthening the "France of Tomorrow" coalition certainly poses risks: the alliance will struggle to become the majority as some demographic trends found elsewhere, notably the United States, are weaker or absent from France. The question is stark: how do we grow this vital electorate? The service sector is currently split between the working- and middle class making two complimentary strategies not only possible but necessary.

The middle and upper-middle class, employed primarily in the service sector, share the same cultural values as the left but diverge sharply on economic questions.

Clearly an increase in the support of the middle class depends on emphasizing the shared cultural narrative while quietly brushing under the carpet some of the more contentious issues at the more radical end of the left's social and economic agenda.

This strategy is clearly compatible with the operating principles of the "France of Tomorrow" coalition as this segment of the voting population responds well to the cultural aspirations of the left. Professionals make up the largest part of this target population (23% of voters) and are becoming more numerous every day. They also represent a relatively blank slate from which to build the future coalition, opening up a gap of 14 points in their vote for the left in the regional elections over their

score in the presidential elections (compared to a +7 points average), the most spectacular evolution witnessed over this period.

### 3.4. Complementary strategy “Working Class”

The natural tendency of the left is to contort its behavior to the defining narrative of its historical roots in the working class. Yet this demographic represents increasingly fraught terrain and while their socioeconomic views conform to the left, culturally they have a greater affinity for the right.

The best strategy to appeal to this segment of the vote is to emphasize the left’s economic and social agenda while casting the State in the role of protector. Discussion of cultural issues should be minimized, most notably on the subjects of Islam or immigration.

Emphasis should be placed on similarities rather than differences and the left is well placed to respond to prevailing conditions: the economic crisis has generated a strong demand for social protections across the political spectrum.

Special care should be taken with the left’s strategy toward the working-class as the relationship is fragile. Building a campaign around the working-class is clearly out of the question as the historic core has been lost to the sands of time. Getting these voters to subscribe to the “France of Tomorrow” strategy will be a challenge and that can only be overcome through placing the primary emphasis on socioeconomic questions rather than cultural ones. Even this strategy will present problems as this group’s approach to economic questions is also divergent with the new mainstream of the left. On one side is a demand for more protection while on the other is the cry for equality of chances; a fear of losing hard won “insider” entitlements against the promotion of “outsiders”. Demographics indicate a losing battle for the left if they struggle for working class votes on this terrain and it will be exceedingly difficult to reverse the gravitational pull of the right in cultural matters.

Certain bright spots do exist however under the surface:

- Younger working-class voters. Primarily immigrants from the Maghréb (North Africa), they are naturally sympathetic to the left’s goals on immigration and national identity. In the prevailing climate however, this demographic is rapidly shrinking.
- Female salaried employees: this group represents huge potential for the left as close to 77% of this economic group is composed of women:

In thousands	Men	Women	Total
Total working population	13 488	12 203	25 691
Percentage of employee/gender	13%	47,50%	29,40%
Number of employees	11 753	5 796	7 553
Percentage of gender/employee	23%	77%	

([http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg\\_id=0&ref\\_id=HATnon03173](http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=HATnon03173))

Up until now, no political party has made overtures to this demographic or even made mention of them. They are forgotten voters who nevertheless are naturally sympathetic to the policies of the left. Typically, they work irregular hours under poor conditions, lack any collective bargaining power and live under difficult circumstances (single mothers). They share the same aspirations as the “outsiders” who find themselves excluded from economic activity. They would like to be “inside” and are looking for representation that corresponds to their aspirations.

### 3.4. The strategy of the impossible: shifting the elderly vote

The idea is simple and has gained some support from within the movement. The elderly played a large role in sinking Ségolène Royal in 2007 when she received only 35% of the over-65 vote. With only 43% of their vote she would have won the election. The influence of the elderly is of a magnitude even higher than their considerable numbers would suggest as this demographic continues to expand and strengthen its power to make or break elections. During the last election cycle it would have been fairly straightforward to make up the eight point gap by capitalizing on the profound sentiment of disillusion toward the outgoing Gaullist President. Additionally, the left is departing from such a low base with the elderly that even the most minor improvement would represent progress. With the right candidate, the right campaign could bear surprising fruit.

The rosy picture is complicated however by the small matter of values and by the elderly's vehement opposition to the left's agenda. They are firmly anchored on the right and it would take a massive "triangulation" effort to create the seismic shift necessary to bring them over to the left.

Two elements that represent potential to limit the negative impact of the elderly are:

- A candidate's leadership qualities. Seniors are highly sensitive to the credibility and gravitas of candidates and respond well to individuals who promise to return dignity to the Elysee Palace and the head of state role.
- 
- A "triangulation" on public safety. The elderly are particularly responsive to issues concerning security but this is also true for the majority of the population. The security issue has become somewhat detached from partisan politics and can thus be safely appropriated by the left without the risk of offending its own constituency.

\*

\*