

The Front National: Still Racist and Xenophobic

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Judging by the opinions of the Front National’s members and supporters, no matter what its president says, the party has never stopped being racist and xenophobic. This is clearly shown by the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights’ annual survey.

Since Marine Le Pen was elected president of the Front National in January 2011, her strategy for rising to power has involved ‘de-demonising’ or mainstreaming the party with a view to making it a party ‘like any other’.¹ Above all, the aim has been to show that it is neither racist nor xenophobic and above all not anti-Semitic. Louis Aliot, vice-president of the party and a European deputy, put this very plainly: ‘The mainstreaming only focuses on anti-Semitism. Handing out leaflets in the street, the only glass ceiling I could see wasn’t immigration or Islam... Others are worse than us on those topics. It’s anti-Semitism that stops people from voting for us. That’s all it is. Once you break down that ideological barrier, you free up the rest [...]’ (Interview of December 6, 2013, in Valérie Igounet, *Le Front national de 1972 à nos jours* [Paris: Seuil, 2014], p. 420).

As for Marine Le Pen, she has never made any anti-Semitic or revisionist remarks and has condemned her father’s anti-Semitic remarks on several occasions (see box 1). She even frames herself as the Jewish community’s best defence against ‘Islamic anti-Semitism’ in the not-unsuccessful hope of attracting a portion of that electorate. As Jérôme Fourquet has underscored: ‘what better proof of ‘normalisation’ than a high score (or equivalent to the national average) for the FN among the Jewish electorate?’² She has also targeted the Muslim electorate, as evidenced by her party’s regional election campaign in the Île de France: leaflets were handed out with the slogan ‘Muslim perhaps, but French above all’, while a poster entitled ‘*Quelle banlieue voulez-vous ?*’ [which suburbs do you want?]³ presented, on one side, a young woman wearing a Phrygian cap with the French flag painted on her cheeks and, on the other, the same woman (Kelly Betesh, FN candidate on Wallerand de Saint-Just’s electoral list) wearing a niqab.

Jean-Marie Le Pen’s provocative anti-Semitic statements

In January 2005, when her father stated in an interview with far right newspaper *Rivarol* that the ‘German Occupation in France was not particularly inhumane’, Marine Le Pen did not attend the FN Executive Committee and Political Committee meetings for three months afterwards. In 2011, she qualified what happened in the camps as the ‘height of barbarism’ (Interview of February 2, 2011, *Le Point*, 2011). In April 2014, when Jean-Marie Le Pen stated on his FN-hosted blog ‘Next time, we’ll do an oven-load’ in response to singer Patrick Bruel announcing he would not perform in towns or cities that had elected a FN Mayor, she denounced a ‘political error’ and deleted his blog. Every time he has reiterated that the gas chambers are a

¹ Alexandre Dézé, ‘La “dédiabolisation”. Une nouvelle stratégie ?’, in Sylvain Crépon, Alexandre Dézé, Nonna Mayer (ed.), *Les faux semblants du Front national. Sociologie d’un parti politique* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2015), p. 49-50.

² Jérôme Fourquet, ‘Le vote Front national dans les électorsats musulman et juif’, *ibidem*, p. 375-393.

³ In France, many suburbs around major cities are economically deprived and the term *banlieue* conjures up images of urban decay, immigrant populations, poverty and sometimes violence, with similar connotations as those associated with the British term ‘inner city’.

'historical detail' (in 2008, 2009 and 2015), she has publically stated her 'deep disagreement'. The interview he gave to *Rivarol* in April 9, 2015, in which he returned to this 'historical detail' and praised the Maréchal Pétain, was the last straw which triggered the procedure resulting in his permanent exclusion from the party.

However, this strategy is not unanimous within the party, judging by the many defections of new recruits disappointed to discover a reality worlds apart from the president's stance. Nadia Portheault, of Algerian origin and chief candidate on the FN's list in Saint-Alan, Haute-Garonne, left after a party officer said to her 'You and your kids, you'll go in the oven' (*La voix du Midi*, November 4, 2013). Arnaud Cléré, formerly from the UMP party (now renamed **Les** Républicains) in the Somme, was horrified to see swastikas tattooed on some activists' arms and Anna Rosso-Roig (Front de gauche party) in Marseille and Vincent Morelle (UMP) in Meaux also left. Not to mention the openly racist and anti-Semitic statements made by 104 FN candidates in the departmental elections in 2015, despite strict instructions issued by the leadership. These examples beg the question of the degree of racism and anti-Semitism present in the 'new' Front National. Has the party really changed in this respect or is the mainstreaming strategy just an illusion?

