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The shift of the political spectrum to the right: A study of the normalization of radical right discourses in France between 2002 and 2022

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The shift of the political spectrum to the right: A study of the normalization of radical right discourses in France between 2002 and 2022

MSc Public Administration: International and European Governance

Abstract: How the radical right's favourite themes have dominated some of the main news coverage without necessarily being challenged is worrying. This thesis is focused on the normalization of radical right discourses in the public debate. Based on the content analysis of three major French newspapers articles and of the programmes of the main candidates to the Presidential elections, this work aims to show the extent to which there has been a normalization of radical right discourses in France between 2002 and 2022. I found that while this normalization is mostly present within the right-wing of the political spectrum, liberal and left-wing newspapers also participate in this process. Mainstream politicians too, play a significant role in the normalization of these discourses, and their previous failures in government have opened the door to the radical right.

Author

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June 4th, 2022

I dedicate this thesis to my parents and to my friends, for supporting me through my entire academic experience.

And to all those whose lives are directly or indirectly threatened by the radical right. I hope that as a society, we can eventually find the ways to protect you from their words and actions.

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Introduction

This Master's Thesis focuses on radical right discourses in the public debate. More specifically, the extent to which there is a normalization of these discourses within the French public debate, and how it can be explained.

While there are various definitions of the 'modern' radical right in the literature, most authors agree that the key criteria for a party to be defined as radical right are -ethnic- nationalism (Bar-On 2018; Immerzeel, Lubbers, and Coffé 2016; Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2017), an anti-immigration ideology (Arzheimer 2018; Givens 2004; Skenderovic 2007; Zaslove 2008) linked to a certain level of islamophobia (Feldman n.d.; Gündüz 2010; Hafez 2014; Kallis 2015), a focus on law and order (Immerzeel, Lubbers, and Coffé 2016; Mayer 2018; Ost 2018; Williams 2018), and for some, populism (Berman 2016; Betz 2018; Najimdeen 2017; Zaslove 2004).

In this research, my aim is to focus on some of these criteria in order to assess the extent to which radical right parties' favourite themes have been normalized in the public debate. Therefore, while I use these criteria to identify which parties to focus on, I put populism and law and order aside in my analysis, to concentrate on ethnic nationalism, anti-immigration, and islamophobia. The reason for this selection is first, because the time limits of this thesis required to focus on only a small number of topics, and second, because, as I explain later in the theoretical framework, I believe that these three themes are at the centre of the radical right ideology. Third, because they are intertwined and function together, it makes the analysis of this particular group of topics deeper and more interesting than another combination.

Societal relevance

In light of recent events, e.g. the election of Donald Trump, the rising far-right within the European Union (Borg 2014; Lazaridis, Campani, and Benveiste 2016; Stevkovski 2015), the rise of far-right-related attacks (The EU's work to tackle terrorism 2021), the refugee crisis and its coverage in the media (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017) and the refugee treatment within the European Union (Case 1598/2020/VS n.d.), it seems important to measure the extent to which the ideologies of radical-right parties can be a threat to minorities within Europe, a threat to their rights and their integration, and beyond this, a threat to democratic values and to democracy in general. As we have seen in the recent years with the governments of Poland and Hungary, the struggle for the European Union to act against its own members (Smith 2021), even when the Rule of Law and its democratic values are threatened, is an indication that fighting illiberalism and the radical right ideology should start before they reach power. When it becomes harder to drive them out. With the current war in Ukraine, and the presence in Europe of radical right parties in power, some of which with ties to Russia and Vladimir Putin (Freedland 2022), the fight against the radical right becomes even more important now, as this ideology directly threatens the future of European integration and European safety. The Hungarian and Polish governments have already been sanctioned by the European Union (Baczynska 2022). However, these sanctions are believed by many not to be equal to the menace that these governments pose for the Rule of Law in Europe. In order to evaluate the danger of this new radical right, I believe it is necessary to start by evaluating the prevalence of the discourses leading to/arising from its success in the public debate. The French presidential election and especially the year leading to the election, have shown how prevalent radical right issues have become within the public debate (François 2022).

Moreover, recent controversies within the French public debate have accused French academics and French universities in general of being complacent with what has been framed as American ideologies threatening the French identity: 'wokism' and 'islamo-leftism'(Hours 2020). Those accusations have come from various French political parties and the French government through the interventions of its Minister of Education and Sports. Deemed anti-republican and a menace for the unity of the country

(Fassin 2021; Saad 2021), these theories - on gender, race, islamophobia for example - and the academics working on them have been targeted by government figures (Dumont 2021). ‘Islamism’ is recognized as a scientific concept for some authors, and not for others (Raynaud 2021) and it is thought to come directly from the radical-right ideology (“Islamisme-gauchisme”: stopper la confusion et les polémiques stériles 2021).

The formal debates it led to at the Senate (Sénat 2022) are one example of the extent to which radical right discourses are now present within the ideologies of mainstreaming parties, and the potential threat they pose to freedom of speech and academic freedom (de Jonge, Beau Segers, and Thorleifsson 2021).

How the radical right’s favourite themes have dominated some of the main news coverage without necessarily being challenged is worrying from a societal point of view. Therefore, I believe it is important to study those radical right discourses, with a focus on three of the specific themes thought to partly define these discourses, and which have been mainly present within the public debate recently. Those three themes are ethno-nationalism and its links to migration and islamophobia.

For these reasons, I have decided to research the extent to which there is a normalization of a specific type of radical right discourses within the public debate and offer some insights regarding some potential causes of this normalization.

Academic relevance

The radical right has been studied a lot in the past three decades: from studies on fascism, neo-fascism, to populism, radical and extreme right-wing ideologies. Regarding the topic of this paper in particular, the current literature focuses on the strategies used by radical right parties, and which themes attributed to the radical right can influence the positions of mainstream parties (Meijers 2015). Part of the literature also looks at how the media are involved in legitimizing radical right discourses (Ellinas 2018), and how they sometimes enabled what was previously deemed politically incorrect to become acceptable narratives in the society (Najimdeen 2017). Surprisingly though, while some authors argue that media help legitimize radical right discourses (Ellinas 2018), others have decided to study how radical right parties see the media. They are often perceived in a negative way by those parties, who believe they are purposely excluded from the public debate and accuse media of having a political agenda that would favour other - more mainstream - parties (Knops and De Cleen 2019).

While some authors refuse to call radical right parties a threat as long as they are far from power, others argue that they are evolving on a ground that has never been more favourable to them in history (Mudde 2018).

The literature on the normalization of radical right discourses is less extensive than the one regarding the relationship between media and the radical right. However, it has explored various consequences of this normalization (Orazani, Wohl, and Leidner 2020) and some of its possible causes (Liebhart 2020), along with methodological approaches to the concept of normalization itself (Krzyżanowski 2020). While there are various case studies of this normalization within Europe, they are mainly focused on parliamentary political systems such as Austria and Sweden (Liebhart 2020; Norocel 2017). Those studies do not necessarily explore the extent to which this normalization is present within those countries. Therefore, researching the intensity with which this concept is present within a semi-presidential political system such as France seems relevant. First, because the current French political context, with the radical right being closer to power than ever before, influences the future of Europe (Corbet, Petrequin, and Casert 2022), and therefore of the world. France’s position within the international system, with a seat at the Security Council, access to nuclear weapons, and the 7th biggest economy in the world (Silver 2022), amongst other things, gives it both soft and hard power to influence European and world politics. Second, because the presidential side of the French political system means that if they were to reach power, these radical right discourses could have more influence both nationally and internationally, than if they were still constrained by a Parliament. It is not to say the French

parliament does not have any power, but it has less power than within a parliamentary system (Chadwick 2022), especially because parliamentary elections are held only once per presidential mandate, a month or two after the presidential election. Therefore, the presidential party, benefiting from the presidential election's dynamic, is more likely to reach a majority of parliamentary seats, and this majority is unlikely to be challenged for the five years of the mandate.

This thesis will attempt to answer the following research questions through a case study of France and a comparative within-case analysis of two of its presidential elections -2002 and 2022- : To what extent is there a normalization of radical right discourses? How can we explain this normalization?

To answer the question on the extent of normalization, I have explored the treatment of Immigration, Islam, and Nationalism within three of the main French newspapers: Le Monde, Libération, and Le Figaro during both periods. In addition, I have also analysed the political programmes of ten out of the twenty-five candidates to the 2002 and 2022 elections, to see how prevalent those themes were within them.

To answer the second question on the causes of normalization, based on the literature, I have come up with four expectations, two of which I have been able to partially test. The first one, on the past failures of traditional parties, which saw them lose a part of their electorate to the radical right. The second one, on the personalization of politicians, especially radical right politicians, creating a sense of identification from people with these radical right figures, and making their discourses more and more socially acceptable.

This thesis is divided into four parts. First, to provide academic context and background, I define what I mean by radical right discourses, normalization, and the possible causes of this process in a theoretical framework. I then present the methodology I have used to conduct this research, including the justification of France as a case study, how I collected the data and the method used to analyse it.

Afterwards, I present the findings that arose from the analysis of the data and analyse and discuss those results in the Results and Discussion chapter.

Last but not least, in the Conclusion, I build a summary of this research, its results, its expectations, and its limitations, and offer some insights into possible future research on the topic.

Theoretical Framework

Radical right discourses

Defining the radical right is not an easy task, however, previous research has shown that the core ideology of the radical right parties (RRPs) builds on different criteria. Immerzeel, Lubbers, and Coffé (2016) list immigration, nationalism and law and order as three main pillars of this ideology. Populism is also often included in the various definitions found in the literature (Mudde 2015). However, for Rydgren (2017), “populism” is not necessarily useful in defining the radical right ideology. Indeed, he emphasizes the concept of *ethnic* nationalism specifically, which he believes is not a populist view. In this paper, I argue, in agreement with Bar-On (2018), that -ethnic- nationalism is the departing point of the radical right ideology, because it leads to an anti-immigration sentiment, among other things, which in turn creates targeted discrimination towards Islam and the Muslim community, in which Kallis (2018) believes the radical right has *invested* politically since the 1980s. For Hafez (2014), this investment has led to what he calls “accepted racism” within Western societies.

I find it important to explain that, in my opinion, *ethnic* nationalism, anti-immigration and anti-Islam sentiments are intertwined within the radical right ideology. While nationalism can also frame globalization in general and ‘Americanisation’ as a threat to European values and culture (Bar-On 2018), both concepts are also linked to Immigration and sometimes Islam. Globalization in the way that it is what is thought to have led to increasing migration flows, including refugees and asylum seekers, and ‘Americanisation’ in that various ideologies in social sciences are thought to have been imported to Europe from America. These ideologies are specifically those who defy the State, point its past and present weaknesses regarding race and discrimination in general. Among those we find critical race theory, postcolonial studies, intersectional feminism, what is termed ‘wokism’ and ‘cancel culture’. These ideologies are seen as a threat by many politicians in Western Europe, be they from mainstream parties or RRP, because they threaten the alleged ‘unity’ of nation-states and of Europe, by creating divisions based on demographic criteria amongst the population, and ‘weakening’ the power of the State by pointing out its past mistakes. This goes against the aim of radical right parties to “re-elaborate their countries’ national past” (Caramani and Manucci 2019).

Nationalism in the radical right ideology

For Bar-On (2018), nationalism is *the* ‘master concept’ of the radical right, the core of the radical right ideology (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2021). It is the concept from which all other radical right discourses emanate. It is defined by Griffin (2003) as “the sense of belonging to and serving a perceived national community”. It is the idea that a specific nation carries unique characteristics linked to its identity, its historical past and its -religious or cultural- traditions (Griffin 2003; Muller 2008).

In the case of the radical right, nationalism is ethno-centred. In opposition to the civic nationalism presented by Muller (2008) within which a nation is simply defined by its borders and nothing else, ethnonationalism is defined by a shared heritage and a ‘common ethnic ancestry’ (ibid). Adam (1995) refers to nationalism as a ‘politicized ethnicity’. Indeed, many authors point out that the very concept of nationalism and of national identity in general is fully constructed (Zawadzki 1996) and is not essentialist (Linz 1985).

Nationalism, as used and understood within the radical right ideology, is based on the creation of an “Other” who is seen as threatening and a danger for the national identity and traditions of a people (Adam 1995; Muller 2008). This “other” is then designated by radical right politicians, usually as an ‘illegal immigrant’, or as an individual or a community of individuals whose religion differs from the ‘traditional’ religion of the country. The designation of this ‘enemy’ and the characteristics of this enemy

are context dependent. While it was the Jews during WWII, the post-WWII nationalism has been mainly focused on immigrants, especially those coming from Muslim countries. Ethnonationalism is inherent to European politics, and as Muller puts it, “politically correct or not, [it] will continue to shape the world in the twenty-first century” (Muller 2008, p.20).

In addition to the fact that -ethno- nationalism is at the centre of the radical right ideology, the fact that it has been omnipresent, although through various forms, for decades, even centuries, is another important reason why it should be studied in the context of this research.

Immigration in the radical right ideology

Stemming from radical right ethnonationalism, anti-immigration sentiments are seen as the ‘primary focus’ for RRP (Skenderovic 2007). According to Skenderovic (2007), the radical right’s stance on immigration has led to a certain definition and perception of immigrants in the public debate. They are seen as criminals, a threat to the security of ‘natives’ and to their -cultural and national- identity (Rydgren 2007, 2008; Zaslove 2004). This depiction of immigration as a danger and a menace to the survival of European societies has been put forward mainly by radical right parties all over Europe (Skenderovic 2007), but not only. Though radical right voters are thought to be voting for RRP because of their view on immigration, it is also important to mention how what used to be known as a central radical right theme is now also very much a part of mainstream parties’ political programmes, especially the centre-right parties (Down and Han 2020; Meyer and Rosenberger 2015).

Indeed, while some authors argue that the radical right has very little or limited impact on immigration policies, even when they are part of coalition governments (Akkerman 2012; Meyer and Rosenberger 2015), the direct impact of radical right politicians is not what necessarily interests us in this research. What is even more interesting, is the fact that RRP do not need to have a direct influence on immigration policy for centre-right and right-wing parties in government to implement strict immigration policies. Therefore, Downes and Loveless (2018) for example, explain how the appropriation of the immigration ‘issue’ by the centre-right and right-wing parties led to a “reconsideration of immigration as an exclusive issue for far-right electoral success” (p.1). This does not mean that immigration has become less of a radical right issue, but that immigration, as a radical right issue, has made its way through the public debate, all the way to mainstream discourses. As Down and Han (2020) express, “mainstream parties risk fuelling radical right party support by adopting more restrictive immigration positions” (p.1). Akkerman (2018) also shows with his study on the radical right and immigration policies in the Netherlands, that the shift to stricter immigration discourses and policies partly arises from the pressure inflicted on mainstream parties by the competing radical right.

This specific argument explains in itself why it is necessary in this research to focus on Immigration as one of the most interesting radical right discourses to study their normalization. As the most ‘adopted’ radical right theme by mainstream parties, Immigration cannot be ignored and is likely to represent the normalization process of radical right discourses well.

Islam in the radical right ideology

Why focusing on Islam? According to Kallis (2018), Islamophobia has become one of the main themes of the radical right and its importance and pervasiveness within the ideology keep increasing. Because the radical right is also inherently anti-immigration, Islam is one of the numerous collateral damages of this specific part of the radical right ideology. For Bauman (1990) it is clear that the growth of islamophobia as a radical right concept emerged after the shift to pro-Israel narratives in the West: the radical right needed a new enemy and chose to portray Islam and Muslims as a threat to European and national cultures and values, which helped justifying its strict anti-immigration views. In France for

example, Eric Zemmour has framed both Islam and immigration as being an ‘imminent and deadly risk for the French civilization’ (Raynaud 2021).

Indeed, the radical right has framed Islam as “the religion of the immigrant” (Frigoli and Ivaldi 2017). In France especially, various authors note how the media have painted a violent, fanatical image of Islam to the public (Bensalah 2006), without necessarily nuancing their discourse. Both the focus on Islam by the radical right and the way it has been depicted by the media led to a surge in fear of the “Other” within the population.

My definition of normalization in the next section describes a new ‘norm’ in that Islamophobia is now ‘socially acceptable’. In fact, many authors wonder whether the ‘acceptability’ of Islamophobia and other forms of discriminations usually accorded to the radical right, were not actually initiated, or reinforced by mainstream parties in governments (Kallis 2018; Mudde 2012). Because they are the ones who adopted and implemented anti-immigration and subtle -or not- anti-Islam policies, they are sometimes deemed responsible for the rise of these sentiments, and the rise of RRP’s themselves (Bale 2008; Mudde 2010). According to Kallis in another article, how Islamophobia has been framed as a radical-right issue poses a certain danger as regards to the reality of things. Indeed, while the debate is focused on the Islamophobia of the radical right, the population fails to see the ‘radicalization of anti-Muslim prejudice’ under mainstream parties’ governments (Kallis 2015).

In fact, in the French context, Macron’s mandate has been described as the “securitarian and Islamophobic quinquennat” (Maître Chekkat, in Bendhaou 2021), and before him, the Hollande’s government had already refused to recognize Islamophobia as a real concept after the 2015 terror attacks (Kallis, 2018). It is as if recognizing the existence of discrimination towards the French Muslim community would portray the terrorists of the Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan attacks as victims. But this reaction in itself results in a terrible conflation, which is part of what Islamophobia is.

Normalization

The literature on normalization of discourses is relatively varied in that it touches an extensive number of topics and fields, from psychology to political science and international relations. However, what normalization is and what it entails also varies depending on the subject studied, and specific definitions regarding what the normalization of discourses exactly is, are lacking. Therefore, in order to allow for a proper understanding of this paper, it is necessary that I define what I understand by the “normalization of discourses”.

