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# What kind of economic relation impacts right-wing populist vote?

Alexis Baudour

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Institut d'études politiques de Paris

**ECOLE DOCTORALE DE SCIENCES PO**

Programme doctoral de Sociologie

Max Planck Sciences Po Center on Coping with instability in Markets Societies  
et le Centre de recherche sur les inégalités sociales

Doctorat en sociologie

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# What kind of economic relation impacts right-wing populist vote?

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**Alexis Baudour**

Thesis supervised by  
Olivier GODECHOT

Defence on 15th May 2023

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**Abstract :**

We explore the relationship between the right-wing populist vote, economy and status decline. First, we propose a relational model linking the Right-Wing populism (RWP) vote and economic transformations. These transformations would induce a divergence between "winner" groups and "loser" groups (Kriesi et al., 2008), and members of the "losers" group would fear falling into a lower status group subjectively associated with immigrants. We show Le Pen voters have a strong feeling of social decline. Losers groups are operationalised as shrinking professional sectors. There is a robust correlation between the extent of such sectors and the increase of Le Pen votes in French cities. Furthermore, this effect seems stronger in cities where the educational level in shrinking sectors is low. These populist cities are characterised by a divergence in the distribution of income between the working class and the rising middle class. We apply this relational model to understand the spectacular 2017 vote increase of Marine Le Pen in the north of France. However, the region's mining history, as an additional factor, is critical to understanding the Le Pen's success there.

Second, we explore the link between inter-generational status decline and the RWP vote. We found a strong association between subjective status decline and populist vote for men but not for women. We consider three hypotheses to explain this disparity. First, status anxiety and the feeling of not getting their "fair share" for men would be associated with bitterness against women and minorities. Second, downward-mobile women would be more feminist and, therefore, less likely to support right-wing populism. Lastly, downward mobile men have a higher perception of external locus of control (attribution of failures to external causes) than women. This would impact their political inclinations. Our data supports only this last hypothesis. These results shed some light on the puzzle of the gender gap vote (Immerzeel et al., 2015).

**Résumé :**

Nous considérons les relations entre vote populiste de droite, économie et déclin social. Premièrement, nous proposons un modèle relationnel reliant le vote populiste et les transformations économiques. Ces transformations induiraient une divergence entre les groupes de "gagnants" et de "perdants" (Kriesi et al., 2008) ; les membres du groupe des "perdants" craindraient d'être associés à un groupe de statut inférieur subjectivement associé aux immigrants. Nous montrons que les électeurs de Le Pen ont un fort sentiment de déclin social. Ces groupes sont opérationnalisés comme des secteurs professionnels déclinants. Il existe une corrélation robuste entre l'étendue du déclin de ces secteurs et l'augmentation du vote Le Pen dans les villes françaises. En outre, cet effet semble plus fort dans les villes où le niveau d'éducation des secteurs en déclin est faible. Ces villes populistes se caractérisent par une divergence entre les revenus de la classe ouvrière et la classe moyenne. Nous appliquons ce modèle relationnel pour comprendre la spectaculaire progression du vote de Marine Le Pen en 2017 dans le nord de la France. Cependant, l'histoire minière de la région, comme facteur additionnel, est essentielle pour comprendre le succès de Le Pen dans cette région.

Deuxièmement, nous explorons le lien entre le déclin intergénérationnel et le vote populiste. Nous avons trouvé une forte association entre le déclin du statut subjectif et le vote populiste pour les hommes mais pas pour les femmes. Nous envisageons trois hypothèses pour expliquer cette disparité. Premièrement, l'anxiété liée au statut et le sentiment de ne pas recevoir sa "juste part" pour les hommes seraient associés à l'amertume envers les femmes et les minorités. Ensuite, les femmes en mobilité descendante seraient plus féministes et, par conséquent, moins susceptibles de soutenir le populisme de droite. Enfin, les hommes en déclin ont une perception de locus de contrôle externe (attribution des échecs à des causes externes). Ceci aurait un impact sur leurs inclinaisons politiques. Nos données ne soutiennent que cette dernière hypothèse. Ces résultats apportent un éclairage sur le puzzle de l'écart de vote entre les hommes et les femmes (Immerzeel et al., 2015).

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# Introduction

## The sociology of the vote choice

The recent rise of the right-wing populism (RWP) vote has been a source of significant concern in the Western world, especially since the victory of Trump and Brexit in 2016. While this global upward political trend is clear ([Heinö, 2016](#)), the causes of this general phenomenon are still elusive. In order to understand the factors which favour the right-wing populism vote, it makes sense to start to look at the sociology literature on the vote choice for mainstream parties. This sociology literature has been built in clear opposition to the economic literature on vote choice.

For the economists, ([Downs et al., 1957](#)) voting would be a rational choice as most others choices. Like a shopping consumer, the voter would weigh the different political outcomes depending on the winning party compared to the personal material interests of the voter. The voter would then choose the platform fitting most of his interests. This optimisation process can be combined with game theory and information theory ([Lupia et al., 1998](#)) where the analysis considers the lack of information to base a voting decision and potential non-cooperative behaviours like politicians' false promises.

In contrast to the micro approach of the economists, the sociologists often use a "macro-sociological approach" ([Sharlamanov & Jovanoski, 2014](#)) to study the vote choice like [Lipset et al. \(1967\)](#). In this approach, the individuals are in conflict and promote the interests of the social groups that they represent through their vote. Social class is central here to determine

the boundaries between these social groups.

The Columbia school ([Zuckerman et al., 1994](#); [Berelson & Paul, 1954](#)) emphasises the role of the political orientation of the family and the political socialisation. This political socialisation would push the individuals in their childhood to foster particular values and interests that would translate to specific political preferences. The influence of friends and the media would complete this socialisation. The Michigan school ([Campbell et al., 1980](#)) represented by psychology researchers also insists on the importance of parental influence, which would be crucial to "party identification", which is the core concept of this psychological approach to voting choice.

Contrary to the classical sociological approach, the dominant ideology thesis ([B. S. Turner et al., 2014](#)) emphasises the ability of media to have a massive influence on the outcome of the elections to impose issues for discussion favourable to a particular party. The dominant ideology thesis claims that in each society, some values and beliefs are dominant and spread in a pervasive manner. Media are, therefore, instrumental in this proselytising work.

It is somewhat surprising the sociology literature regarding the explanations of the RWP vote is quite disconnected from the vote choices theories we briefly described. [Mayer & Perrineau \(1992\)](#) "stress the inadequacy of the classical models of voting behaviour" to explain the RWP vote. These models assert that the voter is rational in different ways because he tends to follow internal preferences or norms to make an informed decision. Nevertheless, it is not clear this is a good way to describe the RWP voters.

We can concede that the voters have clear preferences regarding their concerns about high immigration or criminality. However, the RWP vote does not seem to represent a "rational choice" resulting from optimising a utility function, as these concerns seem irrational quite often. For instance, the RWP voters may fear immigration despite living in places without many immigrants ([Amengay & Stockemer, 2018](#)) or they also tend to overestimate the local level of insecurity ([Mayer & Perrineau, 1996](#)), as "they lock themselves up

at home before eight o'clock, and have spy holes and chains on their doors" (Mayer & Perrineau, 1992). So the rational choice model does not describe well the RWP voters.

Furthermore, the classical models posit that vote choices are stable, but RWP supporters are fluctuating. Moreover, they fail to identify with the party they vote for in contradiction with the Michigan school model. They even sometimes vote for a candidate whose they do not wish their victory (Mayer & Perrineau, 1992).

Regarding social classes, if the 2022 Le Pen vote could be identified as a working-class vote (thanks to the Zemmour candidacy), the 1980s Le Pen vote drawn from "all groups of the population, old and young, rich and poor, Catholics and non-Catholics, rural and urban, upper and working class" (Mayer & Perrineau, 1992). The heterogeneity and the instability of the social composition of the RWP voters make it challenging to use a social class framework to describe the RWP vote. Even if we identify, for instance, the Le Pen vote with a working-class vote in France (which is very debatable), we may end up considering a conflict between the white working class and an immigrant working class.

The dominant ideology thesis seems more promising. Indeed the RWP parties are, like the other parties, very dependent on the media for their success (Bos et al., 2011), and the regular coverage of illegal immigration stories or insecurity incidents are clearly favourable for such parties. However, the media tend to give an "authoritarian" image of the RWP leaders (Bos et al., 2010). The RWP supporters often consider the media to give a terrible and unfair image of their party. "De-demonization" mediatic strategies are therefore explicitly adopted to improve the perception of the public (Ivaldi, 2016).

Given the inadequacy of the traditional models of the social sciences, understanding the puzzling motivations of the RWP voters is a tough challenge. Some sociologists are tempted to conclude to the "irrationality" (Frank, 2007) of the RWP voters. Of course, we will not accept here such a short answer.

In this PhD, we will focus only on the economic explanations (often opposed to the cultural factors, see [Inglehart & Norris \(2016\)](#)) of the RWP vote. More precisely, our research question is "how do economic factors contribute in a relational manner to the success of the radical right in Europe?" However our purpose is not to get into the old "culture versus economy dichotomy" debate ?, but to better understand one facet of the RWP vote.

The following section will explore the literature linking the RWP vote to the economy. We will then argue about the added value of a relational approach to understand this link economy/RWP vote. We will conclude this introduction with an outline of the PhD.

## **Does economy matter?**

The economy as an explanatory factor of right-wing populism is hotly debated. Still, at first glance, exploring the RWP vote with an economic angle seems ill-inspired. Economic factors of the RWP have been studied for a long time. However, this current literature on economic influences gives a contradictory and puzzling picture. Some scholars actually wonder if the economy is relevant to the RWP successes like Brexit ([Grönlund, 2009](#)). According to [Stockemer \(2017\)](#), between 2009 to 2013, the economic crisis merely triggered a very moderate increase of 1 percentage point in the aggregate average regional vote share of the radical right. If the deepest economic crisis since almost a century had only a barely noticeable electoral effect, one might doubt the economy's relevance in this matter. [Mayer & Klandermans \(2006\)](#) interviewed 160 right-wing activists in Europe. They rarely mention economic issues and insist proudly on the economic costs and the missed opportunities implied by their political commitment.

The most studied explanatory economic factor in the literature is unemployment, but the expected relationship between unemployment and the RWP vote fails to appear in this empirical research ([Arzheimer & Carter, 2006](#); [Knigge, 1998](#)), or with limited external validity. "Most [studies find]

weak negative correlations" with unemployment (Mudde 2007, p.206). For some scholars, the effects of the unemployment variable may be conditional to others factors. For instance, [Aksoy \(2012\)](#) suggests unemployment would be only relevant in the case of an important immigrant minority. The meta-analysis done by [Amengay & Stockemer \(2018\)](#) does not establish any clear association between unemployment and the RWP vote.

If we look at the economic inequality (the gap between low-income workers and high-income workers), the results are more contrasted. For [Engler & Weisstanner \(2021\)](#), rising income inequality increases the likelihood of radical right support. RWP vote would be the symptom of "a widening social hierarchy". However, [Proaño et al. \(2022\)](#) did not reach the same conclusion. The relation between inequality and the RWP vote depends on how one measures economic inequality. In particular, the choice of the income group used for comparison to measure the level of inequality strongly impacts the effect found on the RWP vote. In this PhD, we will compare the first decile income to the top decile income and also the first decile income to the median income. As we shall see, both are relevant for the Le Pen vote but surprisingly in opposite directions.

These findings convinced us to use a relational approach to grasp better the complexity of these groups' comparisons and the links between the economy and the RWP vote. The geographic level (local or national) used to measure inequality is also relevant. Regarding poverty as an explanatory factor, deprived regions are more likely to support right-wing populist parties, but this association at the macro level does not seem to hold at the micro level ([Le Bras, 2015](#)).

If we look at other economic factors, [Halikiopoulou & Vlandas \(2016\)](#) showed unemployment, real GDP growth, debt and deficits have no statistically significant effect on far-right party support at the national level. However, they also found in the same paper that labour market institutions influence this relation: "Where unemployment benefits and dismissal regulations are high, unemployment has no effect, but where either one of

them is low, unemployment leads to higher far-right party support". We should, therefore, not just look at unemployment but also at the consequences of unemployment and the risk of unemployment. [Rovny & Rovny \(2017\)](#) highlighted among "outsiders" workers, the ones who are the most likely to support an RWP party, have a relatively high income but a high risk of losing their job and, therefore, their income. Hence for [Maurin et al. \(2009\)](#) "la peur du déclassement" (the fear of falling) may be actually more relevant than the "déclassement" itself.

A particular case of people experiencing unemployment risks and this fear of falling are "losers of the modernisation" ([Minkenberg, 1998](#)). Many researchers see this group as supporting RWP parties, but "theoretically, they tend to remain vague about the exact effects of modernisation, particularly at the micro-level" ([Mudde, 2007, p.203](#)). Recently, many papers investigated the relationship between the right-wing populist vote and globalisation ([Rodrik, 2018](#)) and, in particular, "shocks" induced by increasing Chinese imports ([Ebenstein et al., 2014](#)). This research shows the most impacted regions are more populist: in the US ([Autor et al., 2017](#)), Germany ([Dippel et al., 2016](#)), UK ([Colantone & Stanig, 2018](#)), France ([Malgouyres, 2017](#)) and Europe ([Colantone & Stanig, 2017](#)). This consensus points clearly to Globalisation as an explicative factor. Interestingly, the impact of other financial shocks, such as housing prices, did not induce similar electoral shifts ([Autor et al., 2017](#)). This leads us to a paradoxical picture with an apparent influence of the economy on the populist vote at the macro level, but with populist voters seeing the economy as "secondary" ([Mudde, 2007](#)).

A last approach that could be qualified as economic is when economic decline leads to status decline, which could translate into an RWP vote ([Marx, 2019](#)). We can cite here the work of [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#) establishing a relation between the income deciles relative evolutions of workers and the RWP vote. Drawing inspiration from the concept of relative deprivation ([Runciman, 1966](#)), recent works ([Poutvaara & Steinhardt, 2018](#); [Peugny, 2006](#); [Burgoon et al., 2018](#); [Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012](#)) have tested the association

relative deprivation/ RWP support. Although the operationalisation differs a lot from one paper to another, the empirical results point all to the reality of this association.

So the RWP vote is not just the result of a "cultural backlash" (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Nevertheless, the links between the economy and the RWP vote are not a straightforward relation between unemployment or inequality and populism. However, much of the creative sociological research done during the last decade helps to grasp the subtle relations between the economy and the RWP vote.

In this PhD, we will aim to extend this last economic relational approach. As we pointed out, there are many ways to operationalise economic comparison between workers or between social groups. We can, for instance, compare workers in different professional sectors or regions, or a worker can be compared to his parents 30 years ago. We will try, therefore, different types of comparison in this PhD to identify which kind of inequality or economic dynamic are pertinent for the RWP vote. In the next section, we will define more precisely this relational approach.

## **A relational approach of the RWP vote**

In this PhD, we will attempt to use a relational approach to understand better the RWP vote. Here we want to contrast the sociology considering the world as "substances or processes" from relational sociology considering "dynamic, unfolding relations" (Emirbayer, 1997). In particular, "Rational-actor and norm-based models, diverse holisms and structuralisms, and statistical variable analyses" belong to the former.

Bourdieu considered the promotion of relational sociology as one of the "most essential [element]in my [his] work" (Bourdieu, 1998). An excellent example of relational sociology is his study of elite schools (Bourdieu, 1988). The actions and strategy of a school like Sciences Po can only be understood if we consider the actions of other related elite schools like ENA, ENS or



Polytechnique. Studying Sciences Po in the "vacuum" could lead to essentialist interpretations.

In his work, Bourdieu showed a clear disdain for classical "statistical variable analyses" like the regression, as they hide the relations between the agents we want to study. This PhD will use a lot of regression analysis. However, we will add variables aiming at grasping relations between the individuals.

In the social theories seen at the beginning of this introduction, we can notice they suggest "substantial models" (Emirbayer, 1997) of the vote decisions. Individuals obey internalised preferences and norms to make decisions regardless of their current environment. In particular, these models tend to give an image of a stable state of voters. However, they are not well designed to describe a dynamic electoral situation like the dramatic rise of an RWP party. The 2002 "meteoric rise" (van Holsteyn & Irwin, 2003) of "Pim Fortuyn" in the Netherlands would be an extreme example of this.

For Mudde (2007), Right-wing populism is composed of three core values: Nativism, authoritarianism and populism. In addition, three frameworks exist in the research on populism (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2013): Populism as a "political strategy", as a "discursive style" and as a "political ideology". We will use the political ideology framework from Mudde, which is flexible and allows for easy classification of parties. Mudde (2007) defines populism as a "thin-centred" ideology where the political field is framed as the opposition between "the corrupt elite" and the "pure people". Populist parties claim to give back the power to "the people". Populism as "thin-centred." ideology can combine with various other philosophies, such as neo-liberalism or protectionism.

A dynamic and relational approach to studying the RWP vote seems then better suited. In this approach, we consider the relation and interactions of the different field agents to understand each agent's behaviour. For instance, in the field of elite universities/schools of a country, one may not understand the strategy and the decisions of a particular university without taking into account the strategies and decisions of the other universities (Bourdieu, 1988).

The definition of populism in the literature has always been a "challenge" (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2013). In this PhD, we will try to avoid this difficulty by studying the voters for parties clearly identified as populist. However, to show the advantage of the relational approach, we can try the exercise of giving a relational definition of populism in western democracies. First, we can observe being "populist" as a politician is not substantive quality like being rich. Being "populist" is a stigma assigned by other people. Furthermore, this stigma is assigned based on particular "populist" propositions or ideas from these stigmatised politicians.

In order to define populist politicians, we need to identify first these people assigning this blame. In western democracies, there are clearly two groups of political parties that could be described as the mainstream left and the mainstream right. These parties push an agenda aligned with the interest of the economic middle/upper class for the mainstream right and of the cultural middle/upper class for the mainstream left.

There are topics of disagreement between these two groups, for instance, the reduction of the work time week for the mainstream left or the cut of the wealth tax for the mainstream right. However, there are consensual topics between the mainstream left and right, like the opposition to the death penalty in West Europe. A politician supporting the death penalty would be labelled as a populist.

This gives us a relational definition of a populist politician: A politician defending propositions contrary to both the mainstream left and right platforms. Indeed any French politician supporting propositions outside of the mainstream consensus like the death penalty, the exit of the European Union, the legalisation of cannabis or the use of the central banks to pay back the national debt would be easily qualified as populist.

This definition highlights a particular difficulty: Such a politician supporting the death penalty would not be qualified as a populist if she was American. Actually, it is probably more an American politician against the death penalty who is at risk of being labelled as a populist. As the consensus

between mainstream parties may vary from one country to another and from time period to another, very different persons may be labelled as populist, and it is, therefore, troublesome to try to find a substantial definition of populism.

Indeed, the fact that populism is a thin centre ideology [Mudde \(2007\)](#) where a leader like Marine Le Pen may easily switch her position on "secondary" economic themes like the Euro does not help this quest for a substantial definition. Furthermore, the dissident groups may depart from the consensus in different manners. It is difficult to point out what is shared between the French populist left (France Insoumise) and the French populist right (Front National) as they disagree on most things (tax reductions, deficit, police, ecology, immigration, unemployment policies, societal and discrimination issues...).

We are therefore convinced that adopting a relational approach help to avoid troublesome difficulties in defining populism and perceive new directions of research. We will then use different relational approaches to tackle our research question. This PhD will therefore explore the relational links between the economy and the RWP vote. Its main contribution will be a relational framework to understand how RWP relates to economic transformations. These transformations would induce a divergence between "winner" groups and "loser" groups, and members of the "losers" group fear falling into a lower-status group subjectively associated with immigrants. Losers groups are operationalised as shrinking professional sectors. We will apply this "fear of falling" framework in chapter 7 to understand the spectacular 2017 vote increase of Marine Le Pen in the north of France.

We will also present three secondary contributions. First, we will explore different hypotheses to explain the negative correlation between the increase in the local top decile income and the Le Pen vote. Second, we will show men experiencing the feeling of an inter-generational status decline are more likely to support RWP, but it is not the case for women. Several hypotheses will be considered to explain this disparity. In the last chapter, we test several

alternative hypotheses suggested in the literature linking economic status decline and the RWP vote.

For a lot of chapters, we will use data about France and the Le Pen vote. As we do not yet have the economic data for 2022, we will consider only the 1995-2017 period, and we will refer to her party as the FN (Front National) before it changes its name to Rassemblement National. As the FN had a situation close to a monopoly of right-wing populism during this period, and its two candidates were Jean-Marie and Marine Le Pen, it is easy to make time comparisons. We would like to test if our findings in the French case are still valid in other countries. However, we could not find comparable data to make relevant comparisons in many cases. Still, we will look at several EU countries using the 2009/2019 international survey program in chapter 6 and at dutch data (LISS survey). The following section will provide a detailed plan for the PhD.

