



France's *Front National (FN)*

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1 Introduction

In the European Parliament (EP) elections of 22-25 May 2014, Front National (FN) obtained 24.9% of the vote in France, and thus became the largest French party in the EP with 24 seats. This result was described as a “political earthquake.” Yet it was not an isolated phenomenon: the FN has enjoyed a number of electoral successes in recent years. This Standard Note provides a brief history of the FN, before looking in more detail at its performance in the recent European Elections.

2 History of Front National

2.1 Early years

The FN was founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen.¹ It struggled to make any major electoral impact in its early years, but this changed decisively in the 1980s. FN gained 11% of the French vote in the 1984 European Elections, and went on to gain 9.8% of the vote in the Parliamentary elections of 1986. The latter result was especially notable since the electoral system had been changed – for one election only – to proportional representation.² Under this system, FN’s 9.8% vote share was enough to win 35 seats. Subsequently, in 1988, the FN made its first major impact in a Presidential election, with M. Le Pen obtaining 14.4% of first-round votes.

2.2 1990s and early 2000s: the first ‘earthquake’

The FN’s vote share remained broadly stable throughout most of the 1990s, with a notable drop in the European Elections of 1999: the party won just 5.7% of the French vote, a fall of 4.8 percentage points compared to the previous European elections in 1994. Yet this was followed by a remarkable breakthrough in the Presidential election of 2002: M. Le Pen obtained 16.9% of first-round votes, beating Lionel Jospin, the Socialist candidate, into third place, and progressing to a second round run-off against the sitting President, the UMP’s Jacques Chirac. Le Pen’s heavy defeat in the second round (polling 17.8% as opposed to 82.2% for M. Chirac) was regarded as inevitable, with the political forces of the left lending their support to the centre-right Chirac.³

2.3 Late 2000s to present: new beginnings under Marine Le Pen

In the late 2000s the UMP’s Nicolas Sarkozy succeeded in attracting many FN supporters,⁴ with M. Le Pen obtaining just 10.4% of first round votes in the 2007 Presidential election, and the FN just 6.3% of the French vote in the European Election of 2009. M. Le Pen retired from the party leadership in 2011, at which point a two-way battle for the leadership ensued, pitting his daughter Marine against Bruno Gollnisch. The former won a decisive victory, and has since sought to portray a more professional, and slightly more moderate, image than her father.⁵ In the Presidential Election of 2012, Marine Le Pen did not manage to emulate her father by qualifying for the run-off, but she succeeded in winning 17.9% of first-round votes – more than her father had ever managed.

In March 2014, just two months before the European Elections, mayoral elections took place across France. Almost 37,000 municipalities were contested, with the FN only putting up a

¹ <http://www.frontnational.com/membres/jean-marie-le-pen/>

² “The Rebirth of Right-Wing Charisma? The Cases of Jean-Marie Le Pen and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 3 (3), pp. 1-23.

³ “Le Pen vote shocks France”, *The Guardian*, 22 April 2002

⁴ “French election: Marine Le Pen voters grapple with their role as kingmakers”, *The Guardian*, 23 April 2012

⁵ “The French Right scores a historic victory”, *The New Yorker*, 31 March 2014

candidate in 597 of these. However, the party managed to win 11 mayoralties, comfortably surpassing its previous record of four.⁶

3 Electoral performance

The tables below provide a historical overview of the FN's electoral performance:

3.1 Presidential elections

Year	First round	Second round
1974	0.8%	
1981		
1988	14.4%	
1995	15.0%	
2002	16.9%	17.8%
2007	10.4%	
2012	17.9%	

3.2 Parliamentary elections

Year	Vote share (first round)	Seats
1973	0.5%	0
1978	0.3%	0
1981	0.2%	0
1986	9.8%	35
1988	9.8%	1
1993	12.7%	0
1997	14.9%	1
2002	11.1%	0
2007	4.3%	0
2012	13.6%	2

3.3 European elections

Year	Vote share	Seats
1984	11.0	10
1989	11.7	10
1994	10.5	11
1999	5.7	5
2004	9.8	7
2009	6.3	3

⁶ "French Socialists suffer as far-right and conservatives sweep elections", *The Guardian*, 31 March 2014

4 2014 EP elections: Front National's manifesto

As part of the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF), the FN stood on the following manifesto:

4.1 Institutional aspects

- At least a redefinition of the legislative powers assigned to the European Institutions and, more specifically, those that are linked to the Lisbon Treaty in terms of national sovereignty and subsidiarity principles.
- A greater consideration of European citizens through national referendums on issues of common interest at the European level.
- A re-examination of enlargement policies of the European Union by holding referendums in each Member States (sic) with regard to accession criteria.
- The setting up of effective solutions towards lower unemployment rates, especially among young people. This should be based on the conditions and evaluations pertaining to each Member State, and not on EU common policies; the individual approach being more effective than the general one.