I define it as **the process through which an ideology, that was once deemed ‘socially unacceptable’, becomes ‘socially acceptable’ for large parts of the population and/or the majority of the media.** To the extent that this ideology is not questioned or challenged by people and institutions in positions of power, as much as it used to be. It is the idea that this ideology is not something to be shocked about anymore, rather it can be debated about and is seen as an ideology like any other, to which the principle of the freedom of speech applies. The process of normalization, for Gavriely-Nuri (2015), involves euphemisms, naturalization, legitimation, and symbolic annihilation of competing views. In a sense, it also implies the normalization of misinformation and disinformation by radical right voices through different types of media, including social media (Innes et al. 2020).

In particular, this thesis focuses on the normalization of *radical right* discourses. This implies that preferred themes of the radical right and the way they are framed by those parties, are normalized within the public debate. This definition recalls the ‘ideological normalization’ described in a case-study of Sweden, which mentions the transformation of radical right discourses regarding the link between intersectionality and populist radical right discourses, from ‘fringe nationalism and outright racism’ to ‘welfare chauvinism and cultural racism’ (Norocel 2017). The strategies originally used by radical right parties aim at transforming their discourses, so said discourses seem to fit in the current debate, and step by step insert their ideology into the public debate in the long term.

It builds on the assumption that the unchallenged presence of radical right discourses - within the media and other parties' discourses - increases over time. Krzyżanowski et al. mention the path-dependency of normalization processes. It is the idea that one step towards normalization automatically leads to more action towards it, making it more and more difficult to stop the normalization process with time (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, and Wodak 2018). While in the past -and by past, I mean post-1945- and because of recent European history, those discourses were most likely shocking for the media and the public opinion, and rarely allowed to be used in public without direct or indirect confrontation, various factors have led to the careful re-inclusion of those discourses into the public debate. I argue that some of these discourses are nowadays considered equally important and valid than more mainstream views on the same topics.

We can identify three main consequences of the normalization of radical right discourses: legitimization, electoral success, and a decrease in the freedom of speech. All three of them are somehow intertwined, and the second and third one stem from the first one. Identifying the effects of the normalization of these discourses allows for an understanding of the danger they pose to the systems in place and to democracy in general. It makes research on this topic relevant, and I believe is necessary to understand the issue at hand better and draw a more complete picture of it.

First, legitimization of discourses is the main consequence -or goal, depending on from which angle we decide to look at it - of the normalization process. This normalization expresses itself partly through the omnipresence of radical-right themes in the media agenda. By increasing their presence in the media, radical right parties aim to be seen as legitimate as other politicians. This legitimization then leads to the building of a 'new' normality (Krzyżanowski 2020). Once an ideology, within a democratic state, has been inserted into the political landscape, and is considered legitimate by other parties, recognizing, and discussing the danger it poses becomes more complicated. Because those discourses are now 'socially acceptable' in the eyes of a part of the population and of other parties, it is harder for those of us who acknowledge the threat they pose to democracy in general to justify and explain the incomprehension and the fear those parties create. In turn, this takes media and public attention away from issues cherished by other parties and by the majority of the electorate, leaving the door open for radical right parties to express themselves on the themes they value the most. Once they are thought to be socially acceptable to a certain extent, they are more likely to do well -or at least not bad- in the various elections they participate in (Krzyżanowski 2020). While normalization of discourses and their legitimization is partly responsible for the entry into parliaments of radical right parties all over Europe, their presence in both national and European parliaments also participate to the normalization of their discourses (Valentim 2021). What more than a democratically elected representative to be seen as legitimate and be taken seriously by both the population and your political opponents? This is what Valentim researched in his paper "Parliamentary Representation and the Normalization of Radical Right Support" (2021).

Second, radical right parties' electoral success forces mainstream parties to engage with those questions, both within the media and within the communication of their own ideology, which then shifts more and more to the -radical- right. Because of the new presence of RRP in elected positions and their omnipresence in the media, making RRP's preferred themes their own seems like the best thing to do for mainstream parties to stay relevant and present in the public debate. Indeed, their aim is to get back the electorate they lost to the more radical fringe of the political spectrum (Mangeot et al. 2012). For these more mainstream parties, it is about finding the right balance between staying mainstream and speaking to the majority of the population, but also not forgetting the reasons why a certain part of the population chose the radical right. The issue -and maybe the paradox- here is that by choosing to include more and more of a radical right discourse within their own, mainstream parties contribute to the electoral success of the radical right parties because they contribute to the normalization of their preferred issues, especially the legitimization of the ideology they claim to be combatting. Not only do mainstream parties participate in the legitimization of radical right ideas, but they also help radical right politicians' strategies of "dédiabolisation", by accepting to see them as "normal" and "equal" political actors from whom we should not necessarily be afraid (Pour Combattre le Front National 2017).

The third consequence of the normalization process is evoked by Orazani et al. in their studies on the consequences of the normalization of radical political ideologies on the freedom of speech of their

opponents (2020). Their research is interesting in that it does not only focus on the radical right, but also on the radical left ideology. Nonetheless, they find that while the normalization of both ideologies impacts the support for the freedom of speech of their adversaries and the political tolerance towards their views, the radical left ideology impacts those factors less than the radical right (Ibid). Indeed, this study is important because it shows how dangerous the normalization of the radical right ideology can be for democratic norms and values such as freedom of speech. Because the radical right ideology is omnipresent in mainstream media and now that we know this ideology influences the tolerance for freedom of speech regarding their opponents, it is clear that how widespread these discourses are within the public debate creates a real menace for Democratic systems, both through RRP and mainstream parties, whose gradual shift to the right is concerning.

The normalization of radical right discourses therefore has consequences on their electoral success, the legitimation of their discourses and the tolerance for freedom of speech. However, what is also interesting and necessary to look at, is the various causes, the necessary factors for this normalization process to happen. This research’s aim is to describe to which extent this normalization is present, while also explaining how it has made its way into the mainstream public debate. Figure 1 shows four different possible causes that I expect to be responsible for the normalization of radical right discourses within the French public debate, and the links between them. Those expectations are derived from the literature and are described in more details in the following sections of this chapter.

The causes of normalization

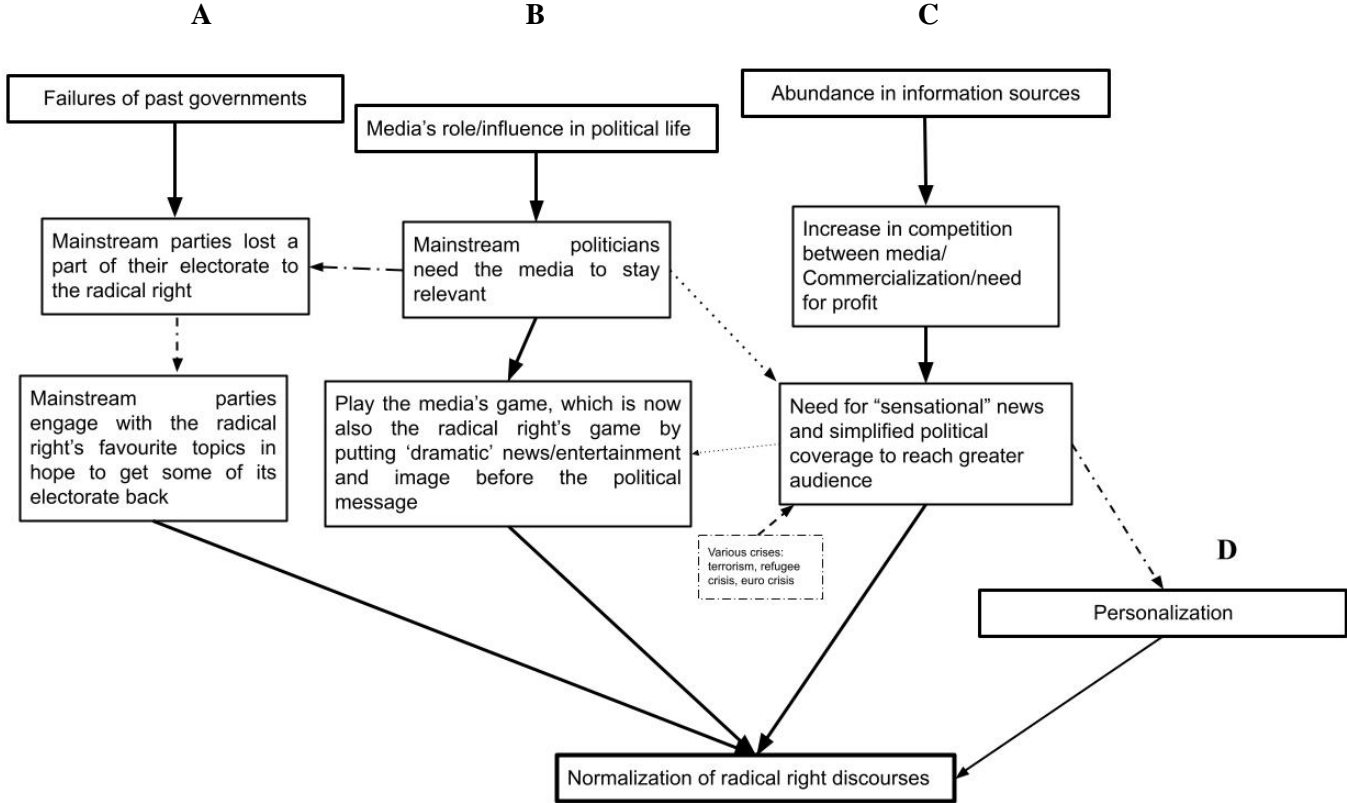


Figure 1. The various processes leading to the normalization of radical right discourses

The failures of traditional parties (Path A)

First, in her case study of the Austrian political landscape, Liebhart seems to explain this process partly by the failure of traditional parties to handle the different crises that Europe has faced in recent years

(Liebhart 2020). This argument aligns with Vrakopoulos' (2022) explanation of the electoral support for radical right parties. According to him, this support increases when the quality of the government in place is relatively low, and when the right-wing parties of a country are highly conservatives. How far right a political landscape is, determines how likely radical right parties are to emerge and succeed.

Camus, a French author, mentions three political themes which he deems the governmental right-wing parties have failed to endorse, even though they are what the population finds important. Those themes are: (a) the relationship between preserving social achievements, building Europe, and globalisation; (b) direct democracy; and (c) multiculturalism and national and European identities. For him, what causes normalization is not only the idea that mainstreaming parties use radical right issues as their own, but also their failure to focus on the needs of the population they govern, and their growing non-inclusive conception of identity and of citizenship (Camus 2011). Playing the game of the radical right also means polarizing issues that only have for consequence to divide the population and therefore render the elected right-wing politicians less legitimate because they fail to gather as much votes as they used to.

Nonna Mayer (2002) studied Le Pen's electorate during the 2002 election. She explains that Jean-Marie Le Pen's score in 2002 increases based on the degree of dissatisfaction of voters regarding Jospin's government and its various measures such as: the 35-hour week, the civil union for homosexual couples, the end of the military service, the implementation of the euro and the law on gender parity.

In the survey she conducted, before the first round of the election, 82% of the electorate agreed with the statement: "politicians do not worry about what people like us think". This score is the highest ever recorded on this specific statement, even though it has kept increasing since 1977. When looking specifically at Le Pen's electorate, 93% emphasize the little attention given to them by politicians, and 77% think that most of them are corrupted. Here, it is interesting to see that people do not consider Jean-Marie Le Pen as being one of those corrupted politicians, even though he has been a politician for decades. Only, he has not been in positions of power, and therefore people have not seen whether he would act like the other politicians if he were in their position. Le Pen also uses this to convince people to vote for him, by emphasizing how different he is to the politicians *de carrière*. In Nonna Mayer's survey, it is also specified that the part of the electorate who votes for Le Pen mainly does so for the presidential election, and rarely for other elections, especially the parliament elections.

Mayer's work shows how a part of Le Pen's electorate votes for him rather to send a message to other politicians than by conviction.

Therefore, based on this literature, we can formulate the following expectation:

Expectation 1: If, after having lost part of their electorate to the radical right, mainstream parties start using more and more of the radical right's narratives in their own discourses, then we can say that their past failures have led to the normalization of radical right discourses.

The radical right and the media

The media as political actors (Path B and C)

First, the literature on political communication helps us understand how the media are involved in the political life, and how they influence and shape the political reality (McNair 2011). Because the media sphere is both judge and party of the political scene (Ibid), it is able to shape the information spread to tailor it to its own interests and manipulate its audience (Druckman and Chong 2010; McNair 2011). As expressed by Graber (2005), media *are* the political environment, and therefore their position within the political and social environment allows them to influence policymaking (McNair, 2011). However, because they exist within a complex political and social environment, media are also influenced *by* other political actors, especially politicians and their parties or governments. For example, Butler and Kavanagh (1992) explain that during periods of elections, each candidate and their political party will

try to use the media in their advantage in order to shape the political agenda so as to fit their preferences. But while politicians need the media to communicate to the people, it also requires more effort on their side to be able to influence them. Indeed, they need to understand how the media work, how they evolve, what they need, so they can reach a position where they can offer them interesting enough information, which will in turn attract the audience needed for the media to thrive (Strömbäck and Shehata 2010).

One issue in the Politicians-Media relationship, is the need for sensational, dramatic, unexpected news. To understand this shift from the original role of the media – educate and inform – (McNair, 2011) to its modern use, it is necessary to look at the Commercialisation aspect (Ibid). In an increasingly capitalist world, what usually matters the most is the financial success of an organisation, and the media industry is no exception. Every newspaper, every television channel or radio show is in competition with the others on who will have the greater audience (Blumler 2016). This need for constant growth and to attract more and more people has led to a reduction of the complexity of the information shared, so it is more accessible for the general population (Strömbäck and Shehata 2010). But this also reduces the quality of the information given to citizens, and, when the -boring- political coverage of A is in competition with the more interesting program of B, it is in A's interest to increase the entertainment value of its political coverage, which then surpasses the political importance of the original message (McNair, 2011).

This is the idea expressed by Mudde (2012), when he mentions the “tabloidization of political discourse”. It is the idea that political discourses are more and more democratized and ‘normalized’ because they have reached a different audience in the tabloids. Or because previously ‘serious’ news channels and newspapers have started a “tabloidization” of their editorial process, in comparison to political ideologies that are confined to other more recognized and serious newspapers for example, through which it is hard to reach a certain part of the population. While Mudde believes the radical right to be less dangerous than it can be assumed, because European democracies have, so far, been relatively resilient to this type of threats (Mudde 2011), he also argues that the successful dynamic they benefit from at the moment will continue in the future. Though he specifies that it is still unlikely that those parties will have an impact important enough to affect the current political systems in place (Mudde 2012), he believes that the “tabloidization” of the political discourse is one of the factors allowing this dynamic to survive. This is therefore one of the many dangers posed by the media regarding the political reality of a country: the media's need for public attention is creating a certain image of politics within which scandals, failures and polemics prevail (Gurevitch, Coleman, and Blumler 2009). Because radical right discourses still have a ‘sensational’ aspect to them, they are likely to make people react and interact with the different media reporting on them. Whether the people's reaction is negative or positive does not matter for the media, as long as their audience grows. But it does matter for the politicians because a negative media coverage of the establishment party leads to a lower voter turnout in elections (Iyengar and Simon 2000), which usually benefits the radical right and disadvantages more mainstream parties. This leads us to expect the following:

Expectation 2: If -in a context where media's influence in the political life is high- mainstream parties start putting their image and sensational discourses before actual politics during media interventions, then we can say that media's role/influence in the political life of a country leads to the normalization of radical right discourses.

Expectation 3: If, after an increase in the number of information sources available, media's political coverage/headlines see an increase in “sensational” and simplified political narratives related to the radical right's favourite topics, we can say that the abundance of information sources leads to the normalization of radical right discourses.

The personalization of politicians (Path D)

A second argument on how the use of the media by politicians, and the use of politicians by the media influences the political reality, is the concept of the personalization of political communication (Van

Aelst, Sheafer, and Stanyer 2012). It is argued that, because of the commercialization of media, what matters is not the essence of the message communicated, but more how it is presented, which again leads to a political coverage that appears less serious and oversimplified. This constant competition between political actors to participate in the agenda-setting of the media forces them to build a personality that will be pleasing to citizens and create positive engagement with a party's values (Gurevitch, Coleman and Blumler, 2009). In turn, both the media and the political actor targeted will use this tendency to focus on the individual rather than the politician or elected representative, on the candidate instead of the party it represents. This personalization of politics, with for example a TV show about Marine Le Pen in France, where she is filmed inside her own house, with her cats (Le Marchand 2021) like a 'normal' citizen, that make her appear endearing, contributes to the normalization of the radical right. While their political ideas are not discussed in this type of broadcasting, it participates to the "dédiabolisation" of their being, and therefore makes them more likely to be listened to by the population, more 'likeable' because they are "like them" in the end. Expectation 4 summarizes the outcome we can expect from the research on this argument:

Expectation 4: The more 'personalized' a radical right candidate is, the more likely its discourses are to be seen as "normal" and "equal" to other discourses, therefore leading to the normalization of radical right discourses.

In sum, politicians need the media to attract voters, but the media need sensational political news to maximize their audience, which then leads to the manipulation of the electorate by the media, through the downplaying of real, rational, and important political messages, in aid of reactionary politics. This usually tends to favour the radical right -which does not mind the sensational aspect of politics, as long as it gives it a seat at the table- and help its politicians 'normalize' their discourses, by being omnipresent in the media, and forcing their opponents into their own playground if they want to stay relevant.

Indeed, the way media frame certain issues and the time they allocate to specific ideologies in their agenda help "legitimize a political space in which the radical right can thrive" (Ellinas 2018). Because of this, media are perceived as political actors in their own right by the radical right (Knops and De Cleen 2019). Therefore, it allows radical right actors to manipulate them, or at least attempt to manipulate them, like they would do with any other audience or political actor. Through normalization, and because they are both actors of and used by the process itself, media participate to the rise of the radical right and the shift of the political landscape to the right. Berning, Lubbers, and Schlueter, for example, in their exploration of the effects of media on the sympathy expressed towards the radical right, find that presence in the media usually affects the sympathy for these parties positively, especially when the issue at hand has to do with a 'perceived ethnic threat' or Euroscepticism (Berning, Lubbers, and Schlueter 2019).