## Plan

### **Chapter 1:** Unemployment is not a good predictor of Fn vote

In this chapter, we test the relation unemployment threat-Le Pen vote in 2017 with several operationalisations at the individual and canton levels. Using the 2017 French electoral study, we show that unemployment at the individual level is not a significant predictor of the Le Pen vote. At the canton level, the extent of unemployment is not a significant predictor of the 2002/2007/2012/2017 Le Pen vote (longitudinal model), using the following independent variables:

- numbers layoffs/ number of workers
- numbers of 10+ layoffs/ number of workers
- numbers of people quitting their job/ number of workers (turnover)

Interactions with the proportion of immigrants are also tested. Therefore, unemployment is not an explanatory factor of the Le Pen vote. Our fear of falling model, presented in the following three chapters, will explore

alternative measures of economic insecurity.

### **Chapter 2:** Shrinking professional sectors

This chapter will be the first part of our model, which includes shrinking professional sectors, income divergence between groups and the fear of falling into a despised group as explanatory factors of the RWP vote. We operationalise groups of people experiencing economic relegation due to structural economic transformations in a given sector as job loss in "shrinking professional sectors".

Our independent variable is, therefore, the amount of job loss in declining professional sectors divided by the number of jobs in these sectors. [Dancygier & Donnelly \(2013\)](#) suggest this variable is related to the populist vote. We will look in particular if such a relation exists for the industrial, construction, service and public sectors. We found this relation is relevant for the industrial sector.

As we expect the hardship and stress of workers in shrinking sectors to be higher if they lack appropriate cultural capital to adapt to economic transformations, we check if the effect of shrinking sectors is conditional on the level of cultural capital ([Bourdieu, 1984](#)). We, therefore, include the interaction job loss in shrinking professional sectors/education level.

### **Chapter 3:** Economic divergence

As the second part of our model is based on a relational perspective, we consider the divergence between the incomes of different social groups. According to [Hirschman & Rothschild \(1973\)](#), status anxiety would not come from a widening gap between the rich and the poor, but people would compare themselves with people of a similar socio/economic status. Therefore, we suggest such an economic divergence would foster a fear of falling, which will be tackled in detail in chapter 4.

As the data available to us restrict our ability to measure divergence between different social groups, as a proxy, we will use the income divergence between the working-class and the rising middle class. This divergence is operationalised as the five year evolution of the difference between the fifth

decile and the bottom decile income at the town level. The dependent variable is the Le Pen 2012-2017/2007-2012/2002-2007 vote variation per town.

All the studied periods show a strong correlation between the income divergence and the increase in the Le Pen vote. This divergence is especially drastic in towns in the north of France, where Le Pen achieved very impressive performances in 2017. A secondary finding is a negative correlation between the local top decile income increase and the Le Pen vote. This last point will be the topic of chapter 5.

#### **Chapter 4:** The Fear of Falling

Following [Peugny \(2006\)](#), we suggest downward subjective mobility is related to RWP support. As the last part of our model, the fear of falling into a despised group" would push individuals to assert a symbolic distance between them and individuals with lower perceived status (unemployed and immigrants). First, we test if individuals supporting RWP tend to feel a social status decline. Second, we look if RWP support is also associated with the perception of a worsening economic environment. Third, we check if the perception worsening economic environment is related to the vision of unemployed people as "undeserving" ("they could find a job if they really wanted to").

For the independent variables, we operationalise the subjective perception of social status decline as the difference in own status-family status. Other independent variables: "economy worse than 12 months ago", "my job is worst than my father".

After control, there is a strong association feeling of social decline→RWP support for men, "economy is worst than 12 months ago" → Le Pen vote (for men and women) and "economy is worst than 12 months ago" → "the unemployed are able to find a job if they really want" (for men and women).

**Chapter 5:** The link between the income gap top earners-workers and the FN vote

A solid and consistent relation between an increasing top decile income and a decreasing Le Pen vote was found in chapter 3. Understanding better the origin of this correlation is the puzzle of this chapter. We consider three hypotheses to make sense of this puzzle. First, it could be explained by a composition effect: Top decile increase could be the symptom of high-income people inflows in towns altering their social composition and, therefore, the Le Pen vote. Alternatively, the good fortune of the top earners could induce a consensual optimism regarding the economy, and such optimism may "prevent" the Le Pen vote, according to chapter 4. The last possible explanation of the puzzle is a contact hypothesis. An increase in the top decile is correlated to a higher presence of the top earners and, therefore, an increase of positive contact between people and them, reducing anti-establishment feelings linked to the Le Pen vote. Our empirical results seem to discredit the composition effect hypothesis and support the second hypothesis. The results are mixed regarding the contact hypothesis.

**Chapter 6:** Downward mobility and gender gap vote

We consider whether this feeling of status decline is a relevant factor for the RWP vote. Surprisingly it seems the reply is positive for men but negative for women. This result seems to hold for the different datasets tested (ISSP 2009/2019, FES 2017, Life in Transition survey).

In order to understand the origin of this disparity, we first look if this feeling of status decline is rooted in an objective economic decline. We measure objective status decline for men as the difference of status between "your job" and "your father's job" measured by ISEI and SIOPS indexes. We test if the objective status decline is strongly related to RWP support. We also check if the feeling of social decline in 2017 is stronger in départements where incomes stagnated between 1994 and 2016 (using medium income per canton ville). The relation between RWP support and objective status decline is weak. There is no correlation between the perception of status decline and lower wages growth in French départements.

Another interesting finding is: While men feeling generational status decline are more likely to vote for RWP parties, they are not more likely to be hostile to immigrants. We test three hypotheses that could explain this disparity between men and women. First, status anxiety and the feeling of not getting their "fair share" for men would be associated with bitterness against women and minorities. Second, downward-mobile women would be more feminist and, therefore, less likely to support right-wing populism. These two hypotheses did not lead to compelling results. However, the specific feature of these downward mobile men is their anti-establishment feelings which are typically highly correlated to the RWP vote. This could be explained by the external locus of control of men observed in psychology experiments (Sherman et al., 1997). We perform a mediation analysis to test the relation between status decline, and the RWP vote is mediated by items indicating an external locus of control for men.

#### **Chapter 7:** The FN upsurge in the north of France

In 2017 Marine Le Pen had improved her score the most by far in the North of France. In this chapter, we explore if the previous chapters' results help explain this FN breakthrough. Indeed we observe in the north of France a shrinking of the industrial sector, an income divergence, stigmatisation of the unemployed, and a feeling of status decline for men voting for Le Pen. However, these variables in this region do not seem to reach drastically different values from other similar French regions (except for the economic divergence).

We need, therefore, to consider other factors to understand the whole story of this case. One potential factor is the mining history of the region. While the history is ancient (most mines closed in the 70s and the 80s), this is still relevant to understand the politics in the north of France. As a consequence of the 2008 financial crisis, the industrial crisis may reactivate a traumatic history where left governments played a bad role and fueled an anti-establishment vote. We found that the 2017 vote for Le Pen was significantly higher in northern towns with a mining history.



## Chapter 8: Alternative hypotheses

This chapter considers three alternative hypotheses proposed in the literature to describe the relationship between economic status decline and the right-wing populist vote. According to these theories, immigrants can be seen as a threat to either customary "solidarity" [Wimmer \(1997\)](#), job market ([Autor et al., 2017](#)) or social capital ([Putnam, 1993](#)).

Alternatively, right-wing populist support could be a "coping mechanism" ([Marx, 2019](#); [Pellicer, 2018](#)): People would convert their negative feelings due to economic frustration to violence and anger directed toward immigrants. However, the data available was not sufficient to test this hypothesis.

For our empirical research, we use the LISS panel data (Netherlands), which asks the same question to individuals every year (2008-2018). Our dependent variable is an operationalisation of "a first vote for PVV": Support of a mainstream party for at least two years, then support of PVV ("switch to PVV"). We perform a longitudinal logistic regression with random effect to see if a switch to PVV is concomitant to the rise of a particular concern representing one of the three threats associated with the theories proposed in the literature.

Independent variables: 3 concerns related to immigration (questions asking the level of agreement on a 1-5 scale):

- Customary "solidarity" hypothesis: Legally residing foreigners should be entitled to the same social security as Dutch citizens.
- Job threat hypothesis: Some sectors of the economy can only continue to function because people of foreign origin or descent work there.
- Social capital hypothesis: It does not help a neighbourhood if many people of foreign origin or descent move in.

Our results only support the social capital hypothesis.

# Chapter 1

## The unemployment explanation

### Abstract

This chapter tests the relationship between the unemployment threat and the Le Pen vote. In particular, using the 2017 French electoral study, we look at unemployment, past unemployment or perception of the ability to find a job as a factor of the Le Pen vote at the individual level. At the canton level, we test the interaction unemployment/immigration drawing insight from [Aksoy \(2012\)](#), and we consider large layoff episodes and turnover as alternative independent variables. Overall our empirical results do not show any clear relation between unemployment and the Le Pen vote, confirming the literature and the necessity to use other economic indicators to understand the RWP vote.

### 1.1 Introduction

Economic hardships are a widespread explanation to support for right-wing populism (RWP) in western Europe. In particular, the mainstream media are often quick to link RWP and unemployment. However, the press

does not question if the rise of the RWP vote is concomitant to the rise in unemployment or if the western EU countries with the highest unemployment ratio, like Spain, are the ones with the highest RWP vote. This chapter aims to show that the focus on unemployment is too narrow to describe the economic factors linked to the populist vote. Therefore, the following chapters will study other facets of unemployment of economic precariousness and whether such factors are related to the RWP vote.

In sociology research, many studies have explored the links between unemployment and the RWP vote. In most studies, unemployment is the main independent variable and is used explicitly or implicitly as a proxy for "economic hardship". Overall the empirical results of the literature dismissed the widespread belief of a simple linear relationship between unemployment and RWP support. Despite these disappointing results, research on this topic is still very active. As pointed out by Hainmueller (2014):

"As an explanation of mass attitudes toward immigration, the labour market competition hypothesis has repeatedly failed to find empirical support, making it something of a zombie theory."

Arzheimer (2009) using a large database of Eurobarometer surveys found unemployed had an effect on RWP support, but this relation is mitigated by other variables and highly dependent on countries considered. According to a meta-analysis of Amengay & Stockemer (2018), unemployment as a structural predictor of the vote share of RWP parties "has shown inconsistent, often contradictory results." Indeed some studies show a negative correlation between unemployment and RWP support (Stockemer, 2016; Bloom, 2012), but it is more common not to find any effect (Goodwin et al., 2016; Gidron & Hall, 2017; Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2016). Several potential explanations proposed in the literature may shed some light on these confusing results.

First, the simplest one is a significant interaction between unemployment and immigration: Unemployment only matters when immigration is high (Aksoy, 2012; Golder, 2003). In this vision, unemployment would be only

related to immigration in voters' minds in places with a significant presence of immigrants. Both factors would reinforce each other to affect the RWP vote.

Second, another explanation of these ambiguous results could be that RWP support is possibly more related to the time evolution of unemployment and immigration than the absolute level of these two variables. [Coenders & Scheepers \(1998\)](#) claims "that support for ethnic discrimination is more widespread in times of high and increasing levels of ethnic immigration, as well as in times of growing unemployment. However, the level of unemployment as such has a negative effect on support for ethnic discrimination". Regarding cohort characteristics, the results show that the higher the level of ethnic immigration and unemployment during the formative years, the more widespread support for ethnic discrimination is". In this approach, the voters have some anchorage biases; therefore, we need to consider more the time evolution of unemployment than the actual level of unemployment.

Third, another possibility is the effect is conditional to the risk associated with unemployment ([Rovny & Rovny, 2017](#)). A possible interpretation could be: People experiencing unemployment may support left policies. On the other hand, individuals at risk of unemployment may favour RWP policies to prevent this risk. In this framework, unemployment benefits and dismissal regulations could be mediator variables ([Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2016](#); [Arzheimer, 2009](#)).

Finally, several recent economic papers investigated the relationship between the right-wing populist vote and globalization [Rodrik \(2018\)](#), and in particular, "shocks" induced by increasing Chinese imports [Ebenstein et al. \(2014\)](#). This research shows the most impacted regions are more populist: in the US [Autor et al. \(2017\)](#), Germany [Dippel et al. \(2016\)](#), UK [Colantone & Stanig \(2018\)](#), France [Malgouyres \(2017\)](#), and Europe [Colantone & Stanig \(2017\)](#). These results seem to indicate Globalisation is an explanatory factor of the RWP vote. Depending on the country of the individuals, the threat of unemployment may be associated with globalization itself associated with

immigration.

The link between RWP support and unemployment seems, therefore, quite blurry. The European countries where RWP support has been constantly strong for the last 30 years tend to be countries with a strong economy: Austria, Denmark and Switzerland with low unemployment come first in mind, but also populist regions in Belgium and Italy (Flanders and north of Italy) are economically strong regions. France is the only exception in this list. The historical decrease in unemployment did not prevent the presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round of the 2002 presidential election.

This chapter aims to confirm the lack of a direct relationship between unemployment and the Le Pen vote during the 2017 election. In order to do that, we will use micro-level data from the 2017 French electoral study and macro-level data with different measures of unemployment in French cantons.

## **1.2 Methodology**

### **1.2.1 Micro level data**

The French electoral study 2017 is a poll of French voters during the 2017 presidential election with more than 340 questions. This survey is beneficial to understand the features of Le Pen voters. In this section, the focus will be on unemployment, the risk of unemployment and globalization concerns. Unemployment as an independent variable is given directly by the FES 2017 survey. For the risk of unemployment that may be relevant to populist support (Rovny & Rovny, 2017), we use two proxies: First, the question asking if "you have ever been unemployed for more than three months", and second "the perceived ability to find a new job within the next 12 months" if necessary. For the latter, the perception of job opportunities easily available is probably related to a low risk of unemployment. This second independent variable is clearly subjective, and even the first one would only provide a rough estimate of the objective chances of becoming unemployed. The focus

here is the subjective perception of the unemployment risk; the macro-level data will aim at a more objective measure of the risk of unemployment.

For the concerns related to globalization, two items will be used: "Economic consequences of globalization are very negative for France" and "Customs barriers and economic protectionism should be restored in France". Here the objective is more modest than in the paper of [Malgouyres \(2017\)](#), where the impact of economic shocks on electoral support for the far-right is measured in an objective manner. While the correlations found by [Malgouyres \(2017\)](#); [Autor et al. \(2017\)](#); [Rodrik \(2018\)](#) are quite compelling, we need more research to understand the exact mechanism linking globalization and the right-wing populist vote. Nevertheless, if there is an objective link between globalization and the Le Pen vote, it is reasonable to assume such a link will be visible with subjective questions on globalization.

The dependent variable will be the vote for Marine Le Pen in the first round of the 2017 presidential election. Only respondents stating a vote for a candidate will be considered: The Le Pen vote is still quite stigmatized, so it would not be surprising that some of the "abstentionists" or "blank voters" are, in fact, Le Pen supporters. In the regression analysis, the control variables will be income, gender, age, education (4 levels), and job sectors (not working will be the reference).

### **1.2.2 Macro level data**

In order to measure unemployment and the risk of unemployment in an objective manner, we consider unemployment at the French canton level. Obviously, the fact a canton with a high unemployment level has a Le Pen vote does not indicate the numerous unemployed people who vote for Le Pen. But it would show the influence of a high unemployment level and, therefore, the risk of unemployment to all the voters.

The objective unemployment situation of a canton is not necessarily a piece of information easily available and shared by all residents. Furthermore, it is possible spectacular downsizing measures publicized by local media tend

to influence more voters than the barely visible mass of unemployed people. Unexpected layoffs in previously thriving sectors may be more impactful in the mind of voters than the difficulty of long-term unemployed people. Several operationalizations will be considered to measure these different facets of the unemployment phenomenon.

The first independent variable will be the unemployment ratio at the canton level. To take into account the dynamic of unemployment, we consider the layoff and exits from companies as independent variables. In recent years in France, the number of layoffs decreased in favour of voluntary redundancy. It is then not clear between voluntary exits or layoffs from companies which one has a stronger electoral effect. Olivier Godechot and the CASD made available extensive data for each canton, including the number of people experiencing layoffs and exits from companies.

We compute the ratio of layoffs and exits compared to the number of jobs for each canton for 2002/2007/2012/2017. To check if large-scale layoffs are more impactful, we also look at the exit ratio in large companies and the largest layoff episode in each canton.

The analysis will use a longitudinal regression using first difference and within models with unemployment/exit/layoff ratios as independent variables. First difference models, looking at variations from one period to another, will enable us to study the [Coenders & Scheepers \(1998\)](#) hypothesis: There is a correlation between the rise of unemployment and the rise of RWP vote. The dependent variable will be the Le pen score in a given canton during the 2002/2007/2012/2017 presidential elections. As control variables, we add the log of the number of voters, education (4 levels), mean wage and the proportion of immigrants. Interactions with the proportion of immigrants will also be considered to test [Aksoy \(2012\)](#) claims about a stronger effect of unemployment in places with more immigrants.

## 1.3 Results

### 1.3.1 Micro level data

Table 1.1 shows the main factors related to Le Pen vote in 2017. The typical Le Pen voter would be a young service or industry worker with low education. Unemployment is not a predictor of Le Pen vote after control.

If the state of unemployment is not a predictor of Le Pen vote, the risk of unemployment could, however, be relevant to vote decision according to the findings of [Rovny & Rovny \(2017\)](#). We consider here at the micro-level two proxies for such risk: First, the experience of being unemployed for more than three months at some point in the past and second, the difficulty in finding a new job if necessary.

Both of these subjective proxies fail to predict Le Pen in a significant manner. Table 1.2 indicate the regression analysis with past unemployment as the independent variable, and table 1.3 considers the "Perceived ability to find a new job within the next 12 months" as the independent variable. For the latter, this 4 levels variable (values within 0,1,2,3) is continuous in the first model and as a dummy variable in the second model (very easy to find a job being the reference).

To summarize, unemployment or perceived risk of unemployment have very low predictive power regarding the FN vote. This statement needs to be nuanced here, however. Given our independent variables relies on the direct individual experience and perception, we can not exclude so far, a high risk of unemployment is related to the Le Pen vote if one is not conscious of such risk or if this risk is not verbalized. The next section will therefore tackle unemployment at the macro level to measure unemployment risk in a more objective manner.

Finally, we look at how concerns about globalization are connected to the Le Pen vote. According to [Rodrik \(2018\)](#), economic "shocks" due to globalization are related to the Populist vote. In table 1.4 the two independent variables are the perception globalization has a positive impact on the French



economy and the need for higher customs barriers and protectionism. These two variables are highly correlated to the Le Pen vote. It is, therefore, not surprising globalization and protectionism are central themes of the Front National campaign.

We should not conclude that globalization risks are a driver of the rise of the right-wing populist vote. Indeed globalization concern is a clear feature of Le Pen voters, but our data do not prove globalization is the main motivation for Le Pen's vote. Furthermore, there is clearly here a lack of external validity. These regression results may not hold in other European countries or in France for a different election.

### 1.3.2 Macro level data

This section will look at how unemployment at the canton level influences the Le Pen vote. Table 1.5 gives a longitudinal regression for Le Pen vote in cantons with the proportion of unemployed people as the independent variable. We look first at the within model, which fails to show any effect of unemployment. However, if we consider the interaction between unemployment and the proportion of immigrants in a canton, the results are different. For either the within or first difference model, this interaction is highly significant.

So maybe there is an effect of unemployment on the Le Pen vote, and this effect would be conditional on the presence of immigrants. The interaction found is in the opposite direction of the one found by [Aksoy \(2012\)](#). In cantons with more immigrants, there is fewer votes for Le Pen! Only in cantons with very low-level immigration, unemployment would be a significant driver of the Le Pen vote.

