

The Electoral Paradox: Public Opinion and the Rise of the National Rally in France (2008–2024)

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The emergence of right-wing populist parties throughout Europe stands as one of the most important political changes that occurred during the twenty-first century. The French case shows great importance because the National Rally's electoral success has advanced together with research findings, which show public opinion on immigration and cultural diversity has remained unchanged or decreased throughout time. The research problem that this study investigates stems from the existing situation, which shows increased backing for a populist party despite the fact that public backing does not show any signs of radical movement.

The current body of research on populism presents multiple competing theories. The initial studies identified economic hardship and globalization as the main factors that drove voters to support populist candidates (Kriesi et al., 2008). Inglehart and Norris (2019) established the cultural backlash thesis, which shows that populist supporters rise when there are transformations in cultural norms that occur throughout extended periods of time. The recent European party system studies identify two main factors that explain institutional distrust, together with decreasing public trust in political systems (Mair, 2013; Mudde, 2007). The existing literature shows that anti-immigration beliefs directly lead to electoral victories for right-wing political groups. The scientific community has not yet fully studied the gap that exists between public attitudes and actual voting behavior, especially regarding French voters after 2010.

The study bases its findings on quantitative survey data from the European Values Study (EVS), which collected data in 2008 and 2017. The study includes official electoral statistics that the French Ministry of the Interior published for all elections between 2008 and 2024. The EVS provides nationally representative data on social attitudes, political trust, and perceptions of economic and cultural change. The main research variables examine public attitudes about immigration, economic competition, cultural transformation, and their trust levels toward political institutions. The datasets enable researchers to examine how public attitudes changed over time and how electoral behavior patterns developed.

The research applies a mixed-methods approach, which integrates both comparative descriptive statistical analysis and institutional analysis. The first step involves creating composite indicators through the use of EVS variables to develop three indexes: Immigration Attitude Index Economic Insecurity Index and Institutional Trust Index. The researchers examine electoral data to investigate how the National Rally's vote share increased during different election periods. The researchers use document analysis to study legislative changes and political discussions, which help them understand how institutions modify their practices in response to new public issues. The research uses attitudinal information, election results, and institutional background to evaluate how public sentiment influences populist electoral patterns.

The author introduced a new analytical method which studies representation gaps instead of studying identity-based explanations. The research examines how populist voting correlates with political institution dissatisfaction and governing elite rejection instead of examining populist success as an immigration and cultural diversity response. The study refutes the belief

that public opposition to social changes drives populist electoral success by linking survey-based attitudes to electoral outcomes. The research findings show multiple significant empirical trends that have emerged throughout the investigation.

The analysis of EVS data shows that French respondents from 2008 to 2017 developed greater acceptance of immigrants as neighbors, while their economic competition and cultural coexistence views remained unchanged. The data shows that public attitudinal changes about welfare pressure and crime concerns remained at moderate levels without showing signs of extreme shifts. The National Rally shows increasing electoral support, which reached a peak when it became a major competitor in French political battles. The divorce between these two processes demonstrates that immigration attitude changes cannot serve as the exclusive explanation for electoral realignment.

The research discovered that populist voting patterns showed a stronger connection to citizens' decreasing trust in political institutions than their views on immigration. The research discovered that citizens developed greater doubts about political parties and representative institutions throughout the time period studied. The research results demonstrate that people use their voting decisions to show their discontent with government institutions because they lack proper political representation, instead of showing their extreme political beliefs. The legislative responses that focus on governance reform and political accountability demonstrate the widespread problem of representation that currently exists.

The French case demonstrates an electoral paradox that shows that social attitudes maintain stability or moderate changes while people increasingly support populist political options. The National Rally's growth should be viewed as a component of the democratic political changes, which show citizens' mistrust of institutions and develop a gap between themselves and political leaders. Populism arises from two sources, which include social change, because it shows built-up pressures between politicians and the public who vote for representatives.

By reconciling survey evidence with electoral outcomes, the research contributes to contemporary debates on populism, democratic legitimacy, and party system transformation in Western Europe. The findings encourage reconsideration of dominant explanatory models and highlight the importance of institutional confidence as a central variable in explaining electoral behavior.

Источники и литература

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