Via the media, that they often also criticise for their coverage of radical right issues, radical right parties have reorganized the political discourse and redistributed the cards to make what was once politically incorrect, acceptable political narratives (Najimdeen 2017).

The overall process starts from radical right parties implementing strategies of normalization alongside the commercialization aspect of the media, in need of 'interesting' news and reactionary politics to maximize its audience. Because the radical right's favourite themes are more likely to incite interaction and reactions from the audience, thanks to their 'dramatic' character, media are also more likely to focus on these topics, which then forces mainstream parties to interact and get involved with radical right ideologies. The media's strategies to increase its audiences also impact how citizens view the political scene (Druckman and Chong 2010), therefore it is important for mainstream parties to remain relevant and engage in debates with radical right politicians or radical right rhetoric, to try and convince the radical right's growing electorate to choose them instead.

Once radical right parties have reached parliament or positions of powers, then the mainstream parties start to shift their own political discourses towards more radical narratives. Thus, the normalization of radical right discourses increases within the public debate, which gives them an even bigger opportunity for future electoral success, and this cycle never ends.

While four expectations arise from this theoretical framework, only two ([Expectation 1](#) and [Expectation 4](#)) will be tested for this thesis. For time and resources reasons, it is not possible to test [Expectation 2](#) and [Expectation 3](#). Indeed, for example, regarding Expectation 3, the data available is very limited for 2002. The French archives (INA) is the organism responsible for archiving TV shows and important moments of the French public life that it judges relevant for French history and French culture. Therefore, a wide range of headlines and TV interviews or interventions by the candidates in 2002 and the treatment of the campaign on various channels are not available anymore and make a deep and insightful comparison very difficult to realise.

Methodology

This research is a qualitative comparative within-case analysis, in which I observe the evolution of the radical right discourses within the French public debate. My aim is to explore the extent to which the French society has seen a normalization of these discourses over the past twenty years and attempt to explain the processes that led to this.

France as a case study

As already mentioned in the introduction chapter, the choice of France imposed itself for various reasons. First, as a French-speaking student, it was easier to explore the various sources in a language I understand, especially because this analysis requires an understanding of the subtlety of the language used by the different political actors. Second, the recent French presidential elections, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, and the build up to the election in this time of crises seem to have led to an increase in the use of the radical right rhetoric within the public debate. Indeed, the 2022 election saw a total of three official extreme-right candidates, two of them benefiting from a wide political coverage. While it was the first time a second extreme-right candidate had a major place within the public debate, it was not the first time an extreme-right candidate made it to the second round of the election. Third, the choice of France as a case study in this context also originates from its semi-presidential system. Although there are four other semi-presidential systems in Europe, France's is very interesting, as the power of its President are far more important from a national point of view, than in other semi-presidential systems (Chadwick 2022). Also, France's history and the role it plays in the international order make it an influential country, and therefore render its system and political life interesting to study. Based on the role of France within the European Union, the spread of the radical right ideology within France should be something everyone worries about, for the future of European integration, the Rule of Law, and for the outcome of the current Ukrainian war.

The timeline

I have decided to compare two electoral periods within French history: the 2002 election, and the more recent 2022 election. In 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen reaches the second round of the presidential election, against the President Jacques Chirac. Not only was this a surprise for most, but also the reaction to this accession was almost unanimous: not one vote for the National Front. Those were the instructions of all the other political parties, who called for the creation of a Republican Front against the radical right candidate. Now, 20 years later, his daughter, Marine Le Pen, has reached the second round for the second time in her political career, and while in 2002 the results of the second round were pretty much predicted in advance in favour of Jacques Chirac, the 2022 polls appeared much closer, and placed the radical right candidate in the margin of error of the opinion polls, meaning there was a risk she could access power. The final results show a 16-points gap between Macron and Le Pen. However, the score of the radical right was the highest ever seen in French history.

Therefore, the comparison of the political coverage and the political programmes of the candidates between both these elections seems interesting for two reasons. First, to understand how the radical right managed to attract this number of voters. Second, to explain how it was made possible in the 'country of Human Rights' as French people like to call it, in reference to the universal impact that the French Declaration of Human Rights in 1789 had, to turn to the radical right for its future.

It is then necessary to understand to what extent there was a normalization of radical right discourses within the French public debate and the possible causes of this normalization, in order to attempt to explain its consequences.

The timelines for this analysis will represent the months leading to the first round of each election: from the start of the pre-campaign to the end of the actual campaign, 48 hours before the first round takes place. It translates to the period from January 1st, 2002, to April 19th, 2002, and from January 1st, 2022, to April 8th, 2022. I find important to include the pre-campaign in this research, since it shows the build-up to the start of the official campaign before the candidates are officially declared by the Constitutional Council. Because, at least in 2022, many voters have waited until the last minute to decide who they would support, it is also important not to exclude the last few weeks before the election.

The Type of Data

To what extent is there a normalization of radical right discourses?

The data collection for this thesis is based on a variety of secondary sources. In order to enhance the credibility and transferability of this research, it is necessary to evaluate the extent to which normalization of radical right discourses happen through different types of media and communication.

Normalization, in this context is **the process through which an ideology, that was once deemed ‘socially unacceptable’, becomes ‘socially acceptable’ for large parts of the population and/or the majority of the media.** To the extent that this ideology is not questioned or challenged by people and institutions in positions of power, as much as it used to be.

Therefore, there are three ways to measure this normalization in newspapers. First, when an ideology becomes normalized, it is deemed socially acceptable and therefore is not challenged anymore, by other political actors. In this case, the more newspapers articles that contain unchallenged radical right discourses there are, the more normalization there is. I understand *unchallenged* discourses by the idea that those discourses, stated by radical right personalities, would simply be reported within the article. However, their content would not be questioned by the author of the article or by any other person interviewed for the article itself. In this way, these discourses appear as legitimate as other political discourses, since they are treated in the same way meaning, relevant enough not to be automatically deconstructed or fact checked.

Second, when an ideology becomes normalized, in addition to not being much challenged anymore, it also gains supporters and is therefore most likely to be used more and more as a legitimate ideology in the public debate, including in newspapers. In this case, this means that journalists would -consciously or not- describe a situation through a radical right lens. For example, radical right discourses usually portray a very negative image of Islam and of immigration. Therefore, if there is an increase in the number of articles portraying one or both of these themes negatively between 2002 and 2022, this shows the normalization of radical right discourses on these topics.

Third, when personalities representing an ideology benefit from a wide political coverage, no matter whether this political coverage is positive or negative, it makes them relevant, because it shows them as interesting enough -and therefore legitimate enough- to be discussed. Hence the more articles mentioning a radical right candidate there are, the more likely the ideology they represent is to be normalized.

I have therefore analysed 345 articles from three different French newspapers. I have chosen to select those articles from Le Monde, Le Figaro and Libération, as they are the three main newspapers in France, and have three different editorial lines. The variety of editorial lines is important to observe to what extent this normalization is widespread: does it mainly concern right-wing newspapers, or has it also spread onto the opposite side of the political spectrum?

In order to understand the choice to study these newspapers, it is important to first understand how popular they are and how wide their audience is, by looking at the number of copies circulating for each of them during both periods.

In 2002, Le Monde was the first newspapers of France, with 361,254 copies. Followed by Le Figaro (345,080 copies) and Libération quite behind the both of them with 156, 077 copies.

In 2021, Le Monde was still first, and since 2002 had seen an increase in its audience, with 445,894 copies. The gap between Le Monde and Le Figaro has grown, with the latter reaching ‘only’ 347,052 copies last year. Regarding Libération, contrary to the other two newspapers, it has seen a decrease in its audience, at least within its audience with a subscription, since its copies fell to 90,354.

Therefore, Le Monde is the most influent, right before Le Figaro, and Libération is the least influent of the three.

These numbers only include paid memberships to all three newspapers, implying an even wider audience regarding some of their free-to-access articles for which we have no exact data.

The analysis of these articles is based on their content, and how the themes of interest are represented within them. Based on the codebooks I elaborated, each article is placed in one of three categories for each theme:

- A positive representation of Islam and Muslims/Immigration
- A negative representation of Islam and Muslims/Immigration
- A neutral stance on Islam and Muslims/Immigration: simply stating facts, with no further analysis or points of views

Each article has been coded in accordance with a ‘keywords’ table (see [Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#)) and based on the ratio of positive/negative/neutral codes present in each article, placed into one of the three categories (see [Annexe 2](#) for an example of how this was done). I have also looked at how many articles have come up with a “unchallenged radical right discourses” code, and the most common narratives arising from all articles, whether they are positive and negative.

The Keywords tables have been built first from what could be found within the literature on radical right discourses and how the radical right expresses its ideology about each theme. However, during the content analysis itself, I also have added new codes that I found within the articles themselves and which were recurrent.

These articles have been collected via the Europresse database, using [specific keywords](#) relating to the themes studied. Regardless of the negative, positive, or neutral aspects of the articles, I also found interesting to look at the numbers of articles containing those keywords, to compare them and see if there is a link between the number of articles about a topic, and whether it is depicted more positively or negatively. Especially, regarding Immigration, because various words can be used to depict immigrants: refugees, asylum seekers, migrants; and because each of those words has a different connotation to it: for example, migrants has a more pejorative connotation than asylum seekers or refugees (Duriez 2015; Hupin 2015), it is interesting to see which one is used the most at what time.

Last but not least, I also find important to look at the programmes of each of the official candidates for each election, in order to assess whether this normalization can be observed in the direct communication of the political parties, or if it happens in a more subtle way. For this, I have gathered documentation on each of the thirteen candidates to the 2002 election, and all twelve candidates to the 2022 election.

After having done some research, and for time and resources reasons, I decided to select five of the thirteen candidates to the 2002 election, and five of the twelve candidates to the 2022 election.

Regarding 2002, I have focused on:

- **Jacques Chirac**, first because he was the President at the time and present in the second round of the election, in addition to representing one of the traditional right-wing parties. Therefore, he could have had a lot of significant influence on which topics were treated and focused on during the election campaign.
- **Lionel Jospin**, first because he was the prime minister at the time and though he did not reach the second round, his score was still pretty high with 16.18% of the votes. His party, which is also one of the traditional French parties, the Socialist Party, had a majority at the assembly, which also made him influential within the political life of the country at the time.
- **Jean-Marie Le Pen**: for reasons that are obvious to this research, and especially because he was the first radical right candidate to reach the second round of a presidential election in France.
- **François Bayrou**: Although his score at the presidential election was only 6.84%, his parliamentary group had 19% of the seats at the time. This clearly made him an important figure of the election campaign.
- **Bruno Mégret**: With his 2.34% at the presidential election, he does not necessarily seem that relevant. However, he was the second radical right candidate of this election, and therefore it is also important to see whether the issues he raised were the same as the ones raised by Jean-Marie Le Pen, and if they have travelled to 2022 too.

Regarding 2022, the candidates I have studied are:

- **Emmanuel Macron**: as the President with a majority at the assembly and with a score of 27.85% in the first round of the election, his discourses cannot be excluded, because he is one of the most influential French politicians of his time, if not the most influential.
- **Marine Le Pen**: As with her father, for obvious reasons relating to this thesis, and especially because her score in both the first and second round of the 2022 elections are historical (respectively 23.15% and 41.45%).
- **Eric Zemmour**: Like Bruno Mégret, he was the second radical right candidate during this election. However, his score was way higher (7.07%) than Bruno Mégret, and his omnipresence in the media is thought to have influenced the main topics of discussion of the campaign.
- **Valérie Pécresse**: Although her low score (4.78%) could make her irrelevant, she did represent the traditional right-wing party during the election, Les Républicains, and therefore was very much present within the media during the campaign, in addition to benefitting from the political influence of her party.
- **Anne Hidalgo**: For the same reasons as Valérie Pécresse, despite her low score (1.75%), she was also representing the traditional Socialist Party, which also gave her greater influence during the campaign than her score at the election.

How can we explain this normalization?

The first expectation ([Expectation 1](#)) I have tested assumes that, after having lost part of their electorate to the radical right, mainstream parties start using more and more of the radical right's narratives in their own discourses. This would confirm that their past failures have played a role in the normalization of radical right discourses.

To test this expectation, I have looked at various polls and surveys that have been done before and during the election campaigns by polling institutes (Elabe 2022; Harris-Interactive 2022; Ifop-Fiducial 2021). These surveys' aim is to understand why people vote for the radical right, and therefore for Marine Le Pen or Eric Zemmour in 2022. In the theoretical framework, I have already covered the reasons why people voted for Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2002, based on the work of Nonna Mayer (2002). I assume that if, in 2022 also, some of those reasons are linked to dissatisfaction regarding previous governments' actions, and that at the same time we observe a shift to the radical right within mainstream parties' discourses, then this expectation can be validated. However, on its own, its validity is limited, as it shows

more a correlation than a causation, because various other factors already mentioned can influence the process of normalization of radical right discourses.

The second expectation ([Expectation 4](#)) I have tested relates to the personalization of politicians. I expect that the more ‘personalized’ a radical right candidate is, the more likely its discourses are to be seen as ‘normal’ and ‘equal’ to other discourses. If this is the case, then it participates to the normalization of their discourses.

For this expectation, I have watched the TV show “Une Ambition intime” (Le Marchand 2016, 2021) and “Face à Baba” (Hanouna 2022) where Marine Le Pen appears, and I have compared the various surveys realized during the campaign, before and after her appearance in the shows, to see if there was a correlation between her personalization on TV in front of an important audience, and how people perceived her. As with expectation one though, the likeliness of a causation is very low, as there is no survey specifically on this particular aspect of the campaign. To establish a causation, it would be necessary to create a survey in which people are asked whether they have felt more sympathy for radical right candidates after watching such shows, but the time and the resources allocated for this thesis did not allow for the realization of a representative survey.

Content Analysis

For the content analysis of the newspapers and programmes, I have determined three categories: Islam, Immigration, and Nationalism. I have made a list of keywords (see [Annexe 1](#)) for each of these categories. I have used these keywords to determine which parts of the content I was analysing I should be focusing on.

The Units of Analysis are the relevant articles based on the keywords search for each category, each newspaper and both periods, and the “profession de foi” of the ten candidates selected.

Regarding sampling, I have explained in the previous section why I selected the ten candidates out of the twenty-five original ones. For the political programmes part, I have decided to focus on what we call the candidates’ programmes instead of their detailed programmes. Indeed, these “profession de foi” are sent directly to all voters by post, and therefore the voters are more likely to read those than the full programmes. Because of this, they represent the candidates and their views, the image they want to convey, more than the detailed programmes, at least in the mind of voters.

For the newspapers, I have made a first sampling through the timelines I have chosen (January 1st, 2002 – April 19th, 2002 and January 1st, 2022 – April 8th, 2022). Then, I used the keywords (see [Annexe 1](#)) to make a search based on specific criteria on the Europresse database. After having collected all the newspaper articles including the keywords, I searched through them to exclude the irrelevant ones. I excluded articles based on the topics they covered. If they were not about France specifically, or if the topic of the keywords used was not the main one of the articles, or if the keywords had a double meaning and were used as such in the article, I removed them. For example, the topics of the articles excluded were related to:

- Terrorism: because when articles are specifically about Islamic terrorism, the way Islam might be treated could be biased, and not necessarily representative of how it is usually treated outside of the time periods where such attacks happened.
- Terrorist trials.
- Wars that do not concern France directly, including articles on refugees that were outside the European borders: this research is about the French public debate, and while the migration situation of other countries outside of the Schengen area might be discussed within the French public debate, they do not necessarily influence the way the French population view refugees and migrants, as they are not directly concerned by it.
- Events related to the themes selected but happening in other countries.

- Migration events (like Ukraine) that do not fit within the radical right discourses as defined in this thesis because they are not about ethno-nationalist immigration: they are thought to have the same culture, come from the same -or a similar- civilisation.
- Articles about art(ists) that are immigrants or Muslim, unless their art focuses on Islam and immigration.
- Articles that contain the words searched but have another meaning than the one used in this thesis.

After this, the sample I have analysed accounted for 345 articles total, out of 782 at the beginning.

Because of the different searches done within the same category, some articles appear in different searches. For example, some articles include ‘migrants’ and ‘refugees’, and were found in both of those searches. For those, I have either analysed them separately or focused on the relation between the words used, depending on what the article focuses on and how the words are used. Therefore, sometimes those articles, though they appeared more than one time, will count as 1 article, and sometimes they will be counted multiple times as separate articles within the same category.

Coding

After having sorted all the documents I collected through the Europresse database, I have started coding them. Because regarding the part on the “extent of the normalization of radical right discourses”, one of my aims is to look at whether the content of articles is mainly positive or negative regarding specific discourses, I have built up a table (see [Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#)) based on the various ‘frames’ and point of views I have identified during the analysis itself. I have kept building the codebook until the end of the analysis. Using Atlas-ti, I have allocated a colour to each category: the ‘positive’ codes were in light green, and the ‘negative’ ones in red. Some parts of the newspapers, excluded from one or the other category, but relevant for context, were allocated different colours.

The codes are based on perceptions of radical right discourses. For example, an empathetic narrative regarding asylum seekers and their struggle to have their rights respected is coded as ‘positive’. On the contrary, a narrative that places asylum seekers as ‘the problem’, or as ‘criminals’, therefore in line with radical right discourses, is coded as ‘negative’. This helps to have a global understanding of the picture painted by the three newspapers on each topic: immigration, Islam, and nationalism.

After the analysis of each category, I have created pie charts to depict what percentage of the sum of articles on a topic had negative, positive, or more neutral views, so as to allow a clearer perception of the results.

[Annexe 2](#) shows one example of articles coded as positive from Le Monde.