One possible explanation of these results is a potential correlation between the immigrant presence and the presence of French people of foreign origin. If these French voters with foreign origin are numerous in high unemployment cantons and very unlikely to vote for Le Pen, this will give a reasonable interpretation of the results. French laws preventing ethnic stastics, it is chal-

Table 1.1: Le Pen vote 2017 and unemployment, source: FES 2017

	Le Pen vote (first round 2017)
Income	0.00000 (0.0001)
Gender (1=male)	0.143 (0.143)
Age	-0.019*** (0.006)
Education (ref: none or primary)	
Education: Lower secondary	-0.438* (0.188)
Education: Secondary	-1.149*** (0.226)
Education: Tertiary	-1.745*** (0.244)
Job (ref: not working)	
Farmer	0.349 (0.477)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm manager	0.529 <sup>+</sup> (0.320)
Professionals	-0.450 (0.368)
Technicians	-0.104 (0.288)
Service workers	0.557* (0.263)
Industry workers	0.571* (0.236)
Unemployed	-0.204 (0.311)
Constant	0.074 (0.408)
Observations	1,482
Log Likelihood	-664.272
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,356.543

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01,\*\*\*p<0.001

Table 1.2: Past risk of unemployment and 2017 Le Pen vote, source: FES 2017

	Le Pen vote (first round 2017)	
Ever been unemployed for 3 months	0.053 (0.143)	0.073 (0.145)
Women	0.151 (0.143)	0.141 (0.144)
Income	0.00000 (0.0001)	0.00000 (0.0001)
Age	-0.019*** (0.006)	-0.019*** (0.006)
Education: Lower secondary	-0.424* (0.188)	-0.438* (0.189)
Education: Secondary	-1.131*** (0.224)	-1.147*** (0.225)
Education: Tertiary	-1.722*** (0.243)	-1.737*** (0.244)
Farmer	0.356 (0.478)	0.357 (0.478)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm managers	0.530 <sup>+</sup> (0.320)	0.542 <sup>+</sup> (0.320)
Professionals	-0.462 (0.367)	-0.449 (0.368)
Technicians	-0.116 (0.287)	-0.105 (0.288)
Service workers	0.533* (0.261)	0.560* (0.264)
Industry workers	0.540* (0.234)	0.567* (0.237)
Unemployed		-0.236 (0.316)
Constant	0.018 (0.413)	0.029 (0.414)
Observations	1,480	1,480

*Note:*

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 1.3: Perceived ability to find a new job within the next 12 months and 2017 Le Pen vote, source: FES 2017

	Le Pen vote (first round 2017)	
Ability to find a job within a year	0.091 (0.117)	
Ability to find a job (ref: Very easy)		
easy to find a job	-0.394 (0.322)	
difficult to find a job	-0.149 (0.327)	
very difficult to find a job	0.122 (0.379)	
Women	0.074 (0.210)	0.088 (0.212)
Income	-0.0001 (0.0001)	-0.0001 (0.0001)
Age	-0.031** (0.009)	-0.033*** (0.010)
Education: Lower secondary	-0.181 (0.346)	-0.192 (0.348)
Education: Secondary	-0.981* (0.382)	-0.978* (0.385)
Education: Tertiary	-1.199** (0.393)	-1.190** (0.396)
Farmer	0.399 (0.826)	0.399 (0.829)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm managers	0.669 (0.713)	0.637 (0.715)
Professionals	-0.507 (0.768)	-0.528 (0.769)
Technicians	0.073 (0.694)	0.071 (0.695)
Service workers	0.552 (0.684)	0.532 (0.685)
Industry workers	0.751 (0.666)	0.737 (0.668)
Unemployed	-0.233 (0.763)	
Constant	0.163 (0.863)	0.582 (0.902)
Observations	652	652

Note:

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 1.4: Globalization risks and Le Pen vote, source: FES 2017

	Le Pen vote (first round 2017)	
Globalization is good for French economy	−0.769*** (0.099)	
Customs barriers should be restored in France	1.161*** (0.088)	
Income	−0.00002 (0.0001)	0.00005 (0.0001)
Age	−0.020*** (0.006)	−0.013* (0.006)
Education: Lower secondary	−0.401 <sup>+</sup> (0.209)	−0.309 (0.212)
Education: Secondary	−0.931*** (0.245)	−0.673** (0.259)
Education: Tertiary	−1.444*** (0.261)	−0.900** (0.282)
Farmer	0.715 (0.506)	0.391 (0.532)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm managers	0.495 (0.342)	0.631 <sup>+</sup> (0.362)
Professionals	−0.188 (0.378)	0.040 (0.408)
Technicians	0.050 (0.304)	0.261 (0.323)
Service workers	0.674* (0.276)	0.533 <sup>+</sup> (0.302)
Industry workers	0.623* (0.252)	0.758** (0.272)
Unemployed	−0.534 (0.344)	−0.295 (0.351)
Constant	0.934* (0.441)	0.788 <sup>+</sup> (0.456)
Observations	1,318	1,451

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01,\*\*\*p<0.001

lenging to explore this hypothesis further. Regardless, even in a hypothetical canton with 0% of immigrants, the effect of unemployment would be minor. In such a canton, an increase of the unemployment rate from 10% to 15% due to a major economic shock would lead to an increase of 0.5% of Le Pen vote. Such an increase of the unemployment is uncommon, the unemployment rate was 8.8% in 2012 and 10.2% in 2017 for a typical city.

The first difference model in the table 1.5 gives a different story of the within models. It seems an increase in unemployment is correlated with an increase in the Le Pen vote. This result seems to support the Coenders & Scheepers (1998) hypothesis of the importance of the dynamic of unemployment evolution to understand the RWP vote. We need to nuance this result, though.

First, the results are not congruent with the within model, suggesting some time heterogeneity and casting some doubts on the validity of model assumptions. Second, the effect is quite modest; a city with unemployment growing from 10% to 15% will see an increase of 0.4% of the Le Pen vote. Third, if we look at the result of the two last presidential elections (see maps in Figure 1.1): There is no correlation between regions where unemployment raised and regions where Le Pen support increased between 2012 and 2017. Given these limitations, we should not overstate this result's importance.

The table 1.6 is a longitudinal regression with a within model and considers the layoff and exit ratio (the number of exit/layoff compared to the number of workers). Furthermore, the number of workers quitting large firms (Exit big ratio) and the largest number of layoffs during a downsizing episode in a canton in a given year are also independent variables (Layoff max ratio). Among the four dependent variables, only the exit big ratio is significant but with a negative sign. It means layoffs in large firms are correlated with a decrease in the Le Pen vote. If this result is not a statistical artefact, one potential explanation could be most of the rise of the FN vote happened in suburban places where there are not many large firms and, therefore, not many layoffs from large firms. Regardless of how we interpret this

result, it does not back up the hypothesis of a relation between the risk of unemployment and the FN vote.

Table 1.7 is longitudinal regression with the same variables as in table 1.6 but with the first difference model. The layoff ratio and layoff max ratio are not significant in this model. The exit and exit big ratios are both significant. It seems, therefore, there is a link between the increase in turnover of employees and a rise in FN. These results are very similar to the findings of table 1.5 for the first difference models. Here the same caveats apply: Results are not coherent with the within models, the size of the effects is modest, and they do not seem very helpful in understanding the 2017 results (Figure 1.1). Still, it adds some credit to the Coenders & Scheepers (1998) hypothesis.

Table 1.8 considers the same model as table 1.6, but with the addition of the interaction of the proportion of immigrants with the variables of interest. The layoff ratio and layoff max ratio are still not significant, but the exit ratio and exit ratio for big firms are. This result is very similar to table 1.5, the interaction is negative, so in cities with a high level of immigration, the effect of a high turnover is negative on the Le Pen vote. Only in towns with less than 5

## 1.4 Summary

Overall the evidence of a direct effect of unemployment or risk of unemployment on the Le Pen vote is slim. This lack of relationship seems to hold with a subjective and objective measure of unemployment. Adding the interaction of immigrant proportion with unemployment does not provide either evidence. The unemployment effect would be higher in cities where immigrants are present. The possibility of a French population with foreign origin impacted by unemployment that would despise the FN could be a bias in this study. Still, these regression results hold in regions with low and stable immigration, like the North of France. Moreover, the literature on

Table 1.5: unemployment in cantons and Le Pen vote

	Le Pen vote (2002-2017)			
	(Within)	(Within)	(FD)	(FD)
Unemployment ratio	-2.13 (1.92)	10.52*** (2.12)	7.85*** (1.79)	12.39*** (2.06)
log(number of voters)	-1.56* (0.63)	-1.35* (0.58)	-4.54*** (1.09)	-4.53*** (1.08)
no diplom	-12.35*** (1.63)	-11.02*** (1.60)	-20.83*** (1.60)	-20.57*** (1.60)
BEP	20.58*** (1.37)	20.98*** (1.35)	7.40*** (1.29)	7.49*** (1.29)
BAC	28.98*** (1.70)	28.27*** (1.69)	15.89*** (1.53)	15.66*** (1.52)
Mean wage k	-0.43*** (0.04)	-0.47*** (0.04)	-0.13*** (0.03)	-0.14*** (0.03)
migrant prop	-54.57*** (2.01)	-21.55*** (4.17)	-42.36*** (2.29)	-31.40*** (4.01)
migrant prop x unemployment ratio		-212.49*** (22.65)		-78.38*** (21.61)
2007 fixed effect			-4.46*** (0.06)	-4.45*** (0.06)
2002 fixed effect			7.22*** (0.15)	7.22*** (0.15)
Constant			3.30*** (0.12)	3.35*** (0.12)
Observations	13908	13908	10,430	10,430
R <sup>2</sup>	0.27	0.28	0.52	0.52
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.10	-0.10	0.52	0.52

Note:

<sup>†</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Robust standard error. Source: EDP/Olivier Godechot



Table 1.6: Exit/layoff and evolution of Le Pen vote in French cantons(2002-2007-2012-2017), within models

	Le Pen vote (2002-2017)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Exit ratio	-0.01 (0.04)			
Exit big ratio		-0.06 (0.05)		
Layoff ratio			-0.38 (1.90)	
Layoff max ratio				-1.06 (1.12)
log(number of voters)	-1.85* (0.65)	-2.14* (0.71)	-1.77* (0.65)	-2.02* (0.64)
no diplom	-12.03*** (1.75)	-13.81*** (1.97)	-9.63*** (1.75)	-5.49* (1.75)
BEP	20.18*** (1.51)	20.02*** (1.69)	19.66*** (1.51)	19.95*** (1.51)
BAC	29.31*** (1.85)	31.80*** (1.98)	30.38*** (1.85)	26.64*** (1.85)
Mean wage	-0.0004*** (0.000)	-0.0004*** (0.000)	-0.0004*** (0.0000)	-0.0004*** (0.000)
immigrant prop	-52.08*** (2.11)	-51.98*** (2.08)	-52.76*** (2.11)	-52.79*** (2.11)
Observations	13,440	11,904	6,040	4,765
R <sup>2</sup>	0.31	0.33	0.35	0.32
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.06	0.08	-0.30	-0.50

Note: <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Robust standard error. Source: EDP/Olivier Godechot

Table 1.7: Exit/layoff and evolution of Le Pen vote in French cantons(2002-2007-2012-2017), First difference models

	Le Pen vote (2002-2017)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Exit ratio	0.18*** (0.04)			
Exit big ratio		0.10* (0.05)		
Layoff ratio			-0.33 (0.93)	
Layoff max ratio				-1.16 (1.02)
log(number of voters)	-5.40*** (1.11)	-5.29*** (1.18)	-2.24** (1.11)	-4.05*** (1.11)
no diplom	-23.96*** (1.67)	-25.79*** (1.83)	-32.69*** (1.68)	-26.90*** (1.67)
BEP	3.45* (1.47)	5.80*** (1.62)	4.02* (1.47)	5.48*** (1.47)
BAC	15.96*** (1.76)	18.04*** (1.90)	19.55*** (1.76)	16.51*** (1.76)
Mean wage	-0.0000 (0.0000)	-0.0000 (0.0000)	0.0000 (0.0000)	0.0000 (0.0001)
migrant prop	-40.91*** (2.24)	-41.33*** (2.93)	-35.33*** (2.24)	-33.61*** (2.24)
2002 fixed effect	8.07*** (0.15)	8.25*** (0.16)	6.04*** (0.15)	4.59*** (0.15)
2007 fixed effect	-4.60*** (0.07)	-4.60*** (0.08)	-5.74*** (0.07)	-6.05*** (0.07)
Constant	2.90*** (0.08)	2.82*** (0.09)	1.30*** (0.13)	1.34*** (0.16)
Observations	9,894	8,611	3,057	2,167
R <sup>2</sup>	0.87	0.87	0.84	0.84
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.87	0.87	0.84	0.84

Note: <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Robust standard error. Source: EDP/Olivier Godechot

Table 1.8: Exit/layoff and evolution of Le Pen vote in French cantons(2002-2007-2012-2017), within models

	Le Pen vote (2002-2017)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Exit ratio	0.57*** (0.08)			
Exit big ratio		0.36*** (0.08)		
Layoff ratio			-4.165* (1.73)	
Layoff max ratio				-4.91* (1.97)
log(number of voters)	-1.44* (0.63)	-1.95* (0.72)	-1.74* (0.64)	-2.02* (0.64)
no diplom	-11.10*** (1.73)	-13.42*** (1.95)	-9.56*** (1.75)	-5.50* (1.74)
BEP	20.70*** (1.49)	20.40*** (1.68)	19.69*** (1.51)	19.95*** (1.51)
BAC	27.11*** (1.82)	30.56*** (1.96)	30.39*** (1.85)	26.64*** (1.84)
Mean wage	-0.39*** (0.04)	-0.38*** (0.04)	-0.37*** (0.04)	-0.38*** (0.04)
migrant prop	-36.47*** (2.59)	-42.90*** (2.03)	-52.73*** (2.08)	-52.79*** (2.07)
migrant prop x exit ratio	-10.84*** (1.32)			
migrant prop x exit big ratio		-6.81*** (1.31)		
migrant prop x layoff ratio			85.21* (36.06)	
migrant prop x layoff max ratio				104.0** (39.95)
Observations	13,440	11,904	6,040	4,765
R <sup>2</sup>	0.33	0.34	0.35	0.32
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.09	0.09	-0.30	-0.50

Note:

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Robust standard error. Source: EDP/Olivier Godechot

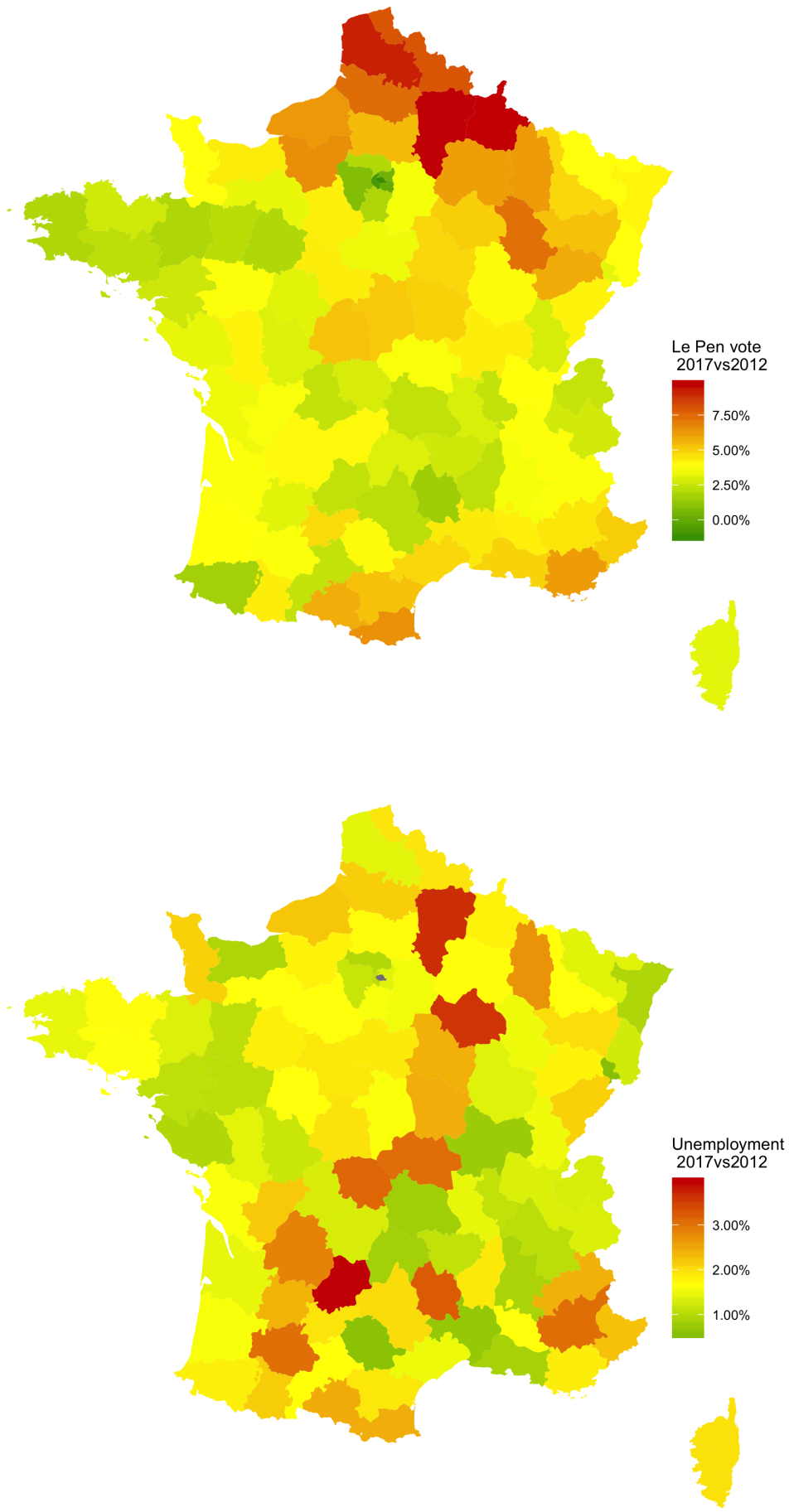


Figure 1.1: Top: Le Pen vote variation between 2012-2017. Bottom: Unemployment rate variation between 2012-2017. For each département, the unweighted average is computed over all French towns.

unemployment predictor of the populist vote gives mixed results ([Amengay & Stockemer, 2018](#)) despite the number of studies on the topic. That does not mean we should give on economic factors to explain the RWP vote, but on the contrary, explore more the multidimensional facets of economic precariousness ([Autor et al., 2017](#); [Rovny & Rovny, 2017](#)).

The obvious concerns about the globalization of FN voters are indicative of this vote's economic dimension. In the following chapters, as other facets of economic precariousness, we will study economic divergence between groups, fear of the lower middle class falling into poverty, reduction of economic opportunities and spatial segregation between the economic elites and the working class. Data about these variables are less available than unemployment, present in any poll. This probably explains to some extent why these variables have not been as much explored in the literature. However, enough data is available, especially in France, to consider their relationship with the right-wing populist vote.

## Chapter 2

# Shrinking sector and Populist vote

### Abstract

In the following three chapters, we propose a relational model linking the Right-Wing populism (RWP) vote and economic transformations in Europe. Each chapter will be focused on one particular feature of this model. These economic transformations (globalisation, mass unemployment, weakened unions, use of subcontractors...) would induce a divergence between "winner" groups and "loser" groups (Kriesi et al., 2008), and members of the "losers" group fear falling into a lower status group subjectively associated with immigrants. Losers groups are operationalised as workers in shrinking professional sectors. These shrinking sectors, as an independent variable predictor of the Le Pen vote, are the theme of this chapter. There is a robust correlation between the shrinking jobs count in industrial and building sectors and the increase of the Le Pen vote in French cities. However, shrinkage in the service sector and the public sector seems unrelated to the Le Pen vote. Controlling the number of immigrants in the shrinking sectors does not seem to alter these findings.

## 2.1 Introduction

According [Hainmueller & Hopkins \(2014b\)](#), both political economy and political psychology literature reach the same conclusion: "Consistently, immigration attitudes show little evidence of being strongly correlated with personal economic circumstances". There is widespread claim immigration tends "to push down salaries". The research, for the most part, is dismissive about this statement ([Card, 1990, 2001](#); [Friedberg & Hunt, 1995](#)).

Preference regarding high-skilled vs low-skilled immigration does not follow either a pattern based on self-interest as "low-skilled and highly skilled natives strongly prefer highly skilled immigrants over low-skilled immigrants, and this preference is not decreasing in natives' skill levels" ([Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2010](#)).

There is, therefore a somewhat puzzling lack of congruence in the literature between, on one side, micro-level studies failing to link personal economic circumstances and preference regarding immigration, and the other side, macro levels of studies showing a correlation between xenophobic populist vote and economic indicators like the volume of imported goods ([Autor et al., 2017](#); [Colantone & Stanig, 2017](#); [Dippel et al., 2016](#)).

Preferences about free trade policies do not seem either anchored in personal interest: "we find strong evidence that trade attitudes are guided less by material self-interest than by perceptions of how the US economy as a whole is affected by trade" ([Mansfield & Mutz, 2009](#)). Change regarding trade policies could have a fast and drastic impact on the industrial sector ([Bernard et al., 2006](#)). According to [Pierce & Schott \(2016\)](#) "Industries more exposed to the change experience greater employment loss, increased imports from China, and higher entry by US importers and foreign-owned Chinese exporters. At the plant level, shifts toward less labor-intensive production and exposure to the policy via input-output linkages also contribute to the decline in employment." Therefore it is not surprising international trade directly influences elections ([Jensen et al., 2017](#)).