4.2 Economic aspects

- Solidarity within the EU cannot be a one-way path. The European Union is facing its deepest crisis since its inception and economic issues that are truly real. The redistribution by the wealthiest Member States to those that are facing financial imbalance is not a viable solution and only serves to avoid, in the very short term, the collapse of the system. Therefore, the EAF will call to put an end to supporting measures or other types of funding to Member States in financial difficulty as a result of current economic views and Eurocentric dogmatism with regard to the single currency and austerity.
- The Member States that are facing a severe financial and economic crisis should be allowed to leave the Eurozone, while a concerted dissolution of the Eurozone should be considered. A Member State will be able to go back to its own national currency, to devalueate {sic} it if necessary, in order to relaunch its competitiveness.
- The implementation of protections for small, middle and large sized businesses, for industries in Europe and for the agricultural sector in particular. These protections will help to fight against the unfair competition induced by the mass importation of goods from countries outside the European Union or other Member States.

4.3 Social aspects and immigration policies

- With mass migration being a simplistic answer to the demographic and economic challenge Europe is actually facing, it is necessary to strengthen the position of the family in Europe and to preserve traditional family policies. These are the only viable solution to demographic issues, while implementing, for instance, a more equitable tax system.
- Defending the right for each Member State to shape and implement its own asylum and immigration policies, as well as all the legislation regarding social and labour rights for immigrants. Migrants from other EU Member States should also be subjected to these measures.
- An enhanced protection of secularism in Europe, whose Christian and humanistic roots are threatened by the rise of radical Islam within the European Union, and, in

general, an affirmation of the people's identity and of the nations that make up Europe.⁷

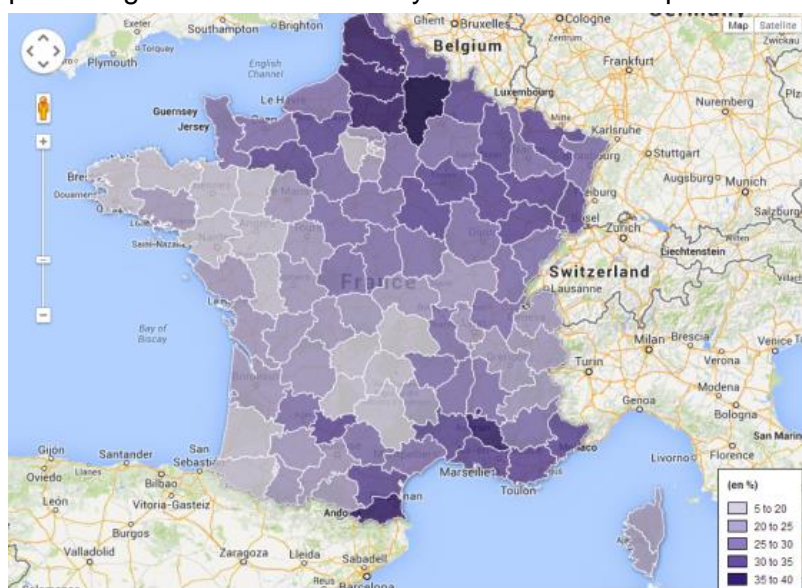
5 2014 EP elections: results

The table below provides an overview of the results, broken down by region:

Region	Front National	UMP	PS
North-West	33.62% (5/10 seats)	18.75% (2/10 seats)	11.78% (1/10 seats)
West	19.31% (2/9 seats)	19.64% (3/10 seats)	15.62% (2/10 seats)
East	28.98% (4/9 seats)	22.72% (3/9 seats)	13.24% (0/9 seats)
Massif central-Centre	24.18% (2/5 seats)	21.38% (2/5 seats)	15.82% (1/5 seats)
South-West	24.71% (3/10 seats)	18.52% (2/10 seats)	15.73% (2/10 seats)
South-East	28.18% (5/13 seats)	22.40% (3/13 seats)	11.88% (2/13 seats)
Ile-de-France	17.00% (3/15 seats)	21.79% (4/15 seats)	14.28% (3/15 seats)
Overseas Territories	10.25% (0/3 seats)	26.70% (1/3 seats)	19.36% (1/3 seats)