In order to answer this question, a unique database is available in the shape of the annual survey that has been conducted for the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDDH) since 1990⁴ and that explores all forms of racism and xenophobia. It allows a particular population – FN supporters, i.e. people who cite the Front National as the party to which they are 'closest or let's say the least distanced' – to be examined as a group. Openly stating closeness to the FN is less of an engagement than joining the party, of course, but it is more than just voting. And the hard core of the FN electorate – the most loyal, the most won over by its ideas – serves as a magnifying glass revealing its transformations. On the one hand, the survey enables comparison of the racist prejudices of FN supporters with those of people who support other political parties, and, on the other, it offers a way of assessing whether the level of racism has decreased since Marine Le Pen's election to the party leadership.

A record level of intolerance

The conclusion is clear. On all questions relating to perceptions of the Other – 'other' by origin, skin colour, religion, or culture – the answers of FN supporters are consistently more negative than those of supporters of other parties, no matter which wave of the survey is examined.

Rather than taking each question one by one, the technique of attitude scales highlights the underlying structure of the answers. The questions with the most correlated answers are selected – here, those relating to the same racist or 'ethnocentric' attitude, in Claude Lévi-Strauss's sense of the term:

'The attitude of longest standing [...] is to reject out of hand the cultural institutions – ethical, religious, social or aesthetic, which are furthest removed from those with which we identify ourselves. "Barbarous habits", "not what we do", "ought not to be allowed", etc. are all crude reactions indicative of the same instinctive antipathy, the same repugnance for ways of life, thought or belief to which we are unaccustomed.' (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History* [Paris: Unesco, 1952], p.19-20).

This same technique ranks the questions retained by increasing level of intolerance, like steps on a staircase, from the lowest level of ethnocentrism to the highest. It then provides an ethnocentrism 'score' between zero for people who never give an intolerant answer and 100 for those who always do (box 2).

⁴ See the annual report about the fight against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia since 1990 on the website: <http://www.cncddh.fr/fr>. The survey takes a representative sample of the adult population living in metropolitan France. If we add together the 13 waves that asked the question of political party proximity, 721 people declared themselves close to the FN, which is an average of 5.5% of the total sample. This proportion is rising, as it went from 6% in 2011 to 7.5% in 2012, 13% in 2013 and 12% in 2014.

The ethnocentrism scale

The same 10-question scale was used between 2009 and 2014. The six waves gave a total sample of 6090 people, of which 458 were close to the FN. The answers in bold relate to the same ‘ethnocentric’ attitude and the average of the answers from the six waves is indicated in brackets. Those who did not accept Jewish people tended not to accept Muslims, immigrants, or foreigners either. However, there was a hierarchy to this rejection. Across the six waves, the item indicating the highest level of ethnocentrism was the absolute refusal of the idea that French Muslims are citizens in their own right (‘completely disagree’ as opposed to all other responses), followed very closely by the same refusal regarding French Jews (‘somewhat disagree’ and ‘completely disagree’). These people, in the minority, tended to also give the ethnocentric answer to all the other questions. Conversely, the least distinguishing item related to the stereotype that immigrants come to France simply to benefit from state welfare. More than 9 out of 10 people questioned did not completely reject this (all those who gave an answer other than ‘completely disagree’), without necessarily sharing the other prejudices.

