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TRACKING CHANGE IN THE FRENCH-STYLE GENDER GAP

THROUGH THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Réjane Sénac and Maxime Parodi

Translated from French by Sarah-Louise Raillard

On 16 May 2012, just ten days after being elected president, François Hollande appointed a parity government which included a fully-fledged Ministry for Women's Rights, echoing the momentous occasion when the reins of the Ministry for Women's Rights were handed to Yvette Roudy (1981–86) by François Mitterrand.¹ The establishment of the first² gender-balanced government in France followed on from the dynamics of the presidential election campaign, when Hollande specifically took a stand on issues of gender equality through his 40 commitments to “guarantee the rights of women and usher in a new era of social equality”.³

One of the traits of any presidential election based on direct universal suffrage is that it constitutes an institutional framework for orchestrating demands by “partially by-passing the traditional channels of classical representative democracy, which is to say political parties and elected officials”.⁴ As the only majority “minority”, women are “sufficiently numerous” to “force politicians to listen more attentively to the demands of French female voters”.⁵ From the right to contraception in 1965, to “parity” in 1995, via the right to abortion in 1974, the “main electoral contest of the Fifth Republic”⁶ has long been the stage for debate regarding the political applications of the principle of legal equality between the sexes,⁷ which

1. For more information on the issues surrounding state feminism and its development over the years, see Dorothy MacBride Stetson, Amy G. Mazur, *The Politics of State Feminism. Innovation in Comparative Research* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); Sandrine Dauphin, *L'État et les droits des femmes. Des institutions au service de l'égalité?* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010); Anne Revillard, “Quelle politique pour les femmes? Une comparaison France-Québec”, *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 15(4), 2008, 687-704.

2. To recap: following Nicolas Sarkozy's election as president in May 2007, 35% of the first Fillon government (from 18 May 2007 to 18 June 2007) was made up of female members of parliament; in 1959, in the Fifth Republic's first government, there was only one female MP (the Secretary of State in charge of social issues in Algeria).

3. <http://www.laboratoiredeegalite.org/IMG/pdf/40_Engagements_pour_l_egalite_FH_Francois_Hollande.pdf>.

4. Mariette Sineau, *La force du nombre. Femmes et démocratie présidentielle* (La Tour d'Aigues: L'Aube, 2nd edn, 2010), 18.

5. M. Sineau, *La force du nombre*.

6. Mariette Sineau, “L'égalité femmes/hommes: question-clé pour 2012?”, *Notes du Cevipof élections 2012*, 4 October 2011, available at the following URL: <<http://www.Cevipof.com/rtefiles/File/AtlasEI3/noteSINEAU.pdf>>.

7. Rainbow Murray, “Fifty years of feminizing France's Fifth Republic”, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 16(4), 2008, 469-82; Laure Bereni, “Feminism and the Republic”, *French Politics*, 5(3), 2007, 187-228; Drude Dahlerup, “Gender quotas – controversial but trendy. On expanding the research agenda”, *International Feminist Journal*

has been constitutionally enshrined in France since 1946.¹ The 2012 presidential election was characterised by overlapping themes and the wide media coverage of demands (equal pay, the fight against gender-based violence, parity, etc.). The mediatisation of male-female equality as a major political issue at the heart of the campaign should be understood as the result of a specific context where three important elements intersected: the revival of feminism within the framework of the global economic crisis; the trials of Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Georges Tron for sexual assault and attempted rape; and the presidential election itself. Having become an unavoidable political issue within the campaign,² the question of gender equality and how it should be approached seemed at times to have created a cross-party “Newspeak”,³ which contributed to a form of depoliticisation.⁴ It was in this context that the period between the two rounds of the election was marked by a move to reinvest this issue with decisive political weight, thanks to the campaign “*Les droits des femmes passent par la gauche*”⁵ (“Women’s rights come from the left”) and the subsequent publication of an eponymous opinion column in *Libération* on 25 April 2012.

Continuing in the same vein as debates on the complementarity of explanatory models⁶ for voting according to the effect of socio-economic variables (gender, age, religion, class, etc.) described as either deterministic or rational,⁷ the way in which voters’ positions with regard to their gender and their conception of the “sexual order”⁸ influences the relationship between “issue voting” and “cleavage voting”⁹ must be addressed. In order to do so, we shall analyse voting patterns in the 2012 presidential election from the perspective of current events and the evolution of the “French-style gender gap”.¹⁰

Following changes in the electoral behaviour of women during the 1980 American presidential election – when, for the first time, women as a group voted overwhelmingly for the

of *Politics*, 10(3), 2008, 322-8; Jill Lovecy, “‘Citoyennes à part entière?’ The constitutionalization of gendered citizenship in France and the parity reform of 1999-2000”, *Government and Opposition*, 35(4), 2000, 439-62.

1. See the preamble to the 1946 Constitution, incorporated into the 1958 Constitution, which stipulates that “the law guarantees that women shall have equal rights to men in all matters”.

2. See “Le genre à la frontière entre policy et politics”, *Revue française de science politique*, 59(2), 2009.

3. The term “Newspeak” was invented by George Orwell in his novel 1984 (published in 1949) to describe the official language of Oceania. Characterised by its lexical and syntactical simplicity, Newspeak is designed to make the expression of subversive ideas impossible and to prevent all criticism of the state – including the very “idea” of criticism. Newspeak is used throughout the novel itself but is also the subject of a brief analysis at the end of the text, in a fictional appendix titled “The principles of Newspeak”.

4. Jacques Lagroye, “Les processus de politisation”, in Jacques Lagroye (ed.), *La politisation* (Paris: Belin, 2003), 367.

5. Launched by Caroline De Haas, university professor Françoise Picq and the president of the feminist organization “40 ans de mouvement”, Martine Storti, this campaign stipulated that “this text should be signed by all those women and men who want to get rid of Nicolas Sarkozy and who strive for a different type of politics to ensure equality between the sexes – a different type of politics overall”. In particular, readers may consult the article entitled “Droits des femmes: les petits arrangements de Nicolas Sarkozy”, available at the following URL: <<http://lesdroitsdesfemmespassentparlagauche.wordpress.com/pourquoi-cette-campagne/>>.

6. Nonna Mayer, “Qui vote pour qui et pourquoi? Les modèles explicatifs du choix électoral”, *Pouvoirs*, 120, 2007, 17-27.

7. Nonna Mayer, Daniel Boy, “Les variables lourdes en sociologie électorale: l’état des controverses”, *Enquêtes*, 5, 1997, 109-22.

8. Maxime Parodi, “Les inégalités entre les hommes et les femmes au prisme de l’opinion”, in Françoise Milewski, Hélène Périer (eds), *Les discriminations entre les femmes et les hommes* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2011), 163-97; Réjane Sénac-Slawinski, *L’ordre sexué. La perception des inégalités femmes-hommes* (Paris: PUF, 2007).

9. See in particular Marc Franklin (ed.), *Electoral Change. Responses to Evolving Social and Attitudinal Structures in Western Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

10. Mariette Sineau, “Les paradoxes du gender gap à la française”, in Bruno Cautrès, Nonna Mayer (eds), *Le nouveau désordre électoral* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2004), 207-28.

Democratic candidate, Jimmy Carter – a number of academic studies have examined the transition from the “traditional” electoral gender gap of the 1950s and 60s to a “modern” electoral gender gap that was the product of realignments which occurred during the 1980s.¹ Drawing in particular on world values surveys, which allow for the comparative analysis of over 60 different countries, these studies on post-industrial democracies largely emerged² as a means to investigate the issues and causes of the gender effect on electoral behaviour, after having controlled for the other socio-demographic variables (age, class, “race”, religion).³ The longitudinal (1974–2000) analysis of the data provided by the Eurobarometer⁴ for twelve European countries also demonstrates the importance of not overlooking national context.

Janine Mossuz-Lavau⁵ has examined changes in female electoral behaviour in France since women first cast their votes in the 1945 municipal and legislative elections. She describes the period stretching from then until the end of the 1960s as a “learning curve” when French women, largely more conservative, also abstained more than men did (with the exception of elections which took place immediately before the Liberation).⁶ The 1970s saw the beginning of a take-off phase, which was characterised by increasingly similar electoral behaviour for both sexes, both in terms of turnout rates and left-right distribution on the political spectrum. The third period identified by Mossuz-Lavau began in the 1980s and is designated as a “time of autonomy” when the female vote was no longer a mere alignment of women’s votes with men’s. The reluctance of women to vote for the *Front National*, their “slightly higher likelihood of voting for socialists” and their more marked tendency to vote for Green Party candidates have in particular been linked with changes to their status in terms of socio-economic autonomy and the spread of feminism.⁷

More specifically, Mariette Sineau pinpoints the beginning of the third phase in 1995, associating it with “the end of the left-right cleavage according to gender. From this point on, a split occurs within the right itself: women begin to vote more often for moderate parliamentary right-wing candidates, while men begin to vote more often for extreme right-wing

1. Susan J. Carroll, “Women’s autonomy and the gender gap: 1980 and 1982”, in Carol M. Mueller (ed.), *The Politics of the Gender Gap. The Social Construction of Political Influence* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1988), 236–57; Carole K. Chaney, R. Michael Alvarez, Jonathan Nagler, “Explaining the gender gap in U.S. presidential elections, 1980–1992”, *Political Research Quarterly*, 51(2), 1998, 229–311; Jeff Manza, Clem Brooks, “The gender gap in U.S. presidential elections: when? why? implications?”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 102(5), 1998, 1235–66; Vicky Randall, *Women and Politics. An International Perspective* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987); Robert Y. Shapiro, Harpreet Mahajan, “Gender differences in policy preferences. A summary of trends from the 1960s to the 1980s”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 50(1), 1986, 42–61; Margaret C. Trevor, “Political socialization, party identification and the gender gap”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 63(1), 1999, 62–89.