Source: [French Ministry of the Interior website](#) (accessed 19 June 2014)

As can be seen from the above, the FN's performance varied greatly from one region to another. It performed especially well in the North-West, and comparatively poorly in the Ile-de-France (including Paris) and the Overseas Territories. The map below shows the percentage of votes obtained by the FN in each department:



Source: J Smith, "[Mapping France - the link between unemployment, GDP and voting Front National](#)", *Prime Economics*, 10 June 2014

⁷ European Alliance for Freedom, *Political Party Manifesto: European Elections 2014*

6 Reaction

After the results were announced, the *Guardian* summarised the French Government's reaction as follows:

In Paris the prime minister, Manuel Valls, ruled out any policy change as the mainstream parties reeled from the results.

Valls, speaking on RTL radio before heading to the Elysée palace for an emergency mini-cabinet meeting, said President François Hollande and the Socialist government had been elected for a five-year term with a specific "roadmap". "I'm not going to change this roadmap," he said, referring to tax cuts which the government hopes will pave the way for economic recovery.

As the results became clear on Sunday evening, a sober-looking Valls went on television to acknowledge that an "earthquake" had shaken the country, and recommitted himself to restoring jobs and growth in response.

Hollande, in a televised speech to the nation last night, said the result was "painful" and an embarrassment for France, the "founding nation of the European Union, homeland of human rights, country of freedom".

He also suggested that the EU should curb some of its powers, saying: "Europe must be simple, clear, to be effective where it is needed and to pull back where it is not needed."⁸

Following the elections, the FN attempted to form a political group in the European Parliament. The formation of a group requires 25 MEPs from 7 countries.⁹ Four other far-right parties agreed to join with the FN (Italy's Lega Nord, the Netherlands' Partij voor de Vrijheid, Austria's Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs and Belgium's Vlaams Belang). It was reported that Poland's Kongres Nowej Prawicy might be willing to join, but its views proved too extreme for Geert Wilders, the Partij voor de Vrijheid leader. Ultimately no further parties were willing to join by the deadline of 24 June, so the FN was unable to form a political group.¹⁰

7 Analysis

The French journalist Pierre Haski has argued that:

Deep in the economic and social crisis, with more than 3m unemployed and no concrete sign of relief, French voters have concluded that the main parties have failed.

[...]

Le Pen has long anticipated the discomfiture of the two main parties. She coined the UMPS tag, fusing the UMP and the Socialist party into a single party. It is a marketing ploy that has captured voters' imaginations.

She succeeded in territory her father never explored: she has moved from confrontational politics to a more respectable, proposal-oriented approach. Her economic programme may sound unrealistic and even demagogic to experts and elites. Laurence Parisot, a former president of the business federation

⁸ ["Front National's success not surprising to heartland supporters"](#), *The Guardian*, 27 May 2014

⁹ ["Buoyant Le Pen seeks more allies for Eurosceptic group in Brussels"](#), *The Guardian*, 28 May 2014

¹⁰ ["Le Pen fails to create far-right EP faction"](#), *EU Observer*, 24 June 2014

Medef, even published a book demolishing the FN's programme, but to no effect.

Front National has won the conceptual battle with simplistic ideas – get France out of the euro, stop the free movement of people in Europe – all radically different from the mainstream parties that tried and failed with "reasonable" policies.¹¹

The Guardian reported that:

Le Pen may claim she has "de-demonised" the party and her victory in Sunday's European ballot shows that in the secrecy of the polling booth she is right, but FN voters remain reluctant to publicly stand up and be counted.

"I won't tell my daughter I voted FN," Anne added. "She's a Parisienne, she wouldn't understand." The "bleu Marine" wave that washed over France, giving the FN one quarter of the vote, spared only the French capital and the west of France.

"But Paris is not France and France is not Paris," added the businessman, echoing the oft-repeated complaint from the provinces.¹²

¹¹ P Haski, ["The Front National's victory reflects a failure of France's elite"](#), *The Guardian*, 28 May 2014

¹² ["Front National's success not surprising to heartland supporters"](#), *The Guardian*, 27 May 2014