French Muslims are French people like everyone else: Completely agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, did not respond / **Completely disagree (9%)**

French Jews are French people like everyone else: Completely agree, somewhat agree, did not respond / **Somewhat disagree, completely disagree (12%)**

Immigrant workers should be considered at home here because they contribute to the French economy: Completely agree, somewhat agree, did not respond / **Somewhat disagree, completely disagree (23%)**

Muslims in France should be allowed to practise their religion in good conditions: Completely agree, somewhat agree, did not respond / **Somewhat disagree, completely disagree (23%)**

The presence of immigrants is a source of cultural enrichment: Completely agree, somewhat agree, did not respond / **Somewhat disagree, completely disagree (31%)**

Non-European foreigners who have lived in France for a certain time should be allowed to vote in municipal elections: Completely agree, somewhat agree / did not respond, **Somewhat disagree, completely disagree (51%)**

There are too many immigrants in France today: **Completely agree, somewhat agree** / Somewhat disagree, completely disagree, did not respond **(62%)**

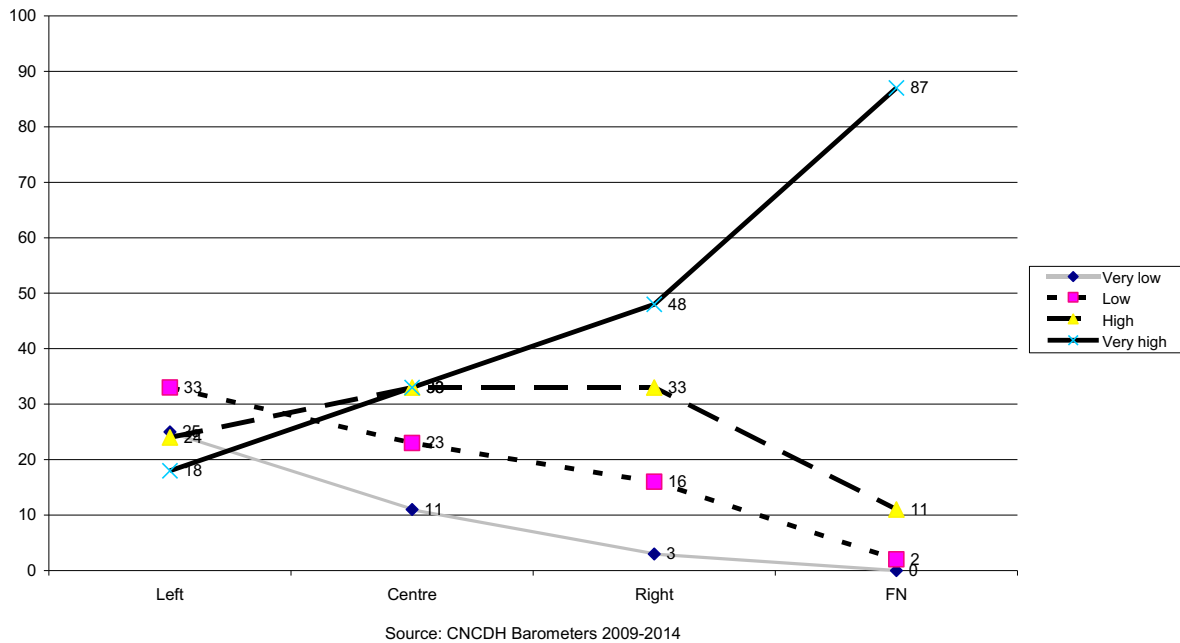
The children of immigrants born in France are not really French: **Completely agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree** / Completely disagree, did not respond **(59%)**

Immigration is the main cause of crime and violence: **Completely agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree** / completely disagree, did not respond **(77%)**

Many immigrants come to France just to benefit from social welfare: **Completely agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree** / Completely disagree, did not respond **(87%)**

FN supporters break all records of intolerance to the Other. If we divide the respondents into four groups according to increasing levels of ethnocentrism, from ‘very low’ (scores of 0-1) to ‘very high’ (6-10), 87% are very ethnocentric compared with 48% of those close to right-wing parties, 33% of those close to centre parties, and 18% of those close to left-wing parties (figure 1). Conversely, no one close to the FN had a score below 2 on this scale (compared, respectively, to 3% for supporters of the right, 11% of centrists, and a quarter of left-wing supporters). Above all, looking at the evolution of FN supporters over time, the proportion of those who are ‘very racist’ has not changed since 2011, remaining stable at 87%.