2. Ronald Inglehart, Pippa Norris, “The developmental theory of the gender gap. Women’s and men’s voting behavior in global perspective”, *International Political Science Review*, 21(4), 2000, 441–63; and *Rising Tide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

3. J. Manza, C. Brooks, “The gender gap in U.S. presidential elections”.

4. Sandra Baxter, Marjorie Lansing, *Women and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983); Maurice Duverger, *The Political Role of Women/La participation des femmes à la vie politique* (Paris: Unesco, 1955); Martin Lipset, Stein Rokkan, “Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments: an introduction”, in Martin Lipset, Stein Rokkan (eds), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments. Cross National Perspectives* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 1–64.

5. Janine Mossuz-Lavau, “Le vote des femmes en France (1945–1993)”, *Revue française de science politique*, 43(4), 1993, 673–89; and “L’évolution du vote des femmes”, *Pouvoirs*, 82, 1997, 35–44.

6. M. Duverger, *The Political Role of Women*.

7. Janine Mossuz-Lavau, “Les Françaises aux urnes (1945–1994)”, *Modern and Contemporary France*, 3(2), 1995, 149–57; and “Les électrices françaises de 1945 à 1993”, *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 42, April–June 1994, 67–95.

candidates”.¹ After the 2002 presidential election and faced with the sizeable deficit in women’s votes for the *Front National*’s leader (14%, compared with 20% in the first round), Sineau began to wonder if “a new type of gender gap was emerging”.² She addressed this question by interpreting the female reluctance to vote for the FN as shown by Jean-Marie Le Pen’s poor score “across two groups of women who had absolutely nothing in common.”³ The first group was comprised of women embracing modernity and feminist values (higher education, white-collar professionals and executives, students, etc.). The second group – rather unexpectedly – was on the contrary made up of women with more traditional profiles: women 65 and older, the retired, practising Catholics and widows”.⁴

After examining the political dimension of the gender equality issue in the 2012 presidential campaign, we shall analyse the issues of this election in terms of the growing similarities between female and male voting patterns, focusing in particular on women’s reluctance to vote for the *Front National*, or what we have termed the “French radical right gender gap”.⁵

Methodology

Both the 2012 presidential campaign and the ensuing election gave rise to a multitude of polls and surveys. We mainly drew on Cevipof’s post-electoral survey conducted by OpinionWay, based on the quota method. This survey took place almost simultaneously in two different formats: by telephone (CATI, Computer assisted telephone interview) between 10 and 29 May 2012, with a representative sample of 2,504 individuals aged 18 or above and registered to vote; and online (CAWI, Computer assisted web interview) between 18 May and 2 June 2012, with a representative sample of 1,431 individuals aged 18 or above and registered to vote. We also used the *Présidoscopie* poll conducted online by Ipsos among a panel of 6,000 individuals (pre-attrition figure) representative of the French population aged 18 or above. We concentrated in particular on the ninth and tenth waves of the poll, which surveyed 4,075 and 3,967 individuals between 19 April and 21 April 2012 and between 27 April and 30 April 2012, respectively. We likewise analysed the qualitative aspect of this survey through telephone interviews conducted by Ipsos in order to better understand the reasons behind changes in the panellists’ voting intentions.

Other polls were occasionally referred to, in particular the many polls conducted on election day, in order to hone the accuracy of the gendered distribution of votes across different candidates.

Equality between men and women: a political issue in the 2012 presidential election

Ranging from traditional newspaper columns and NGO press releases such as those issued by the *Collectif National pour le Droit des Femmes – CNDF*, *Femmes solidaires*, *Femmes 3000*, *Osez le féminisme*, to the organisation of events such as the Equality

1. M. Sineau, “Les paradoxes du gender gap à la française”, 210.

2. M. Sineau, “Les paradoxes du gender gap à la française”, 210.

3. M. Sineau, “Les paradoxes du gender gap à la française”, 210.

4. M. Sineau, *La force du nombre*, 80.

5. Nonna Mayer, “From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen: electoral change on the far right”, in “Special issue: French presidential and parliamentary elections 2012”, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 66(1), 2012, 160-78; and “Gender identity and ethnocentric voting: is France changing?”, panel “Changing dimensions of identity in the Americas and Europe”, Session “Gender, religion, identity”, presentation given during the International Political Science Association Conference, Madrid, 11 July 2012.

Laboratory's launch of the *Tour de France du Pacte pour l'égalité* on 5 October 2011, or the 6 March 2012 declaration "Ce que veulent les femmes" ("What women want"), issued by the associations *Paroles de femmes* and *Les Mariannes de la diversité*, there were myriad occasions to demand that candidates in the 2012 election make their commitment to equality between men and women clear and explicit. In its press release announcing the evening event at *La Cigale* on 7 March, the *Féministes en mouvement* (an umbrella group bringing together over 45 different associations, including *Planning familial*, *La Fédération solidarité femmes* and *Osez le féminisme*) stipulated that "presidential candidates will enter into dialogue with feminist organisations during an important evening debate which seeks to put gender equality on the political agenda as a priority during this campaign".¹ They sold their publication *Mais qu'est-ce qu'elles veulent encore?*² [*But what do they want now?*] during presidential candidate meetings seeking to make gender equality an unavoidable public issue. The main objective of the 7 March evening event was also to bring the issue to public attention.³ The afternoon debate on 7 March organised by the *Atelier de la République* and the *Assemblée des femmes Paris-Île-de-France*⁴ around the collective publication *Femmes-hommes: enfin l'égalité?*⁵ [*Women and men: equality at last?*] illustrated the diversity of actors from different walks of life, including politics,⁶ unions,⁷ academia and community organisations, all committed to defining the meaning of gender equality and the terms of its implementation.

Women's magazines also got involved, for example on 5 April 2012, when *Elle* invited the presidential candidates to discuss issues at Sciences Po within the context of a debate entitled "Les PresidentiELLES".

The issue of gender equality in the presidential campaign

Was gender equality a priority for French voters during the 2012 election? Throughout the various waves of the *Présidoscopia* survey⁸ conducted between November 2011 and May 2012, inequality between men and women was only cited by 1 to 2% of the respondents as one

1. This press release also stated that "among the measures that the candidates will have to address: the creation of a Ministry of Women's Rights, the over-contribution of part-time workers to social insurance, the creation of 500,000 new daycare places, the 100% coverage of voluntary pregnancy terminations, and the establishment of 4,500 shelters for women who are victims of domestic violence", available at the following URL: <http://www.planningfamilial.org/sites/internet/files/cp_fem_7_mars.pdf>.

2. *Mais qu'est-ce qu'elles veulent encore?* (Paris: Les Liens qui libèrent, 2012).

3. Laurie Boussaguet, Sophie Jacquot, "Mobilisations féministes et mise à l'agenda de nouveaux problèmes publics", *Revue française de science politique*, 59(2), 2009, 173-81; Amy Mazur, "Les mouvements féministes et l'élaboration des politiques dans une perspective comparative. Vers une approche genrée de la démocratie", *Revue française de science politique*, 59(2), 2009, 325-51.

4. Available at the following URL: <<http://www.atelier-republique.fr/docs/invitation7032012.pdf>>.

5. Nathalie Pilhes, Gilles Pennequin (eds), *Femmes-hommes: enfin égalité?* (Paris: Eyrolles, 2012).

6. Martine Aubry, Christine Boutin, Chantal Brunel, Marie-Georges Buffet, Jean-François Copé, Rachida Dati, Élisabeth Guigou, Anne Hidalgo, Chantal Jouanno, Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, Valérie Pécresse, Ségolène Royal, Marielle de Sarnez, Olga Trostiansky, Manuel Valls, Marie-Jo Zimmermann.