Regarding the link between the right-wing populism (RWP) vote and

"personal economic circumstances", the relation also seems weak. The sociology literature showed the correlation between unemployment and the RWP vote is weak or, at best, very dependent on the cases considered (Amengay & Stockemer, 2018; Arzheimer, 2009). Zagórski et al. (2019) noted, "RWP perform strikingly well in countries less affected by the Great Recession". According to Stockemer (2017), during the five years after the 2008 economic crisis, we can measure a very moderate increase of 1 percentage point in the aggregate voting share of the RWP parties. (the RWP vote increased though during other financial crises according Funke et al. (2016)).

The results in chapter 1 of this PhD thesis support the lack of a straightforward correlation between unemployment and RWP vote. However, we will not conclude with a disconnection between the economy and RWP vote and perceive the latter as a manifestation of "cultural backlash" (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). First, some works show the importance of the general economic context (Autor et al., 2017; Mols & Jetten, 2016; Dancygier & Donnelly, 2013). RWP vote could occur in "a strong economy" (Pastor & Veronesi, 2018) where growth due to globalisation implies rising inequalities and, therefore, a backlash populist vote.

Furthermore, we suggest the link between the economy and the RWP vote is more subtle than a linear correlation unemployment-RWP vote or poverty-RWP vote. Maybe unemployment or poverty are not the appropriate variables to understand the relation between the economy and RWP vote. We, therefore, advocate adopting a broader view that would encompass all the facets of economic insecurity (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2017, 2019; Rovny & Rovny, 2017; Zagórski et al., 2019). In particular, the risk of unemployment should be distinguished from actual unemployment.

One way to measure such risk for a worker in a particular sector is to measure the declining size (measured by job loss) of the workforce in this worker's professional sector. We will call the variable the extent of shrinking in this professional sector. This chapter will be focused on this independent variable as one particular facet of economic insecurity. More precisely, we



aim to test if shrinkage in some particular sectors is a predictor of the 2017 Le Pen vote at the local level in French towns.

Of course, the individual unemployment risk for a worker may be quite different from the aggregate risk, given the distinctive characteristics of this worker. Nevertheless, workers do not usually have enough information to estimate this risk accurately. Visible layoffs and shrinking episodes in a sector may be seen as a sign of enhanced unemployment risk by most workers. We saw in chapter 1 that layoff episodes do not seem correlated to higher RWP votes. However, layoff episodes are maybe not problematic in dynamic growing sectors where workers are regularly reshuffled around. Moreover, layoffs evenly distributed across sectors may not be noticed or perceived as problematic if a large share of jobs disappears in a particular sector. Here, by distinguishing the dynamics of the industrial, construction, service and public sectors, we get a more refined assessment of the job market situation than in chapter 1.

The literature shows a clear and consistent link at the local level between the rise of the RWP vote and the rise of foreign imports impacting local industrial jobs (Autor et al., 2017; Ebenstein et al., 2014; Rodrik, 2018; Dippel et al., 2016; Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Malgouyres, 2017; Colantone & Stanig, 2017). Can we generalise this result? Are all economic transformations leading to shrinking of the job pool, like, for instance, automation (Im et al., 2019) or a financial crisis (Funke et al., 2016) lead to an increase in the RWP vote? Or does only the loss of jobs in the industry implies a higher RWP vote, as local competition by immigrants for jobs or oversea competition by cheap labour is easily associated with xenophobic feelings?

Here we make the hypothesis the effectiveness of a shrinking job pool on the RWP vote is conditional on the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) of the workers. We claim for workers facing economic transformation and job pool shrinking in western Europe and in the US, the dividing line between winners and losers (Kriesi et al., 2008) is the lack of appropriate cultural capital enabling them to seize opportunities for a career change given by

these economic transformations.

McVeigh ([McVeigh & Estep, 2019](#)) underlines the economic transformations that occurred after the great recession in the US. There was never any recovery of jobs with lower education requirements. These jobs have been replaced by jobs with high education requirements (See figure [2.1](#)). These requirements are obviously a daunting challenge for workers looking for a career change after a job loss. This "unfair" division of the labour force may lead to bitterness. For instance, resentment in rural regions against public employees with legitimate university diplomas is not surprising ([Cramer, 2016](#)).

## 2.2 Shrinking sectors

When the number of workers in a given professional sector decreases, it means some of these will have to move out of this sector. It does not mean these workers will become unemployed, as they can start to work in another (growing) sector or retire (see Figure [2.2](#)). We must therefore distinguish job loss in a given sector from the increase in unemployment. A stable unemployment rate can hide flows between shrinking and growing sectors. Furthermore, shrinkage is not just impactful for workers leaving a sector. Shrinkage can be perceived as a sign of threat by those keeping their job. [Rovny & Rovny \(2017\)](#) showed the perception of unemployment risk is related to the RWP vote. Shrinkage can also be correlated with a higher pressure from the managers towards workers ([Wagner, Incoming](#)), either because of a difficult environment for the companies in a given sector or because shrinkage events help to create credible unemployment threats toward workers regardless of the health of the company.

Shrinking sectors have been used as an independent variable by [Dancygier & Donnelly \(2013\)](#) to study hostility to immigrants. Using data from the European labour force surveys, [Dancygier & Donnelly \(2013\)](#) measured the proportion of immigrants and natives in professional sectors (based on the

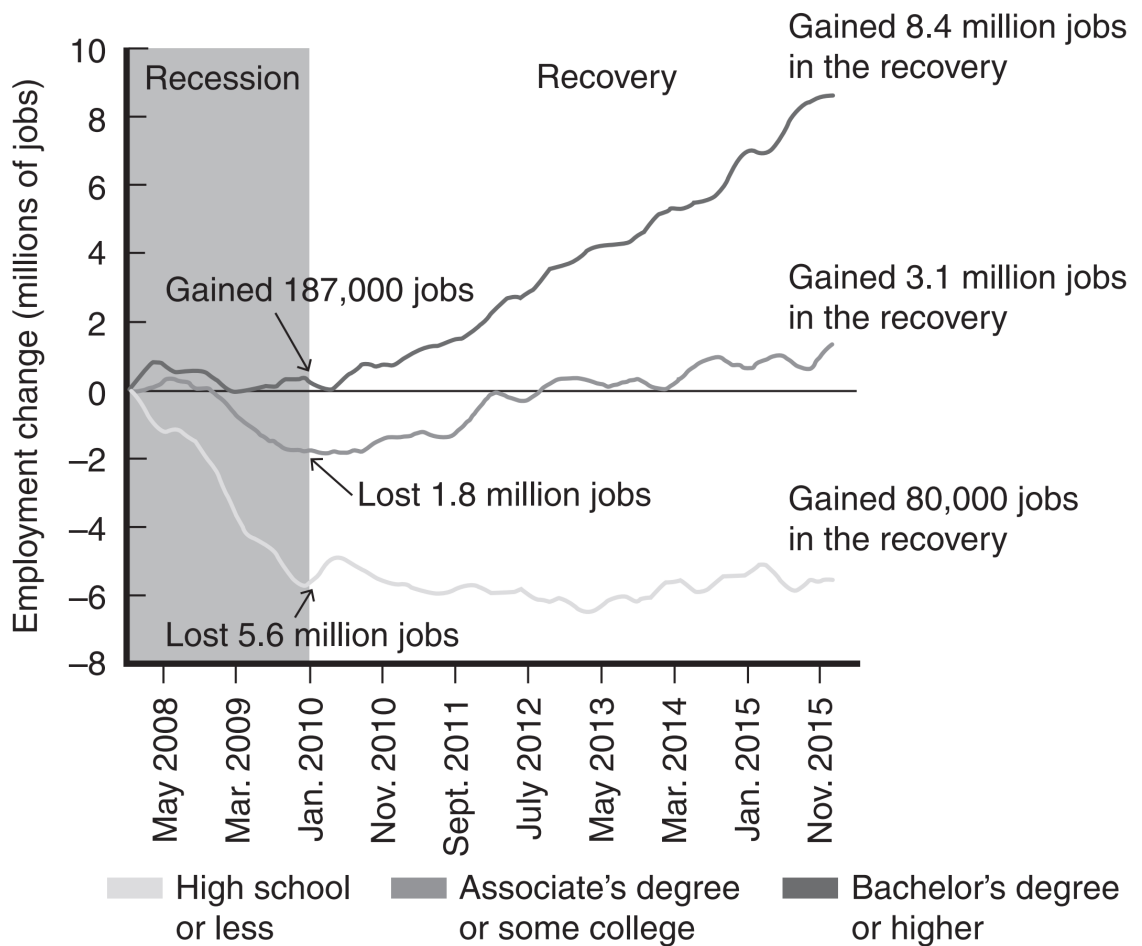


Figure 2.1: Jobs with lower education requirements have been replaced by jobs with higher requirements. Chart from [McVeigh & Estep \(2019\)](#)

NACE classification) in several European countries. [Dancygier & Donnelly \(2013\)](#) research question is twofold: Is the inflow of new immigrants in some sectors related to attitude regarding immigration? Are workers in growing economic sectors less hostile to immigrants, as they could be less likely to be perceived as an economic threat during good times? The correlation for the former appeared quite weak, but the latter (respondents working in growing sectors) seems strongly related to a positive attitude regarding immigration. This last result was robust despite the fact that a large number of control variables were added, like economic outlook or demographic variables.

To some extent, this chapter aims to check if [Dancygier & Donnelly \(2013\)](#) results hold in the French context. However, our research question is slightly different. First, our dependent variable is the RWP vote, not the attitude to immigration (they are correlated, though). Second, we want to know if shrinkage in some sectors has a stronger effect. For instance, we look if shrinkage in industrial sectors to be more relevant than shrinkage in the public sector regarding the RWP vote, as workers in the public sector do not compete directly against foreign workers. Given [Autor et al. \(2017\)](#) results, we expect shrinkage in the industrial sector to be linked to the RWP vote. However, the effect of shrinkage in other sectors is an open question.

Lastly, we consider shrinkage at the local town level. As the [Dancygier & Donnelly \(2013\)](#) paper consider only growing sectors at the national level. It is unclear if workers are especially sensitive to shrinkage near their workplace or if they consider mostly the broader national context. Looking at the shrinkage at the local level enables us to estimate how impactful is shrinking events in a given city.

We will therefore look for each professional sector at the aggregate level of the French towns as the unit of analysis. Our dependent variable will be the variation of Le Pen score between 2012 and 2017 in these cities. We will operationalise groups of people experiencing economic relegation due to structural economic transformations as shrinking professional sectors in a given sector. Our independent variable is, therefore, the amount of job loss

in declining professional sectors in French cities. The disappearance of one job in a shrinking sector is not necessarily associated with one additional unemployed person. This person may find another job or retire; however, professional opportunities are scarce in shrinking sectors. Workers in these sectors will experience a glass ceiling, unfavourable career change, uncertainty about the future and, in particular, fear of relegation (see Figure 2.2).

**Hypothesis A:** Vote to Le Pen tends to increase more in French cities where there are a lot of job losses in shrinking professional sectors.

We expect the hardship and stress of workers in shrinking sectors to be higher if they lack the appropriate cultural capital to adapt to economic transformations. To perform a career change inside or outside shrinking sectors, cultural capital (often as legitimate university degrees) is almost mandatory. The "inflation" of diploma requirements is especially detrimental for those without adequate qualification (Bourdieu, 1984), preventing any occupational integration from scratch.

**Hypothesis B:** The association between the Le Pen vote increase and job loss in shrinking professional sectors are stronger when the education level is lower (shrinking professional sectors-education interaction).

We need to state a caveat here. In the two previous hypotheses, we implicitly assume most or maybe all of the working population in a sector is French. In some sectors, for instance, construction, there is a large number of immigrant workers. It is reasonable to assume if shrinkage mostly impacts immigrant workers, it would not trigger a boost in the Le Pen vote. Of course, immigrants do not have the right to vote, and their French relatives are unlikely to expect any help from Marine Le Pen. To test hypothesis A, we, therefore, need to control for the local immigrant population in the professional sectors:

**Hypothesis C:** The association between the Le Pen vote increase and jobs loss in shrinking professional sectors is weaker when a lot of immigrants work in these shrinking sectors (shrinking professional sectors-number of

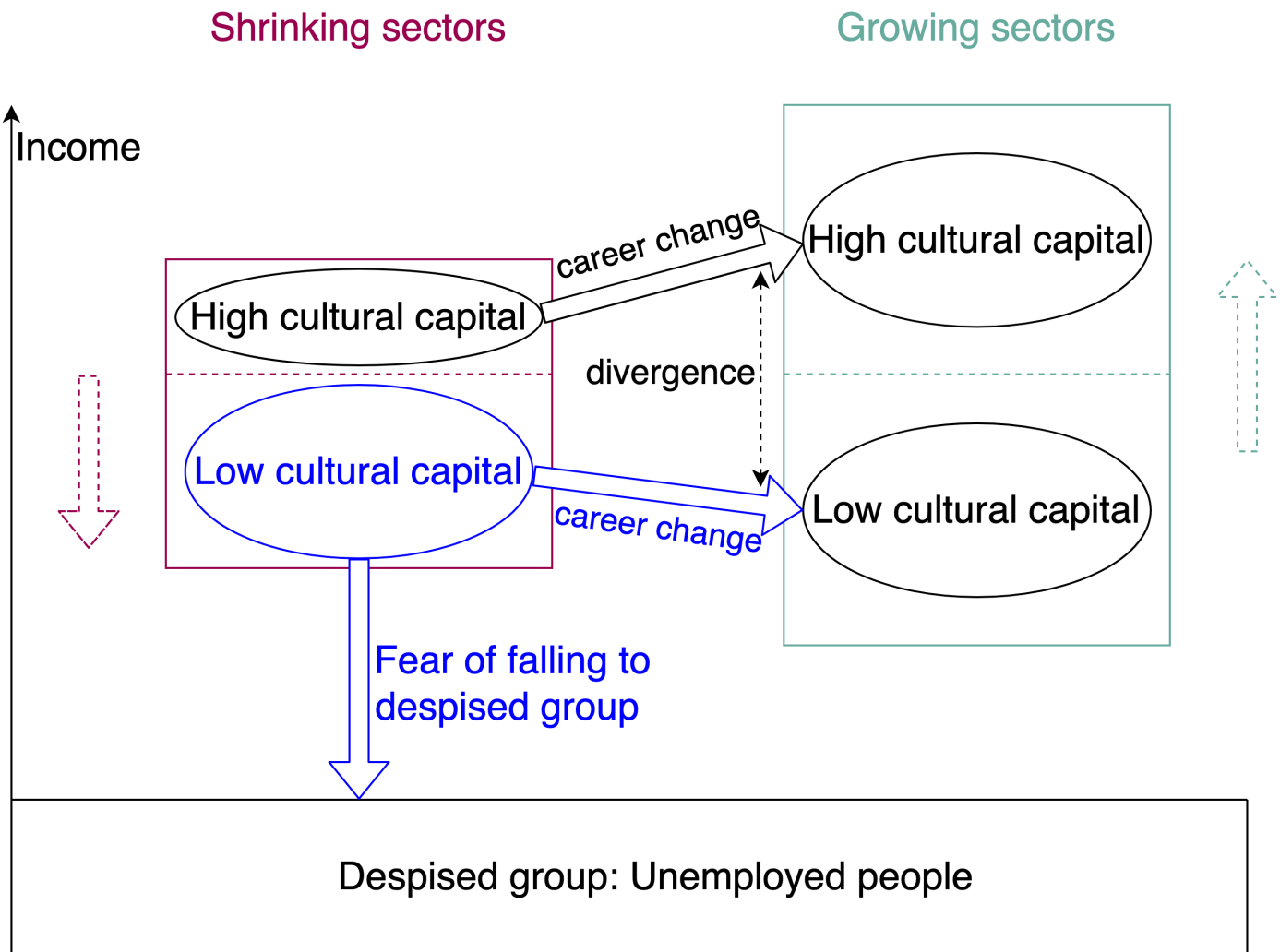


Figure 2.2: shrinking and growing sectors (operationalisation of "winners" and "losers" groups)

immigrant workers interaction).

There is a difference between the legal immigrant worker population and the workers perceived as immigrants. As noted by [Préteceille \(2009\)](#), unlike in countries like the US, assessing the size of an immigrant or ethnic population with poll methods is difficult given the restrictions of French law.

In our theoretical framework, it must be highlighted that only economic transformations leading to fear of an individual status decline and not collective declines are relevant to explaining right-wing populism. During a global economic crisis, times are difficult for everyone, individuals do not feel particularly guilty about the situation, and such a crisis is, to some extent, a translation of the usual social hierarchy, not a distortion. The risk of a mix-up between the lower and middle classes is limited. [Caner \(2015\)](#) showed in crisis years, compared to years of economic expansion, the importance of the happiness of having a high absolute income is more significant, and the importance of having high relative income or high-income expectations is lower. Impressive breakthroughs of RWP usually happen during economic recoveries, not during a crisis. This phenomenon has been described as the "Wealth Paradox" by [Mols & Jetten \(2017\)](#). We suggest, therefore, the frustration and the tension leading to a rise of RWP support is maximum in case of *divergence* between "losers groups" and "winners groups" in particular during economic recoveries. We conjecture this relative decline leads to a "fear of falling" which will be the theme of the next chapter.

## **2.3 Data and method**

### **2.3.1 Shrinking sectors and unemployment as measures of economic insecurity**

We discuss here the impact of economic transformations, leading to economic insecurity at the French cities level (Figure 2.2). Our dependent variable will be the variation between 2012 and 2017 in Le Pen's score at the presidential

election in French cities with a population of over 2000 people. We want to use a measure of economic insecurity as an independent variable. Unemployment has been a common measure of economic insecurity (for instance, [Arzheimer \(2009\)](#)). While the relation between unemployment and RWP support has been widely studied, unemployment seems a poor and inconsistent predictor of the populist vote (see [Amengay & Stockemer \(2018\)](#) for a meta-analysis).

If our hypothesis is relevant, unemployment may actually not be an adequate measure of economic insecurity for two reasons. First, in our framework, the engine of hostility against immigrants is a risk of economic relegation, not actual relegation. So unemployment and switching to RWP may not be simultaneous. Second, declining individuals in dwindling sectors may get a new job with a lower wage in a new professional sector.

We will also look (hypothesis B) if there is an interaction between the educative level in shrinking sectors and job loss in shrinking sectors to check if the effect of jobs loss depends on the educative level in these shrinking sectors (see [Figure 2.2](#)).

To assess the extent of job loss in shrinking sectors in a given city, we use a methodology similar to [Dancygier & Donnelly \(2013\)](#). The extent of the shrinking of the sector  $i$  is given by:

$$\frac{\max(N_i^{2013} - N_i^{2017}, 0)}{N_i^{2013}}$$

With  $N_i^{2013}$  the number of workers in the sector  $i$  in the considered city. This definition implies shrinkage for a sector will be, therefore, always a positive number. If, for instance, during the 2013-2017 period, the number of jobs in the construction sector increased, the shrinkage of construction will be defined as 0 in this sector for this city. We look here to isolate the effect of shrinking. The effect of growing sectors could be potentially very different, so they are not considered here.