Figure 1. Ethnocentrism score by party proximity (%)



Marine Le Pen’s arrival has therefore not weakened her supporters’ prejudices. However, in a context of economic crisis and political disaffection, supporters of other parties, especially on the right wing, have become more racist. Over the same period, the proportion of very high scores on the ethnocentrism scale rose from 11 to 21% among left-wing supporters (+10 points), from 58 to 69% among centrists (+11), and from 33 to 55% among right-wing supporters (+22). The discrepancy between levels of racism in the FN and in other parties may have decreased a little, but it nonetheless remains spectacular with FN supporters still 32 points above right-wing supporters and 66 points above left-wing supporters.

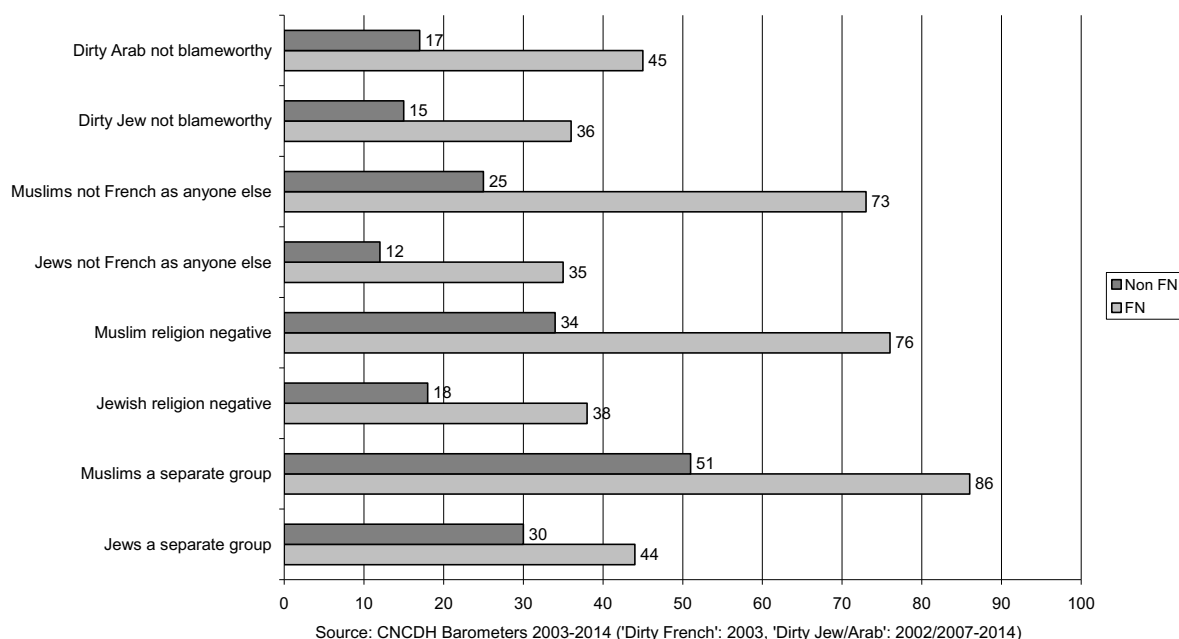
More Islamophobic than Anti-Semitic

A second characteristic feature of FN supporters is a strong anti-Islam focus, which is far more pronounced than their anti-Semitism. Several questions on the CNCDH barometer – presented in identical terms over a longer period than those on the previous scale (as early as 2002 in some cases) – reveal perceptions of cultural and religious minorities in French society (Jewish, Muslim, North African, Asian, Black, etc.). The questions focused on recognition of citizenship (are their members ‘French people like everyone else?’), their degree of integration into society (do they form a ‘separate group?’), positive or negative perceptions of their religion, and the need for stronger legal sanctions for insults targeting them specifically. Across all party affiliations, the Jewish minority was by far the most accepted in France and the Muslim minority the most rejected. 87% of people questioned, on average, considered French Jews as ‘French people like everyone else’ whereas only 72% thought the same thing about French Muslims. The idea that Jews form a ‘separate group’ was shared by 31% of the people questioned, as opposed to 53% where Muslims were concerned. The Jewish religion had negative connotations for 19% of people questioned, compared to 36% for Islam. Agreement about the need for stronger legal sanctions was higher for insults such as ‘dirty Jew’ compared to ‘dirty Arab’ (81 and 78% respectively).