7. Laurence Parisot for the *Mouvement des entreprises de France* (Medef), Bernard Thibault for the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT), Laurence Laigo for the *Confédération française démocratique du travail* (CFDT), Jean-Claude Mailly for *Force ouvrière* (FO).

8. Cevipof, *Le Monde*, Fondapol and the Fondation Jean-Jaurès teamed up with Ipsos/Logica Business Consulting to poll online a panel of 6,000 individuals registered to vote and who were representative of the French population aged over 18. These individuals agreed to answer questions at regular intervals leading up to and after the second round of the 2012 legislative elections. The Internet questionnaire, conducted in twelve waves, was supplemented by semi-structured individual interviews in order to understand, in real time, the evolution of electoral decisions, highlighting a number of aspects in particular: abstention, volatility, electoral mobilisation, the influence of images and the media. See <<http://www.Cevipof.com/fr/2012/recherche/panel/>>.

of the three most important issues today in France, and by 3 to 4% of the respondents as one of the three most personally important issues. The main issues cited by French citizens were unemployment, and more generally, the economy (ranging from the financial crisis to purchasing power). Nevertheless, this does not mean that other, lower-ranked topics such as the legal system, the environment and gender inequality were not considered as political issues.¹ The survey conducted by CSA for *Terrafemina* and called “*Présidentielle 2012: les femmes dans la campagne*”² [2012 Presidential election: women in the campaign] ranked issues of public policy with regard to gender equality as shown below.

Table 1. Among the following subjects, which would you say are a priority, important but not a priority, or secondary, in light of the upcoming 2012 presidential election? (as % by line)

	Priority	Important but not a priority	Secondary	Don't know
“Equal salaries for men and women in the same jobs”	75	21	3	1
“More severe punishment for men convicted of domestic violence”	68	26	5	1
“The enhancement of pensions for women who stop or limit their professional activity to raise their children”	57	33	9	1
“Special programmes to help single mothers”	57	32	10	1
“Limitations on part-time work, which primarily affects women”	46	36	16	2
“The presence of women in senior corporate positions”	43	43	13	1
“Equal representation of women in politics”	41	42	16	1
“Increasing the length of paternal leave”	19	37	43	1

Source: CSA Survey for Terrafemina, “*Présidentielles 2012: les femmes dans la campagne*”, February 2012.

In order to go beyond the pseudo-consensus of all candidates, from the far left to the far right, on topics such as equal pay or the condemnation of domestic violence, we need to examine how the different candidates sought to implement gender equality in the context of their political agendas.³ When developing their presidential platforms, political parties addressed this issue by organising specific events, such as the convention on “*La place des femmes dans la société*” (“The place of women in society”) held by the UMP on 21 June 2011, the “*Où sont les femmes?*” (“Where are the women?”) conference held by the *Nouveau Centre* on 7 March 2011, or the *Europe Ecologie-Les Verts* (EELV) “*Jeudi de l’Ecologie*” (“Ecology Thursday”) on 31 March 2011, which focused on “*Comment bouleverser l’ordre*

1. The question was: “Among the following issues, which are the three that seem the most important to you for France today? 1/ The financial and economic crisis; 2/ Unemployment; 3/ The public deficit; 4/ Purchasing power; 5/ Social inequality; 6/ Immigration; 7/ Education; 8/ Insecurity; 9/ The healthcare system; 10/ Taxes; 11/ Retirement; 12/ Access to housing; 13/ The legal system; 14/ The environment; 15/ The future of nuclear power; 16/ Inequality between men and women?”.

2. Conducted by phone on 15 and 16 February 2012, with a representative sample of 1,001 individuals aged 18 and above, available at the following URL: <<http://www.csa.eu/multimedia/data/sondages/data2012/opi20120216-presidentielles-2012-les-femmes-dans-la-campagne.pdf>>.

3. Claire Aubé, “Le sexe des programmes”, *Les nouvelles news*, uploaded on 12 March 2012 and available at the following URL: <<http://www.lesnouvellesnews.fr/index.php/civilisation-articles-section/elections-2012/1758-le-sexe-des-programmespolitiques>>.

sexué?” (“How to overthrow the sexual order”). The socialists decided to integrate this issue in their “Convention sur l’égalité réelle” (“*Convention on Real Equality*”),¹ the text of which was adopted by the National Council on 9 November 2010 and includes a sub-section entitled “How to achieve gender equality” in its third chapter on “The same rights for all citizens”.

Analysis of the candidates’ agendas for family policy is one indicator that sheds some light on their political dimension in both an ideological and partisan sense. The UMP and the MoDem both base their “gender convention”² on the need to help women reconcile their personal and professional lives. This notion should be understood in relation to one of the feminist developments of the post-industrial welfare state according to Nancy Fraser: the care-giver parity model.³ “The goal is not to have women lead the same lives as men, but to eliminate ‘the cost of difference’”.⁴ Public policy would thus aim to provide women with the means to alternate care and work, by providing generous benefit programmes and easier access to part-time jobs. The proposal to create a commission of inquiry into the introduction and dissemination of gender theory in France, put forth by a group of UMP parliamentarians on 7 December 2012,⁵ embodies the link between this model and the defence of the complementarity between the sexes as one of the foundations of the social contract.

For their part, the left-wing parties (the *Front de Gauche*, the EELV and the socialists), placed their emphasis on dismantling the sexist socialisation model, finding echoes in Nancy Fraser’s work of two other possibilities for the feminist development of the welfare state: namely, the universal breadwinner model and the universal care-giver model. The *Front de Gauche* made no secret of its desire to “get rid of the patriarchy” and the EELV sought to “put gender equality at the heart of the transformation of society”. In particular, the *Front de Gauche* called for gender equality in March 2012, publicising its commitment to “no longer relegating feminist demands to being a mere pretext, but instead putting them at the centre of political debate in 2012”.⁶ Reading these parties’ platforms, it remains uncertain whether they lean towards the universal breadwinner model – criticised by Nancy Fraser for being androcentric – or towards the universal care-giver model, where “the state intervenes in order to encourage a lack of differentiation with regard to the roles of men and women”.⁷

During the campaign, one of the specific tactics of the *Front National* was its attempt to promote its leader Marine Le Pen as “a woman of her times [...] free [...] modern [...] divorced, a mother of three”.⁸ Using her own personal story, she argued that she stood for (and acted for) all women⁹ and shared the same difficulties: “When you’re a woman, you don’t know what a 35-hour work week is [...] Women are subject to a ‘double penalty’: an

1. Available at the following URL: <http://www.parti-socialiste.fr/static/9243/convention-nationale-egalite-reelle-le-texte- debat.pdf>.

2. See in particular Marie-Thérèse Letablier, “Régimes d’État providence et conventions de genre en Europe”, *Informations sociales*, 151, January-February 2009, 102-9.

3. Nancy Fraser, “After the family wage: equity and the welfare state”, *Political Theory*, 22(4), 1994, 591-618; and “Après le revenu familial. Exercice de réflexion postindustrielle”, in *Le féminisme en mouvement. Des années 1960 à l’ère néolibérale* (Paris: La Découverte, 2012), 153-88.

4. N. Fraser, “Après le revenu familial”, 177-8.

5. Available at the following URL: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/propositions/pion0482.asp>.

6. Available at the following URL: <http://www.placeaurope2012.fr/feminisme/>.

7. Sandrine Dauphin, “Action publique et rapports de genre”, in Françoise Milewski, Hélène Périer (eds), *Les discriminations entre les femmes et les hommes* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2012), 313-41 (321).

8. Available at the following URL: <http://www.marinelepen2012.fr>, under the tab “Marine”.

9. In particular, see the work and debates on the relationship between descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation: Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

often demanding job and a family to take care of". How were these statements then expressed in her presidential platform?

Her party's proposals on the subject stemmed both from the principle of "national priority" and a pro-natal policy. The proposals to lower the retirement age for women having raised at least three children or having cared for a disabled child, to create a parental salary (and not just a maternal one) equivalent to 80% of the SMIC (minimum wage salary) after the birth of the second child, and to recalculate and index the family welfare benefits to the cost of living would in fact only apply to families with at least one parent who was a French national. The shift from a maternal salary to a parental one (thus envisioning stay-at-home fathers) should be interpreted in the context of the renewal of the *Front National's* electorate, which is now younger and more familiar with new family structures that have incorporated, at least in part, some feminist changes. On the other hand, defending the free choice "not to have an abortion", thanks to expanded prevention measures, pre-natal adoption and the improvement of family benefits can be seen as a strategy designed to retain the party's traditional voters.