In [Dancygier & Donnelly \(2013\)](#), the independent variable is the extent of shrinking in the respondent sector. However, here we will consider here



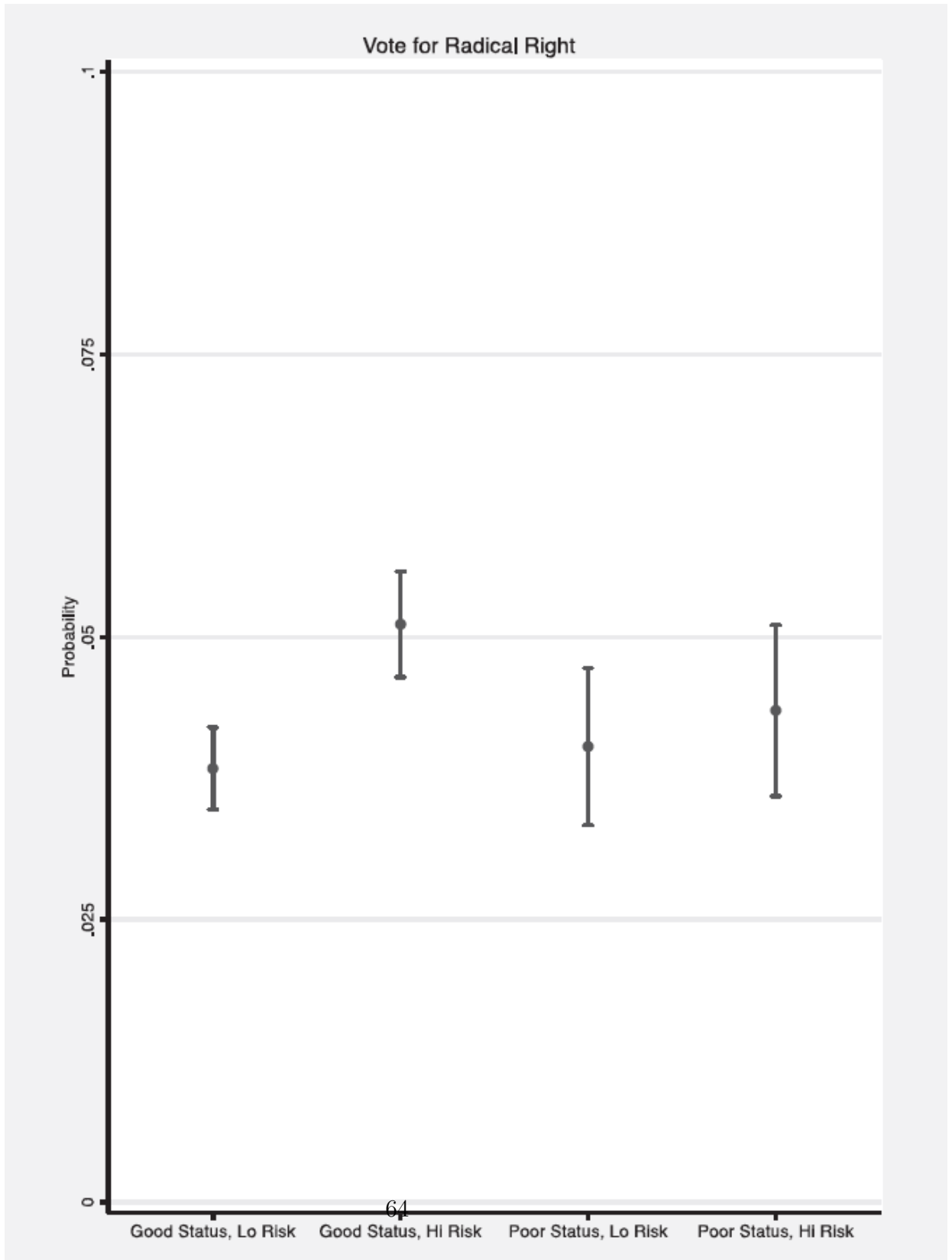


Figure 2.3: Results from [Rovny & Rovny \(2017\)](#), high risk/high-status outsiders tend to support more RWP

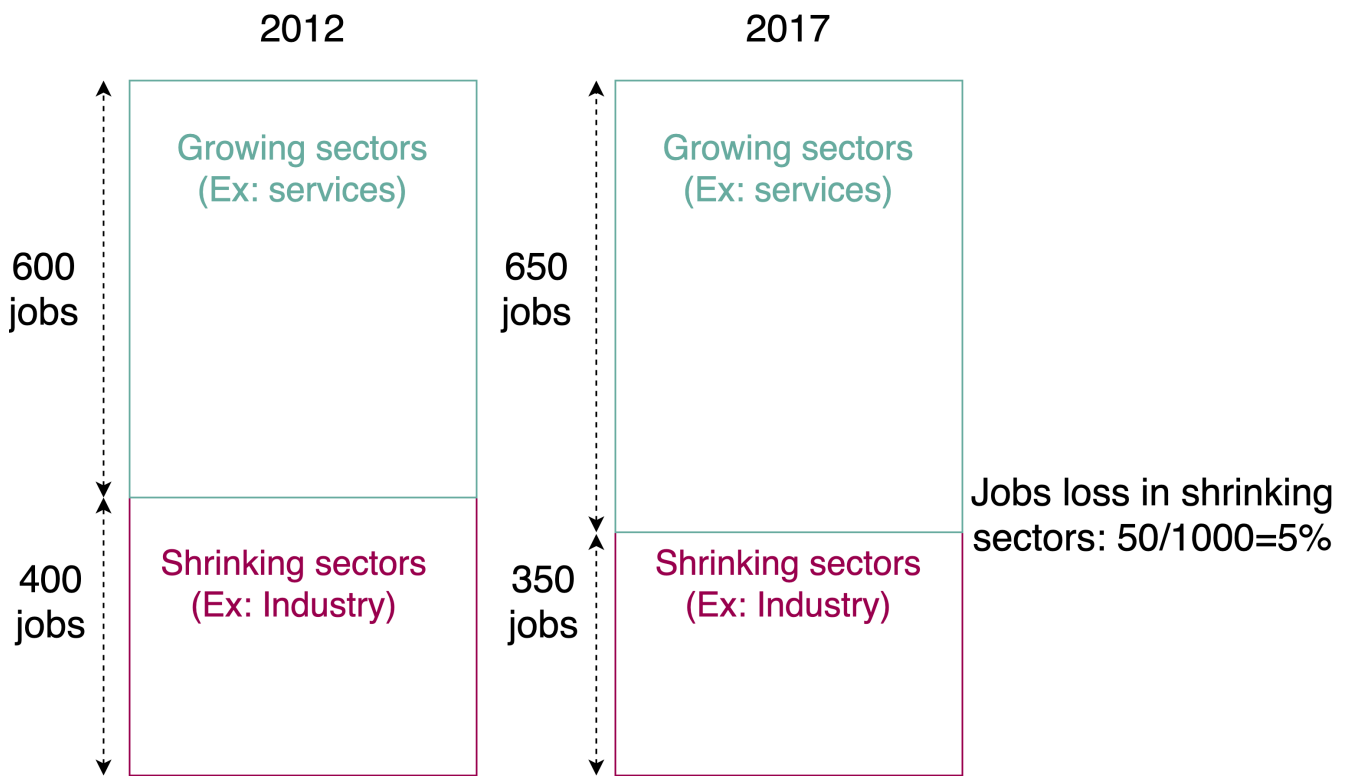


Figure 2.4: Definition of the shrinking as jobs loss in given sector

the aggregate vote of a city where workers belong either to the construction, industrial, public or service sectors. Therefore it makes sense to take into account the relative local weight of each sector. If, for instance, in a city of 5000 workers, the construction sector shrank from six workers to three workers between 2013 and 2017, we can not expect it to have a significant electoral impact, despite a 50% shrinking. The weight of a sector  $i$  is  $\frac{N_i^{2013}}{\sum_j N_j^{2013}}$ . We picked the 2013 data for the weight and not 2017, as if the industrial sector shrank drastically, we expect this to be impactful, even if this sector is relatively small in 2017 compared to 2013 due to the shrinkage. So our independent variable for sector  $i$  is:

$$\frac{N_i^{2013}}{\sum_j N_j^{2013}} \times \frac{\max(N_i^{2013} - N_i^{2017}, 0)}{N_i^{2013}} = \frac{\max(N_i^{2013} - N_i^{2017}, 0)}{\sum_j N_j^{2013}}$$

Figure 2.4 gives a simple example where 50 jobs in the industry disappear for a city with 1000 jobs for all sectors. The shrinking is then 5% for the industry sector.

We use 2013, 2017 and 2018 census databases, where workers are classified into 17 professional sectors. We group these professional sectors into four groups: Industrial, construction, service and public (including health jobs) sectors. Our independent variable will be the number of jobs lost in each of the four professional sectors between 2013 and 2017 divided by the total number of jobs in 2013 (see Figure 2.4). This ratio is higher than 25% in a quarter of French cities. The losses could be potentially balanced by the expansion of the workforce in developing sectors. Still, those staying in the shrinking sector and those leaving for more promising sectors will experience economic insecurity.

To estimate the number of workers in each professional sector, we use census (MIGCOM) data. Unfortunately, the database started in 2013 is updated every year for only 20% of the small cities. So for the cities updated in 2014, we have only one year of evolution (2013-2014). To mitigate this

problem, we only keep the cities updated in 2017 or 2018 (2013-2017 or 2013-2018 periods). Some tests done with the whole set of cities give similar results, so we do not think the result is impacted by restricting our sample.

We compare the number of job losses in each sector between 2013 and 2017, compared to the total number of jobs in 2013. In some cities, the proportion of job losses could reach 25% (compensated locally to some extent by new jobs in growing sectors).

The sector with the most shrinking is the industrial sector. The pie chart Figure 2.5 gives the national distribution of workers in the four sectors. We decided to distinguish the industrial sector from the construction sector for two reasons. First, the educative level is neatly lower in the construction sector. Second, the number of immigrants is a lot higher in the construction sector than in any other sector.

To measure the average educative level in shrinking sectors (hypothesis B) in each French city, we also use the 2017 census (MIGCOM) database. Each individual is rated on a four-level scale (no diploma, CAP/BEP, Bac, university degree) which we associate to a 0-3 numerical scale. The average educative level (between 0 and 3) across all shrinking sectors is computed for each city.

To measure the number of immigrants, we use the same 2017 census (MIGCOM) database. We define an immigrant as someone who is born in another country. The goal of the broad definition is to include people who may be perceived as immigrants regardless of their French nationality. The proportion of immigrants is computed for each professional sector. As we could easily underestimate the number of workers perceived as immigrants with this methodology, we will not try to compute the number of "native workers" or the number of jobs lost by "native workers". Instead, we consider our estimation as an indicator of the number of immigrants in a sector. We test the interaction between this indicator and the shrinking in this sector. If we find a negative interaction, it means the effect of shrinking is lower when the presence of immigrants is high. This path seems safer to us than trying

to measure the jobs lost by native workers.

## 2.4 Results

### 2.4.1 Shrinking sectors

The unit analysis here is French cities, and the dependent variable is the increase in the Marine Le Pen vote (2012-2017). Table 2.1 shows how the extent of shrinking professional sectors is associated with a rise of the Le Pen vote in French cities. In the first model (without control), there is a robust association between the shrinking of the industrial and the construction sector and the increase of the Le Pen vote. We did find a negative correlation for the shrinking of public or service sectors.

Adding control variables (city population, evolution of unemployment, immigration, first, fifth and top decile) does not alter the strength as a predictor of a shrinking industrial and construction sectors. On the other hand shrinking in the service, or public sector does not seem highly relevant for the Le Pen vote.

The increase in unemployment is not correlated to the Le Pen vote, confirming this variable, unlike shrinking sectors, may not be appropriate to gauge economic insecurity related to the populist vote. Variation in immigration is significant but negatively correlated to the FN vote. It is likely this variable is more related to the composition of the pool voters, in particular the presence of French voters with foreign origin than a quantitative measure of a hypothetical economic or cultural threat related to immigrants.

An increase in the first decile income is associated with decreasing in the Le Pen vote, which could be expected. However, the association between the rising median income and the Le Pen vote may be more surprising. This remarkable result will be studied in detail in the next chapter devoted to the economic divergence between winner and loser groups. The relation between the increase in the top decile income and the decrease in the Le Pen vote will be the object of chapter 5. We will just mention here this relationship

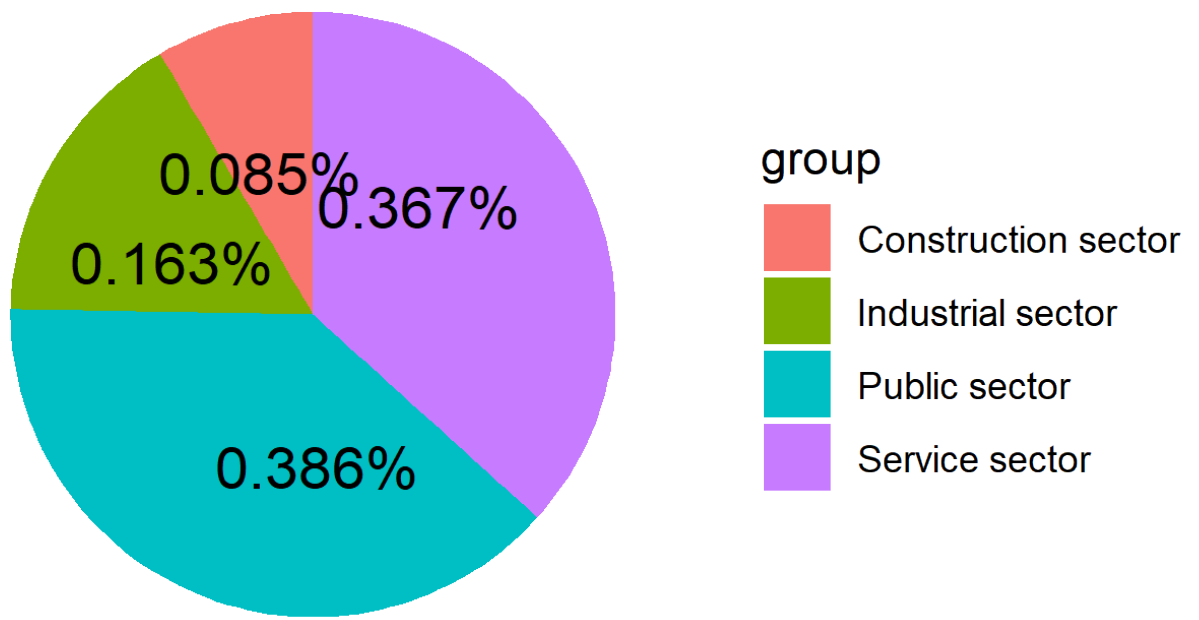


Figure 2.5: distribution of job sectors, all French towns aggregated

Table 2.1: Shrinking professional sectors and evolution of populist vote in French cities (2012-2017)

	variation of Le Pen vote (2012-2017)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Shrinking industrial sector	8.13*** (1.58)	8.54*** (1.56)	7.82 (5.17)
Shrinking construction sector	7.16*** (2.00)	6.44*** (1.89)	
Shrinking service sector	-4.49*** (0.98)	-4.53*** (1.05)	
Shrinking public sector	-3.31*** (0.78)	-2.91*** (0.79)	
Education in the industrial sector			-3.17*** (0.27)
Shrinking in industrial sectors*			-2.51 (2.86)
Education in the industrial sector			
Δ decile 1		-2.86* (1.27)	-1.58 (1.04)
Δ decile 5		11.02*** (2.92)	6.46** (2.32)
Δ decile 9		-8.00*** (1.61)	-4.39** (1.33)
Δ Unemployment		0.63 (1.42)	-0.45 (1.30)
Δ Immigration variation		-20.75** (7.15)	-28.72*** (6.32)
Log(voting pop)	-0.79*** (0.06)	-0.80*** (0.08)	-0.56*** (0.07)
Constant	9.96*** (0.51)	9.68*** (2.29)	13.00*** (1.81)

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001  
Robust standard error (clusterized at the département level). Source: MIGCOM/INSEE

is quite robust, and several interpretations may explain it. For instance, the good fortune of the top decile may be seen as a good omen for future economic opportunities (euphoria phase of the tunnel effect (Hirschman & Rothschild, 1973)).

In the third model, we include the education level in the industrial sector. We are especially interested in the interaction of this variable with the extent of the shrinking of the industrial sector in French cities. This interaction is not significant. However we should mention here, in some models, for instance without robust standard error correction or by merging the industrial and the construction sector, we find a weak negative interaction. It would mean the relationship between shrinking industry and the rise of the Le Pen vote is stronger if industry workers are less educated. This result may suggest a higher difficulty in achieving internal or external career change for workers with lower cultural capital, as suggested by our model (Figure 2.2). Still if this interaction exists, the effect seems weak.

Education in the industrial sector as the main effect is also strongly negatively associated with an increase in the Le Pen vote. Overall our results seem to support hypotheses A and partially B, but only for the industrial and construction sectors.

We look now if these results hold if we take into account the number of immigrant workers in each sector. As stated before, we will not try to measure the exact number of jobs lost in the sector for French native workers, as the population of immigrant workers may be quite different from the population perceived as immigrant workers. We consider only the interaction between the shrinking of a sector (industrial, construction, service or public) and the proportion of non-native (immigrants) workers in this sector. It is worth noting that the median proportion of immigrant workers (10.4%) is larger in the construction sector than in the industrial (6.2%), service (6.8%), and public (6.8%) sectors. The sectors have been tested separately to avoid bias due to a potential correlation between the independent variables.

Table 2.2 shows there is still a significant positive correlation between



Table 2.2: Shrinking professional sectors and evolution of populist vote in French cities (2012-2017)

	variation of Le Pen vote (2012-2017)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Shrinking industrial sector	6.72*** (1.95)			
Immigrants in industrial sector	-2.81** (1.02)			
Shrinking indus.*immigrants ind	3.85 (14.78)			
Shrinking construction sector		2.41 (2.56)		
Immigrants in construction sector		-2.29*** (0.59)		
Shrinking cons.*immigrants in cons		20.96 (14.96)		
Shrinking public sector			-1.63 (1.90)	
Immigrants in public sector			-6.04*** (1.38)	
Shrinking public*immigrants			-43.61 (27.38)	
Shrinking service sector				-1.48 (1.02)
Immigrants in service sector				-4.41*** (1.12)
Shrinking service*immigrants				-11.99 (8.87)
$\Delta$ decile 1	-3.03* (1.27)	-3.06* (1.28)	-3.32** (1.26)	-3.23* (1.26)
$\Delta$ decile 5	11.19*** (2.90)	10.85*** (2.87)	11.01*** (2.84)	11.16*** (2.87)
$\Delta$ decile 9	-8.00*** (1.60)	-7.99*** (1.60)	-7.91*** (1.51)	-7.87*** (1.56)
$\Delta$ Unemployment	0.40 (1.41)	0.64 (1.39)	0.90 (1.40)	0.83 (1.45)
$\Delta$ Immigration variation	-18.97** (6.61)	-17.38** (6.49)	-11.68 <sup>+</sup> (6.67)	-13.85* (6.57)
Log(voting pop)	-0.70*** (0.08)	-0.69*** (0.09)	-0.78*** (0.08)	-0.76*** (0.09)
Constant	9.15*** (2.33)	9.77*** (2.31)	10.90*** (2.23)	10.33*** (2.28)

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001  
Robust standard error (clusterized at the département level). Source: MIGCOM/INSEE

shrinking in the industry and there is no relevant interaction with the proportion of immigrants in this sector. However, the relation found in table 2.1 does not hold for the construction sector and there is not significant interaction. Regarding the service and public sectors, there is no significant interaction. Overall taking into account the proportion of immigrants in each sector does not help much to improve our model. The finding is similar to Table 2.1. Therefore we do not find much evidence to support hypothesis C.

## 2.5 Discussion

Our results indicate a striking difference between sectors. If shrinking in the industry and the construction sectors seems strongly correlated to a higher vote for Le Pen. This is not the case for other sectors. This effect may be more substantial if the education level of industrial workers is low. If this gives some credit to hypotheses A and partially to B for the industrial and construction sector. We need though to understand why it is only valid for the industrial and the construction sectors.

The lack of results for the public & health sector is not that surprising. These jobs, for the most part, are not accessible to foreign workers. Furthermore, the workers in this sector tend to have a higher education. So they are maybe less likely to feel threatened by unemployment and more confident of finding a new job if necessary. However, the service sector does not share these features, so if shrinking in the industry is meaningful for the Le Pen vote, it is surprising it is not the case in the service sector. It is true shrinkage was larger in the former than the latter, so maybe only large shrinkage episodes are effective to influence electoral results. We have done some tests with a quadratic term for shrinking, but they were not conclusive.

So maybe the observed disparity between sectors is related to the more significant proportion of immigrants in the construction and industrial sectors. However this hypothesis seems at odds with the literature where similarly tested hypotheses give inconsistent and conditional results (Amengay &

Stockemer, 2018; Halla et al., 2017; Hopkins, 2010; Janssen et al., 2019; De Blok & Van Der Meer, 2018). Furthermore our results show the lack of interaction between the proportion of immigrants and the shrinking in all sectors. So to understand the effect of shrinking sectors, we need to look to others factors than the presence of immigrant workers.

The conjecture that seems to emerge from these results is shrinking may be relevant in the industry as they are associated with the threat of foreign imports and, therefore, protectionist and xenophobic feelings. This hypothesis would be very congruent with Autor et al. (2017) results, but it is not with Dancygier & Donnelly (2013) results. According Dancygier & Donnelly (2013), workers in shrinking sectors tend to be hostile to immigrants regardless of the sector. It is possible a large part of the workers in a shrinking sector in Dancygier & Donnelly (2013) were in fact, in the industrial sector (as is the case in our data). Therefore the specificity of the industrial sector may not appear in Dancygier & Donnelly (2013) results. However, the different results may also be explained by the use of different dependent variables, the study of local effect and not national in our work, or some specificity of the French case.