However, the phenomenon reached remarkable levels among FN supporters. The figure below shows comparative perceptions of Jewish and Muslim minorities according to party proximity, contrasting FN supporters with supporters of other parties (Figure 2). While there are always more negative perceptions of both minorities among the former (black bars) compared to supporters of other political parties (grey bars), the party difference is even more pronounced when it comes to Muslims and Islam. Regarding the refusal to see Muslims as citizens like everyone else, the FN supporters' score 48 points above the results seen for supporters of other parties (compared to a 23 point difference regarding French Jews); their negative opinion of the Muslim religion is 42 points higher (compared to 20 for the Jewish religion); their belief that Muslims form a 'separate group' is 35 points higher (compared to 14 for Jews); and their refusal of legal sanctions for insults is 28 points higher (compared to 21).

This gap between people who support the FN and people who do not continued after 2011 where negative judgments about Islam and Muslims were concerned. However, the negative image of the Jewish religion and the sense that Jews form a separate group only progressed among FN supporters (+5 points). In other words, not only did Marine Le Pen taking up the reins of the party not lower the relative level of anti-Muslim prejudice among its supporters, but their levels of anti-Semitism increased, even though this remained much lower than their Islamophobic prejudice.

Figure 2. Perception of Jewish and Muslim minorities by party proximity (%)

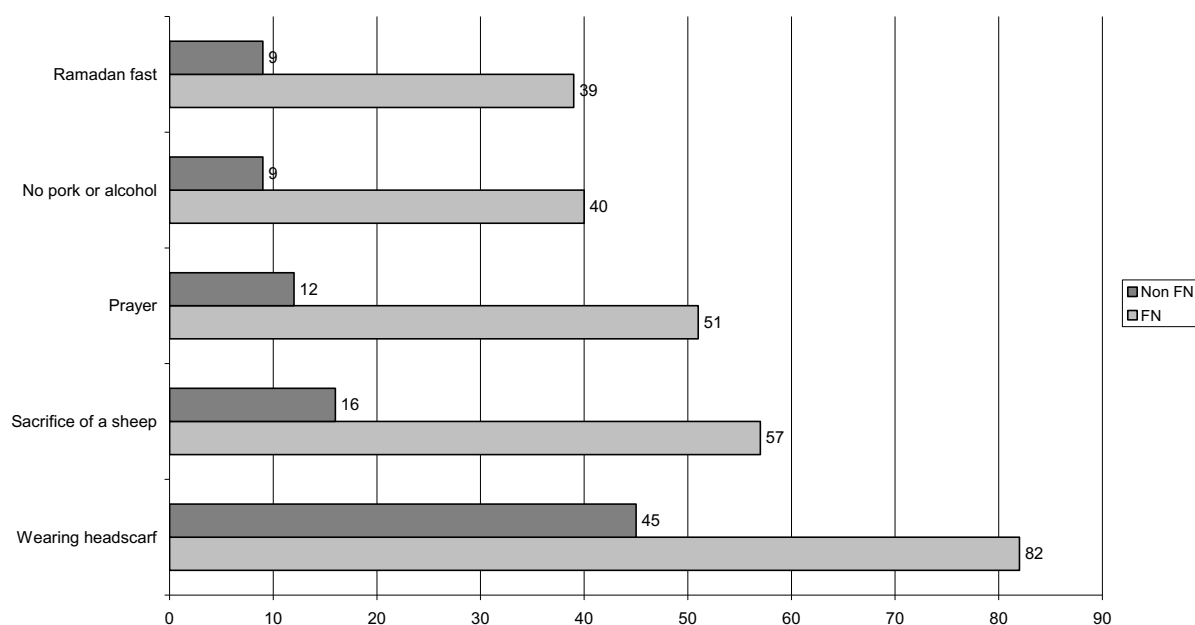


A pronounced aversion towards Muslim practices

From as early as 1989 with the controversy about the veil being worn at school, in France public debate has been strongly divided around the practices of Islam and how compatible they are with Republican values. Unsurprisingly, this aversion is most pronounced among FN supporters.