Based on this coding, I have also looked at the articles that contained unchallenged radical right discourses, in order to analyse what type of discourse was generally unchallenged and offer insights on how normalization can also happen through the simple recount of an ideology by journalists who sometimes think they are only doing their job to inform people.

| IMMIGRATION | |
|--|---|
| - (In line with) radical right discourses - Negative portraying | - Anti-radical right discourses - Positive portraying |
| Migrants = danger | Openly disagrees with asylum seekers/refugees/migrants’ situation |
| Migrants = criminals/liars | Expresses empathy |
| Migrants = threat to values and national cohesion | Advocates against discriminations |

| | |
|--|---|
| Emphasis on the migration <i>crisis</i> , associated with words that have a negative connotation such as: pressure, intensity, risk, invasion, subversion. | Feeling helpless though willing to help |
| Anti-help for migrants | Actively looking for human solutions to the issue(s) |
| Anti-migration narrative(s) | Openly outraged by the way asylum seekers/refugees/migrants are treated |
| Portrays themselves (political actors/French population) as victims | Engages in positive/helpful action |
| Angriness towards migrants | Offers recommendations to improve asylum seekers/refugees/migrants' situations |
| Against migrants' rights | Advocates for the respect of asylum seekers/refugees/migrants' rights |
| Blames immigration for things that are not necessarily related to it, without evidence | Expresses support |
| Fear of immigration | The article interviews various actors including volunteers and/or asylum seekers/refugees/migrants themselves |
| Hostile behaviour/words towards migrants | Challenges/deconstructs/criticizes radical right discourses |
| War vocabulary such as: taking something by storm, conquer by force. | Points out the issues of the system in place |
| Criticises the current migration policy: the state is too laxist/requires stricter action | Criticises the current migration policy regarding human rights |

Table 1: Categories for coding - Immigration

| ISLAM | |
|--|---|
| - (In line with) radical right discourses - Negative portraying | - Anti-radical right discourses - Positive portraying |
| Muslims = danger | Advocate against discriminations |
| Muslims = threat to security and to Republican (French) values | Criticises anti-Islam policy/narratives |
| Muslims = terrorists (conflation) | Criticises Islamophobia |
| Civilization/culture is incompatible with French culture | Deconstruction of radical right discourses |
| Islam = communitarianism | Defence of Islam |
| The state is too laxist | Newspapers plays its educative role |
| Absence of positive portraying of Islam: only points out the flaws | Avoids conflation and denounces it |
| Use of words with negative connotations: separatism, Islamism, communitarianism | Points out the issues of the system leading to discrimination etc. |
| Islamophobia does not exist | The article interviews various actors including Muslims themselves and associations fighting for human rights and discriminations |
| Against Hijab | Islam respects/is compatible with French values |
| Presence of unchallenged radical right discourses coming directly from radical right personalities (candidates or not) | Welcoming words/actions |

Table 2: Categories for coding - Islam

Counting – quantifying

As an additional method, I have decided to count how many articles mentioned the names of each candidate for each newspaper, during both periods (see [Figure 2](#)). This allows us to observe whether the radical right candidates are more present than others, or proportionally more present now than they were in 2022. And to have a first idea of the evolution of radical right discourses within the three newspapers, including the propension of articles about non-radical right candidates, who, based on the analysis of their programmes, are likely (or not likely) to also be using radical right discourses.

Results and Discussion

In this chapter, I present the findings that arose from the data I have collected, and discuss them in relation to the expectations mentioned in the previous sections.

I will start by explaining the results related to the extent of the normalization of radical right discourses. I measure the normalization of radical right discourses in four different ways: the presence of radical right discourses within the political programmes of mainstream parties, the omnipresence -or not- of radical right candidates in the media, the treatment of immigration and Islam in *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *Libération* and whether this treatment is in line with radical right discourses or in opposition to it, and finally the presence -or not- of unchallenged radical right discourses within newspapers articles. The degree to which normalization is present within the French public debate depends on the extent to which it is present within each of these four criteria. If it touches all four criteria, then it means that the radical right discourses mentioned have reached various spheres of the public debate and are now very much dominating said debate. If, on the contrary, this normalization is only found in some of these criteria but not all, then it shows the limits of this normalization.

Afterwards, I link these results to the various possible causes of this outcome that I have been able to partially research, namely the failures of traditional parties in government and the personalization of politicians.

Content Analysis – Candidates’ programmes

First, let us look at the extent to which 2022 candidates have integrated radical right discourses into their own programmes. This is one of the starting points of normalization and it tells us to what extent we can expect this normalization to be present, and on which side of the political spectrum it is most likely to appear.

In this section, I expose the main themes present within the programmes of the radical right candidates in 2002 and compare them to the rest of the candidates to the same election. Then, I do the same for the 2022 election. Lastly, I compare the differences and similarities between the other candidates’ programmes in 2002 and 2022. This will allow for an understanding of the extent to which mainstream parties have integrated radical right discourses within their own since 2002.

2002

Jean-Marie Le Pen, as a radical right candidate, uses insecurity as one of his main themes. He links it to a “massive” and “uncontrolled” immigration, that threatens the lives, jobs, and safety of French people.

For example, in a paragraph titled “France and its population threatened”, he states that the “crazy massive immigration policy” of the government has “dramatic consequences” on “unemployment, security and taxes”¹. Later in this paragraph that he started by mentioning immigration, he describes the “fear” that has been growing in French villages and cities because of “racketeering, drugs and violence”.

The President, the government and politicians in general are blamed for France losing sovereignty to Europe and the migration ‘issue’. He expresses a nationalist ideology through both a hard

¹ My own translation, based on the original text - « La France et les Français menacés : Une folle politique d’immigration massive a entraîné [...] des conséquences dramatiques sur le chômage, l’insécurité et le fiscalisme »

Euroscepticism discourse and the clear depiction of a majority of migrants being incompatible with the French Republic. He associates migrants with violence and crimes. However, he does *not* mention Islam.

Interestingly enough, **Bruno Mégret**'s discourse is more direct and 'radical' than Jean-Marie Le Pen's. For example, while Le Pen insists on the failures of the government, Mégret explicitly states that "thugs and illegal immigrants are *protected* by the government"². We observe a difference between the way they both express their ideas and their motivations on paper. While Jean-Marie Le Pen seems to already be polishing the angles of his discourse to widen his electorate, Bruno Mégret is more straightforward, and actually reproaches Le Pen his lack of determination. On the first page of Mégret's programme, the first words are 'Against immigration'. The next pages of his programme are full of an anti-immigration sentiment, which he believes responsible for the insecurity faced by French people. His nationalism is very much present on most pages and very explicit. Contrary to Le Pen, he does mention Islam and what he calls 'islamisation' and its dangers for French culture: "No to the islamisation of France"³.

Both candidates have in common ethno-nationalism, anti-immigration causing insecurity, and anti-Europe views, even if they express them differently. First, both their first pages mention the ideas of putting "France and French people first" in opposition to foreigners outside of Europe: "Reform of the nationality code so that the quality of French be inherited or deserved. Priority to French people and Europeans for jobs and state benefits". Second, they both come up with measures to reduce insecurity that they think is mainly caused by immigrants coming from outside Europe. However, while in the expression of the measures themselves Le Pen does not specify which one would target immigrants the most, Mégret does. He puts on an equal foot the expulsion of immigrants and "foreign thugs" and the referendum on the death penalty, along with the use of words like "châtiment" which refer to a very severe punishment.

Less with the ideas and more with the words employed, Mégret appears more severe and extreme than Le Pen, even though the ideology they stand for is fundamentally the same.

While **François Bayrou**'s main themes are Europe and insecurity, the insecurity he mentions is general and broad, and he does not target any specific group who would be responsible for all the insecurity French people are facing. On the contrary, he accuses the President and the government who he thinks failed in their role to protect French citizens. There is no mention of Islam or of immigration in his discourse. Regarding Europe, he is a fervent defender of a stronger, federal Europe and nationalism, no matter the type, is not noticeable.

For **Jacques Chirac**, the difficulties faced by France and French people, have his Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and his government to blame. Regarding 'nationalism', he always links it to Europe, of which he speaks positively. Therefore, there is no mention of ethno-nationalism in his discourse. On the contrary, he emphasizes that he wants a stronger Europe, and a deeper European integration. He does not mention immigration or Islam, but he does talk a lot about insecurity too, in the same way that Bayrou does.

Like Bayrou and Chirac, one of **Lionel Jospin**'s focuses is insecurity, which he also links to various issues faced by the French population: unemployment, housing crisis, lack of public services. He talks about Europe positively and advocates for a more social Europe. He does not mention immigration at all, nor does he ever mention Islam.

In 2002, what most of the candidates' programmes have in common, no matter their position on the political spectrum, is insecurity. Now, while mainstream candidates associate insecurity with various components of life and offer different solutions to different types of insecurity, both radical right candidates see insecurity as mainly caused by -uncontrolled and massive- immigration. No other candidate makes the link, at least not explicitly, between immigration and insecurity or crimes. Regarding Islam, Mégret is the only one mentioning it back in 2002, even Jean-Marie Le Pen does not

² My own translation, based on the original text – "Les voyous et les clandestins protégés par le pouvoir : la violence et la criminalité explosent »

³ My own translation, based on the original text – "Refus de l'islamisation de la France"

make it a central theme of his campaign, at least not in his programme. When it comes to nationalism, mainstream candidates tend to emphasize their attachment to Europe and its future developments, while both Le Pen and Mégret convey very nationalist stances, blaming Europe and immigration for France's decline.

Therefore, in 2002, we do not observe radical right discourses within the programmes of mainstream parties. There is a very clear wall between mainstream parties' ideologies and the radical right ideology.

2022

In 2022, **Marine Le Pen**, like her father twenty years before her, makes insecurity one of the central themes of her campaign. She emphasizes that this insecurity is caused by immigration *and* Islam this time. She makes an explicit link between these two categories and crimes in general. Also, Islam is depicted as a danger for France, its people, its traditions, its civilisation as a whole. Her mentions of Europe are relatively minor and definitely not what she wants to emphasize. Though she has put a "dédiabolisation" strategy in place that media and academics working on the topic think make her appear 'softer', the comparison between the way her father expresses himself in 2002 and hers paints a different picture, at least in the programmes. Even if there are many noticeable elements of this strategy such as various photos of her smiling, with kids and crowds of people from different backgrounds and a less aggressive first page, her measures are the same, and they are not necessarily expressed differently. She is as explicit as her dad, if not more, in her programme on immigration and Islam.

For instance, like her father and Mégret, she also offers to put French thugs in jail and foreign thugs in a plane back to "where they come from". And when Jean-Marie Le Pen chooses not to mention Islam, she states she will start a "war" against Islamism by closing mosques that she judges as radical.

The surprise of this election, **Eric Zemmour**, like Bruno Mégret before him, talks way more freely than the Le Pens. He expresses a lot his negative depiction of Islam though he tries to make a distinction between good and bad Muslims - criminals and not criminals. He is also the only one mentioning the great replacement theory, which is recognized as being a radical right and racist theory, based on no scientific foundation. He does not talk about Europe at all and focuses on France only. His nationalism is pretty explicit, as he expresses the superiority of French people and French principles over migrants and religious minorities. He blames insecurity on immigration and Islam. Compared to Jean-Marie or Marine Le Pen, his stance on immigration is even more radical, since he wants to *end* it, rather than control or reduce it.

In 2022, both radical right candidates make immigration and Islam their themes of predilection, making explicit links between these categories of people and insecurity and crimes. Their ethno-nationalism is also pretty clear, but contrary to Mégret and Jean-Marie Le Pen, who clearly expressed their Euroscepticism, Marine Le Pen and Zemmour simply decide not to mention Europe much, instead of criticizing it explicitly.

The current French President **Emmanuel Macron** mentions Europe less than would be expected from someone who has defined his presidency and politics around his advocacy for a sovereign Europe in the past five years. However, he does talk about "our Europe", which emphasizes his devotion for the European Union, and rule out every possibility of the presence of nationalism in his programme.

Regarding immigration and Islam, he does implicitly link them both to the insecurity faced by French people. To fight this insecurity, he offers measures to 'defend' French and European borders, and fight against Islamism by doubling the number of policemen present on the streets.

On Macron's right, we find **Valérie Pécresse** from 'Les Républicains'. Technically, she comes from Chirac's legacy and tradition. However, while she also talks about other issues, she does focus on Islam, immigration, and insecurity quite a lot. Sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, she links immigration and Islam to crimes and threats to French traditions and cultures. She also mentions the

necessity to bring order back to and take power back from what she calls “ghettos” in Paris’ suburban areas. This mention of ‘ghettos’ is clear evidence of the link she makes between minority groups, often coming from an immigrant background, and insecurity and crimes.

Regarding nationalism and Europe, while she does not mention Europe that much when she does it is relatively positive. Indeed, she recognizes that France needs to be strong within Europe, not without. Therefore, we can observe the seed of ethno-nationalism slowly forming within her discourse. She understands France as being part of the European Union, and of the European civilization, however the links she makes between minority groups and violence and insecurity show a will to separate and divide based on, if not ‘civilizations’, alleged origins, race, and religious traditions.

Lastly, we have **Anne Hidalgo**, the 2022 figure of the Socialist Party. Like Lionel Jospin, she does not mention Islam. She talks briefly about immigration though, but to emphasize her empathy for current immigrants to France. Indeed, she explains that her own family has immigrated to France from Spain under the Franco regime. Regarding ‘nationalism’, while her focus is on France -it is, after all, a French national election- she also emphasizes her attachment to Europe, and her belief that France needs Europe as much as Europe needs France.

While in 2002, only radical right candidates linked insecurity to immigration and Islam, most candidates in 2022, except from the socialist candidate, clearly made that link in their programme. Some of them also mentioned other reasons for the insecurity French people face like Macron and Pécresse, but Marine Le Pen also did, and therefore this does not make their discourse on the topic much different. Regarding nationalism, all candidates outside of Le Pen and Zemmour link France’s strength and power to the European Union like most of the 2002 candidates. However, some of their views on immigration and Islam open the door for questioning their links to ethno-nationalism, or even “ethno-Europeanism”. The implications of these results for the normalization of radical right discourses are discussed in the following section.

2002 vs 2022

Now that I have explained what the programmes of the various candidates contain, and how in general they differ between 2002 and 2022, it is important to compare candidates based on where they are positioned on the political spectrum. This way, it gives a clear idea of where normalization is, and what degree of normalization appears.

While both socialists, Anne Hidalgo, and Lionel Jospin, show similarities in their programmes and do not let radical right discourses impregnate their own, it is not the case for the four other mainstream candidates. Because they are both considered to be ‘centre’ or ‘centre-right’, and because their respective parties are, in 2022, part of the same alliance in Parliament, it seems logical to compare Bayrou and Macron. It is clear that the centre discourse has shifted to the right in the past twenty years. Even though Macron does not make the link between insecurity and immigration or Islam as explicit as others, he still makes it. In 2002, Bayrou chose not to mention either of these categories, because they were not relevant to how he saw himself and his politics. Now, the President himself is using those radical right themes as part of his own programme. Therefore, for this area of the political spectrum, the beginning of a normalization of radical right discourses is observable.

Regarding the right-wing parties, it makes sense to compare Valérie Pécresse and Jacques Chirac. Here also, Pécresse’s programme is somehow centred on immigration and Islam as dangers and threats, when Chirac did not pay them any attention. In her words, Pécresse appears quite aggressive next to Macron’s implicit links, and closer to Marine Le Pen than any other candidate, at least on those two topics. Thus, for the right side of the political spectrum, the normalization of radical right discourses is very clear and quite explicit. The right has appropriated radical right views on immigration and Islam.

Based on this analysis, I can say there is a normalization of radical right discourses, at least within mainstream parties' discourses. Especially within the discourses of centre-right to right-wing candidates. Narratives on immigration and Islam have shifted to the right, closer to the radical right than they were in 2002. They have also become central themes for some of the candidates when they were not mentioned at all twenty years ago. However, there is no evidence of normalization on the left-side of the political spectrum so far.

Next, I present the findings of the analysis of newspapers that I have conducted, both relating to the presence of candidates in the newspapers, the treatment of immigration, Islam, and nationalism within said newspapers, and the extent to which radical right discourses are unchallenged within these articles. This allows to complete the analysis on the extent to which the normalization is present and go deeper into the implications of it.

Analysis of Newspapers

1. Are radical right candidates omnipresent in the media?

After having explained the extent to which radical right discourses are present within the political programmes of mainstream parties, I turn to the presence of said candidates within the media.

First, [Figure 2](#) shows how many times the different candidates have been mentioned, along with themes like immigration and Islam, in articles from Le Figaro, Le Monde and Libération in 2002 and in 2022. This helps us understand the extent to which radical right candidates are present within the media, compared to other candidates, which participates to the normalization of their discourses.