More generally, the family is defined as an "irreplaceable institution", "the building block of society" which "must be exclusively based on the union of a man and a woman looking to raise children born of a mother and father". It is for these reasons that the FN opposes "any demands for the legalisation of same-sex marriage or adoption for homosexual couples". Marine Le Pen's personal ambivalence towards same-sex marriage can thus be seen as a strategy to address the different segments of the *Front National's* electorate, as analysed by Pascal Perrineau.¹ The party's official opposition to same-sex marriage in fact meets the expectations of its "loyal" voters – largely older men, retired, with little or no education – whereas Le Pen's more liberal rhetoric was an olive branch held out to unaligned voters who were younger and on the moderate right, and voters who had been "won over": "more likely to be female, between 25 and 34 years old, originally from the middle class (mid-level professions and employees), with a high school or college education and low or insufficient income".²

Level of commitment to feminist issues and voting behaviour

Analysing presidential campaign platforms highlights the fact that political parties do not all seek to apply the principle of gender equality in the same way, in particular in relation to other political issues such as employment. Are these partisan differences reflected in the different positions held by their voters on themes which indicate their relationship to feminism?

1967); Irene Diamond, Nancy Hartsock, "Beyond interests in politics: a comment on Virginia Sapiro's 'When are interests interesting? The problem of political representation of women'", in Anne Phillips (ed.), *Feminism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 193-202; Rosemary Pringle, Sophie Watson, "'Women's interest' and the poststructuralist state", in A. Phillips (ed.), *Feminism and Politics*, 203-23; Virginia Sapiro, "When are interests interesting? The problem of political representation of women", in A. Phillips (ed.), *Feminism and Politics*, 161-92.

1. Pascal Perrineau, "Marine Le Pen: voter pour une nouvelle extrême droite?", in Pascal Perrineau, Luc Rouban (eds), *La solitude de l'isoloir: les vrais enjeux de 2012* (Paris: Autrement, 2011), 25-38; and "Marine Le Pen: un héritage qui fructifie?", in Olivier Duhamel, Édouard Lecerf (eds), *L'état de l'opinion 2012* (Paris: TNS-Sofres/Seuil, 2012), 55-70.

2. Pascal Perrineau, "La renaissance électorale de l'électorat frontiste", *Notes du Cevipof*, 5, April 2012, available at the following URL: <<http://www.Cevipof.com/rtefiles/File/AtlasEI3/NotePERRINEAU.pdf>>.

The CSA survey conducted for *Terrafemina*¹ ranked candidates on their level of “attentiveness to women’s rights” and the Yahoo-LH2² poll evaluated the level of confidence French citizens had that a given candidate would enforce gender equality. Both of these surveys suggest that the individuals polled had a political understanding of the candidates’ commitment to and credibility on the issue. In fact, 15% of men and 22% of women respectively cited Hollande as the most likely to favour said equality, ahead of Nicolas Sarkozy (9% and 13%, respectively), François Bayrou (10% and 11%) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon (4% and 6%). Marine Le Pen was the top woman identified in the Yahoo-LH2 survey (10%, compared with 6% for Eva Joly), whereas in the CSA poll Joly appeared to be in the lead with 10% to Le Pen’s 8%.³ Relative to the size of their respective electorates, voters on the right thus displayed a certain lack of confidence in their candidates regarding gender equality. The question is now whether this gap in confidence regarding respect for gender equality had any consequences for voting behaviour.

We seek to shed light on these figures by analysing how the Cevipof’s post-electoral survey highlights the relationship between electoral choice and the level of commitment to important themes relating to the concept of a sexual order, and in particular its connection with the natural order conferring complementary roles to men and women, from procreation to social and political production. What follows below is an examination of the positioning of voters with respect to four different themes: the connotation of the term feminism; giving job priority to men in times of crisis; opinions on homosexuality; and the right for same-sex couples to marry. These questions were influenced by how the survey was carried out; the men and women polled did not respond the same way on the phone (CATI) as on the Internet (CAWI). The percentages contained in the tables below and commented upon were calculated by combining CATI and CAWI data and weighting them according to socio-demographic and educational criteria. The following percentages should thus be seen more as scores ranking candidates along a gender axis than as representative totals of the general population.

“Feminism”, a word that has historically possessed a negative connotation in France,⁴ seems to have become a largely consensual term today. Of those polled, 76% stated that the term evoked something somewhat or very positive for them. Nevertheless, a fairly stark gap remains between Marine Le Pen’s voters, for 69% of whom feminism was a positive notion, and Joly’s electorate, 87% of whom judged feminism as positive. More generally, the left/right cleavage was reflected in levels of commitment to feminism. While the right appeared slightly more reserved, with 72% of Sarkozy supporters and 69% of Bayrou voters in favour of feminism, the left was more enthusiastic: 83% of Mélenchon voters and 81% of Hollande’s supporters declared that feminism was a positive force.

1. Conducted by telephone on 15 and 16 February 2012, with 1,001 individuals representative of the French population aged 18 or above.

2. Conducted by telephone on 2 and 3 March 2012, with 971 individuals representative of the French population aged 18 or above.

3. This reversal between the two polls should be taken with a grain of salt, however, as it corresponds to the margin of error for a 1,000-individual sample population.

4. See in particular the work of historian Christine Bard, specifically Christine Bard (ed.), *Un siècle d'antiféminisme* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).

Table 2. Opinions on feminism, job priority for men in a period of crisis, homosexuality and same-sex marriage, according to declared votes in the first round of the 2012 presidential election (in %)

	Very or somewhat positive connotation of feminism	Completely disagrees with the following statement: "In times of economic crisis, men should have priority over women for getting a job"	Agrees completely with the following statement: "Homosexuality is an acceptable way to live one's sexuality"	Agrees somewhat or completely with the following statement: "Same sex couples should have the right to marry"
Nathalie Artaud	68	65	48	76
Philippe Poutou	82	68	50	86
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	81	77	54	77
Eva Joly	87	83	62	81
François Hollande	83	68	47	75
François Bayrou	69	62	38	56
Nicolas Sarkozy	72	60	32	42
Nicolas Dupont-Aignan	78	65	37	50
Marine Le Pen	68	54	34	57
Jacques Cheminade	75	50	67	50
Total	76	64	41	62

Source: Cevipof's post-electoral survey conducted by OpinionWay via telephone between 10 and 29 May 2012, and online between 18 May and 2 June 2012. Both CATI and CAWI formats were combined while taking into account socio-demographic criteria (sex, age, occupation, religion, size of city), as well education levels and the results from both rounds of the presidential election.

How to read this table: Among voters who said that they voted for Nathalie Arthaud, 68% had a very or somewhat positive view of feminism.

As many as 64% of French voters disagreed completely with the statement "In times of economic crisis, men should have priority over women for getting a job". Although this opinion represented the majority across the board, percentages did vary by candidate. Only 54% of Le Pen voters were staunchly opposed, while 83% of Eva Joly supporters rejected the statement. The degree of opposition to this statement can be related to the traditional left-right split: while 60% of Sarkozy's supporters and 62% of Bayrou's rejected this proposition, 68% of Hollande voters and 77% of Mélenchon voters were opposed to it.

Answers to the question on the right for same-sex couples to marry were also correlated with voting patterns. Establishing the legality of homosexual marriage, presented as number 31 of François Hollande's 60 commitments for France, was opposed by the majority of Sarkozy supporters (58%). On the other hand, 81% of Joly voters, 77% of Mélenchon supporters and 75% of Hollande voters were favourable towards same-sex marriage. While the half-way position of MoDem voters – 56% of whom were in favour of same-sex marriage – seems representative of the Centrist tradition, the fact that 57% of Marine Le Pen supporters were also in favour is a tell-tale sign of the party's changing (and increasingly younger) electorate, as well as of the candidate's personal ambivalence on the subject.

The French-style gender gap revisited during the 2012 presidential election

Although it has become the norm to distinguish three phases in the development of the gender gap in Western democracies since 1945¹, from the traditional post-war “gender gap to the modern gender gap of the 1980s and 1990s, via a middle period when male-female electoral behaviours converged, comparative studies² have emphasized the need to approach these developments through the specificity of national contexts, highlighting differences in timing and form,³ in terms of the evolution of the socio-economic status of women and the influence of religious and feminist values.

The steadily narrowing gap in the socio-demographic profiles of men and women, in particular with regard to religion, education and employment, is thus often put forward as a factor explaining the gap that is likewise narrowing in the voting behaviours of men and women.⁴ “Nevertheless, these increasing similarities in the sociological profiles of men and women should not conceal the differences that still separate them. Differences which can have significant political consequences.”⁵ Women are on the whole older (10.9% of women are over 75 years old, compared with 6.8% of men), over-represented among part-time employees (80%), the working poor (80%), and “they live more frequently under the poverty threshold than their partners (14.1% compared to 12.9% for the population as a whole taking the 60% median income threshold as a reference point. At 75 and over, this rises to 14.7% compared to 10.1%: Insee).”⁶

To shed some light on how the persistence of these socio-demographic differences has continued to influence the transformation of the French-style gender gap, we shall analyse electoral results through the lens of decisive voting factors, before looking more specifically at the issues of the French radical right gender gap as expressed in the 2012 election.