In 2003, the CNCDH survey – conducted just before the Stasi commission⁵ submitted its report – included, for the first time, sets of questions expressed as follows: ‘In your opinion, could respecting the following Muslim religious practices pose a problem for living in society in France? Completely, somewhat, not really, not at all’. Five of these questions were selected – asked for the first time in 2003 and then systematically since 2007 – about wearing the veil, fasting for Ramadan, praying, being prohibited from eating pork and drinking alcohol, and sacrificing a sheep for Eid al-Adha. The most hostile answer was retained (the practice being considered ‘completely’ problematic) (Figure 3). Here again, FN supporters stand apart from supporters of other parties in their higher level of hostility to these practices. The gap is even larger when these practices are visible in the public space. It reaches 41 points for the sheep sacrifice, 39 for prayer (no doubt understood as street prayer, regularly stigmatised by Marine Le Pen), and 37 for wearing the veil, compared to 30 for respecting Ramadan and food prohibitions.

Figure 3. Practices that pose a problem for living in French society by party proximity (%)



Source: CNCDH Barometer 2003/2007-2014

While the rejection of these practices increased considerably between 2009 and 2014 across the whole population, it also continued to rise among FN supporters where it was already very high. The gap between supporters of the FN and supporters of other parties therefore decreased slightly but remained substantial. This is clear on a scale of aversion to Islam based on these 5 questions and an additional question about comparative perceptions of the Muslim religion and the Catholic religion. The proportion of FN supporters with high scores rose from 73% before 2011 to 81% after (against 42% and 55% among non-FN supporters).

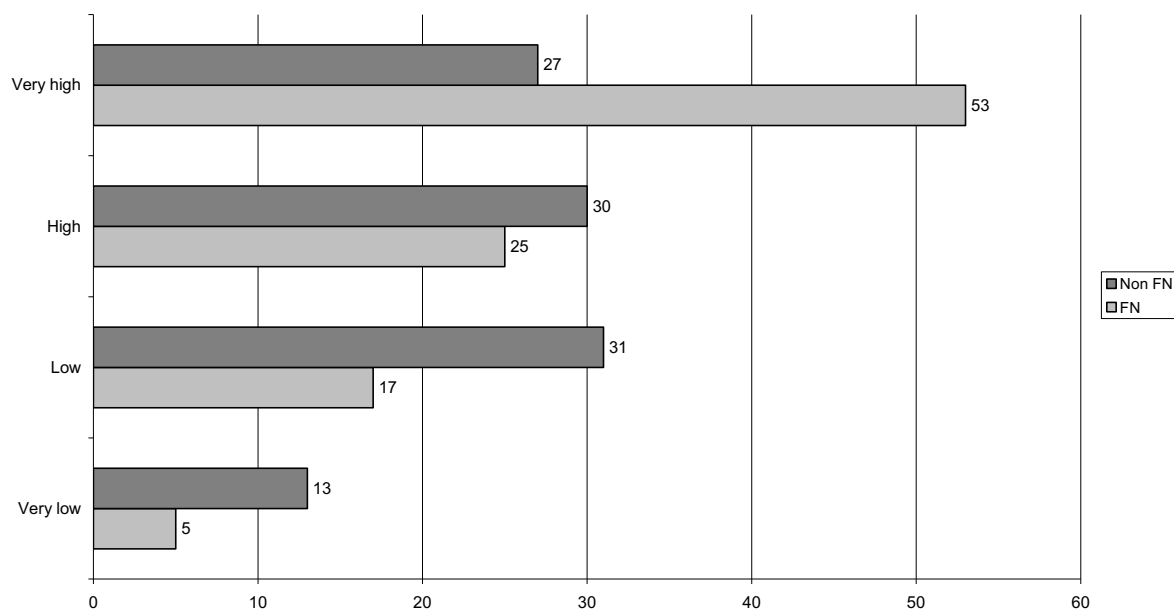
Anti-Semitism unparalleled in other parties

While it may not reach the same heights as Islamophobic prejudice, anti-Jewish prejudice is nonetheless much more frequent among FN supporters than among those of other parties. This can be measured thanks to new questions that have recently been added to the CNCDH surveys, due to

⁵ Commission convened by Bernard Stasi on French President Jacques Chirac’s bidding, to ponder on the issues of secularism and the right to wear an Islamic veil on state school premises.