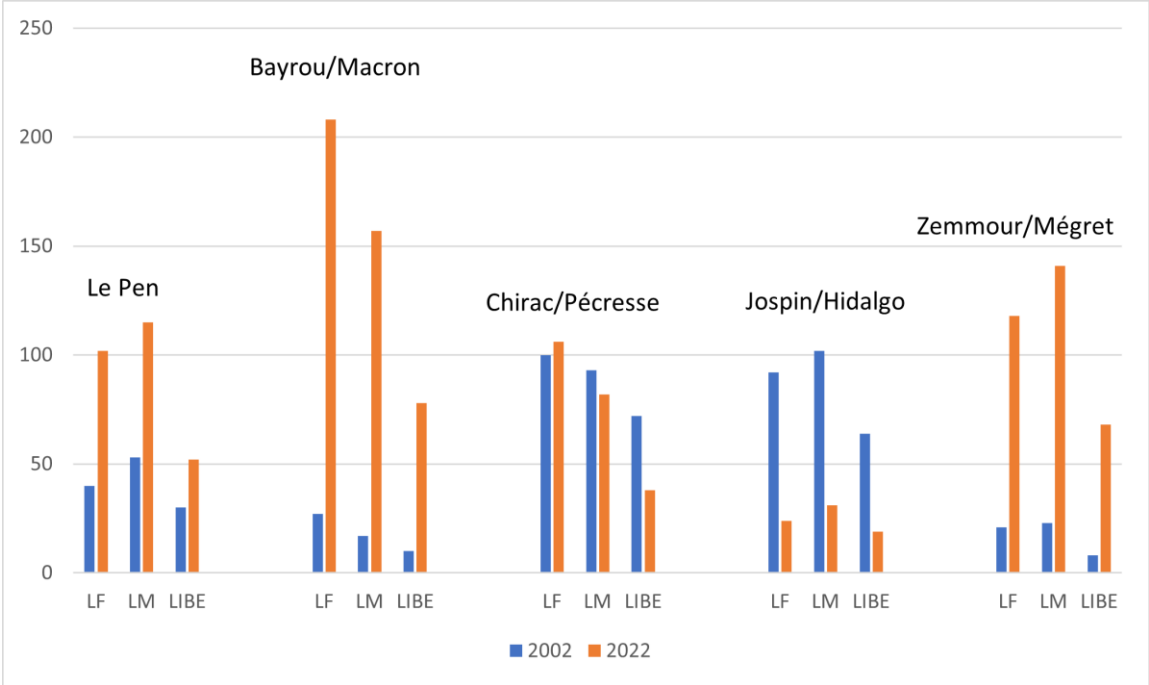


Figure 2 - representation of the evolution of the number of articles mentioning all the candidates studied during the presidential election campaigns. (LF = Le Figaro, LM = Le Monde, LIBE = Libération)

[Figure 2](#) shows that the number of times each newspapers mentioned the name of radical right candidates has substantially increased regarding Le Pen for both Le Monde and Le Figaro but only saw a slight

increase in the case of *Libération*. Regarding Bruno Mégret and Eric Zemmour however, all three newspapers saw a major increase of the number of articles containing their names between 2002 and 2022.

What we can observe in this graph too is the number of articles relating to the same topics, mentioning the names of all the other candidates studied. We can see for example that the socialists are way less present in the news coverage of these newspapers in 2022 than they were in 2002. The 2002 numbers regarding Jospin can probably be explained by the fact that he was Prime Minister at the time, and therefore more relevant to talk about than Anne Hidalgo was during the 2022 election, since she is not part of any government. This factor can also explain the incredible numbers representing Macron's news coverage. He is here associated to Bayrou because of their similar political views and to allow a clearer reading of the graph. However, the comparison is not necessarily relevant in this case, and therefore it makes more sense to look at these numbers separately. Like Chirac and Jospin were the main candidates being mentioned in 2002 because they were both President and Prime Minister, it makes sense that Macron was also mentioned more than the other candidates. Outside of this factor, both Le Pen and Zemmour in 2022 are mentioned way more than the other candidates. In 2002, Le Pen and Mégret, while mentioned equally or more than François Bayrou, did not surpass other candidates in terms of news coverage the way the 2022 candidates do.

In the previous section on the content analysis of the political programmes of the candidates, we have seen that both Macron and Pécresse have engaged with certain radical right discourses on both immigration and Islam and their alleged links to insecurity and crimes. Hidalgo, on the other side, did not. Therefore, regardless of their positions in or out of the government, the general news coverage of candidates likely to use radical right discourses relating to those themes is massively higher than it was in 2002. On the contrary, the coverage of candidates who are not likely to engage with those discourses like Hidalgo, has substantially decreased.

In 2002, based on their political programmes, only Jean-Marie Le Pen and Bruno Mégret were considered to use radical right discourses on immigration and Islam. In 2022, it is Marine Le Pen, Eric Zemmour, Valérie Pécresse and to some extent Emmanuel Macron, which at least doubles the amount of coverage likely to spread radical right ideas. And based on the numbers relating to Macron, Zemmour and Le Pen, now higher than the two traditional parties' candidates, this coverage has more than doubled.

In [Figure 2](#), we can see that the gap between all newspapers regarding the number of articles mentioning the name of Le Pen is relatively low in 2002. However, in 2022, we can see a difference forming between *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* on one side, and *Libération* on the other side. The gap between *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* in 2002 and 2022 stayed relatively similar, while the gap between them and *Libération* widened in 2022. We could assume that right-wing newspapers like *Le Figaro* are more likely to talk about radical right candidates than their left-wing counterparts, but this seems not to be the case when we look at the number of articles on both radical right candidates in *Le Monde*. It is also worth mentioning the gap between *Le Monde* and *Libération*. *Libération* is the only one out of the three where the number of articles about Le Pen has only increased slightly. Even though *Le Monde* is a relatively left-wing newspaper, at least more liberal than *Le Figaro*, the increase in the number of articles about Le Pen (daughter or father) is equal to the one in *Le Figaro*. On the other side of the graph, the increase in the number of articles about the second radical right candidate (Mégret/Zemmour) is clear. While both *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* had pretty similar numbers in 2002, *Le Monde* scores higher in 2022 than *Le Figaro* does. *Libération*, on the other side, albeit seeing an important increase in 2022, still only exceeds *Le Monde*'s numbers for Le Pen in 2002 by a small margin.

Now, this can be explained by different factors. First, a general observation is that media are more prevalent now than they were in 2002. Therefore, it is quicker and easier to convey information on any topic, thanks to Internet and social media and the place they have within everyone's lives. However, it is clear that it is an editorial and political choice. If the only factor at play was the new prevalence of social media and Internet, *Libération* would have been likely to see the same type of increase, at least regarding Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen. Therefore, this explanation is not necessarily valid, though it could partly explain the degree to which there is a change.

What is even more interesting is to see that the numbers for Le Monde are surpassing those of Le Figaro. If those numbers show part of a normalization process through the omnipresence of the radical right candidates in all three newspapers, it is important to point out that the normalization at play within liberal newspapers seems to be more important.

Now, the treatment of both Le Pen is different between Le Figaro and Le Monde. While normalization has various components: unchallenged discourses, the inclusion of radical right discourses within mainstream parties' ideologies, legitimization of the radical right ideology for example, part of it is also the omnipresence of the radical right ideology within the public debate, and in this case, within newspapers articles. Even if Le Monde is often criticising the radical right discourses of Jean-Marie and Marine Le Pen, the importance it gives their discourses by even discussing them plays a role in their normalization. In addition, criticizing and condemning are two different things. Therefore, criticizing a radical right candidate or their discourses without necessarily condemning them and stating explicitly that the ideology conveyed is not condoned, also plays into the normalization process. Indeed, all politicians are subject to criticism regarding their ideas, their actions, and their discourses. Simply criticizing radical right candidates and discourses is treating them the same way as other candidates, therefore legitimizing them and in turn normalising their ideology.

Secondly, when it comes to Zemmour being omnipresent in all those three newspapers, including Libération, other explanations can arise. Indeed, while Libération is more left-wing and therefore instantly publishes less about the radical right than other newspapers, the increase of articles about Zemmour is still significant. However, the 'novelty' that Zemmour represents in a way does create some sort of bizarre interest from the population, and therefore newspapers' audience. As mentioned in the Causes section of the Theoretical Framework, one possible cause for the normalization of radical right discourses could be the need to attract as much audience as possible, and controversial topics or personalities in this case have a tendency to achieve this. But what comes out of the analysis of Libération's articles on Zemmour is that almost every single one of them explicitly criticizes and deconstructs his discourses, in an aim to educate its readers on what he is really saying and the consequences that could come of it. While Libération's intentions seem to be to show its audience the risks and dangers of the radical right, to avoid any normalization and make sure people do not forget where the radical right comes from, the consequences are not necessarily in line with the original intentions. Navigating between educating and informing, and - unconsciously - advertising something or someone is becoming harder and harder. It is not to say that the radical right should not be talked about, it very much should, and I am doing it myself in this thesis. However, it is important to acknowledge that working on the topic itself plays into the strategy implemented by the radical right to be omnipresent in the media and everywhere else. Because news sources nowadays have the tendency to base the topics that they publish on based on what other news sources are talking about, so as to not be left on the side and keep their relevance (Strömbäck 2010), even those with the best of intentions might fall into the trap without realising the risks and the consequences of their actions.

Third, regarding the treatment of Zemmour by Le Figaro, a right-wing newspaper, there is one main factor to consider: Zemmour himself used to work for Le Figaro before he decided to run for President. An important amount of the articles published by Le Figaro on Bruno Mégret in 2002 were written by Eric Zemmour. Therefore, it is hardly a surprise that this ideology has been growing within the editorial line of Le Figaro in the past twenty years. It becomes clear here that the political affiliation of a newspaper and his journalists play a role in the way they treat radical right discourses. There are hardly any negative articles on Eric Zemmour in Le Figaro in the period studied. Even though her discourses are not necessarily criticized, Marine Le Pen as an individual is sometimes criticized in Le Figaro's articles. Power plays and power influences within the structure and the hierarchy of a newspaper do influence their positions on radical right personalities and discourses. Like Libération's history and political preferences influence the way they see and report on Eric Zemmour and Marine Le Pen, the - previous- presence of Eric Zemmour within the network of Le Figaro itself also impacts its publications.

Therefore, we can say that based on these results associated with those relating to the political programmes of the candidates, normalization of radical right discourses to an important extent appears

to be even more likely. It is also interesting to point out that while in the first section relating to the political programmes, right-wing candidates were the ones integrating radical right discourses into their own, the results of this section differ. Indeed, the fact that Le Monde is the newspapers with the most important numbers of articles mentioning radical right candidates in both cases gives new insights into how this normalization presents itself. This shows that, at least within newspapers coverage of candidates, even liberal newspapers have been impacted by this process, while the more left-wing candidates have not.

The next section offers an analysis into the treatment in newspapers of radical right discourses themselves, rather than of the candidates spreading said discourses. It explores the way newspapers have made those discourses their own -or not- and how this normalization translates in articles on immigration, Islam and nationalism, without necessarily having to mention the names of radical right candidates or personalities. This part of the analysis would demonstrate an even more important and deeper normalization if it is present, since it would show that those discourses are now considered so legitimate that they do not have to be associated with a specific party or ideology anymore, they are freely used to describe a certain situation, and therefore would express a new level of normalization.

2. To what extent are radical right discourses normalised in newspapers?

After having described part of the normalization of radical right discourses via the omnipresence of radical right candidates in the media, and in the discourses of other candidates, I am now turning to how this normalization expresses itself within the media through the portraying of the radical right's favourite themes.

Indeed, the way immigration, Islam and nationalism are portrayed within the media influences the way these concepts are seen by their audience and how they are talked about in general. If the portraying of one of these categories matches the radical right point of view on them, then we can say there is a normalization of this specific discourse. In addition, the amount of radical right discourses that are unchallenged within these newspapers and on these topics are also an indication of the normalization of radical right discourses.

I will first explain how immigration is represented in the media in both periods and make a comparison, before turning to Islam. Regarding nationalism, I will explain how it is difficult to study it as a category of its own, rather than as intertwined with both discourses on immigration and on Islam. Then, I will clarify the consequences of the presence of unchallenged discourses within newspaper articles and describe the role they play in the normalization of radical right discourses.

Immigration

First, because there are different ways to refer to populations immigrating to other countries, and each of them has a more negative or positive connotation than the other, it is interesting to see which term is the preferred one by newspapers in 2002 and 2022. This gives us an indication of whether we can expect to see them portrayed from a radical right point of view or not.

In [Figure 3](#), we can see that the number of articles using the term 'migrants' instead of refugees or asylum seekers has been multiplied by five. Because 'migrants' has a more negative connotation than 'refugees' or 'asylum seekers' (Duriez 2015; Hupin 2015), it can lead us to think that the number of articles portraying them negatively has also increased a lot in the past 20 years.

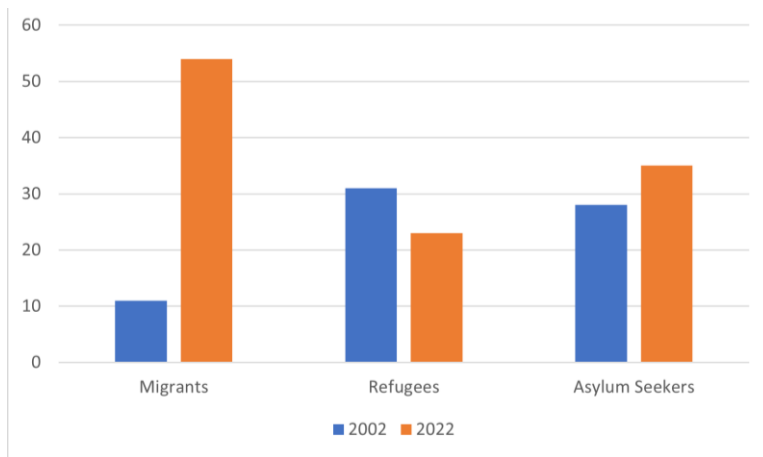
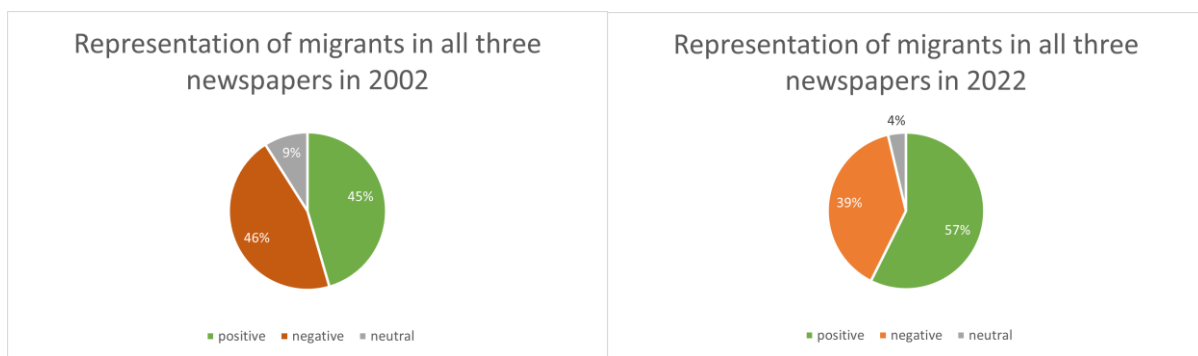


Figure 3 – representation of the evolution of the number of articles containing each term in all three newspapers



Graph 1 – Evolution of the portraying of **Migrants** between 2002 and 2022

Surprisingly, and contrary to the expectation mentioned above, regarding ‘migrants’, the percentage of negative articles has decreased between 2002 and 2022. But then, does it mean that there is no link between the increase in number of articles about a topic, and the risk of it being treated negatively?

In this case, it is interesting to see this relationship newspaper by newspaper, to see if more specific links exist depending on where the newspaper is placed on the political spectrum. As explained before regarding the mentions of radical right candidates in newspapers, the political line followed by a news source can affect its portraying of specific themes.

In *le Monde*, the number of articles on Migrants increased, but so did the percentage of positive articles, while negative ones decreased.

In *Libération*, while the number of articles also increased, the proportion of neutral, negative, and positive articles on the topic stayed equal between 2002 and 2022.

For *Le Figaro* however, while the number of articles increased like in the two other newspapers, positive ones decreased, and negative ones increased. Therefore, it seems to reinforce the idea that right-wing newspapers are more likely to play an important role in the normalization of radical right discourses. Though this does not mean that other newspapers have no responsibility in the normalization process. But for this particular case, it is evident that, depending on which side of the political spectrum a newspaper is, its role and impact on normalization will vary.

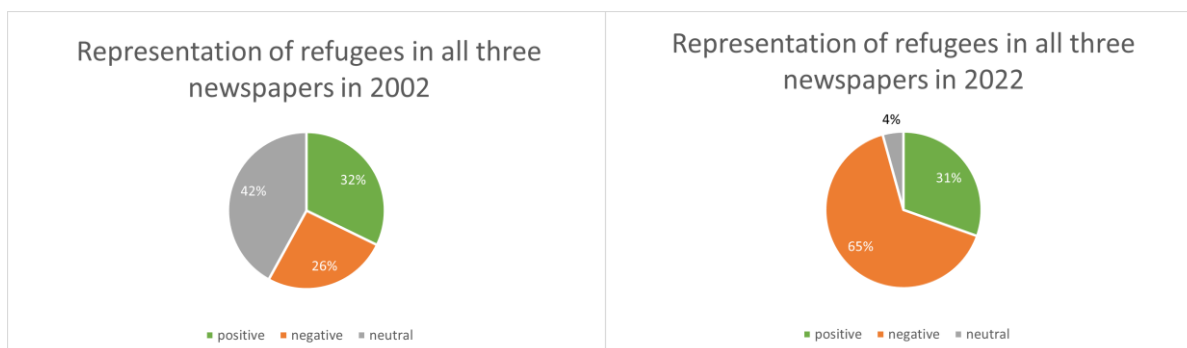
While the term ‘migrants’ does not seem to be an indicator of whether it will portray them negatively or positively, it is still interesting to see whether ‘refugees’ or ‘asylum seekers’ are any indicators. Indeed, an increase of negative articles on refugees or asylum seekers specifically would support the argument that there is a normalization of radical right discourses regarding immigration. Because these terms refer to a person needing protection from something or someone, negative depictions of them might indicate a more general trend on seeing most immigrants as a population to fear and to question, rather than to help.



Graph 2 – Evolution of the general portraying of **Asylum seekers** between 2002 and 2022

Graph 2 shows that negative articles on asylum seekers have seriously increased between 2002 and 2022, while the number of positive articles was cut in half. But if we look at each newspaper one by one, Libération does not contribute much to the increase in negative portraying (there was no negative article in the sample studied for Libération), though with more ‘neutral’ articles, it contributes to the decrease of positive portraying in general. Le Monde saw a decrease in positive articles and an increase in negative ones, but its proportion of positive articles is still equal to the sum of the negative and neutral articles. However, Le Figaro is the one that completely wiped out the positive portraying of asylum seekers in the past 20 years: it went from 40% to almost 80% of negative articles, and from 50% of relatively positive ones to 0%.

In continuity with the previous findings, these results demonstrate that the normalization of radical right discourses is very much present, but it is especially present within right-wing media. While it touches liberal and left-wing media less, it is still important to note that the decrease in both newspapers of positive articles is concerning.