To some extent, these results confirm the results of the first chapter, where large layoff episodes were not linked to a boost in the Le Pen vote. So if shrinkage matters, it is clear it has a conditional effect on the electoral vote. In this regard, maybe shrinkage in the industry is more visible and related to higher pressure on workers than shrinkage in the service sector. The next two chapters will present two factors of our relational model, the economic divergence and the fear of falling, that could be linked to the effect of shrinking sectors.

# Chapter 3

## Economic divergence

### Abstract

Drawing insight from the [Hirschman & Rothschild \(1973\)](#) "tunnel effect", we consider how a particular type of economic inequality relates to the right-wing populist (RWP) vote. More precisely, we study the association between a growing economic divergence, the first versus the fifth income deciles, and the increase of Le Pen's vote in the French presidential elections. We check this correlation at the town and the "arrondissement" level for the 2002-2017 period. Contrary to the [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#) results, the increase in Le Pen's vote is positively associated with widening the economic hierarchy. These different results may be explained by our methodology, which considers inequality at the local level, and may be more relevant to understanding the perception of individuals. Between 2012 and 2017, the widening of the economic gap was more important in the north of France. This may help to understand the surge of the Le Pen vote in 2017 in this region. We also found an increase in the top decile income is negatively associated with an increase in the Le Pen vote.

### 3.1 Introduction

During the recent decades, "median income has often lagged behind the mean in household surveys" in advanced democracies (Nolan & Weisstanner, 2021). This happened in OECD countries where economic growth was slow or robust. So if a large part of the middle class is not able to secure their share of the economic growth and has a feeling of being "squeezed" (Nolan & Weisstanner, 2021), we should ask what has been the impact of this squeeze on electoral preferences.

According to Weisstanner (2020) "the unequal distribution of economic gains is a prominent factor behind policy preferences and recent electoral outcomes". The fact that stagnating income lead to dissatisfaction and distrust toward politicians is not surprising and may seem straightforward. However, the link between inequality and electoral preferences is actually subtle. For instance, the "median voter hypothesis" (Meltzer & Richard, 1981) suggesting an unequal income distribution would lead to political pressure for more redistribution looks pretty reasonable at first glance. However, it has not been confirmed despite an extensive research effort in the literature (Borge & Rattsø, 2004).

To understand better this link between voting and inequality, some scholars introduced a distinction between "absolute" and "relative" economic experiences (Mérola & Helgason, 2016). If economic growth is shared between all social groups in an equal manner (individuals' income growth is proportional to their income), then "people are on the same boat" (Mérola & Helgason, 2016). In this case, people share the same "absolute experience". Moreover, if economic growth is strong, then it is a "desirable boat" (Mérola & Helgason, 2016). This common fate may induce a stronger affinity between social groups and electoral support "for costly redistributive policies" (Proaño et al., 2022).

However, an absolute negative experience "fail to generate any positive group identification and may even prompt individuals to distance themselves from the group given its negative experience", and then "lead to reduced

support for redistribution" (Mérola & Helgason, 2016). Furthermore, if there is a strong divergence between the income growth of the different social groups, then individuals will consider their economic situation relative to the evolution of others. Such divergence may weaken social bonds and support for redistributive policies. To summarise the position of Mérola & Helgason (2016), robust and equally distributed growth are two necessary conditions for popular support of redistributive policies.

Hence the distinction between absolute and relative economic experience leads to a more complex description of the link between redistribution policy preference and economic inequality. According to Proaño et al. (2022), absolute and relative economic experiences may have "offsetting effects". Proaño et al. (2022) use panel data of 20 countries (1985-2019 period) to check if an increase in income inequalities is concomitant to an increase in the (left or right) populist vote. This empirical study shows a relation between inequality and the populist right vote: A decrease of the bottom 10% decile income share and an increase of the Gini index is linked to an increase in the RWP vote after 2000. However, a raise of the top 10% does not seem to have an effect on the RWP vote, which is congruent with Burgoon et al. (2018) findings.

These results should be taken with caution. In recent years, there has been a clear increase in the RWP vote in Europe, and some metrics tend to indicate a concomitant increase in wealth inequalities. A central question in this field of research is to establish if these two phenomena are linked or if they are the result of factors independent of each other. Given the limited sample size, a time correlation between the two is not enough to conclude that the rise of the RWP vote results from increased inequalities.

Furthermore, the dependent variable, the RWP vote, is somewhat censored. For instance, Americans could vote for Trump in 2016 but did not have this opportunity during previous elections. Therefore, it is difficult to say what his performance (or a similar candidate's performance) would have been in previous years. It is then hard to study the relationship between

inequality and the populist vote in the US. It seems less ambitious but safer to tackle a single country with a clear and stable RWP party like France and to explore the potential RWP vote and economic inequalities correlations.

Contrary to [Proaño et al. \(2022\)](#), [Engler & Weisstanner \(2021\)](#) found rising income inequality increases the likelihood of radical right support. RWP vote would be the symptom of "a widening social hierarchy". However, this result is conditional on the income and subjective status of individual respondents. In particular, "individuals with high subjective social status and lower-middle incomes" would be susceptible to increasing inequality. Interestingly the ISSP data used by [Engler & Weisstanner \(2021\)](#) showed that people in the second quintile of income (lower middle class) are more likely to vote for RWP than the bottom quintile (as suggested by [Gidron & Hall \(2017\)](#), and [Minkenberg \(2000\)](#)).

The link between inequality and the RWP vote is therefore questionable: How can we explain the people suffering less at the personal level from inequality are worried about it and support RWP as a consequence of this anxiety? According to [Engler & Weisstanner \(2021\)](#), the threat of decline would be more effective than an actual economic decline in promoting the RWP vote. In this work, the study of the relationship between status/status decline, inequality, and RWP vote is interesting. The question of the links between social status and the RWP vote will be explored in the following two chapters.

In the [Engler & Weisstanner \(2021\)](#) paper (as in [Proaño et al. \(2022\)](#)), economic inequality is measured at the country level as a contextual variable. We should be aware of the possibility of a spurious time correlation between rising inequality and rising RWP vote. Of course, RWP and inequality evolution varies from country to country at a different rate. However, the limited number of countries and time period should invite us to stay cautious.

[Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#) proposed a similar paradigm to [Proaño et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Mérola & Helgason \(2016\)](#), but with clear methodological differences. [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#) defines a concept of positional deprivation as the

slower growth of an individual disposable income compared to the growing income of other groups in the same country's income distribution. This individual would then have a feeling of economic relegation. According to the results of [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#), positional deprivation favours both right and left-populist votes, but in an asymmetrical manner. A widening gap between individuals and the top decile income would boost the left vote.

On the other hand, when the poorest decile tends to catch up with the rest of the distribution, hence a shrinking of inequality at the lower end of the distribution, the RWP tends to increase. This result helps to rationalise both populist votes. The left-wing populist vote would be a demand to address the issue of wealth inequality with rich people. RWP vote would be a call to enforce an economic gap between the lower middle class and the poorest fraction of the population. Why and how RWP voters would favour such a gap and even promote enforcement of such a gap will be tackled in-depth in the next chapter.

If positional deprivation as a concept seems close to relative economic experience, unlike [Proaño et al. \(2022\)](#), [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#) uses individual vote data and not aggregate vote data. In [Proaño et al. \(2022\)](#), if the declining wage share of the bottom 10%, for instance, is correlated to a higher RWP vote, it is unclear if the bottom 10% voted more for RWP or if this increase is due to other sections of the population. So, the fact this result from [Proaño et al. \(2022\)](#) is somewhat contradictory to [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#) results (when the gap between middle-class respondents and the bottom 10% is widening, they are less likely to support RWP), is maybe due to these methodological differences. In any case, [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#) shows in a more convincing manner those experiencing relative economic decline tend to vote more for RWP.

However, their methodological approach ([Burgoon et al., 2018](#)) does not use some panel data, which would be ideal to evaluate if positional deprivation of an individual would be associated with the RWP vote. Instead, they consider the vote and the income of ESS respondents in a given year.



This respondent's income is then matched to a particular decile in the distribution of this country using LIS data. This decile was then compared to the same decile five years ago. Finally, they check if the gap between this decile and the top decile (or the bottom decile) is widening or shrinking.

Such methodology implies a strong assumption: An individual, for instance, in the fourth decile in 2015, was also in the fourth decile in 2010. Such an assumption would be reasonable if individual incomes evolve slowly and in a similar manner. But the aim of the paper is to study how divergent economic dynamics of individuals have an influence on the populist vote. So we should consider a situation where some individuals improve their relative income while others are relegated to the income scale.

Using the evolution of the income decile distribution is not enough to fully grasp the complexity of groups' economic trajectory. We could, for instance, imagine a country where all the deciles in the income distribution were constant between 2010 and 2015. However, during this time span, some groups may improve their position, and others may lose their ranking, and these up and down moves may cancel each other in the aggregate income distribution. In this hypothetical example, some individuals will experience positional deprivation, but the independent variable defined by [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#) will be equal to 0 for everyone.

In the result section, we will indicate how an increase in the top decile income is associated with a variation in the Le Pen vote. However, this association will be explored in detail in chapter 5. The main purpose of this chapter is to test the relation between a widening economic gap (bottom decile income vs median decile income) and the Le Pen vote. The methodology is similar to [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#), but we measure this gap at a more local level. On top of measuring an economic gap that may be more relevant for individual than statistics aggregated at the national level, this local measure enables us to study the differences between French regions. We will first present the divergence part of our model, then the methodology used, and we will test this relation widening economic gap- Le Pen vote using the

2002/2007/2012/2017 elections.

## 3.2 Economic divergence

Figure 3.1 shows a graphic representation of our model with the three key elements: Shrinking sectors, economic divergence and fear of falling. Shrinking sectors were the object of the previous chapter. The current chapter is devoted to economic divergence, and the fear of falling will be explored in the next chapter. We will define economic divergence as the existence of disparity between income growth rates across different social groups. It is a very similar concept to positional deprivation (Burgoon et al., 2018) or relative economic experience (Mérola & Helgason, 2016). However, we will use this term to insist on the disparity of economic fates across social groups.

To show the relevance of economic divergence to understanding the RWP vote, we will look, as an example, at the case of the cities where the Le Pen vote increased the most between 2012 and 2017. The map Figure 3.2, shows the variation of the Le Pen vote between 2012 and 2017 in each département. There is a striking pattern of a drastic increase in the Le Pen vote localised in the north of France. This pattern is even more striking when we consider the 53 cities where Le Pen votes increased by 13 points or higher between 2012 and 2017 (Figure 3.3). Every single one of them is in the north of France. Such statistical neatness is rare in political science.

Surprisingly the median income in these cities grew statistically more than in other cities (Figure 3.4, the median variation among the 53 cities is used to avoid any outlier bias). On the other hand, the first decile decreased drastically by 3.5%, while it increased by 5% in other cities (Figure 3.4)! There is, therefore, a clear case of economic divergence in these cities between the working class and the middle class.

The research question of this chapter is if such a relation between the widening economic gap and the Le Pen vote holds if we consider all French

cities. We will use then the difference between the growth of the fifth decile and first decile as our independent variable instead of the first decile to measure the gap between the established middle class and the working class that may feel threatened of relegation. Furthermore, we will test if such a relationship is valid for different presidential elections.

**hypothesis:** Vote for Le Pen tends to increase in French cities where there is an economic *divergence* between the first income decile and the fifth income decile.

We draw here our insight from the concept of "tunnel effect" ([Hirschman & Rothschild, 1973](#)): during "cyclical upturns", there is first a tolerance for inequalities during a euphoria phase, followed after a few years by increasing envy and bitterness from the groups lagging behind. Hirschman insisted, though, on the requirements for the effectiveness of the tunnel effect in particular:

"For the tunnel effect to be strong (or even to exist), the group that does not advance must be able to empathise, at least for a while, with the group that does. In other words, the two groups must not be divided by barriers that are or are felt as impassable."

So if indeed "Economic hardship leads to radical right voting when the socioeconomic circumstances are favourable" ([Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018](#)), we must highlight the accumulation of wealth by the economic elites will not induce the same kind of envy as the improvement of the economic situation of the middle class. The relation between Le Pen's vote and the variation of top decile income will be tackled in Chapter 5.

For [Hirschman & Rothschild \(1973\)](#), the tunnel effect can only be effective in quite homogeneous societies. On the other hand, in a racially segmented society, people will fail to "empathise" from the start of the economic upturn (the case of the United States comes to mind here, see [Wacquant \(2008\)](#)). From this perspective, we suggest that French society is intermediate between these two models, with a subjective representation of a fairly large and

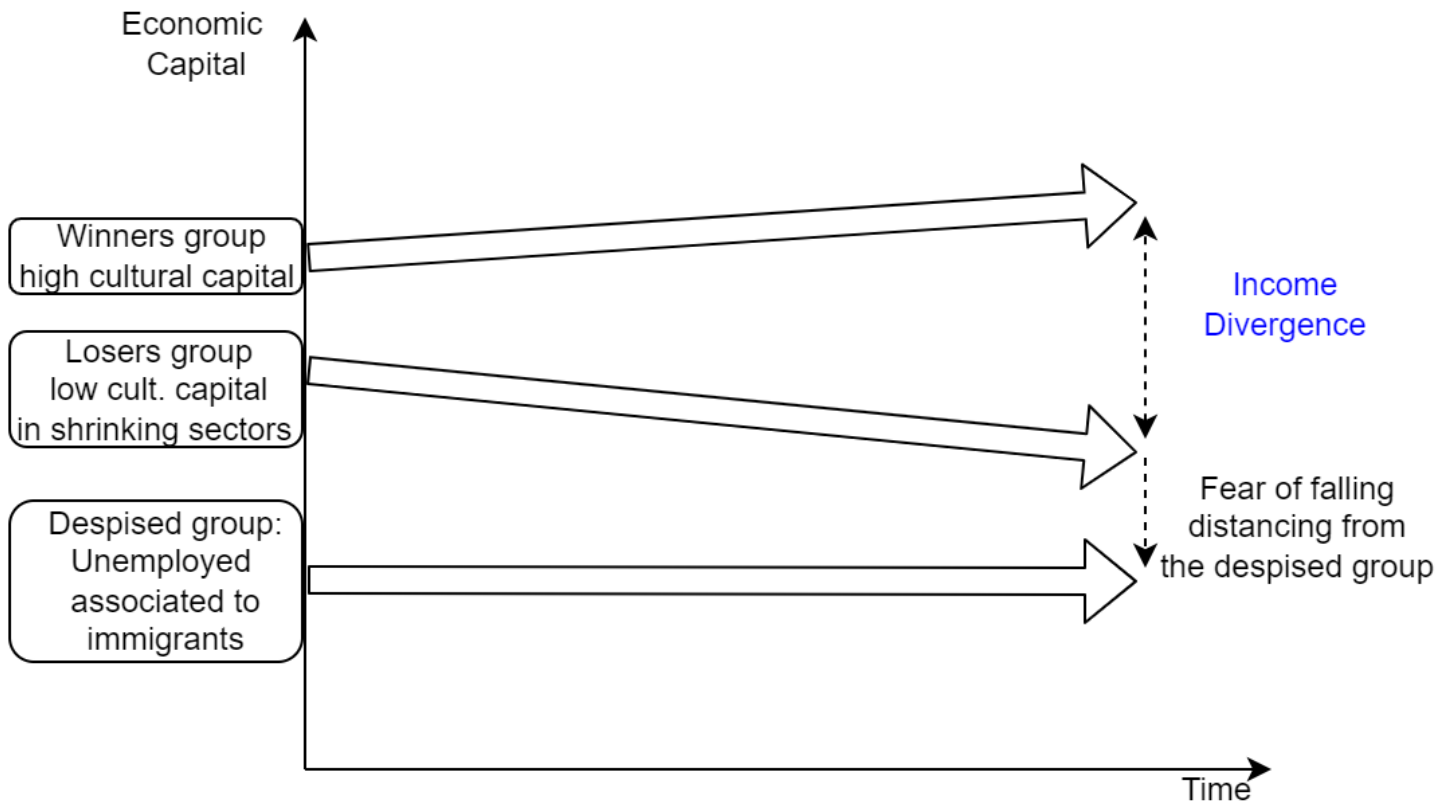


Figure 3.1: Proposed model: Economic divergence between winners and losers groups due to a lack of appropriate cultural capital for the losers group. Members of the losers group fear to fall into a despised group associated with immigrants.

homogeneous block ("Les classes moyennes") where many individuals are anxious to be sent into exile to a deprived and despised group (unemployed people or "les exclus"). This last point will be the focus of the next chapter about the "fear of falling".

### 3.3 methodology

We describe in this section how to measure the economic divergence between the working-class/lower-middle class and upper-middle class. Our unit of

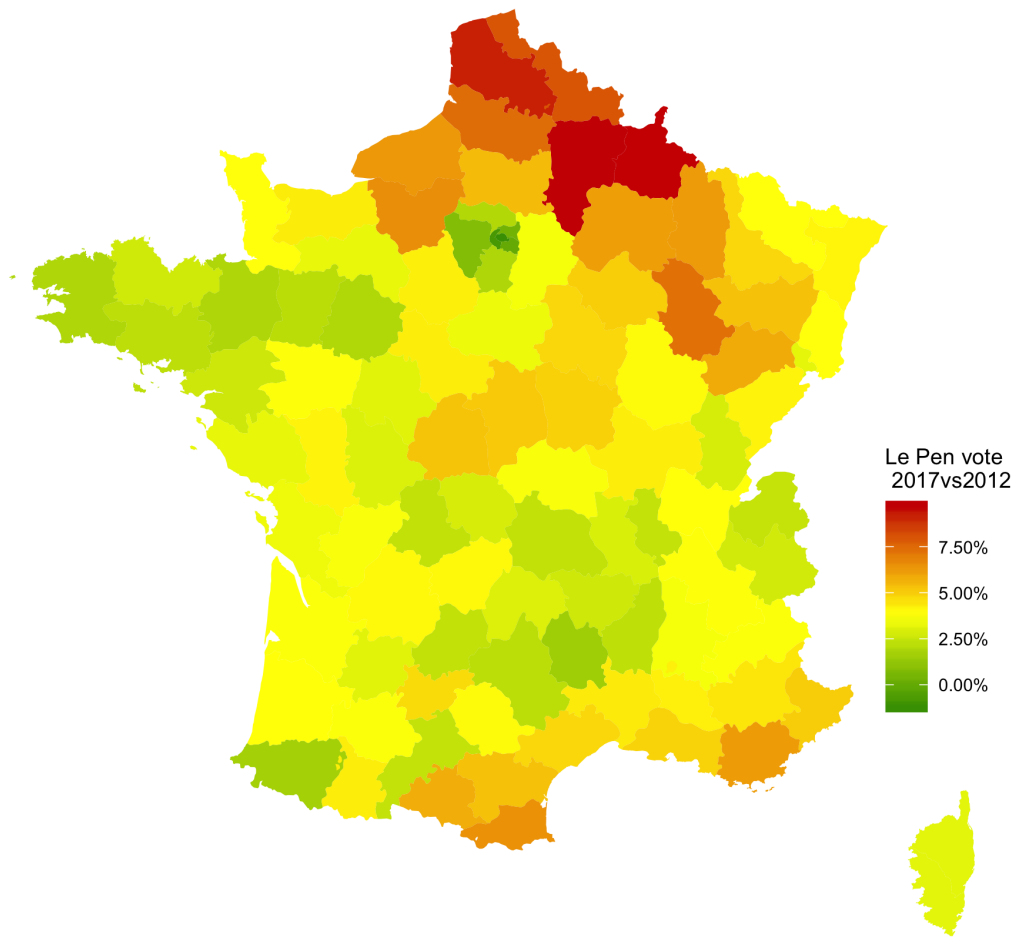


Figure 3.2: Le Pen vote variation between 2012-2017. For each département, the unweighted average is computed over all French cities (population > 2000).