A residual gender gap

The numerous polling sources we have used to analyse the results of the 2012 election all relied on the quota method; some were conducted by telephone (CATI), while others took place online (CAWI). Beyond the variances inherent in any sample selection, the difference in method between the CATI and CAWI formats must be taken into account and, likewise, the decision to calibrate data according to quotas should not be overlooked. Indeed, analysing the differences between men and women, calibrating the data according to simple margins

1. M. Sineau, “Les paradoxes du gender gap à la française”, 207.

2. David De Vaus, Ian McAllister, “The changing politics of women: gender and political alignment in 11 nations”, *European Journal of Political Research*, 17(3), 1989, 241-62; Laurence Mayer, Roland Smith, “Feminism and religiosity: female electoral behavior in western Europe”, in Sylvia Bashevkin (ed.), *Women and Politics in Western Europe* (Bristol: Frank Cass, 1985), 38-49; Pippa Norris, “The gender gap: a cross-national trend?”, in Carole Mueller (ed.), *The Politics of the Gender Gap. The Social Construction of Political Influence* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1988), 217-34; “Gender realignment in comparative perspective”, in Marian Simms (ed.), *The Paradox of Parties. Australian Parties in the 1990s* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1996), 109-29; and “The gender gap: old challenges, new approaches”, in Susan J. Carroll (ed.), *Women and American Politics. New Questions, New Directions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 146-70.

3. For France specifically, see Janine Mossuz-Lavau, Mariette Sineau, *Enquête sur les femmes et la politique en France* (Paris: PUF, 1983).

4. See Janine Mossuz-Lavau, “Les femmes: des intentions de vote évolutives”, *Notes du Cevipof*, 3, 2011, 1; Mattei Dogan, Jacques Narbonne, *Les Françaises face à la politique. Comportement politique et conditions sociales* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1955).

5. J. Mossuz-Lavau, “Les femmes: des intentions de vote évolutives”, 2.

6. J. Mossuz-Lavau, “Les femmes: des intentions de vote évolutives”, 2.

(gender, age range, socio-professional class, etc.) and not according to the intersection of gender with each of the other adjustment variables, can produce statistical artefacts and cause gender-based differences to appear or disappear with regard to voting patterns. Extra caution is therefore needed when examining the concordance of results, by integrating different types of studies.

Generally speaking, the Cevipof study operated in the same manner as quota-based surveys conducted on election day during the first round (CSA, TNS-Sofres, Ifop), and demonstrated the erosion of voting differences between men and women compared to previous presidential elections.¹ In terms of the minority candidates, results were too low overall to discern the possible over-representation of men or women. In Joly's case, each source provided different results on this question: it is thus likely that votes for the EELV candidate were not strongly influenced by gender, despite the party's feminist stance, embodied equally in its statutes, its gender-balanced organisation,² and its presidential agenda. On the other hand, even if the discrepancies are minimal, the five studies included in Table 3 all show that fewer women than men voted for the *Front de Gauche* candidate, Jean-Luc Mélenchon. And this despite the fact that, as Marie-François Colombani and Michèle Fitoussi have argued in their article "Féminisme au poing" on Mélenchon in *Elle* magazine from 8 March 2011,³ the latter's commitment to feminism is well-known and highly publicised. Such a stance was not enough,

Table 3. Declared votes during the first round of the 2012 presidential election, by gender and survey (percentages in columns)

	CAWI CSA		CAWI OpinionWay		CAWI Ifop		CATI OpinionWay		CATI TNS-Sofres		Official
	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	
Jacques Cheminade	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0.3
Nathalie Arthaud	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0.6
Philippe Poutou	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1.2
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	12	10	13	10	12	11	13	10	13	9	11.1
Eva Joly	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	1	2.3
François Hollande	28	29	29	28	27	30	25	32	29	28	28.6
François Bayrou	9	9	9	9	10	8	9	9	8	9	9.1
Nicolas Sarkozy	27	27	28	27	27	28	25	29	23	31	27.2
Nicolas Dupont-Aignan	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1.8
Marine Le Pen	18	18	16	20	20	17	21	16	20	18	17.9

Sources: CSA, election day poll during the first round by quota method on 5,969 individuals registered to vote, polled by CAWI; TNS-Sofres, election day poll during the first round, 1,515 individuals registered to vote, polled by CATI; Ifop, election day poll during the first round, 3,509 individuals registered to vote, polled by CAWI; OpinionWay-Cevipof, 2012 post-electoral surveys by telephone (CATI) and Internet (CAWI).

Note: Cross-tabulations were conducted on the basis of socio-demographic factors (age, sex, socio-professional class, region and size of city) and the results of the first round.

1. In particular, see the aforementioned studies carried out by Janine Mossuz-Lavau and Mariette Sineau.

2. See in particular the site for the EELV's feminist commission: <<http://feminisme.eelv.fr/>>.

3. Available at the following URL: <<http://www.elle.fr/Societe/Les-enquetes/Jean-Luc-Melenchon-le-feminisme-au-poing-1964500>>.

however, to attract female voters or, on the contrary, to repel male supporters. The MoDem candidate François Bayrou attracted just as many female as male voters, despite the absence of gender equality on his political agenda, which focused instead on 20 propositions for the country's economic recovery. In his presidential platform announced in January 2012, Bayrou only addressed the issue of gender equality in the context of the fight against discrimination; he stipulated that he would work to fight discrimination against women in terms of working conditions, pay and family life.

In the case of Hollande, by grouping together the different results and taking into account 90% confidence intervals,¹ the most likely scenario is that slightly more women voted for him than men (30.2% compared to 27.0%). In Sarkozy's case, the TNS-Sofres results were highly dissonant; the confidence interval for this source must therefore be increased to 95%. Consequently, it seems that when the different sources are combined, women were slightly more likely to vote for Sarkozy than men (28.3% and 26.1%, respectively). In the case of Marine Le Pen, the difference between the CAWI and CATI segments of the OpinionWay-Cevipof survey were such that a larger confidence interval (95%) must also be granted for the CAWI format, in order to try and find a grouping value. The likelihood is consequently that 18.5% of men voted for Le Pen, compared to 17.2% of women. Given the erosion of differences in electoral behaviour between men and women, the question is whether or not a gender gap in voting behaviour still exists.

As one might expect in the traditional third phase of the gender gap, relatively more women voted for Hollande (+3.2) and Nicolas Sarkozy (+2.2) than for Le Pen (-1.3). The voting logics informing this third incarnation of the gender gap are thus still residually identifiable. In particular, the erosion of the radical right gender gap is evident: there was a seven-point gap between women and men during the presidential elections of 1988 and 1995, a six-point gap in 2002 and a three-point gap in 2007.² In 2012, it appears that only a one-point gap remained.

Table 4. Declared votes for the *Front National* candidate during the first round of presidential elections from 1988 to today, by gender (in %)

	1988	1995	2002	2007	2012
Men	18	19	20	12	18
Women	11	12	14	9	17

Sources: Cevipof studies from 1988 and 1995; French Electoral Panel from 2002 and 2007; synthesis mentioned above for 2012.

How to read this table: Among the men who cast a ballot in 1988, 18% said they had voted for Jean-Marie Le Pen.

In the second round (see Table 5), the gap between male and female votes was once again slight. By cross-tabulating according to 90% confidence intervals, the percentage of men voting for Hollande came out to somewhere between 51.7% and 54.0%, while the same vote for women was between 48.9% and 51.3%. During the second round, slightly more women voted for the right.

1. The percentages were obtained by cross-sorting the confidence intervals from different sources: their average additionally respects the percentage officially recorded during the first round of the election.

2. Nonna Mayer, "L'électorat Marine Le Pen 2012: un air de famille", published 28 April 2012 on the website <<http://www.trielec2012.fr>>.

Table 5. Declared votes during the second round of the 2012 presidential election, according to gender and survey (% in columns)

	CAWI CSA		CAWI OpinionWay		CAWI Ifop		CATI OpinionWay		CATI TNS-Sofres		Official
	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	total
François Hollande	54	50	54	49	52	51	51	52	52	51	51.7
Nicolas Sarkozy	46	50	46	51	48	49	49	48	48	49	48.3

Sources: 2012 OpinionWay-Cevipof post-electoral survey conducted by telephone (CATI) and on the Internet (CAWI); CSA election day poll conducted by CAWI with 2,612 individuals; by TNS-Sofres by CATI with 1,521 individuals; and by Ifop by CAWI with 1,968 individuals.

In order to interpret what seems to be a reconfiguration of the gender gap in France, albeit on a smaller and almost vestigial scale, let us now turn to the socio-demographic voting determinants of the 2012 presidential election.