Graph 3 – Evolution of the general portraying of **Refugees** between 2002 and 2022

Graph 3 indicates that the number of articles with a negative portraying of refugees almost tripled while positive ones stayed pretty much the same. However, ‘neutral’ articles decreased quite a lot.

Again, Le Figaro is the one in which negative articles thrived the most. They were already high in 2002, but it is impossible not to notice the surge of these articles in 2022. Le Monde started from 0% of negative articles to an equal score between negative and positive articles, while neutral articles have decreased too.

Libération had no negative articles for both periods, however, its percentage of positive articles did increase, since there was no neutral article found for the 2022 sample.

This goes along with the rest of the findings, indicating that the normalization of radical right discourses on immigration in the written press is present, but very much dependent on the type of newspapers studied.

More generally, during my research, I have noticed that, aside from portraying them negatively or positively, something else showed an evolution in the depiction of these populations. In the public debate in 2002, asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants are considered part of the “excluded”. This “excluded” categories includes homeless people, disabled people, and other marginalized populations. This association with other marginalized categories allows them to be included in the discourses of politicians, and therefore in their politics and the promises they make during the campaign. Ironically, while they are part of the “excluded”, they are more included in the general population in 2002 than in 2022, when they are considered to be their own category, away from everyone else and incompatible with French culture. In 2022, they are mostly associated with the word ‘crisis’, which refers to something threatening and dangerous. Most of the negative articles on immigration are either associated with the possibility of an increase in crimes and/or an emphasis on how ‘massive’ this immigration is.

Generally speaking, we can then say that there is a normalization of a negative depiction of these populations within newspapers and of the radical right language usually used to describe them. Therefore, there is a normalization of radical right discourses regarding immigration in newspapers.

Islam

Many immigrants, whether they are here illegally or not, are Muslim, and France in general is home to the biggest Muslim population in Western Europe (Hackett 2017). As explained in the theoretical framework, Islam, and the depiction of Islam as a threat under many angles is one of the favourite themes of the radical right in Europe. Therefore, it is necessary to look at how Muslims and Islam in general are depicted in newspapers. It is also important to see whether there is a link between the depiction of immigration and of Islam because these concepts are usually intertwined within the radical right ideology.



Graph 4 – Evolution of the portraying of **Islam** between 2002 and 2022

The number of negative articles “only” doubled here; it is therefore interesting to compare to the Immigration data. However, it is also important to consider that a number of articles have been taken away from the sample like terrorism due to the risk of an automatic negative depiction of Islam, which would not necessarily be related to how Islam is seen in general.

Again, Libération has the most positive articles out of the three newspapers. Surprisingly, this time though le Monde reaches 0% of negative articles in the 2022 period, for 10.5% in 2002. However, Le Figaro is still the one with the most negative articles, with 100% of its articles on Islam for the period studied in 2022 portraying Islam negatively.

What is interesting in the articles studied is that almost none of them, even the ones defending Islam and stating that it is compatible with French republican values, mention islamophobia as a reality. Actually, most of them, even in Libération, deny the existence of Islamophobia, sometimes even comparing it to a supposed “yellow jacket phobia” to emphasize the extent to which they find this concept ridiculous.

Based on what we have seen regarding Immigration for example, it would make sense to assume that the newspaper denying Islamophobia the most would be Le Figaro, by large. However, while in 2022, Le Figaro's 25% of articles on Islam denying islamophobia and despising those using the term seem in line with the expectations, Libération's 20% do not. In 2002, there was no article of this kind in Le Monde, one for Libération and one for Le Figaro. The increase in the proportion of articles ridiculing the discriminations suffered by Muslims in France is too important not to be considered.

In this case of normalization, there are two parts. First, the depiction of Muslims and of Islam as dangerous, threatening, and violent is a terrible conflation that has kept increasing in the past twenty years, though less present in left-wing newspapers than in right-wing ones. Second, the denial of any discriminations or threats faced by Muslims by most journalists, regardless of their political affiliation, is concerning, especially if we refer back to the first point. The media treatment of Muslims at the moment shows an important increase in the way they are both negatively depicted. But they are also denied the recognition of this negative depiction by most media and most of the political class, who refuse to acknowledge the term 'islamophobia'. What arises from these negative articles is mostly the idea that because Muslims threaten the Republic and French values, they cannot possible be discriminated against. It is the idea that discrimination can only happen to victims, and Muslims are not seen as victims of anything, therefore denied the right to call themselves as such.

In addition to this, there is a lack of argument for the recognition of the term, or at least of the issues faced by Muslims in general, in the 'positive' articles. While they remain in this category because their depiction of Muslims is based on interviews of Muslims, on the volunteers helping and fighting for their rights, on the positive they bring the community and their compatibility with French values, these articles are still lacking the deconstruction and condemnation of the radical right ideas spread in other newspapers or articles. For a newspaper like Libération in 2022 to publish articles fully denying the existence of Islamophobia, and no article arguing for its existence is problematic. It shows that newspapers have made the choice to favour one view over the other, even if it is not what is reflected by the sample in its entirety.

Hence, there is a clear normalization of radical right discourses regarding Islam in French newspapers, even if it is not seen as much at first through the increase in negative or positive articles.

Nationalism

During my research, I have tried to look for articles on nationalism. However, because it is a concept that is most often used in relation to other concepts, articles referring to the nationalism of radical right candidates or presenting nationalist point of views only predominantly exist within articles on other topics. For example, while doing the Islam and Immigration searches, nationalism comes up most of the time when these concepts are described or presented through a radical right lens. However, nationalism on its own is pretty rare. Indeed, candidates seldom express their nationalism by saying "I am a nationalist". It is more present through the expression of a hard Euroscepticism, hard anti-immigration sentiments or the idea that Islam is a civilisation on its own that is incompatible with French or European values.

Similarly, anti-nationalism discourses are more likely to be expressed through a strong and fervent attachment to the European Union, than through clear anti-nationalism communications.

Therefore, while nationalism also participates in the normalization process through its presence within articles on immigration and Islam, it is not a category on its own that can be separated from other topics and thought about as an individual concept. At least not in the context of this thesis in particular.

Unchallenged discourses

Last but not least, in this content analysis, I have also looked at how the direct radical right discourses were treated in the media. Indeed, if radical right discourses are immediately challenged, then the aim of the article is to educate the reader and to deconstruct these ideas to explain their danger and possible consequences. If, on the contrary, those discourses are unchallenged and reported as they were communicated, then they play a role in the normalization of the radical right ideology, because it is presented as normal and equal to other ideologies. My findings have shown a 400% increase of unchallenged discourses between 2002 and 2022.

Unchallenged radical right discourses in this case are discourses directly quoted from radical right candidates or personalities, and not the radical right narratives used by journalists while presenting a topic from one or another angle. Most articles that have been put in the ‘negative’ category contain unchallenged discourses. Some of them are interviews of radical right candidates within which the journalists interviewing them does not question their answers. They interview them like they would any other candidate, and this way spread their narratives on topics like Islam and immigration. Also, in the case of interviews, the facts stated by the candidates are not fact-checked and therefore can lead to misleading information and ‘fake news’.

In an article for *Le Monde* in 2002, the journalist Christiane Chombeau interviews Jean-Marie Le Pen. Her questions are mostly about his strategy for the election campaign, and she even tells him that Bruno Mégret’s candidacy will weaken Le Pen’s weight in the election. Her interview is similar to other interviews of candidates during the 2002 election: strictly about their electoral strategy and the policies they want to implement. There is no warning, no context, no explanation of what Jean-Marie Le Pen’s discourses mean.

Other articles containing unchallenged discourses tend to simply recount what the candidates have said, showing their differences and similarities, without ever pointing out the potential issues that could arise from those discourses.

For example, in an article for *Le Monde* in 2022, the fight between Le Pen and Zemmour is narrated like a typical political fight between two candidates with similar opinions. The journalists mainly describe both candidates’ stances on various topics, opposing them or showing their similarities. However, while towards the end of the article, they refute one of Zemmour’s claims regarding his proposed health policy, the rest of the article does not challenge his or Le Pen’s views. Hence their ideology is legitimised and normalised because it appears to be one of many political ideologies present within the French public debate, and which deserves as much recognition and space as any other.

This shows another factor present in the normalization process. This factor is complementary to the normalization of radical right discourses on immigration and Islam since those unchallenged discourses usually cover these topics, amongst others.

This analysis of newspapers’ content has shown a certain degree of normalization based on the use by media of radical right perceptions of Islam and immigration, and their tendency to not challenge what the candidates say when they interview them or report their sayings. Radical right concepts of predilections are treated from a radical right stance on more occasions than in 2002, and they can simply express their points of views more freely in 2022, without risking being questioned on the ethics or even the legality of their positions. Moreover, it is clear that left-wing newspapers like *Libération*, though they seem to have recently started to enter the radical right game on different fronts, are less likely to *actively* participate in the normalization process than more liberal or right-wing newspapers like *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*.

Referring back to the four criteria mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I can now observe the extent to which normalization is present in the French public debate. First, relating to the presence of radical right discourses within the political programmes of mainstream parties, it is clear that there is a normalization of these discourses in this specific context. Especially on the right side of the political

spectrum, candidates have integrated radical right stances into their own propositions. Second, regarding the presence of radical right candidates in the media, we have seen that not only are radical right candidates more present in the media, proportionally and in comparison, to other candidates, in 2022 than in 2002. But also, since the more mainstream candidates that have also started using radical right discourses are also more present within the media than those who do not, we can observe a certain normalization, legitimation and promotion of radical right discourses. Third, the treatment of immigration and Islam in the three newspapers shows a normalization of the use of radical right discourses by journalists and editorialists, especially in the case of *Le Figaro*, but also within *Le Monde* and *Libération*, even if it is not to the same extent or for the same reasons. Finally, the important presence of unchallenged discourses, with an increase of 400% in general, demonstrates the extent to which these discourses have been legitimized and normalised in newspapers, by not being questioned anymore.

Those results express an important normalization of radical right discourses in all four criteria observed. Even if, in the case of the presence of candidates in the media, *Le Monde* scores the highest, the rest of the results indicate that most of the time, this normalization is more likely to appear and be linked to the right side of the political spectrum: both regarding candidates and right-wing newspapers. Indeed, the right side of the political spectrum, from centre-right to conservatives, seems to be the one where radical right discourses have been included the most. Whereas in *Le Monde* the omnipresence of radical right candidates is also linked to the newspaper attempting to criticize or deconstruct the radical right ideology, in *Le Figaro* and in the programmes of centre-right to right-wing candidates, the use of radical right discourses is usually explicit, and if implicit, still very much noticeable.

Now that I have described the observations made on the extent to which there is a normalization of radical right discourses, I will explain and analyse the results of my research on the various possible causes of this normalization.

The Causes of Normalization

As already mentioned earlier on, [Expectation 2](#) and [Expectation 3](#) were not tested in this thesis, for time and resources reasons. Therefore, in this section we focus on [Expectation 1](#) and [Expectation 4](#), that I was able to partially test.

First, *Expectation 1* assumes that once mainstream parties in power have failed to satisfy their voters, they suffer from a loss of a part of their electorate to the radical right, leading consequently to the normalization of radical right discourses. Indeed, the more voters turn to the radical right, the more it legitimizes them and their discourses, both to reach positions of power and to occupy the media and the main topics discussed within the public debate. As already shown in the theoretical framework through Nonna Mayer's work (2002), traditional parties have indeed lost a part of their electorate to radical right candidates, at least in 2002. What interests us now is whether it has also happened in 2022, and whether or not after having lost this electorate, they tried to get it back by using a radical right rhetoric as part of their own narratives.

Regarding the 2022 election, the most complete survey available was published in March 2021. Even though it is outside the timeframe I have decided to study, it is still relevant to understand why people voted for Marine Le Pen (or even Zemmour) a year later. This survey was conducted by Ifop-Fiducial for the *Journal du Dimanche* and *Sud Radio*. To the question "For what reasons have you ever voted for radical right candidates?", 29% of the 35% of people surveyed who vote radical right put in first position: "Because I wanted to express dissatisfaction with other political parties". In total, 40% used this statement amongst their multiple answers.

For the question "When you happen to vote radical right, it is...?", 65% answered "by rejection of other parties". Here, it is interesting to mention that the proportion of participants answering this has decreased since 1997. It was 84% by then, and even though it went down to 60% in 2017, the 2021 score still

shows a sharp decrease from the 1997 results. This decrease can be explained by the possibility that nowadays, more people vote radical right because they are convinced by their ideas, than in 1997 or 2002.

The previous section on the analysis of the candidates' programmes shows a shift in mainstream parties' main arguments. It is clear that in 2022, most candidates have adopted at least the link between insecurity and immigration and/or Islam. This link was the main argument of radical right candidates back in 2002. Nowadays, the difference between mainstream centre to right-wing parties and radical right parties is on the degree to which they want to control immigration and Muslims, and the importance they give to those topics within the overall programme. It is not on whether these are linked or not anymore. Therefore, at least on Immigration and Islam, we can say that mainstream parties have indeed been using radical right's narratives in their own discourses.

If we link the answers to the 2021 survey and the results of the content analysis of the candidates' programmes, it shows that the radical right's strategy of "dédiabolisation" has worked, and that the normalization of their discourses has happened. Indeed, it means that people have been convinced by the radical right ideology. It is therefore fair to expect that their dissatisfaction with other parties, along with the fact that those parties are now using a similar radical right rhetoric on some topics has led to such a normalization that people now think it is socially acceptable to vote radical right, because it is an opinion like any other.

Second, based on the theoretical framework, we expect that the degree of 'personalization' of a candidate, by making their discourses appear 'normal' and 'equal' to other discourses, is likely to influence how he or she is perceived by the electorate, and in turn normalise said discourses (*Expectation 4*).

Une Ambition Intime -2016 & 2021

To test this expectation, I have used the show 'Une Ambition Intime', where Marine Le Pen appears in October 2016 in an issue that is dedicated to her, and the 2021 version where the presenter is interviewing other politician women. Both shows respectively had 3.1 million of spectators (13.6% of the overall TV audience for the + 4-year-old) and 2.2 million of spectators (10.2%).

I have looked at Marine Le Pen's position in the Harris-interactive election polls and her ranking in the Elabe's political observatory on French people's favourite political personality before and after each show. Even if they are five years apart, if there is a similar tendency in both years, those results could indicate a possible correlation between the personalisation of a candidate and their appreciation by the population, and therefore the normalization of their discourses. Using only these two factors, it is not possible to establish any causal link between the dependent and independent variable. However, no matter the result, it opens the door for further research on the topic, that would be specifically focused on the impact of the personalisation of political candidates, especially regarding the radical right.

While the 2016 episode is about her only, the 2021 one associates her with the other women in politics, which put them on an equal footing. They are only defined by the label "women in power" and nothing else. On its own, this participates in the normalization of her discourse in and out of the show, because she is presented as legitimate as any of these other women.

Both episodes show her in her personal life, smiling, laughing, playing with her cats, or surrounded by family. They also display various family or childhood photos, while accompanying the images with emotional music. After having watched the shows, it is easy to find her sympathetic as an individual, and to forget who she is as a politician. No matter the political side, differentiating between the individual and the politician in an election campaign is misleading.

The ease with which the presenter Karine Le Marchand laughs and jokes with Marine Le Pen rises questions. Mathias Reymond (2019) explained that laughing with Jean-Marie Le Pen decades ago was

barely permitted. The parallel is interesting, as Patrick Sébastien -a TV presenter who laughed with Jean-Marie Le Pen in one of his TV shows in 1995- was highly criticised for this.

In October 2016, right before the show was broadcasted, Elabe's political observatory showed Marine Le Pen entering the top 5 of French people's favourite political figure for the first time ever. At the time, she had 29% of positive image, including the best score on the 'very positive image' measurement (10%). However, she also had 46% of very negative image at this point. After the show, in November 2016, she was still fifth, but with 12% of very positive image and 47% of very negative image.

In this case, there is no specific indication that the show had any impact on whether Marine Le Pen was viewed more positively by French people.

In November 2021, the week before "Une Ambition Intime" dedicated to women in politics, election polls put Marine Le Pen in third position after Macron and Zemmour, with 15-16% of vote intentions. After the show, she is credited with 16% of vote intentions, still in third place, but closer to Zemmour. Regarding Elabe's political observatory, Marine Le Pen ranks 8th before *and* after the show has aired but having lost 2 points of positive image at the end of November.

In this case, like in 2016, there is no indication that the show had any impact on whether Marine Le Pen was perceived more positively by French people.

However, in future research, it would be interesting to build a survey and question people on the various times where radical right candidates have been personalized, to see whether or not voters have found them more or less sympathetic afterwards, and if it has influenced their votes later on.

Face à Baba

I have also decided to look at whether there could be a correlation between Marine Le Pen's popularity and her appearance in one of the most famous shows on French TV. While *Une Ambition Intime* does not talk about the candidate's political views, "Face à Baba" is a debate organised by the TV presenter Cyril Hanouna, very appreciated by young people. In March 2022, Marine Le Pen is present in the show, and she faces Yannick Jadot (leader of the Green Party), Jean Messiha (a French economist), and Marlène Schiappa (former Minister for gender equality and part of the Minister of Interior). The appearance of radical right candidates in family-friendly TV shows also contributes to the personalization of these personalities and the discourses they spread. It is interesting to look at this show and this presenter in particular because their audience is often high for a channel outside of the six main ones. On the day of the debate with Marine Le Pen, *Face à Baba* obtained 1.419 million of spectators, which made C8 the first channel in terms of audience outside of the main six channels. It was also the 2nd channel all channels taken together for the young public.

The audiences of *Face à Baba* make it likely to have even a small impact on how political candidates are perceived, especially because their main target is the youth, most of which had never voted before 2022, at least not in a presidential election.

On March 16th, 2022, a few days before Le Pen's appearance in "Face à Baba", election polls put Marine Le Pen in second position after Macron with 19,5% of vote intentions. After the show, she is credited with the same percentage of vote intentions, still in second place.