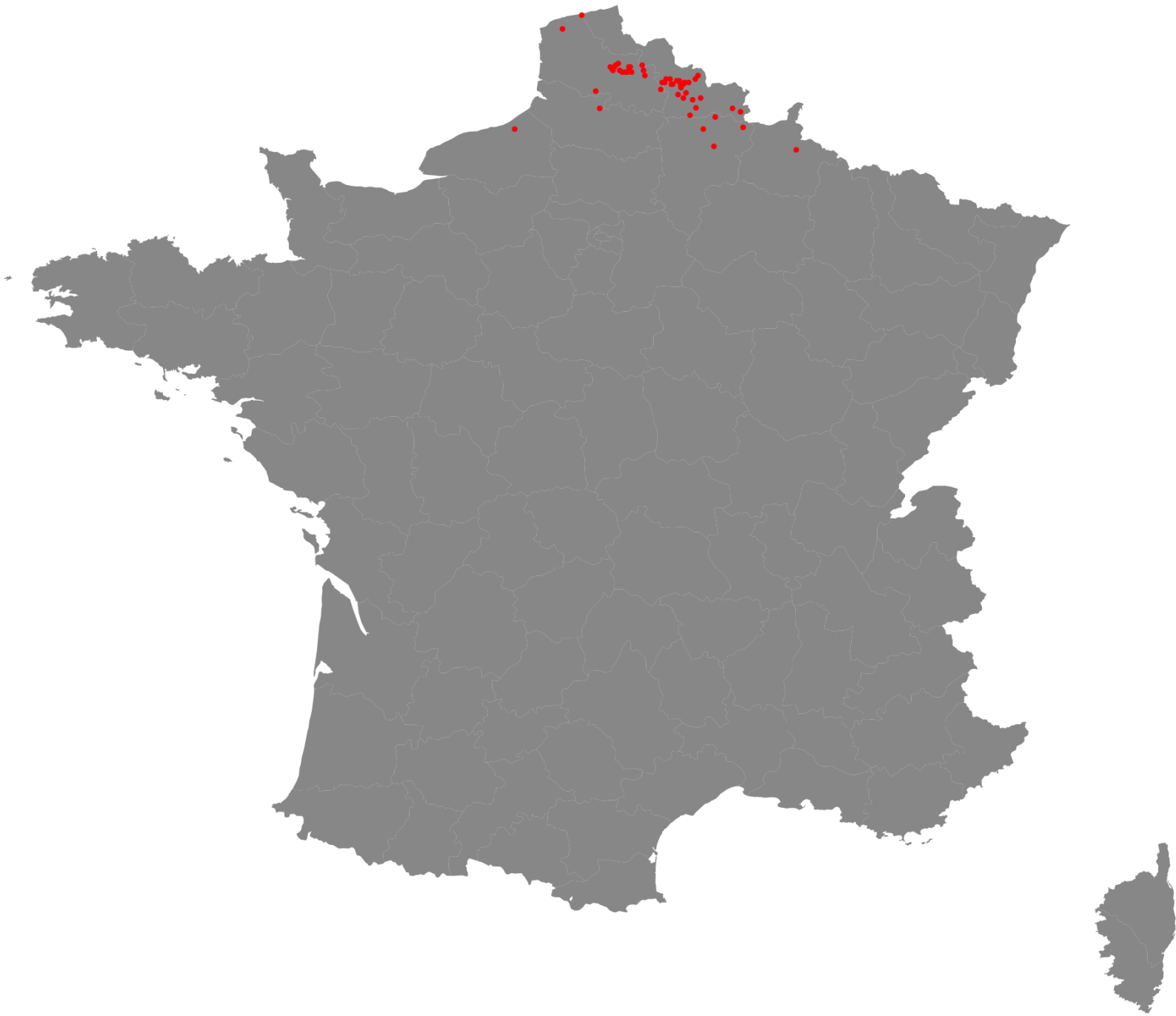


Figure 3.3: The 53 French cities where the Le Pen vote increased of more than 13% between 2012 and 2017

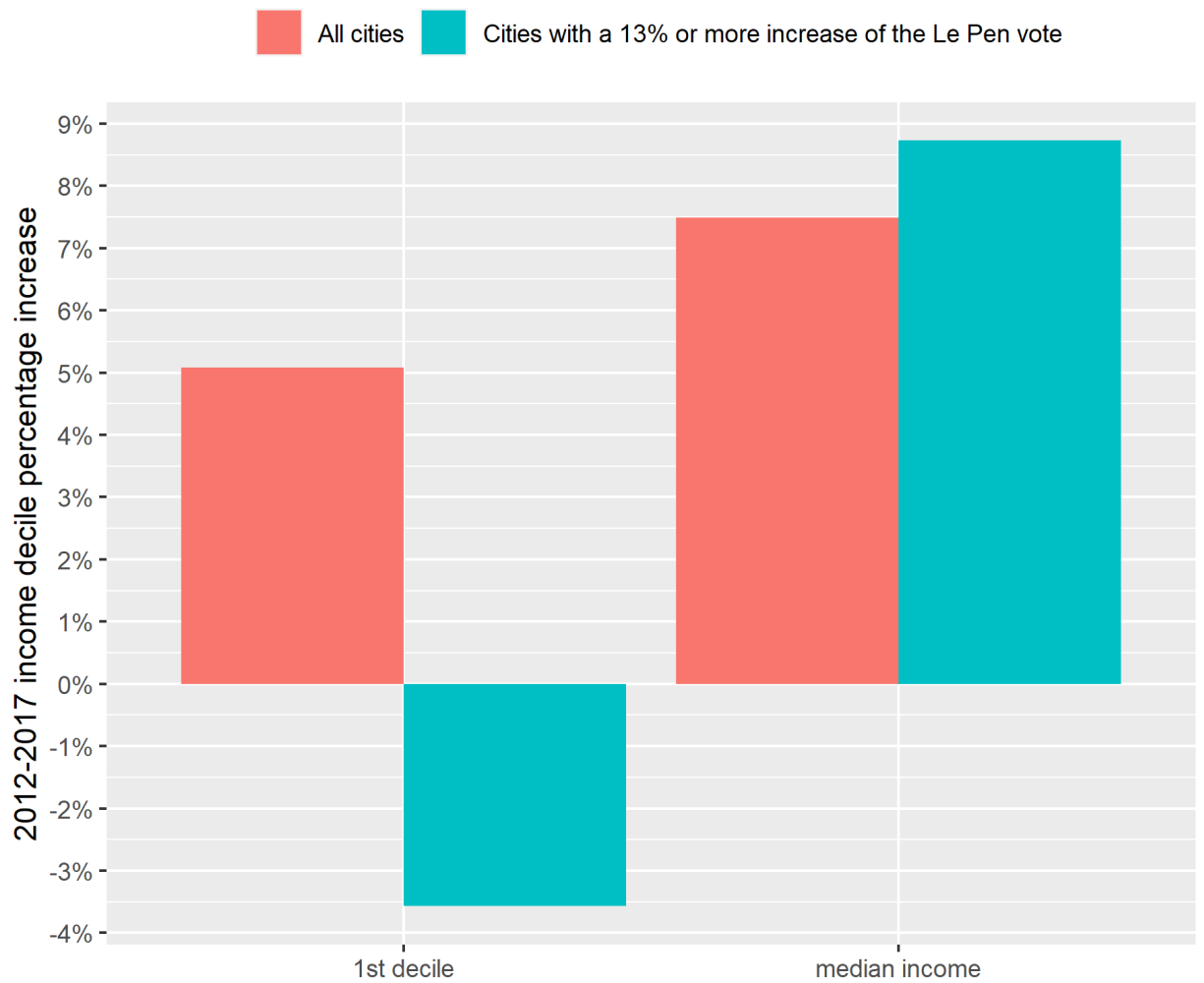


Figure 3.4: Income evolution for cities where the Le Pen vote increased by 13 pts (2012–2017) compared to the rest of France.

analysis is French towns with a population of over 2000 (many economic variables are not available for smaller towns). Our dependent variable is the variation in Le Pen's score between the 2012 and 2017 presidential elections in each of these cities. To check if our results are robust, we will also test with data for the 2002-2007 and the 2007-2012 periods.

Admittedly Jean-Marie Le Pen is a different candidate than Marine Le Pen. However, as immigration is central in their campaigns, and they did not have a strong RWP opponent, it seems fair to compare the 2007 results to the 2012 results. For a future update of this study using the 2022 election results, we would need to question if the Zemmour vote can be merged with the Le Pen vote.

Compared to [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#), our methodology has the advantage of measuring inequality at a very local level and distinguishing the dynamics of the different regions. The drawback of this methodology is we can not prove the groups suffering from income-relative decline are the ones who vote more for Le Pen. However, it is a reasonable assumption as the RWP vote is a protest vote ([Voss, 2018](#)). In particular, we would not expect groups to get better off to increase their support for Le Pen.

Estimating the economic divergence between groups is a challenging task. Ideally, we would need the evolution of income of every citizen in every city. Drawing insight from [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#) we use deciles data for French cities in 2012 and 2017, but people in one decile bracket in 2012 may be in another one in 2017, making comparisons difficult. Theoretically, if the decline of a group is perfectly compensated by the rise of another group, the deciles distribution can remain constant over time despite strong divergence between these two groups.

We are making the assumption that individuals taking full advantage of economic transformation are endowed with more substantial cultural capital and had already slightly higher wages before economic transformations than individuals lacking this appropriate cultural capital (see [Figure 3.1](#)). We, therefore, expect divergences between middle/upper-middle-class deciles and



working/ lower-middle-class deciles to be associated with a higher vote for the FN. To measure such divergence, we use the difference between the first and fifth deciles' growth during the 2012-2017 period (if the median income increased by 5% and the first decile increased by 3%, the difference is then 2%).

To distinguish the divergence effect from the poverty effect, we control the growth of the first decile. We also add the top deciles growths to look at a potential inequality effect. The choice of the fifth and first deciles is arguably arbitrary. 10% of people filling up a tax return earn less than the first decile. We made the assumption the despised group in our model, the very poor social strata earn less than this 10% threshold. Therefore we measure the economic divergence as the difference between the growth of the first and the fifth decile. Tests were done with the sixth or the second decile. They gave very similar results. The reader can find these results in the appendix.

Finally, to better understand the relevant geographic scale of inequality regarding the RWP vote, we will test our hypothesis at the *arrondissement* level. The *arrondissement* is a French administrative division of France. There are about 320 *arrondissements* in Mainland France with a similar population. As each *arrondissement* is usually centred around one middle size city, most of the *arrondissements* are internally economically homogeneous. The INSEE provides deciles income distribution for each *arrondissement*, so we can apply the same methodology. As previously, we will consider the 2002-2017 elections.

### **3.4 Results: Divergence between groups**

We saw earlier (Figure 3.4), that the cities where the Le Pen vote increased the most between 2012 and 2017 were characterised by a drastic divergence between the bottom decile and median decile. We test if such a pattern is associated with the Le Pen vote at the national level.

Table 3.1 shows, indeed, a divergence between the second and fifth deciles

is a strong predictor of a rise in the Le Pen vote. We don't measure here the effect of inequality like the Gini index could as the divergence between the ninth decile and the second decile (which should be similar to the variation of the Gini index) is negatively associated with the Le Pen vote increase. The effect of the divergence between the median and the bottom deciles is unrelated to growing poverty as we control the variation of the second decile.

Immigration and unemployment as control variables give similar results to the previous sections. To check if the effect of divergence is due to particular circumstances in 2017, we perform the same regression during the periods 2002-2007 and 2007-2012. The divergence between the second and fifth decile is a strong predictor for the first period but not 2007-2012. However for this period we found a correlation for other models, like difference between the second and the fifth decile.

Returning to our original question about the rise of FN in the north of France, we compute the average divergence for all French départements (Figure 3.5). The correlation with Le Pen's increased vote across départements is 0.544. The Aisne département is the one by far with the highest level of divergence and also the one with the highest increase in the Le Pen vote. Départements in the north, east and south of Paris following a half-circle pattern have a high economic divergence and Le Pen vote increase. The lack of divergence in France's west and centre seems correlated to Le Pen's poor performance.

On the other hand, the correlation is weak in the Parisian region. The significant presence of immigrants and French people of immigrant origin may explain it (stigmatised French people are unlikely to vote for Fn regardless of the level of divergence). Despite a substantial divergence in the little populated département (6 towns), Creuse did not improve much its support for Le Pen. The divergence also fails to explain the strong vote for Le Pen in the PACA region in the southeast. Finally, the Ardennes and the Pas-de-Calais, where the Le Pen vote improved by 9 points, did have a high but not outstandingly high level of divergence. It remains to be seen if a less

coarse measure of divergence could improve our model.

Finally, we perform the same regression analysis at the *arrondissement* level (Table 3.3). For 2002-2007 and 2012-2017, we find similar results: The divergence between the second and the fifth decile is strongly associated with an increase in the Le Pen vote, whereas such divergence between the top and the bottom decile is associated with a decrease in the Le Pen vote. For both periods, a decrease in poverty is associated with increases in the Le Pen vote. These results confirm the ones obtained at the city level. However, for 2007-2012, we do not find any interesting correlation. It is difficult to say if this lack of results could be due to something specific about the 2007-2012 period or to the low sample size.

Table 3.1: Deciles evolution and populist vote in French cities (2012-2017).  $\Delta$  is variation during 2012-2017 period

	variation of Le Pen vote (2012-2017)
$\Delta$ decile 1	8.74*** (2.20)
$\Delta$ decile 5- $\Delta$ decile 1	11.65*** (2.94)
$\Delta$ decile 9	-7.91*** (1.62)
$\Delta$ Unemployment	0.56 (1.41)
$\Delta$ Immigration	-21.77** (7.07)
Log(voting pop)	-0.81*** (0.09)
Constant	9.24*** (2.35)
Observations	4,945

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001  
 Robust standard error (clusterized at the *département* level). Source: INSEE

Table 3.2: Shrinking professional sectors and evolution of populist vote in French cities (2012-2017)

	variation of Le Pen vote	
	(2002-2007)	(2007-2012)
$\Delta$ decile 1	2.65 (1.71)	-0.29 (1.60)
$\Delta$ decile 5- $\Delta$ decile 1	4.70** (1.67)	-0.74 (1.66)
$\Delta$ decile 9	-1.44 (1.30)	-2.44* (1.12)
$\Delta$ Unemployment	-0.37 (0.41)	-0.24 (0.24)
$\Delta$ Immigration variation	0.65* (0.26)	-0.13 (0.30)
Log(voting pop)	-0.26*** (0.08)	-0.75*** (0.07)
Constant	-1.08 (2.49)	19.20*** (2.19)
Observations	4,313	4,296

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001  
Robust standard error (clusterized at the département level). Source: INSEE

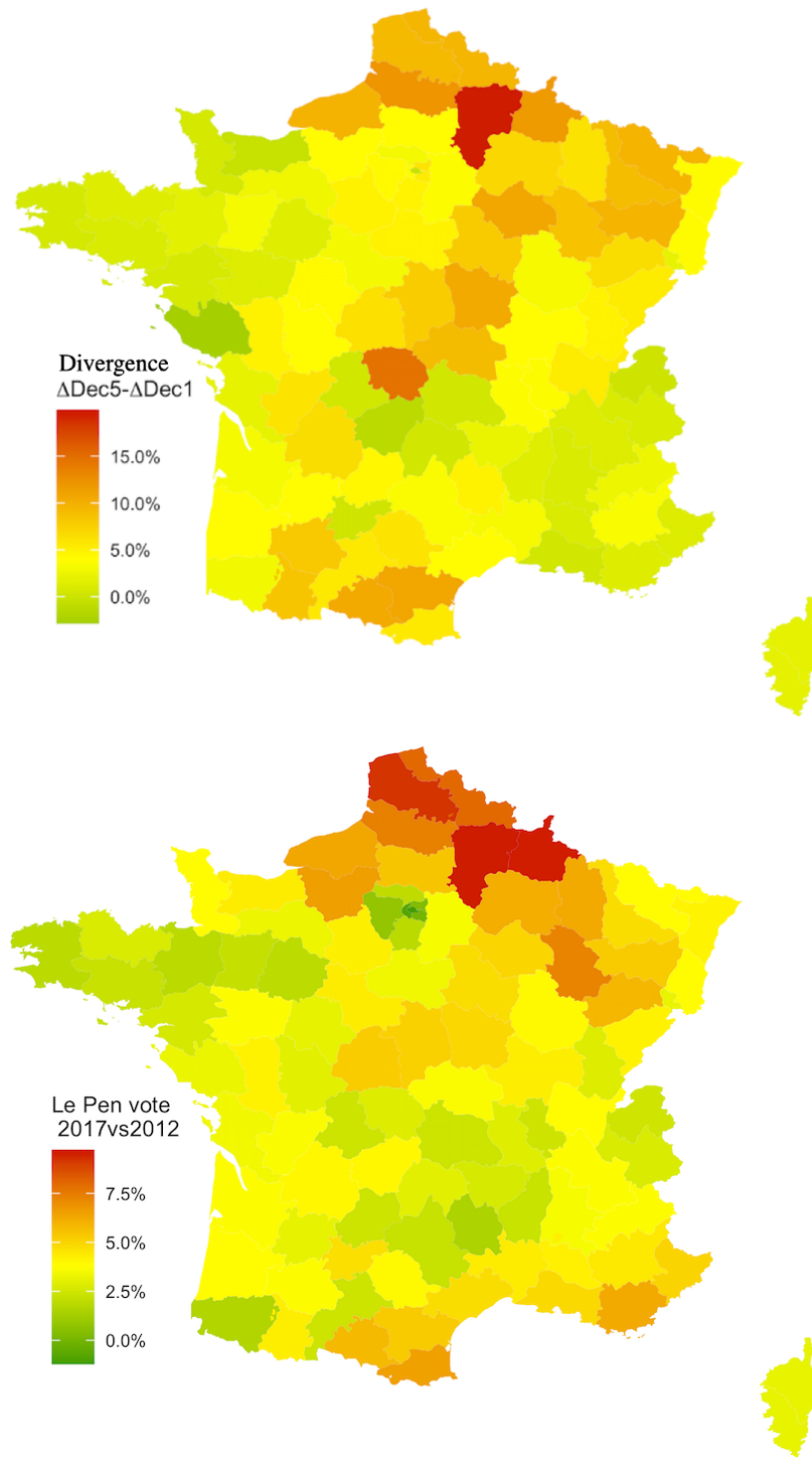


Figure 3.5: Unweighted average divergence per département compared to Le Pen score variation 2012-2017, correlation=0.544

Table 3.3: Deciles evolution and Le Pen vote in French arrondissements (2002-2017)

	variation of Le Pen vote		
	(2002-2007)	(2007-2012)	(2012-2017)
$\Delta$ decile 1	56.00*** (6.79)	-0.96 (6.94)	48.01*** (7.50)
$\Delta$ decile 5 - $\Delta$ decile 1	78.83*** (8.05)	2.43 (8.38)	58.42*** (9.00)
$\Delta$ decile 9	-22.35** (7.81)	-2.14 (4.53)	-40.87*** (6.66)
$\Delta$ Unemployment	-21.72 <sup>+</sup> (11.20)	-1.43 (10.73)	5.05 (12.01)
$\Delta$ Immigration	11.57 (12.14)	-43.89*** (9.50)	-53.93*** (11.74)
Constant	-45.54*** (7.41)	11.63** (4.32)	-4.81 (5.73)
Observations	318	315	314
R <sup>2</sup>	0.29	0.07	0.28
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.28	0.06	0.27

*Note:*

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

## 3.5 Conclusion

It seems the pattern found in Figure 3.3 and 3.4 was not an outlier. Indeed divergence between the second and the fifth decile is associated with an increase in Le Pen's vote. The result holds for different elections at the city level and at the arrondissement level. Actually, if we represent this divergence on a map, it is highly correlated to Le Pen vote variation (see Figure 3.5). This pattern seems not as strong for the 2007-2012 period, though. Maybe it is related to the specificities of the 2007 election: The low performance of J.M. Le Pen (his last attempt) and the competition of Nicolas Sarkozy on the theme of immigration. The pattern seems too strong to be a statistical artefact, in any case.

Does this result lead to asking why the economic divergence between the rising middle class and the working class induces an increase in Le Pen? The bitterness due to an economic relative decline, described as the tunnel effect (Hirschman & Rothschild, 1973), is a possibility. Still, it is puzzling that an increase in this type of inequality translates into a vote focused on immigration and not a lefty vote focused on poverty. The next chapter will attempt to provide another answer to this question with the concept of "fear of falling".

Another question is, why did we have such economic divergence in the north of France? This question will be tackled in chapter 7. However, from the previous chapter, we can already note the large extent of shrinking industrial sectors in the north of France. These economic transformations have an influence on the income distribution of workers.

# Chapter 4

## The Fear of Falling

### Abstract

To understand better Le Pen's vote by economically threatened individuals, we draw from the [Salmela & Von Scheve \(2017\)](#) framework suggesting shame is transformed into anger and symbolic distancing. We show first how this framework helps to understand the story of a young Front National activist. After showing that individuals with a feeling of status decline or a pessimist view of the economy are more likely to vote for Marine Le Pen, we then test economically threatened individuals who are more likely to distance themselves from the unemployed people implicitly associated with immigrants. This shed some light on the relationship between economic pessimism and Le Pen's vote

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the presentation of our model with a description of its third component: the "Fear of falling". According [Minkenberg \(2000\)](#), "Patterns of the new radical right in the era of post-modernity should be



interpreted as modernisation losers in a subjective sense". This sense of "vulnerability emerges from shrinking social and cultural capital rather than from actual victimisation" (Salmela & Von Scheve, 2017). The last two chapters looked at the structural factors generating these "modernisation losers," especially professional shrinking sectors, lack of adequate cultural capital, and economic divergence between groups. In this chapter, we will focus on this 'subjective sense' that modernisation losers give to their hardship and frustration.