Voting factors only slightly influenced by gender

The multitude of different sources used has led to the emergence of a likely synthesis. Rather than debating the merits and drawbacks of each source, decisive voting factors will be analysed by calculating averages from the three sources used: the CATI and CAWI data provided by the OpinionWay-Cevipof survey and the data furnished by the tenth wave of the *Présidoscopie*-Ipsos poll conducted via Internet with 3,967 individuals between 27 and 30 April. It is however somewhat difficult to discern if these averages are more representative of voters than, for instance, the percentages obtained simply from the CATI poll. Each study has its merits and its limits:¹ because they reach people with lower levels of education, CATI surveys are certainly more representative of this segment of the population, whereas CAWI surveys are more representative of individuals with higher levels of education, although probably with a higher rate of distortion than CATI surveys. From the perspective of trying to compare men and women, establishing an average allows relatively robust scores to be compared and inter-category differences to emerge clearly (without, however, being certain that the correct “dosage” between sources, offering the best representation of voting patterns, was administered).

In terms of age and generation, Table 6 emphasises the fact that Sarkozy’s vote came first and foremost from older voters, in particular those aged 65 and over. Conversely, votes for the *Front de Gauche* were concentrated in the younger age range (under 50) and the party clearly struggled to attract older voters. Votes cast for Hollande were more homogenous, with a slight dip among 18 to 24 year-olds. However, differences in votes according to gender and age were not very pronounced for any of the candidates. Although the political socialisation of men and women has traditionally been very different by generation, today these differences leave few traces in voting patterns.

1. Reg Baker *et al.*, “Research synthesis. AAPOR report on online panels”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 74, 2010, 711-81.

Table 6. Age of voters for Hollande, Sarkozy and Le Pen (in %)

First round	Hollande		Sarkozy		Le Pen	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
18-24 years old	20	23	18	19	19	16
25-34 years old	25	27	15	17	19	17
35-49 years old	24	23	20	23	20	18
50-64 years old	26	30	23	27	14	13
65 years old and over	27	26	35	37	10	9

Source: Cevipof post-electoral survey, by CATI and CAWI; *Présidoscopie*, tenth wave.

Methodological note: Based on cross-sorting for each of the surveys used, weighting according to socio-demographics and the results of the first round of the election (and for OpinionWay's CAWI, by education level), we created a weighted average, taking into account the size of the gross sample within each of the categories and for each source. These percentages should be seen more as scores ranking the candidates by gender than as representative totals of the votes cast for the population as a whole. The same method was adopted for the tables that follow (7, 8, 9 and 10).

How to read this table: Among men in the 18 to 24 year-old age group who voted during the first round of the presidential election, 20% said they had voted for Hollande.

Let us now examine the socio-professional categories of voters (Table 7). Among executives and intellectual and mid-level professionals, women were more likely to vote for Hollande than men were. The fact that women from these professional categories are most often civil servants or otherwise affiliated with the government constitutes, as we shall see, one of the main factors explaining the slight over-representation of Socialist Party voters among this population. Among working-class categories (both clerical and blue-collar workers), Hollande appeared to be equally attractive to men and women, while on the right women were more likely to vote for Sarkozy and men for Le Pen.

Le Pen obtained good scores among the unemployed, especially young people looking for their first job. This is quite logical, as her electorate is relatively young, working-class and characterised by low levels of education. Retirees were more likely to vote for Sarkozy than Le Pen. Once again, this result is consistent with what we saw regarding votes by age in Table 6. Finally, “housewives” generally stated that they voted for Sarkozy, but a strong percentage also voted for Le Pen.

Table 7: Socio-professional category or main occupation of voters for Hollande, Sarkozy and Le Pen (in %)

First round	Hollande		Sarkozy		Le Pen	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
Farmer	6	8	52	36	5	15
Artisan, shopkeeper and company director	12	18	35	33	23	16
Executive, Intellectual professions	27	35	24	24	6	8
Mid-level profession	26	34	19	21	14	9
Clerical workers	25	23	15	20	23	20
Blue-collar worker	25	21	14	15	27	22

Retired	26	27	31	34	12	10
Unemployed	29	26	24	21	20	22
Looking for first job	22	24	28	21	28	26
Stay at home spouse	41	20	24	29	10	23

Source and method: See Table 6.

How to read this table: Among male farmers who declared how they voted in the first round of the presidential election, 6% said that they had voted for Hollande. The size of the sample in certain cases was too limited to guarantee the accurate representation of the percentage displayed, in particular for farmers or stay-at-home males.

In terms of education levels (Table 8), the higher the level of education attained, the more likely both men and women were to vote for Hollande. This correlation was the strongest for women with the highest levels of education (higher than bac +2, equivalent to a graduate degree): one-third of them voted for Hollande while only one-quarter (23%) voted for Sarkozy. In terms of men with higher education levels, they seem to have been equally likely to vote for the UMP candidate, Sarkozy, as for the socialist one, Hollande (27%). With regard to the *Front National* candidate, Marine Le Pen, she was very clearly supported by less-educated voters of both sexes.

Table 8. Levels of education among declared voters for Hollande, Sarkozy and Le Pen (in %)

First round	Hollande		Sarkozy		Le Pen	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
No qualification	21	22	20	26	21	15
BEPC, CEP, CAP, BEP ¹	23	25	21	25	24	20
Baccalaureate (high school diploma)	25	25	21	23	17	19
Baccalaureate +2	27	24	24	30	15	12
Higher than Bac +2	27	33	27	23	7	6

Source and method: See Table 6.

How to read this table: Among men with no qualifications who voted in the first round of the presidential election, 21% stated that they had voted for Hollande.

In terms of living standards, calculated on the basis of income per consumer unit (see Table 9), it is clearly evident that voters of both sexes for Sarkozy and, to a lesser extent, for Hollande, came first and foremost from high-income households, whereas Le Pen voters, on the other hand, very clearly came from low-income households. Specifically, a quarter of male voters and a fifth of female voters with very low incomes (in the lowest quartile) voted for Le Pen. The subjective living standard, calculated on the basis of a

1. *Translator's note:* The BEPC is a French national diploma given to students after ninth grade. The equivalent period covered in the UK and US is roughly middle school. The CEP was awarded at the end of elementary primary education in France; it was discontinued in 1989. The CAP is a certificate of professional aptitude awarded to secondary students having obtained the level of a skilled labourer or qualified employee. The BEP, created in 1967, is an intermediate secondary school diploma for those seeking to complete a professional baccalaureate in three years.

question which asked if the person polled had trouble making ends meet at the end of each month, produced the same result.

Table 9: Living standard among Hollande, Sarkozy and Le Pen voters (in %)

First round	Hollande		Sarkozy		Le Pen	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
Q1 (poorest quartile)	23	23	15	19	25	20
Q2	26	26	19	23	18	17
Q3	25	29	23	27	17	12
Q4 (richest quartile)	27	31	29	34	11	8

Source and method: See Table 6. Living standards are expressed in household income quartiles per consumer unit (as calculated by the Insee).

How to read this table: Among the poorest men who voted in the first round of the presidential election, 23% stated that they had voted for François Hollande.

Finally, Table 10, which cross-references according to voters' employment status and gender, confirms that civil servants were more likely to vote for Hollande than for Sarkozy or Le Pen. With the exception of male salaried civil servants, who were less likely to vote for Sarkozy than their female counterparts, the effect of employment status does not appear to be significantly influenced by gender. Nevertheless, gender does have consequences on voting behaviour in the sense that women are over-represented in state, territorial and hospital sectors of the civil service (which is composed of 60% female and 40% male employees).

Table 10: Employment status among Hollande, Sarkozy and Le Pen voters (in %)

First round	Hollande		Sarkozy		Le Pen	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
Civil servants or equivalent	29	31	12	19	18	14
Private sector employees	24	26	20	23	19	16
Self-employed	17	18	36	28	15	16

Source and method: See preceding note.

How to read this table: Among male civil servants (or equivalent positions) who voted in the first round of the presidential election, 29% stated that they had voted for François Hollande.

Overall, differences in voting behaviour between men and women have become fairly insignificant. In addition, other factors such as age, education level and public versus private sector employment appear to have a much larger impact on voting behaviour and often explain the gender-based differences in various segments of the population when grouped together. Consequently, few elements remain today which defend and support the notion that gendered political socialisation is still relevant in terms of electoral behaviour.

Evolution of the French radical right gender gap

During the 2007 presidential election, Mariette Sineau¹ highlighted the fact that young women's reasons for rejecting the *Front National* were different from those of older women. Whereas the latter based their rejection on religious convictions, the former objected to the party's authoritarianism and paternalism. Sineau also observed that in 2007, in contrast to 2002 where young women lagged behind on *Front National* votes (-10 points compared with young men), as many women voted for Le Pen as men did.² She analysed this alignment not so much as an electoral gain among young women due to a so-called "Marine Le Pen effect" than as the result of a dwindling young male audience, increasingly attracted to Sarkozy instead.³

In her analysis of the evolution of the French radical right gender gap as observed during presidential elections between 2002 and 2012,⁴ Nonna Mayer identifies three explanatory factors: the shift of the gendered distribution of jobs and trades towards the increased economic vulnerability and poverty of women;⁵ the ambivalence of older Catholic female voters, whose fear of Islam offsets their understanding of the message of tolerance as expressed by the Catholic church;⁶ and the Marine Le Pen effect, which provided the image of a modern woman, divorced with three children and living with her partner.