Before the show, in early March 2022, Marine Le Pen ranked 4th in Elabe's observatory, with 33% of positive image. The next Elabe's publication in April credited her with 35% of positive image, and she was then ranked 2nd.

It is also important to mention that, while those two TV shows participated in the personalization of radical right candidates in various ways, they are not the only ones playing a role in the process. Indeed, future research would benefit from studying the extent to which new modes of communication, including social media and video platforms like Twitter, Youtube, Twitch and even Tiktok for example,

influence the perception that voters have of the radical right, through their personalization and the normalization of their discourses within the content itself. Indeed, even if I do not have evidence with this specific data that the process itself led to the normalization of Le Pen’s discourses in the reflection of peoples’ preferences in the existing surveys, the normalization still happened.

It happened in the way that in ‘Une Ambition Intime’, Marine Le Pen inserts elements of her political strategy in the interview without explicitly mentioning what they are. It simply flows in the conversation. Also, in ‘Face à Baba’, the fact that radical right candidates have been invited to a debate presented by one of the most famous French TV presenters, whose shows usually target young audiences, on a channel who talks more about radical right topics and candidates than most others, is normalization itself. Those discourses have been so normalized in the past twenty years that their presence in such TV shows is not questioned anymore and does not spark outrage.

Those results give us an indication of the possible correlations between the various possible causes of normalization and the varying degrees of normalization. For a better understanding of the following paragraphs and as a reminder of the different ways normalization can happen mentioned in the theoretical framework, I insert Figure 1 below.

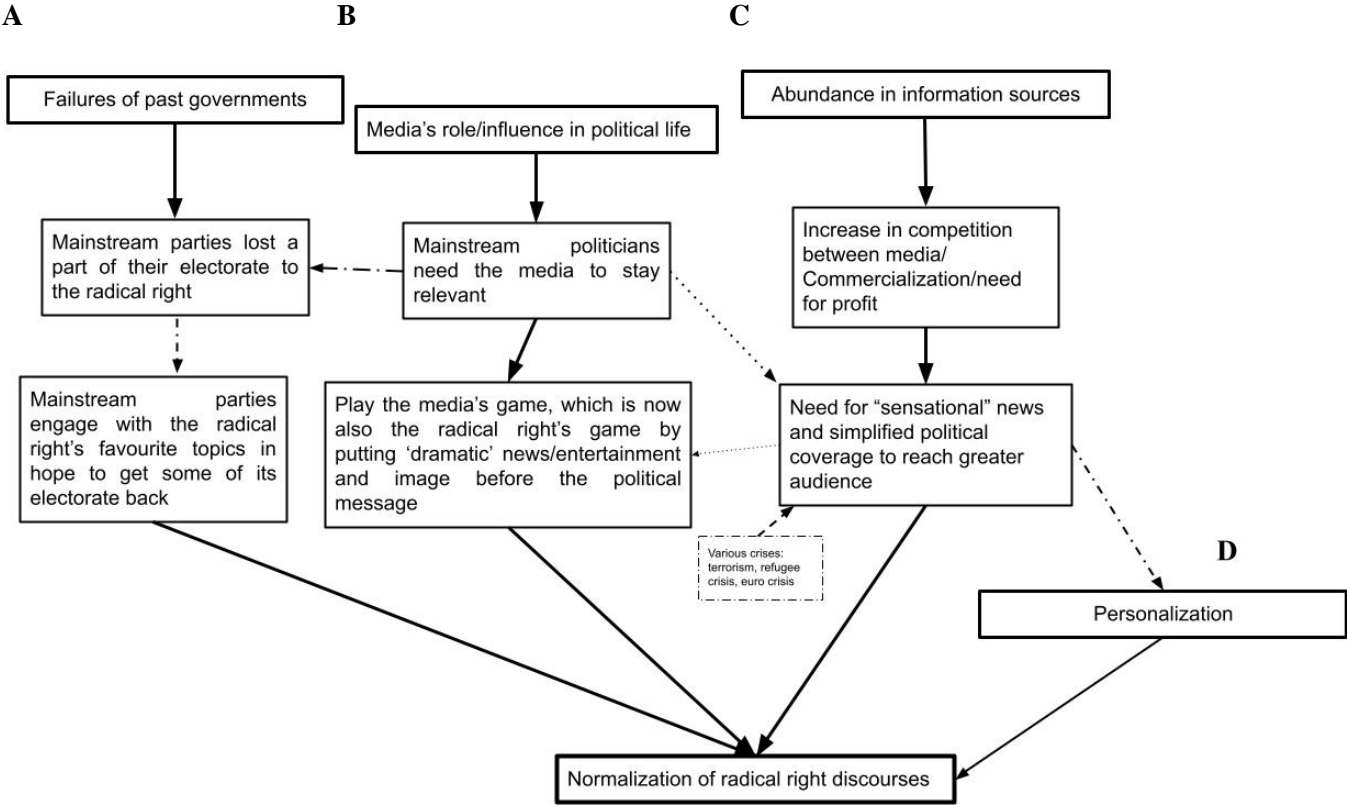


Figure 1. The various processes leading to the normalization of radical right discourses

First, correlations can be observed between the failures of traditional parties in government and the normalization of radical right discourses present in mainstream candidates’ programmes and in the different degree of presence of candidates in the media. Indeed, right-wing candidates including radical right discourses within their own is related to the loss of some of their electorate to the radical right in the last decades. Also, when looking at the presence of each candidate in the media, we can see that the smaller increase and the only decrease present between 2002 and 2022 concern both traditional parties: the right-wing one and the socialist party, respectively.

Second, it is possible that media's influence in the political life, even if this expectation has not been tested, also plays a role in which candidates are the most represented within the political coverage, since we have seen that the choice of emphasising one or the other candidate is most likely related to a political and editorial choice. Also, because media follow each other regarding the main themes treated, it makes sense that if Le Monde chooses to emphasize a topic and a specific treatment of said topic, or a candidate, other popular newspapers will choose to do the same to stay relevant. This could explain some of the similarities in the trends observed in the treatment of candidates and of Islam and immigration in all three newspapers.

Third, this expectation has not been tested either for time and resources reasons. However, the abundance in information sources and the easy access to all those sources could partly explain the presence of one or the other candidate in the media. The more people demand coverage of a candidate, the more a newspaper has to oblige, otherwise it risks becoming irrelevant. This leads newspapers to enter an endless cycle of constantly mentioning the same personalities. In addition, the entrance of left-wing newspapers into this normalization process could also partly stem from the abundance of information sources. Indeed, since it is also the demand that creates the offer, and because people are more and more attracted to controversies, we can assume that some newspapers whose editorial line is far from the radical right, are forced to engage in this process to remain relevant and attract more audience, through unchallenged discourses of the radical right for example.

Fourth, the personalization of candidates, especially radical right candidates, does have an impact in the normalization of their discourses. They get the chance to spread their ideology without the audience necessarily noticing it since it is not the aim of the show or of the appearance originally. But because those shows are popular and attract a very important audience, it is fair to assume that this personalization could also impact the extent to which these personalities are present in the media.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to answer two main questions: explore the extent to which there is a normalization of radical right discourses in the public debate, and the possible factors leading to this normalization, while looking at the possible links between the different degrees of normalization and the various causes mentioned.

After reviewing the literature on the radical right and defining what I understood by the normalization of radical right discourses, I have attempted to explain the various causes of this normalization. The content analysis of French political programmes and French newspapers from 2002 and 2022, along with an analysis of the reasons that push people to vote for the radical right, and an evaluation of the extent to which Marine Le Pen has been personalized in various TV shows allowed me to come to three conclusions.

First, I can confirm that there is indeed a normalization of radical right discourses in the French public debate. This normalization mainly concerns the themes of Islam and immigration. In its ethnic form, nationalism is also part of the process of normalization, via its expression through Islam- and immigration-related narratives. However, the extent to which this normalization is present depends on the side of the political spectrum we look at. Indeed, this research has shown that the part of the political spectrum that typically goes from centre-right to right-wing politics is more likely to see an increase in the amount of radical right discourses used. However, this does not apply to the newspaper *Le Monde* regarding the regularity with which it mentions the names of radical right candidates or candidates likely to be using radical right discourses. While part of the literature on the topic emphasizes the responsibility of the political left in the rise of the extreme right because it is thought to be their failures which led to an increase in the numbers of vote for the radical right, the left plays a much less important role in the practical implementation of this normalization of radical right discourses than the right does.

Second, we can see correlations between various factors thought to be part of the causes of normalization, and the degree of normalization present. One of the main ones being the past failures of traditional parties in governments, who, by dissatisfying voters, pushed them into the arms of radical right parties. After which mainstream parties engaged in a process of integrating radical right narratives to their own discourses in hope to get this electorate back. But there are also other possible correlations regarding the link between media's influence and abundance in information sources and the presence of radical right candidates in the media and the treatment of their discourses within said media. In addition, there is another probable correlation between the personalization of radical right personalities and their presence within the media, along with the treatment of their discourses.

Third, while promising, the expected causal link between the personalization of radical right personalities in the media and the normalization of their discourses could not be fully proven in this thesis. Limited resources and time did not allow for an in-depth study of this specific factor. Nonetheless, future research would benefit from a focus on this concept, especially in an era where politicians have access to a wider range of tools and communication strategies thanks to the rise of social media and its impact on younger audiences.

Two other possible explanations to normalization have been mentioned earlier in this thesis. Further research should therefore aim to explore these two areas that are media's influence and the abundance of information sources alongside the need for 'sensational' and simplified political narratives, and their impact on the normalization of radical right discourses. Especially after the different possible correlations mentioned based on the attempt to explain the degree of normalization that is present within the French public debate.

The strengths of this research are found in the deep analysis of the French case. It allows for a clear understanding of the extent to which radical right discourses are present within the French public debate, and the various strategies or routes it can take to invest the public debate. It helps comprehend the recent results to French elections and difficulties faced by certain populations on the French territory. However, because it is a case study, the generalizability of this research is low and therefore its external validity

is reduced. Also, because of the limitations faced regarding the study of the various possible causes of normalization, the internal validity of the evidence gathered for this part of the research question is relatively low.

On the contrary, thanks to the variety of sources used to explore normalization itself, the internal validity of the evidence gathered relating to the extent to which there is a normalization is relatively high.

The current literature on the radical right is certainly both broad and precise. However, the literature on the normalization of radical right discourses, their causes and their consequences are less important and should be expanded. I believe this thesis contributes to this literature by permitting a certain understanding of the way radical right discourses are inserted within mainstream media and political communications, whether consciously or unconsciously. While the literature on the radical right already benefits from a wide range of texts regarding the various strategies used by the modern radical right to be present in the public debate, it lacks the study of the consequences of these strategies. Further research on this topic could help bring to light the damages caused by these strategies and hopefully a realization of the dangers facing democracies and their values in the future.

ANNEXE 1 – Keyword searches on the Europresse database

The searches were conducted in French; therefore, this is a translation of the keywords used, the original searches in French are available below.

1. Articles mentioning the names of the candidates

- a. “Le Pen” & (islam* | muslim | immig*) – for both the 2002 and 2022 periods
- b. “Zemmour” or “Pécresse” or “Hidalgo” or “Macron” & (islam* | muslim | immig*) – only in 2022
- c. “Mégret” or “Jospin” or “Chirac” or “Bayrou” & (islam* | muslim | immig*) – only in 2002

I found it more relevant to specify the search on the categories studied within the Thesis, rather than conduct a broader search where the candidates would only be mentioned amongst other topics that might not necessarily be relevant for the research itself.

2. Islam

- a. Islam* & (‘islamist separatism’ | communautarianism | muslim | ‘republican values’ | secularity). For 2022 only - without ‘Salah Abdeslam’ and ‘trial’ in the whole text.

The decision to exclude Salah Abdeslam and his trial from the search arises from the fact that the November 13th, 2015 attacks would have most likely created a bias in the treatment of Islam in newspapers. Indeed, the links between terrorism and Islam would have been too recurrent regarding this specific case and therefore would have not rendered the sample representative of the population of articles on Islam in general.

3. Immigration

- a. Migrants & (‘migration crisis’ | ‘migrants crisis’ | migratory) – without ‘refugees’ and ‘asylum seekers’. For 2022 only – without ‘Ukraine’ and ‘Ukrainians’ in the whole text.

The choice to exclude the war in Ukraine from the search is linked to the fact that radical right discourses regarding immigrants are almost always directed to African or Middle Eastern migrants, and less to other Europeans or white immigrants. Including Ukraine in the research would have most likely created a bias and therefore required to control for this variable. Immigration as it is understood in this Thesis comes from ethno-nationalism, and it is specified that it rarely concerns immigrants that are thought by the radical right to be of the same “civilization” as them.

- b. Refugees & (‘migration crisis’ | ‘migrants crisis’ | migratory) – without ‘migrants’ and ‘asylum seekers’. For 2022 only – without ‘Ukraine’ and ‘Ukrainians’ in the whole text.
- c. “Asylum seekers” & (‘migration crisis’ | ‘migrants crisis’ | migratory) – without ‘migrants’ and ‘refugees’. For 2022 only – without ‘Ukraine’ and ‘Ukrainians’ in the whole text.
- d. Immigration & Borders | fight*

4. Nationalism

- a. France \$2 strong | France \$2 powerful & (nationalism | Motherland | ‘republican values’ | protectionism | Eurosceptic*)

1. Articles mentioning the names of the candidates

- a. “Le Pen” & (islam* | musulman* | immigr*) – for both the 2002 and 2022 periods
- b. “Zemmour” **ou** “Pécresse” **ou** “Hidalgo” **ou** “Macron” & (islam* | musulman* | immigr*) – only in 2022
- c. “Mégret” **ou** “Jospin” **ou** “Chirac” **ou** “Bayrou” & (islam* | musulman* | immigr*) – only in 2002

2. Islam

- a. Islam* & (‘séparatisme islamiste’ | communautarisme | musulman* | ‘valeurs de la République’ | ‘valeurs républicaines’ | laïcité). For 2022 only - without ‘Salah Abdeslam’ and ‘procès’ in the whole text.

3. Immigration

- a. Migrants & (‘crise migratoire’ | ‘crise des migrants’ | migratoire) – without ‘réfugiés’ and ‘demandeurs d’asile’. For 2022 only – without Ukrain* in the whole text.
- b. Réfugiés & (‘crise migratoire’ | ‘crise des migrants’ | migratoire) – without ‘migrants’ and ‘demandeurs d’asile’. For 2022 only – without Ukrain* in the whole text.
- c. “Demandeurs d’asile” & (‘crise migratoire’ | ‘crise des migrants’ | migratoire) – without ‘migrants’ and ‘réfugiés’. For 2022 only – without Ukrain* in the whole text.
- d. Immigration & Frontières | combat*

4. Nationalism

- a. France \$2 forte | France \$2 puissante & (nationalisme | patrie | ‘valeurs républicaines’ | protectionnisme | Eurosceptique)

ANNEXE 2 – Article placed in the ‘positive’ category for IMMIGRATION – Le Monde, March 25th 2002

This article, even though it contains both positive codes and negative codes, has been placed in the positive category for various reasons. First, because the article both starts and ends with positive stances towards asylum seekers. Therefore, it accentuates the author’s main argument, which is that those children deserve to and should be helped. Second, because the negative codes are only present for context, so the reader understands why the mayor’s decision has shifted. The article also emphasises the voices of those who help, and expresses empathy for the President of the Red Cross for example, by stating that his task will not be easy based on some of the residents’ concerns.

I have used Atlas-ti to code these articles. However, in order to show a clearer picture of how I did the coding in this example, I highlighted the parts I focused on and wrote down in bold under each part to which ‘keywords’ found in Table 1 on Immigration in the Methodology section it relates.

Reception system for asylum seekers threatened with paralysis

REPORTAGE

In the Val-d'Oise, a project for a reception center comes up against the hostility of local residents

A petition has collected 1,800 signatures. Its main argument: “the insecurity it causes the population”

MEILLON JACQUELINE

TAVERNY from our correspondent - The public meeting scheduled for Monday evening, March 25, at the town hall of Taverny (Val-d'Oise) promises to be stormy: there will be talk of the upcoming opening, probably at the beginning of May, of a reception and orientation center (LAO) for thirty foreign minors seeking asylum.

The objective is to remove these isolated children from all forms of modern slavery such as prostitution or forced labor (actively looking for human solutions to the issue(s) – engages in positive/helpful action – advocates for the respect of asylum seekers’ rights) which await them upon their arrival at Roissy-Charles-de Gaulle airport. This placement, for a maximum of two months, will be decided by the Bobigny minors’ prosecutor’s office (Seine Saint-Denis), **pending a solution more suited to their situation - return to the country, placement in a host family, etc. - be found** (actively looking for human

solutions to the issue(s) – engages in positive/helpful action)

Monday’s meeting is intended to respond to **serious concerns about the rise in crime that the project is causing among residents (asylum seekers as criminals/danger)** The task will not be easy for Marc Gentilini, president of the Red Cross, an association charged by the Ministry of Employment and Solidarity with managing the future center, and Maurice Boscavert, mayor (PS) of the city.

Especially since the mayor, after repeatedly stating his opposition to the project, fully approves it today.