concern about the rise in anti-Semitic acts. These questions focus on the anti-Jewish stereotypes that have built up over time: Christian anti-Judaism, race-based Nazi anti-Semitism, stereotypes about Jews and money/excessive power, accusations of separatism and ‘dual allegiance’, and revisionism, not to mention anti-Zionism. Since the Six-Day War and the occupation of territories, another debate has begun about the emergence of a ‘new form of Judeophobia’ on the left wing, hidden behind a critique of Israel and the defence of the Palestinian cause.⁶

Figure 4. Level of antisemitism by party proximity (%)



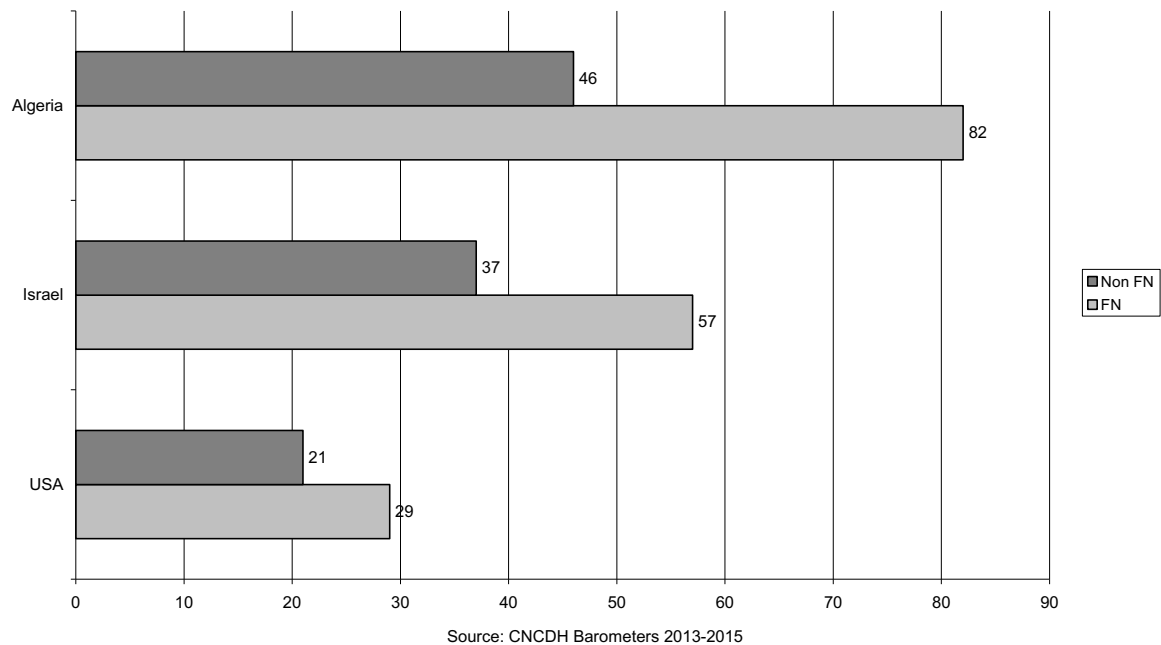
Source: CNCNH Barometers 2013-2016

The technique of attitude scales, already used above, shows that of the ten questions relating to perceptions of Jews, five relate to the same ‘anti-Semitic’ attitude: belief in the excessive power of Jews, denial of their full French citizenship, the view that they form a ‘separate’ group, the sense that Israel counts more for them than France, and their particular relationship to money. Opinions about Israel and the conflict there are not included, nor are revisionist opinions, religious anti-Judaism, or sensitivity to anti-Semitic insults. On this anti-Semitism scale, FN supporters stand apart from the others with their very high level of anti-Semitic prejudices: more than half have high scores (above 3), compared to a quarter of supporters of other parties (Figure 4). Even the difference observed between those close to and not close to the FN – 26 percentage points – remains much lower than that observed regarding Islam and Muslims (Figures 2 and 3).

The same is true when it comes to the question of Israel. Here again, there are far more negative opinions among FN supporters than among supporters of other parties and particular among those on the far left, contrary to the hypothesis that a ‘new Judeophobia’ is shifting from the far right to the far left of the political spectrum (respectively 57% in the FN, 41% for the UMP, 35% for the far left). However, once again the difference FN/non-FN is much more pronounced where a Muslim country like Algeria is concerned (36 points, against 20 regarding the Jewish state) (Figure 5).