With regard to the first point, the data presented in Tables 6, 7 and 8 would seem to indicate the persistence of opposition to the *Front National* from working-class women with low incomes. One possible explanation for this is that in this segment of the population, men are more likely to work in sectors that are prone to competition from foreigners and thus more receptive to xenophobic rhetoric. This explanation can be tested by referring to the question asked in the Cevipof post-electoral poll on the fear that the European Union would cause unemployment in France to increase. A total of 69% of women expressed this fear, compared with only 59% of men. This ten-point differential is even more significant if one considers that this fear appears to be a decisive element for Marine Le Pen voters, in particular women: 96% of women who voted for Le Pen expressed this fear, compared with "only" 80% of the men who did. The slight voting preference of young men for Le Pen is thus not the result of a fear of foreign competition, since they are more liable than women to work in sectors where such competition is felt acutely. This fear is vaguer and also more specifically linked to economic vulnerability, a factor which disproportionately affects women.

1. Mariette Sineau, "Effets de genre, effets de génération?", *Revue française de science politique*, 57(3-4), 2007, 353-69.

2. M. Sineau, "Effets de genre...", 357.

3. M. Sineau, *La force du nombre*, 82.

4. Based on an election day phone poll (n = 1,515), 22 April 2012, conducted by TNS Sofres, Sopra Group, TriElec-Sciences Po Bordeaux, Grenoble and Paris, TFI, Métro, available at the following URL: <<http://www.pacte-grenoble.fr/blog/resultats-du-sondage-tns-sofres-avec-trielec-du-22-avril-2012/>>.

5. Nonna Mayer, *Ces Français qui votent Le Pen* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002); Terri E. Givens, "The radical right gender gap", *Comparative Political Studies*, 37(1), 2004, 30-54; Phyllis Rippey, "When women are right. The influence of gender, work and values on European far right party support", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9(3), 2007, 379-97.

6. Nonna Mayer, Guy Michelat, "Les transformations du rapport à l'Autre: le rôle des identités politiques et religieuses", in *Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'Homme, La lutte contre le racisme et la xénophobie* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2006), 122-38; Nonna Mayer, Guy Michelat, Vincent Tiberj, "Étranger, immigré, musulman: les représentations de 'l'autre' dans la société française", in *Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'Homme, La lutte contre le racisme et la xénophobie* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2007), 104-23.

Turning now to the second explanation proposed by Nonna Mayer to elucidate the erosion of the French radical right gender gap: according to the Cevipof post-electoral survey, religion continues to play a protective role vis-à-vis votes for the *Front National*. Compared to voters with no stated religion, regularly practising Muslims and Catholics (attending services at least once or twice a month) were less likely to vote for Le Pen than the national average, while non-practising Catholics were a little more likely to vote for her than the average. There was no clear difference on this point between men and women. As women are slightly more likely to be practising than men (according to the post-electoral survey conducted by phone, 8% compared to 4%), the religious criterion does indeed remain a possible – but limited – explanation for the persistence of the French radical right gender gap. More specifically, women were more likely to state that they had a negative view of Islam than men were: according to the post-electoral survey conducted by phone, 45% of men and 34% of women said that the word “Islam” had a somewhat or very positive connotation for them. And yet, the negative connotation of Islam is a decisive element in ballots cast for the *Front National*. Moreover, it appears that this rejection of Islam is not linked to feminist concerns with the issue of the Islamic veil or *hijab* because, on this specific topic, as many men as women consider that “respecting a Muslim religious practice such as wearing a full-face veil can present a problem for life in society”.¹

Turning now to regularly practising Catholics: 38% of women felt that the word “Islam” is somewhat or very positive, compared with 47% of men, according to the post-electoral telephone survey. On the flipside, only 69% of Catholic women consider public prayer to be a problem, compared with 80% of male Catholics. Likewise, 78% of these women believe that wearing full-face veils can be problematic, compared with 84% of regularly practising Catholic men. Interestingly enough, regularly practising Catholic women appear to be simultaneously more distrustful of Islam than their male brethren, but also more tolerant of its public forms of expression (public prayer, veil wearing). This ambivalence, as well as the limited size of this population in the electorate as a whole, would seem to marginalise the explanation of the erosion of the French radical right gender gap due to the rallying of older Catholic female voters to the *Front National*, in particular with respect to the question of Islam.

Finally, in terms of the “*effet Marine Le Pen*” on the erosion of the radical right gender gap in France, the ninth wave of the *Présidoscopia* poll (for which 4,075 individuals were surveyed online) allowed the image of the different candidates to be studied. It turned out that there was no difference between men and women on this issue. Le Pen’s political image is illustrated in Table 11. One of her weaknesses during the campaign appears to have been the fragility of her presidential stature, when compared with Sarkozy, as can be ascertained from the qualitative interviews conducted with “undecided” voters as part of the *Présidoscopia* panel. Le Pen only managed to convince one-quarter of those polled on this subject, with a minor difference between women and men (29% and 27% respectively). The idea that the country needed a strong leader with ample experience was thus an expectation of both male and female *Front National* supporters. The fact that only 34% of women, compared with

1. The question is nevertheless somewhat ambiguous, as the tail end of the sentence (“can present a problem for life in society”) can be interpreted as either a moral condemnation of the religious practice in question, or as a factual statement acknowledging that this practice is currently at the heart of highly contentious public debate. Nevertheless, it seems to us that in any case, it is possible to use this question as indicating the rejection or at least distrust of Islam.

37% of men, agreed that “Marine Le Pen understands people like me” challenges the notion that being a “contemporary women, free, modern, divorced and a mother of three” (as her campaign site never fails to mention) gave her an inherently favourable image to women, who would supposedly feel better understood and represented by such a candidate.

Table 11. Image of Marine Le Pen (in %)

Percentage that feels that the statement below applies well or very well to Marine Le Pen	Men	Women
She is sincere	44	43
She is likeable	36	33
She is dynamic	68	68
She is competent	33	35
She worries me	54	54
She has presidential stature	27	29
She has convictions	72	72
She will keep her promises	36	38
She understands people like me	37	34

Source: ninth wave of the *Présidoscopie* poll.

Note: Total of the “well” and “very well” responses to the question: “For each of the following statements, do you feel that it applies very well, well, somewhat poorly, or very poorly to Marine Le Pen?”.

Analysing the Cevipof post-electoral survey and the *Présidoscopie* poll leads us to look elsewhere for the reasons behind the convergence of male and female voters when faced with the *Front National*. One of the reasons why the *Front National* seems to have attracted female voters is that Marine Le Pen refocused the party’s rhetoric on the economy. Less staunchly neoliberal and more inclined towards solidarity and the redistribution of wealth, Le Pen’s economic programme was better suited to meet the expectations of a population living in times of hardship than the proposals previously espoused by her father. This shift had already begun to occur after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Jean-Marie Le Pen abandoned his anti-communist agenda in favour of a minimalist state for a more social programme, so as to attract the working-class electorate that was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the French Communist Party. Marine Le Pen thus benefited from an earlier political shift, which is now bearing fruit with a younger electorate seeking a strong but selective social protection system – strong precisely because it is selective (aid would no longer be given to immigrants, to put it succinctly).

As can be seen in Table 12, demand for the redistribution of wealth in the name of social justice is stronger among women (63%) than men (57%). This is a common result, linked to the greater economic vulnerability of women. Equally without surprise is the fact that voters’ opinions on redistribution are strongly linked to their position on the political spectrum. The left sees the redistribution of wealth as a major aspect of social justice, while the right downplays this point without necessarily excluding it. However, the position of Marine Le Pen’s electorate was rather surprising: the call for redistribution was much stronger among women (63%) in the party than men (48%) – as though, from the female point of view, the

Front National was a fairly centrist party on the issue of redistribution. This 15-point difference between male and female Le Pen voters supports the hypothesis of a link between the erosion of the radical right gender gap in France and the greater tendency for women to appreciate the renewed economic focus of the *Front National*.

Table 12: Do you somewhat or completely agree with the following statement: “In order to establish social justice, one must take from the rich to give to the poor”, according to ballots cast in the first round (in %)

	Men	Women
Nathalie Arthaud	60	71
Philippe Poutou	93	88
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	81	76
Eva Joly	81	78
François Hollande	78	82
François Bayrou	44	54
Nicolas Sarkozy	31	41
Nicolas Dupont-Aignan	50	59
Marine Le Pen	48	63
Total	57	63

Source: OpinionWay-Cevipof post-electoral survey, CATI version, weighted according to socio-demographic factors and the first two rounds of the election.