“We misunderstood my intentions, he explains now. I was opposed not to the implementation itself of an LAO but to the method used, contemptuous for the population. Because this project was laid in a ministerial cabinet without any consultation with the city. In fact, Ségolène Royal, Minister Delegate for the Family,

Children and the Disabled, had announced in June 2001, before the parliamentary mission on modern slavery, that the center would be located in Taverny. An announcement confirmed at a press conference on September 12. "Without ever a single phone call to warn me", hardly ironically Mr. Boscavert. Only the French Red Cross contacted him the day after the municipal elections of March 2001 to inform him of its intention to acquire the Château du Haut-Tertre, a magnificent 19th century residence located on the edge of the forest of Mont morency, less than an hour from Roissy airport. The mayor ended up meeting in the prefecture, on December 20, 2001, with representatives of the cabinets Guigou and Royal and he decided to pass the towel: "The time for controversy is over, he explains. Everyone took a step forward. These are wounded children: who could refuse to help them?" (expresses empathy/support)

It remains to respond to the concerns of local residents (fear of immigration – anti-help for asylum seekers). Because, since the official announcement of the project, the anger has not subsided (angriness towards asylum seekers/those willing to help them). Several of them are grouped in an association chaired by Bijan Guilyardi, real estate consultant. A petition against the center has collected some 1,800 signatures

Main argument: "insecurity for the population" and "for the children themselves" (asylum seekers as danger/criminals – fear of immigration – hostile behavior/words towards asylum seekers), specifies Mr. Guilyardi. "The castle is unsuitable because its perimeter is uncontrollable and permeable. These miners, known to flee, will be able to escape from the park very easily because of the low walls, he alleges. They have to be defended against themselves because they don't know the dangers that threaten them and will throw themselves into the mouth of the wolf on their own. Like him, other residents go so far as to imagine "regular raids by pimps, mafiosos and other pedophiles". And to suggest more closed places like disused barracks (asylum seekers as danger/criminals – hostile behavior/words towards them – requires stricter actions) Remarks that Stéphane Manton, adviser to the management of the Red Cross, considers "inadmissible": "This is not a prison but a center for lonely and destitute children. There will be between 20 and 30 adults at all times." (interview various actors including volunteers – openly outraged by the way those children are treated/seen – engages in positive/helpful action)

To this anger is added that of the mayor, who denounces the attempts to recover fear

by "extremist or political groups", while remaining hopeful. His optimism is reinforced by the words of this woman in her sixties, which reflects the sentiment of a good part of the population: "If Taverny can help build these poor children a future, why not?" (expresses empathy/support)

Appendix – List of surveys and polls used

Expectation 1

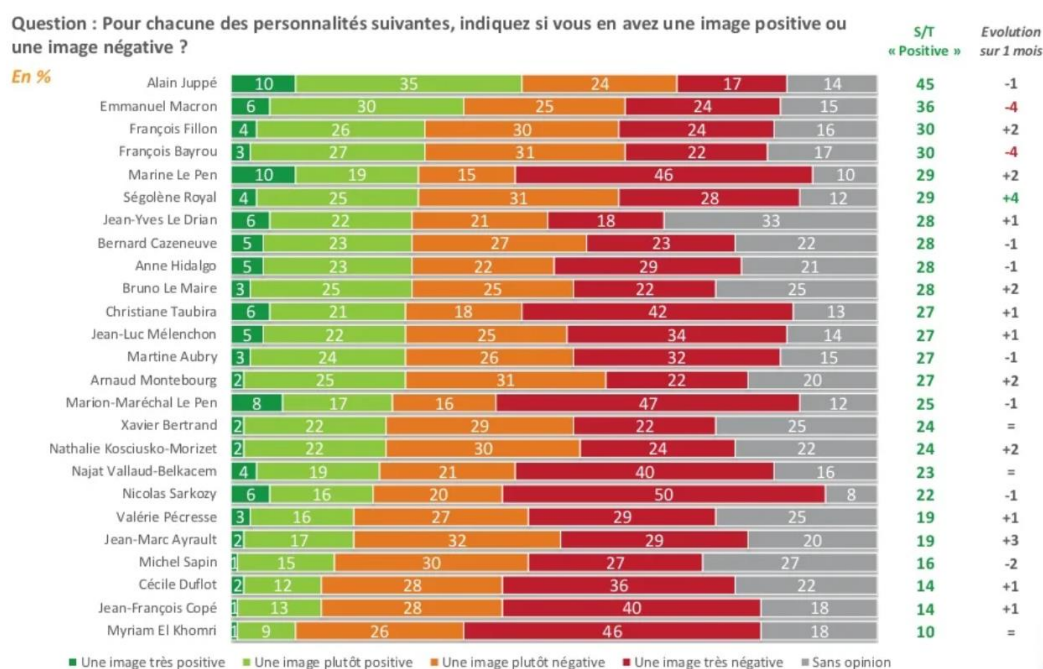
Ifop-Fiducial for Le Journal du Dimanche and Sud Radio

<https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/118005-Rapport-RN-23.03.2021.pdf>

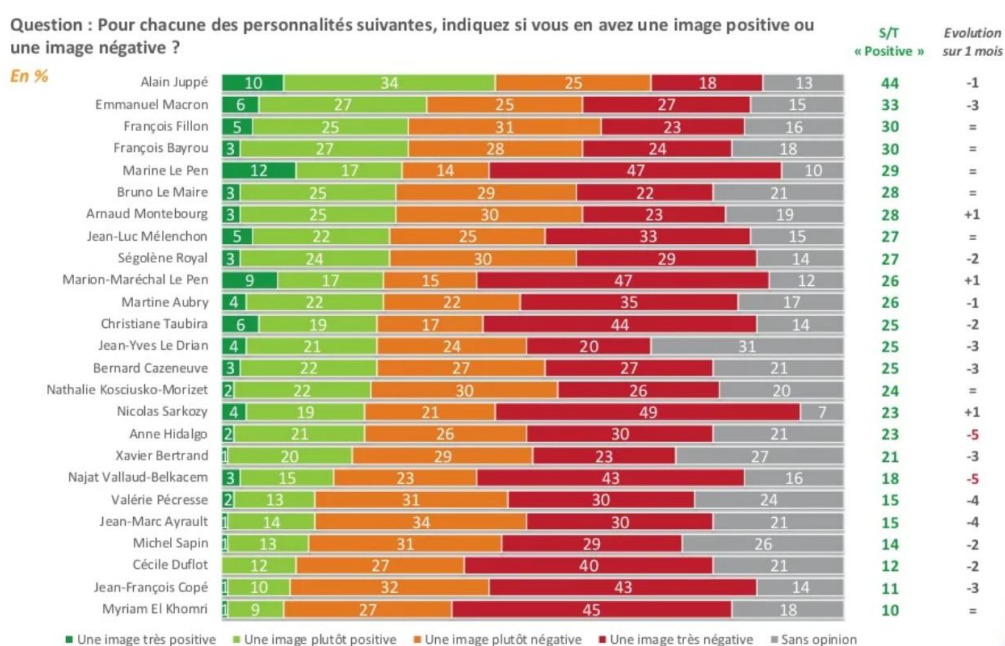
Une Ambition Intime

Elabe's political observatory

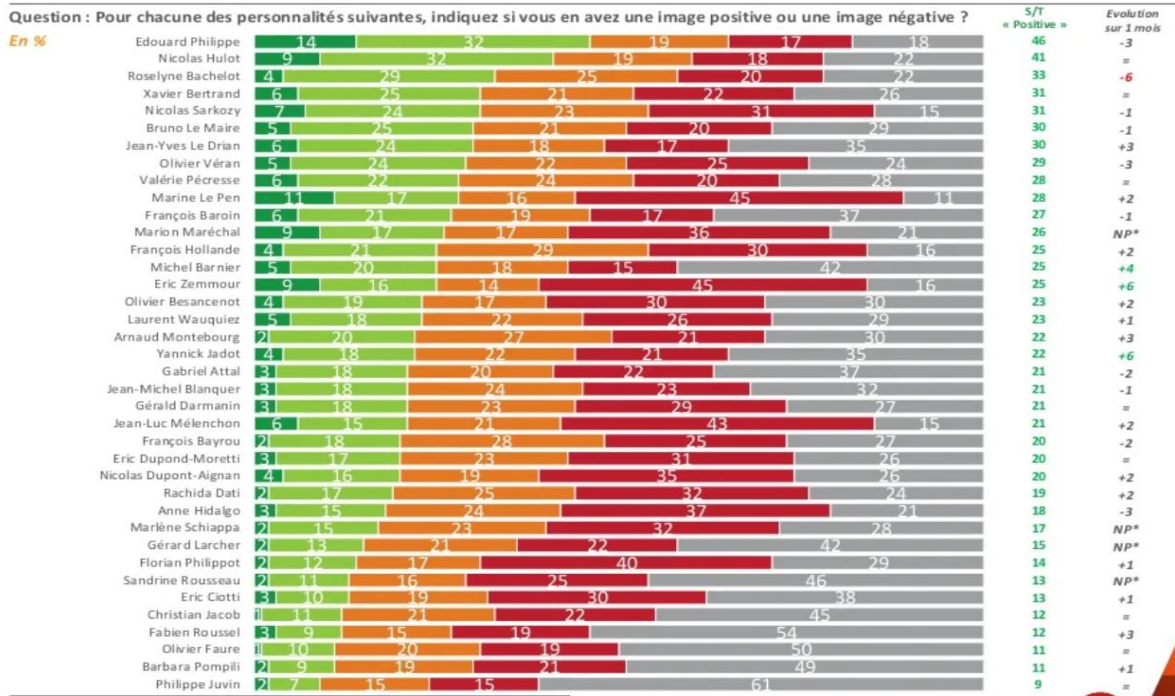
October 2016 – Before the show



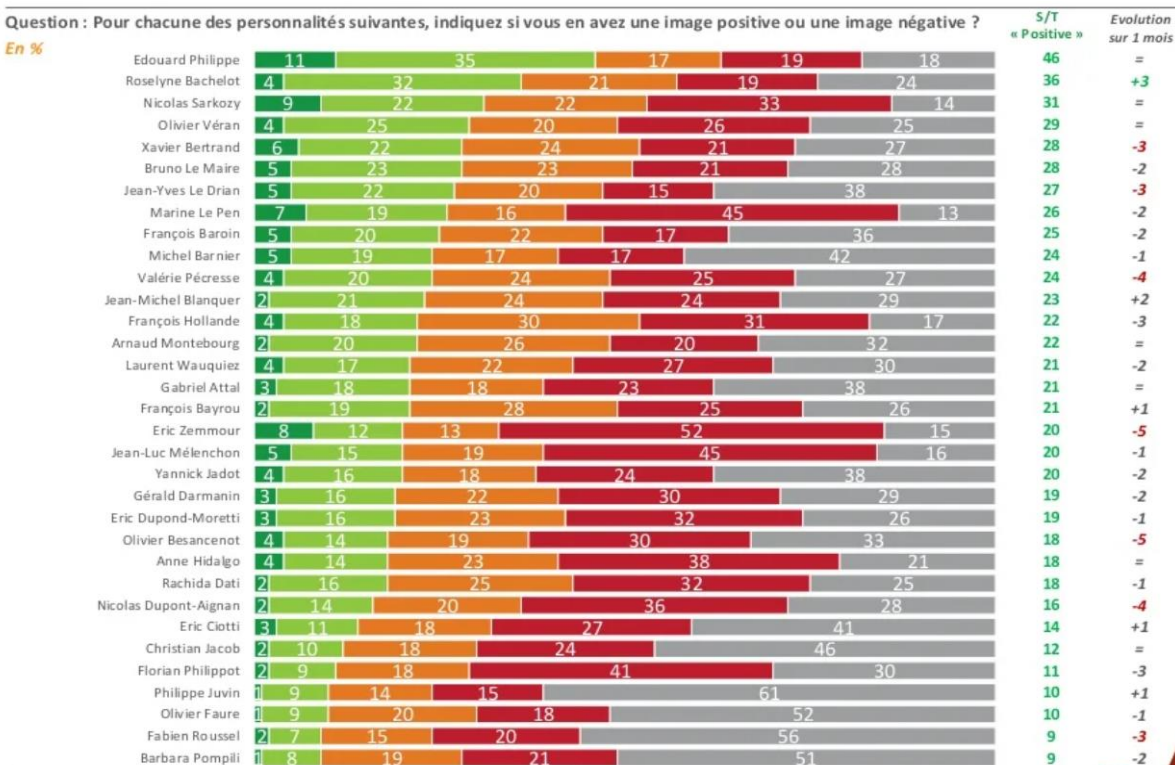
November 2016 – After the show



October 2021 – Before the show



November 2021 – After the show



Harris-Interactive – presidential elections polls

November 3rd, 2022 – Before the show

https://harris-interactive.fr/opinion_polls/barometre-dintentions-de-vote-pour-lelection-presidentielle-de-2022-vague-20/

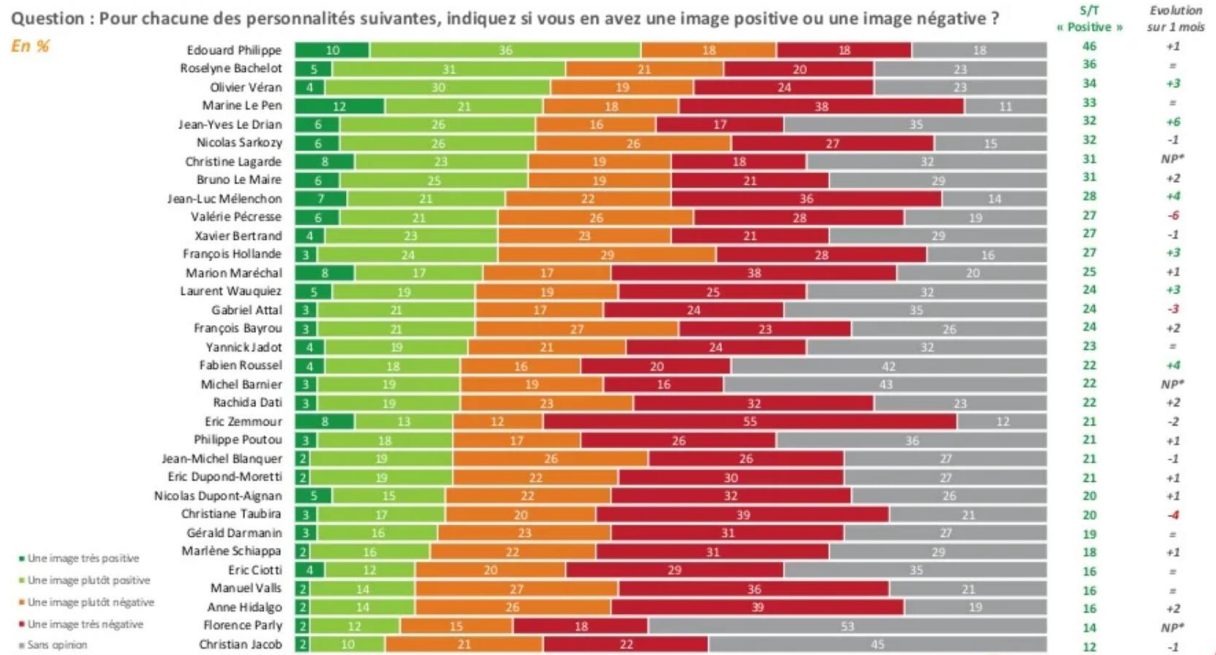
November 9th, 2022 – After the show

https://harris-interactive.fr/opinion_polls/barometre-dintentions-de-vote-pour-lelection-presidentielle-de-2022-vague-21/

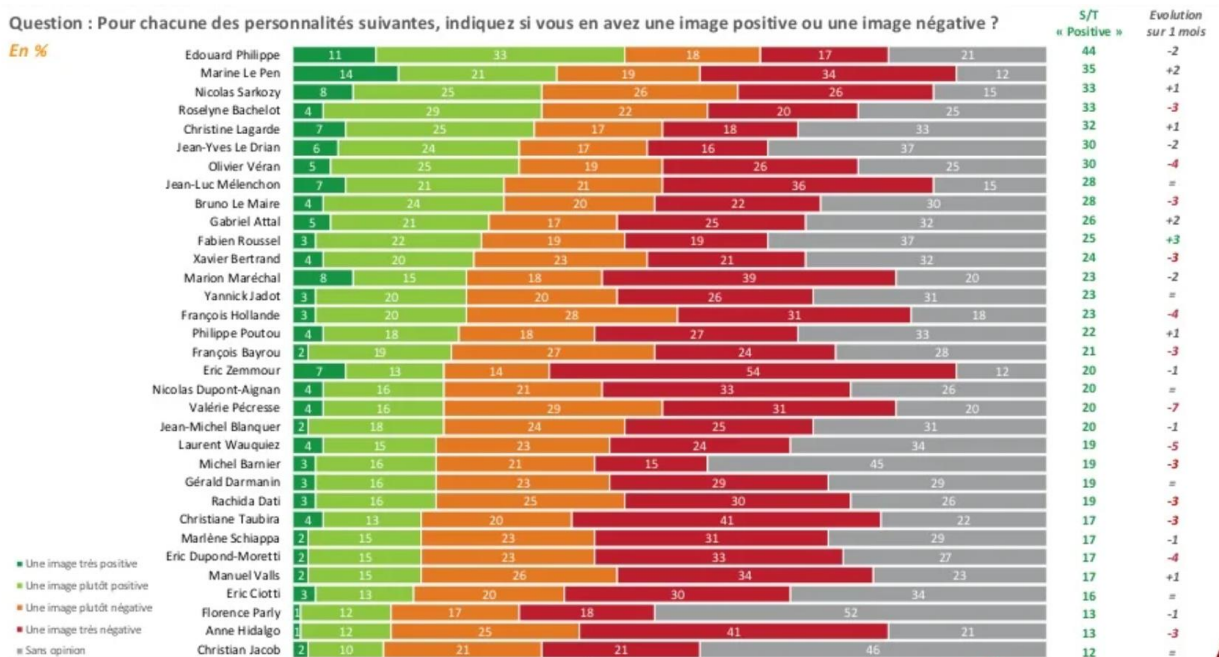
Face à Baba

Elabe's political observatory

March 2022 – Before the show



April 2022 – After the show



Harris-Interactive – presidential election polls

March 16th, 2022 – Before the show

https://harris-interactive.fr/opinion_polls/barometre-dintentions-de-vote-pour-lelection-presidentielle-de-2022-vague-37/

March 23rd, 2022 – After the show

https://harris-interactive.fr/opinion_polls/barometre-dintentions-de-vote-pour-lelection-presidentielle-de-2022-vague-38/

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