⁶ Pierre-André Taguieff, *Une France antijuive ? Regards sur la nouvelle configuration judéophobe* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 2015).

Figure 5. Negative image of Israel, Algeria and the United States by party proximity (%)



Unabashed racism

Since the Second World War and the trauma of the Shoah, fighting racism in all its forms has become the norm in Western democracies. Prejudices are reformulated in more acceptable terms, based on cultural arguments, drawing on conflicts between values or civilisations rather than race. This racism is described as ‘soft’, ‘subtle’, ‘veiled’, ‘symbolic’ or ‘differentialist’, as opposed to the racism of ‘inequality’ that prevailed before.⁷ The relatively euphemistic turn taken by the FN’s discourse and programme, along with its mainstreaming strategy itself, are signs of this. However, this evolution is not reflected among FN supporters, among whom racism is expressed bluntly – ‘old-style’, as it were.

In order to identify this racism, two questions are available. The first, asked regularly since 2002, questions the belief in the existence of human races. Respondents had to choose between three statements: human races do not exist, all human races are equal, and some human races are superior to others. The proportion of people who still believe in the existence of human races is a minority, around 11% during the period studied (2002-2014). However it triples among FN supporters, where it reaches 36%. And this proportion did not vary across the period in question, whereas it did decrease slightly among non-FN supporters (from 10% before 2011 to 8% after). A primary form of racism, grounded in biology, is therefore still present among a strong minority of FN supporters, out of step with the official party line.

The second question, posed since 2009, asked respondents to assess their own degree of racism: ‘Personally, where you are concerned, would you say you were quite racist, a little racist, not very racist, or not racist at all?’ This indicator proved divisive and strongly correlated with the scales of ethnocentrism, anti-Semitism, and aversion to Islam. The boundary was drawn between those who stated they were quite racist or a little racist and the others, with the former systematically giving the most intolerant answers. Over the period studied, their average proportion was around 28%. But all records were broken by people close to the FN: 82% stated they were

⁷ See Pierre-André Taguieff, *La force du préjugé. Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

racist (of which 43% ‘quite’ and 39% ‘a little’), whereas among those close to other parties the proportion fell to 25% and 16% among those close to left-wing parties. While it has dropped 5 percentage points since 2011, it still remains exceptionally high: 80% (compared to 26% among people close to other parties). Today still, support for the FN is made up of a large majority of ‘racists’ who openly claim that label.

These results show a clear discrepancy between the stances of the FN president and those of her support base. Declared supporters of her party stand apart from the rest of population with record levels of rejection of the Other – a rejection that is completely unabashed, as four out of five define themselves as ‘racist’. Although Marine Le Pen has made anti-Semitism a taboo, more than one supporter in two has high scores on a scale of anti-Jewish prejudice. Although she is careful to target ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ and not Islam, her partisans do not draw that distinction. They stand apart from supporters of all other political parties through their exceptionally high level of ‘Islamophobia’, in the sense of rejecting Islam, its practices, and its believers. Marine Le Pen’s mainstreaming endeavour is out of synch with her supporters’ view of the world. In this respect, the ‘new FN’ still looks an awful lot like the old one.

Further reading

- Cécile Alduy, Stéphane Wahnich, *Marine Le Pen prise aux mots. Décryptage du nouveau discours frontiste*, Paris, Seuil, 2015.
- Sylvain Crépon, Alexandre Dézé, Nonna Mayer (ed.), *Les faux semblants du Front national. Sociologie d’un parti politique* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2015).
- Mayer Nonna, Guy Michelat, Vincent Tiberj, Tommaso Vitale, ‘Le regard des chercheurs sur les phénomènes de racisme’, in CNCDH, *La lutte contre le racisme, l’antisémitisme et la xénophobie - Année 2014* (Paris: la Documentation Française, 2014), p. 207-259.
- Vincent Tiberj, ‘L’Islam et les Français : cadrage des élites, dynamiques et crispations de l’opinion’, *Migrations Société*, vol. 26, n°155, 2014, p. 165-181.

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