How to read this table: Among men who stated that they had voted for Marine Le Pen, 48% either somewhat agreed or completely agreed with the proposal that one should take from the rich to give to the poor.

The *Front National* and “those left behind”¹

The *Présidoscopie* poll followed 6,000 individuals throughout the presidential campaign, frequently asking them questions about their voting intentions and the reasons for their choices. In tandem with the quantitative waves conducted online, qualitative interviews were also conducted over the telephone to pinpoint decisive factors, in particular for panellists who expressed a change in their voting intentions (“undecided” voters).²

These undecided voters had one element in common: they all condemned the election-eering of the political landscape, which resembled “a playground” where media hype and polemics discredited politicians both on the left and the right, and which was not constructive for “the common men and women” (“les Français moyens”), who were being “taken for a ride” or treated as “cash cows”. They criticised the traditional parties for not “protecting the French”, even more so during this period of crisis, either by “regaining

1. In particular, see the media's treatment of the subject as a campaign theme: “Marine Le Pen se pose en candidate des ‘oubliés’”, *Reuters*, 11 December 2011; “Marine Le Pen, porte-voix des ‘invisibles’”, *Le Journal du dimanche*, 12 December 2011; Pascal Riché, “La France des ‘invisibles’ et des ‘oubliés’ de Marine Le Pen”, *Rue89*, 19 December 2011; Arnaud Focraud, “Les candidats cherchent les ‘invisibles’”, *Le Journal du dimanche*, 21 January 2012; Laurent de Boissieu, “Le thème des Français ‘invisibles’ ou ‘oubliés’ s’impose dans la campagne”, *La Croix*, 22 January 2012; Jean-Claude Jaillette, “Marine Le Pen retrouve les ‘invisibles’ à Hénin-Beaumont”, *Marianne*, 16 April 2012.

2. Pascal Perrineau (ed.), *La décision électorale en 2012* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2013).

their independence from those technocrats in Brussels”, by protecting “our jobs” and “our economic sovereignty”, or by giving priority to French citizens for social aid and assistance. Votes for Le Pen were precisely motivated by the fact that she presented herself as the candidate who would refocus aid on “those who have lost out during the crisis – French citizens”, “the injured parties”, whether these were blue-collar workers, the retired or the unemployed. Le Pen voters also cited the importance of the measure to increase salaries under 1,500 euros by 200 euros, the re-evaluation of retirement pensions, and greater control over consumer credit rates and housing loans.

Jacqueline (aged 68, former clerical worker, living alone in a large urban area) is a retired woman forced to work in order to supplement her 624 euro pension; she says that “she recognises herself in Le Pen [because] she’s looking out for my wallet”. She connects the fact that she does not receive social assistance with the “influx of illegal immigrants” into a “France that has been living above its means”. Christiane (aged 62, former clerical worker, living with her partner in a large urban area) also complains about her weak purchasing power while lamenting the fact that the state is inept at identifying those who need help (“it’s not the most needy who receive help”) and offers benefits to some but not others (according to her, civil servants have a better retirement scheme than private sector employees). Isabelle (aged 41, administrative assistant in a company, living with her partner and two children in a large urban area) is very clear on the reasons why she voted for Marine Le Pen: “Immigrants, in the city where I live, they get help all the time [...] I haven’t worked since December, so my husband has to work for two and we don’t get anything. No housing assistance, just the standard family benefits, no extra cash for back-to-school expenses [...] I don’t get unemployment benefits [...] Immigrants are here to take advantage of the system”. She criticises the fact that “others get benefits, but not us”: for example, that subsidised housing is given to immigrants’ families, which means that she doesn’t get access to it. Finally, as she emphasises clearly, it is this hope for the “refocusing” of social benefits on French citizens that is the core reason behind her vote: “*Is there anything else in Marine Le Pen’s platform that you liked?* No, because that’s the only issue I am interested in”. Gisèle (aged 26, owns her own company, living with her partner in a rural area) also clearly associates her electoral choice for Le Pen with a legitimate social programme – legitimate because it relies on the principle of national priority. In fact, according to her, “we give way too much to people who come from all over the world and we forget the essentials, that is to say our elderly and those in economic difficulties. I think that we have to start taking care of our own household before we take care of the whole world”.

In these interviews, what came through most clearly was the feeling that the social welfare state should better identify the people it needs to help and avoid unnecessary expenses and benefits granted to “rich people” and immigrants.

*
* *

Beyond the consensus on the principle of gender equality, the 2012 presidential election was the occasion for much public debate regarding the issues involved in the political implementation of such a principle. Both male and female voters perceived that, on this issue, political positions were different and possibly divisive: left-wing party platforms called for reforms of the sexual order, while right-wing party platforms made the connection between the complementarity of the sexes and the need for equal treatment. However, although the

left/right cleavage outlines conflicts in terms of “conventions of equality”, the latter do not seem to be structured according to gender. In reality, the fact that the left-wing parties’ political platforms – in particular the EELV and the *Front de Gauche* – included a “transformation”¹ model allowing for “the identification of the systems and structures that are at the basis of indirect discrimination and a re-evaluation of these so as to remedy the problem”² does not guarantee them the votes of women. Similarly, neither are the right-wing parties – which share a vision of a sexual order based on the complementarity of the sexes and on equality in difference³ – sanctioned by women in electoral terms.

Since the 1980s, studies of voting behaviour have emphasised the alignment of the female vote with the male vote, linking this with the change in women’s status in terms of socio-economic autonomy. The reluctance of women to vote for the *Front National* can thus be interpreted as the expression of socio-demographic differences (in particular age and religion) which have a bearing on high-stakes issues. For the 2012 presidential election, analysing the Cevipof post-electoral survey and the *Présidoscopie* poll led us to relate voting differences according to gender to the effects of social position – the latter still being highly influenced by gender. In particular, the job market is markedly more polarised for women:⁴ the latter are over-represented in public service, which tends to be favourable towards the parties in government and more specifically to Hollande, but also among the most economically vulnerable and poorest segments of society⁵ (part-time workers, the working poor, single parents, the retired and those receiving a pension that is lower than the old-age pension minimum, etc.).

What the *Front National* offers, and which differs from the other political parties in the political landscape, is the protection of the principle of “national preference” (initially defined by her father) defended by Marine Le Pen in her 2012 presidential platform via the implementation of “national prioritization for jobs, housing and welfare benefits”. In the context of a crisis,⁶ this kind of rhetoric – which, far from promising to spend more, underscores the need to spend “better”, in particular by reserving social aid and protection for French citizens – meets the expectations of both the middle and lower classes. This conclusion echoes the hypothesis developed by Christophe Guilluy in *Fractures françaises*,⁷ according to which one of the breeding grounds for the *Front National*’s electorate can be found among the “poor whites” who don’t make enough to live downtown, and who flee the overly “diverse” suburbs to end up in peri-urban areas with the impression that they have been abandoned by the state, which concentrates its efforts on the “mixed ethnicity” suburbs currently attracting so much media attention. The erosion of the French radical right gender

1. Nancy Fraser, *Qu'est-ce que la justice sociale? Reconnaissance et redistribution* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), 107-44.

2. Teresa L. Rees, *Women and the EC Training Programmes. Tinkering, Tailoring and Transforming* (Bristol: University of Bristol, School of Advanced Urban Studies/Policy Press, 1995), 46-8 (translated by the authors).

3. Joan W. Scott, *Parité! L'universel et la différence des sexes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005), 248; Réjane Sénac, *L'invention de la diversité* (Paris: PUF, 2012).

4. Françoise Milewski, “Égalité dans l'emploi: un demi-siècle de progrès et de reculs”, in Sandrine Dauphin, Réjane Sénac (eds), *Femmes-hommes: penser l'égalité* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2012), 83-96; Françoise Milewski, Sandrine Dauphin, Nadia Kesteman et al., *Les inégalités entre les femmes et les hommes: les facteurs de précarité*, report submitted to the minister in charge of gender equality, Nicole Ameline, on 5 March 2005 (Paris: La Documentation française, 2005).

5. Janine Mossuz-Lavau, “Pauvres parmi les pauvres? Des femmes”, *Les essais*, Fondation Jean-Jaurès, 17, 2008; Évelyne Duhamel, Hervé Joyeux, “Femmes et précarité”, *Les études du conseil économique, social et environnemental*, February 2013.

6. Myriam Revault d'Allonnes, *La crise sans fin. Essai sur l'expérience moderne du temps* (Paris: PUF, 2012).

7. Christophe Guilluy, *Fractures françaises* (Paris: François Bourin, 2010).

gap may thus be caused by the appeal of the *Front National's* social repositioning, in particular for the poorer segments of society where women are predominant.¹

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