We saw in the previous chapter how the economic divergence between the declining middle/lower class and the rising middle class is related to the RWP vote. Therefore, we could expect some frustration and bitterness from the declining groups against rising groups as their change of fortune may be perceived as "unfair". However, we should not overlook the potentially tense relationship between the declining middle/lower class and the sub-proletariat (what we will call in this chapter the "despised group"). Suppose any hostility from the less privileged toward the even less privileged may seem "irrational" when resentment against the rising middle of the upper class would appear "logical". In that case, empirical research tends to show the existence of such hostility between the lower middle and the bottom of the economic scale.

For instance, Burgoon et al. (2018) showed that people tend to vote more for RWP parties when the economic gap between them and the bottom decile is reducing. However, we do not observe such an RWP vote boost when the income of the top decile is growing faster than the rest of the income distribution (we observe a boost of the radical left in this case). The relation between the top decile income and the RWP vote will be the object of the next chapter.

The fear of falling part of our model (Figure 4.1) is largely inspired by Salmela & Von Scheve (2017) framework aiming to understand the emotional roots of right-wing political populism. In this framework, individuals experience "precarious living conditions and perceptions of profound ambiguity of a world that is hard to understand" as well as 'calculable risks of one's

market position" (Flecker et al., 2016). This insecurity, despite the complexity of phenomena, is "experienced as an individual insecurity" (Salmela & Von Scheve, 2017). This framework is twofold: First, the shame "involved in fear of *déclassement*" and in the feeling of "insecurity" is repressed. This shame would be transformed into anger as a self-preservation mechanism (J. H. Turner, 2007; Scheff, 2019) to redirect the pressure of shame "away from the self". Immigrants are one of the potential targets of this redirected anger. Second, "One obvious way to cope with low group status is to distance oneself from the group" Ellemers et al. (2002). So individuals may try to distance themselves from social identities that connect them to their insecurity and their shame. They instead may invest in other identities that would help to make sense of the shaming situation and to regain self-esteem, for "instance, nationality, ethnicity, religion, language and traditional gender roles" (Salmela & Von Scheve, 2017). Both mechanisms would lead anti-immigrant feelings: Anger against immigrants for the former mechanism and symbolic distancing from the immigrant for the second.

According to this framework, shame and the RWP vote related to it is a lot less likely to occur if the embarrassing situation is experienced at a collective level. For instance, the RWP vote did not improve much in Spain, Portugal and Greece after the 2009 crisis. This lack of success for RWP may not be that surprising if we consider that "large segments of the population have been affected by austerity" (Salmela & Von Scheve, 2017). There was "common awareness" people were not individually responsible for their difficulties. On the other hand, the countries less affected by the crisis may favour individualisation of responsibility and, therefore, shame.

If we generalise this concept, in a neoliberal society, employees facing a large range of risks and challenges have the incentive to become "entrepreneurs of the self" (Foucault et al., 2008, p.266), and therefore they are more likely to be subject to shame. To fully explore with quantitative methods this concept from Salmela & Von Scheve (2017) would be a challenge, as the relationship between economic hardship and RWP vote would not be linear,

and more research would be needed to determine which economic conditions lead to personal embarrassment.

As an illustration of our model, we will present in the next section the story of a 20 years old militant of Front National described in the documentary *La cravate* (2020). We will then interpret this story using the Salmela & Von Scheve (2017) framework. Finally, we will present our fear of falling model derived from this framework. To our knowledge, this framework has not been yet tested with empirical data. The quantitative results of this chapter are, therefore, a contribution to assessing the relevance of the Salmela & Von Scheve (2017) framework.

#### 4.1.1 Becoming a right-wing populist

The documentary *La cravate* (2020) makes a portrait of Bastien, a 20 years old militant of Front National during the 2017 presidential election campaign. Despite his young age, Bastien is already a full-time worker, so this example enables us to present our hypothesis. Other ethnologic works provide similar examples (Hochschild, 2016; Girard, 2017; Marchand, 2017; Bourdieu, 1993), but the large amounts of details about Bastien's life trajectory enable a particular understanding of his engagement. Bastien has been an active FN supporter since he was 15. He lives in Amiens in the north of France, where the popularity of the FN increased drastically during the 2010s decade.

Bastien did not grow up in a neighbourhood where he had difficult relations with immigrants. His parents have a relatively high economic capital (his father has a building company) but relatively low cultural capital. The transfer of this economic capital to Bastien is problematic, however. Bastien will not choose not to take over his father's business because the company's future seems uncertain. Bastien and his parents are conscious of the necessity to acquire the necessary cultural capital to preserve his social position. In order to complete this aim, he is a student in a high-status private secondary school since he was 11.

But Bastien does not have the prerequisite cultural capital to decode the

demands of this institution. His parents pushed him to work very hard, and indeed he worked many hours every night. But unable to correct Bastien's inefficient efforts, they are powerless witnesses of his scholar's failure. During this period, the constant threat of being kicked out of the elite school and forced to join the public school, perceived as a shameful relegation, feels closer and closer. The thought of being mixup with this lower social stratum that he does not know anything about is unbearable for Bastien. For Bastien, this despised imaginary world is full of dangerous foreigners with unknown motivations, like the "feujis" (slang for Jews).

After a nervous breakdown, he will quit this private school. He will never join the public school, though. He then becomes highly hostile to immigrants. Unexpected circumstances will then make him join a group of skinheads for a year. According to Bastien, this group did not propose any viable solution to solve "the problem", but only looked for excuses for violent brawls.

At 15, he discovered Marine Le Pen on YouTube, who was able to provide the answers he was looking for. After leaving the skinheads, he became a local FN militant at Amiens. Through dedication, he becomes, after a few years, the local manager of this group of supporters and tries to assimilate the habits and customs of the FN leaders at the national level. He evokes with nostalgia a time period of the "original France" that disappeared before he was born. After the problematic experience at his father's building company, he finds a stable job at a Laser Quest venue which is his other passion.

#### **4.1.2 Relative decline and keep at a distance the despised group**

The first thing to highlight in this story is the relative affluence of the Bastien family. His family managed to pay for an elite private school, although most of the kids come from more affluent families than the Bastien one. Our model regarding the RWP vote is not focused on people at the bottom of the economic scale. [Minkenberg \(2000\)](#) observed that RWP voters "can be characterised as the second-to-last fifth of postmodern society, a stratum

which is rather secure but objectively can still lose something". This statement has been confirmed with the Engler & Weisstanner (2021), and Gidron & Hall (2017) empirical analyses.

As noted by Flecker et al. (2016), people "fear that, in spite of hard work and sacrifices, they are not able to maintain or attain the standard of living and social status they have previously enjoyed or which they aspire to". Indeed Bastien is frightened of *déclassement* despite a lot of hard (but inefficient) work. The fear here is about an individual relegation, not a collective one. From the point of view of Bastien, he's the only one to struggle in this private school when the others seem to do fine. This situation favours an "individualisation of responsibility" described by Salmela & Von Scheve (2017). This divergence of trajectories makes this threat psychologically challenging to cope with. This fear is then similar to the "tunnel effect" (Hirschman & Rothschild, 1973).

We also note Bastien will actually never join the dreaded public school with the "feuj's". The radicalisation process of Bastien happened under a threat that will never really materialise. "The threats of precarization or *déclassement* seem to be more important politically than actual *déclassement*" (Salmela & Von Scheve, 2017).

The Bastien resentment "derives primarily from repeated experiences of individual weakness and powerlessness" (Betz, 2005). These feelings clearly cause great shame to Bastien. To transform this shame into anger is a way to manage an unbearable (Marx, 2019). Therefore the participation of Bastien in a skinhead group and violent brawls at 14 makes much sense in the Salmela & Von Scheve (2017) framework. Bastien is, therefore, an excellent example of the first component of the model, the transformation of shame into anger. The second component, social identity distancing, is equally relevant here.

In the documentary, the problem of Bastien is strikingly not about immigration itself but the fear of falling into a despised group. Bastien is not in contact with many immigrants in his private school and does not really blame immigrants for his problems. So Bastien's hostility to immigrants is

not, in our view, a case of "scapegoating" (Burgoon et al., 2018).

The immigrants represent the group that he needs to distance himself from. Of course, this despised lower class is not exclusively composed of immigrants. Maybe as this threat feels closer, associating this lower class with people of a different ethnicity is a way to increase the distance between him and them artificially. Salmela & Von Scheve (2017) describe workers experiencing similar tension: "In addition to hampering material living conditions, economic uncertainty hampers the construction and maintenance of vital social identities".

If we transpose the fear of Bastien (not wanting to join the public school with lazy and unworthy children) to grow up workers, we can suggest that threatened workers under pressure do not want to be symbolically associated with lazy and unworthy unemployed people. "Along with a fear of unemployment go fears of losing social status and established living standards, and of becoming part of a stigmatised group, such as the unemployed" (Salmela & Von Scheve, 2017).

Those who are perceived to avoid work or who live off the work of others are seen as not deserving any welfare benefits. These 'undeserving beneficiaries', usually include 'the politicians on high and secure income, the refugees who are "looked after by the state", and the long-term unemployed who allegedly do not want to work at all "(Flecker et al., 2016, p.41-42), then become the targets of resentment.

In this working world competition, where success and failure is highly related to personal responsibility, "there is, therefore, the need to maintain a sharp boundary between 'us', the winners (who managed to keep their job), and 'them', the losers who are blamed for their own condition" (Bauman, 2004). The workers who keep their jobs may demand "punishment of those whom they perceive to 'under-perform' and to be 'undeserving'" (Salmela & Von Scheve, 2017).

However, the difficulty in keeping a decent job for a lot of workers does not come from "laziness" but mainly from the lack of appropriate cultural

capital in embodied and institutionalised forms (Bourdieu, 1984) necessary to perform the reconversion imposed by economic mutations. This lack also prevents an "alternative career" in non-economic fields like the artistic field. This is congruent with the well-known fact that education is a good predictor (better than income) of the right-wing populist vote (Fourquet, 2017). For Bastien also, the lack of cultural capital, mainly transmitted cultural capital from his father managing a building company, was crucial in his shortcoming at school. In this chapter, we will not explore the question of cultural capital as a moderator of success, but we refer to look at this question in the chapter devoted to shrinking sectors.

The last striking thing about Bastien's story is his wish to "return" to an imaginary period (around his grandparents' time) of the "original France". As De Weerd et al. (2016) pointed out, "People who feel threatened by the future tend to focus on the past." As a consequence,

"This often leads to nostalgic accounts contrasting the 'good old days' with the aggravating present and an even more frightening future. Right-wing populists respond to this need by offering backwardly oriented utopias and historical narratives that glorify traditional communities."

(Salmela & Von Scheve, 2017).

## 4.2 Fear of falling model

We can now state our hypotheses related to the fear of falling part of our model (see Figure 4.1 for a diagram of our model): People experiencing the threat of downward economic mobility fear falling into a "despised group". The diagram Figure 4.2 gives a detailed account of the fear of falling hypothesis. To test this hypothesis, we look if feelings of social decline, the expectation of future social decline and the perception of a worsening economic environment are associated with the Le Pen vote, hence our first three hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1a:** Voters who have a feeling of social relegation tend to vote more for Le Pen.

**Hypothesis 1b:** Voters expecting to be socially relegated in the future tend to vote more for Le Pen.

**Hypothesis 1c:** Voters who perceive their economic environment as worsening tend to vote more for Le Pen.

This last hypothesis is the relation between the first and last circles of the diagram Figure 4.2. This diagram gives a detailed view of the fear of falling process: Economic degradation leading to an RWP vote. Our second hypothesis suggests that people experiencing the stress of a potential economic relegation and "fed up to pay for others" (Marchand, 2017, p.168) will become hostile against the despised group they are afraid to be associated with. "Winner" groups or upper class, which may be perceived as responsible for their economic insecurity, are only secondary targets or not a target at all of this hostility.

In the French context, we will operationalise the despised group as the group of unemployed people, and we also expect individuals despising the unemployed to vote more for Le Pen. To establish a symbolic distance between themselves and the despised group, threatened individuals might summon a discourse using the oppositions hard workers/ lazy unemployed, taxpayer/welfare cheater, law-abiding citizen/ disregard for the French laws and customs (Bastien is very respectful of rules) or even cultural opposition. These oppositions are then used to justify a particular "vision or di-vision" of the society (Bourdieu, 1980). As mentioned above, immigrants are easily associated with this despised group, probably to mark the distance between this group and declining individuals. In order to further distance themselves, a particular targeted immigrant subgroup (like Muslims in France) may be stigmatised with flaws which are the polar opposite of the qualities/values claimed by declining individuals. Given that we consider here the effect of economic relegation and degradation, we will focus on the opposition hard workers/ lazy unemployed, taxpayer/welfare cheater:



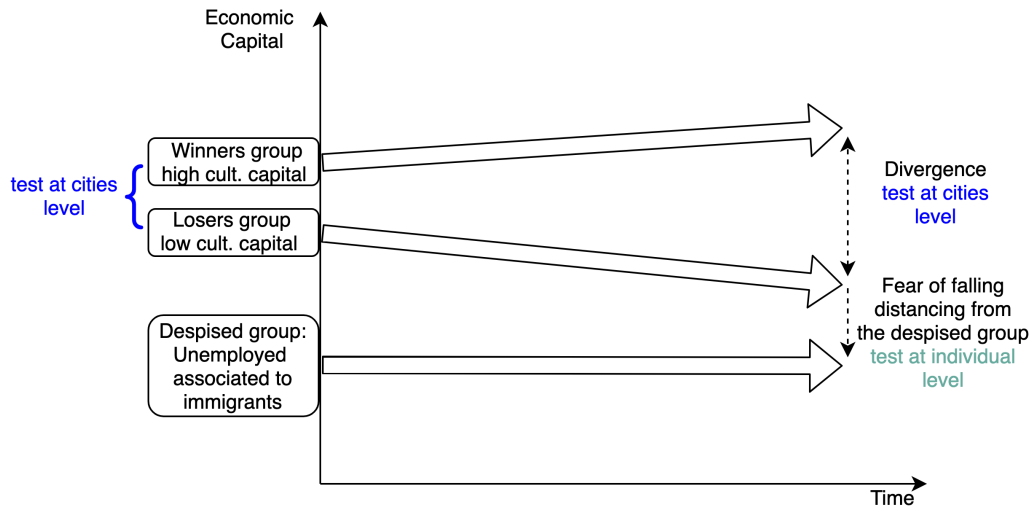


Figure 4.1: Proposed model: Economic divergence between winners and losers groups due to a lack of appropriate cultural capital for the losers group. Members of the losers group fear falling into a despised group associated with immigrants.

**Hypothesis 2a:** Individuals threatened by economic degradation will stigmatise unemployed people as lazy

**Hypothesis 2b:** Le Pen voters denigrate unemployed people

**Hypothesis 2c:** Stigmatisation of immigrants as welfare cheaters is associated with stigmatising unemployed people as lazy.

Finally, to fully explore the relevance of the model Figure 4.2, we will consider the associated mediations (see Figure 4.3).

### 4.2.1 Methodology

The empirical data is drawn from the 2017 French Electoral Study. We operationalise at the individual level (Figure 4.1) the fear of status or economic decline. The two main independent variables in this chapter are the subjective feeling of status decline (inspired by Mayer (2015b)) and the perception of a worsening economic environment.

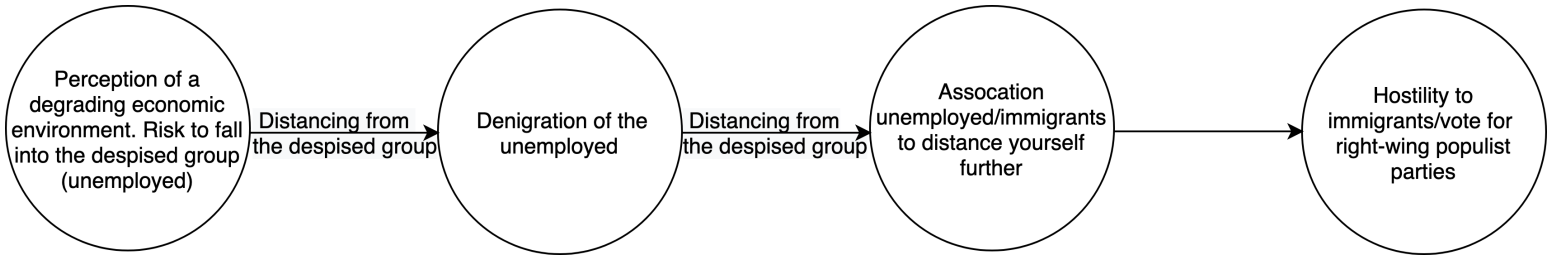


Figure 4.2: Fear of falling detailed model

For the former, we use the two items asking to put "yourself" on the [1 : 10] scale, with 10 representing the "top" of their society, and on the next question, put "the family that you grew up with" on the same scale. A respondent, rating himself a five and then grading his family of upbringing with a 7, feels clearly a decline in his social position. The difference between a respondent's social status and that of his family will then be a measure of social decline or social advancement for this particular individual. It is therefore measured on a [-9 : 9] scale. We will check with a logistic regression if the social decline is associated with higher odds of voting for Le Pen.

We also consider a vote for the left-wing political leader Mélenchon to enable some comparison between the two populist votes leaders. Respondents also give their expectations of social status in 10 years. Therefore expectation of a decline or advancement of social status will also be tested as a predictor of Le Pen's vote. The second independent variable is the perception of a worsening economic environment. This perception may be linked to the perception of economic risks for individuals.

Furthermore, we want to test the relevance of the Figure 4.2 model. So we test the couples independent/dependent variables: "The economic situation is better or worst for 12 months"/"The unemployed could find jobs if they really wanted to" & "The unemployed could find jobs if they really wanted to"/"Many immigrants come to France only in order to benefit from Social security". The relation between Le Pen's vote and the opinion "Many immigrants come to France only in order to benefit from Social security" is quite obvious, so we did not report the result of this regression. We will use

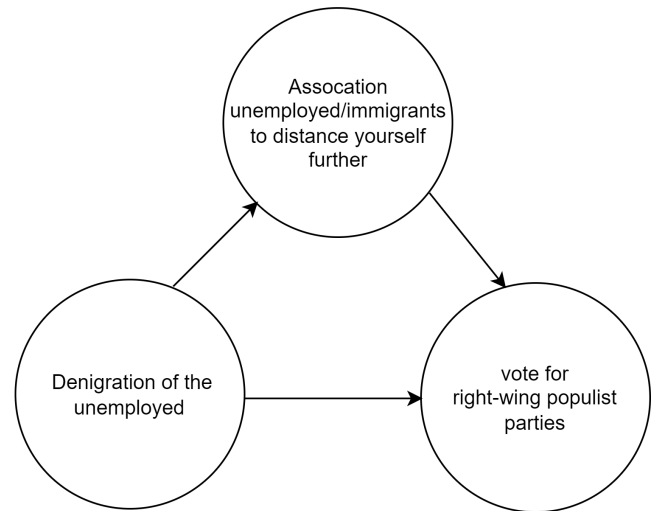
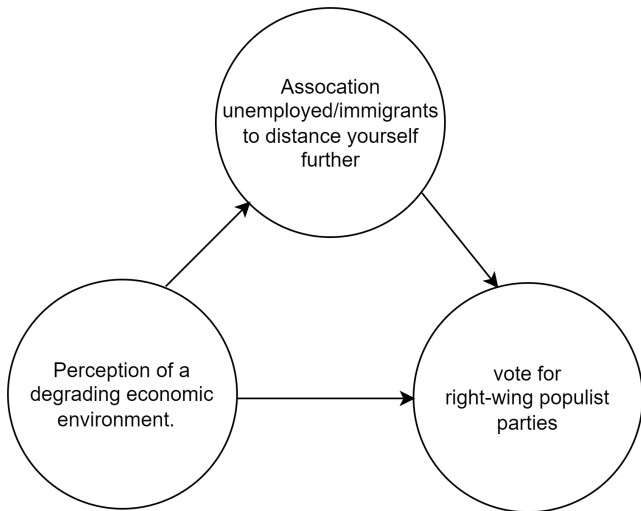
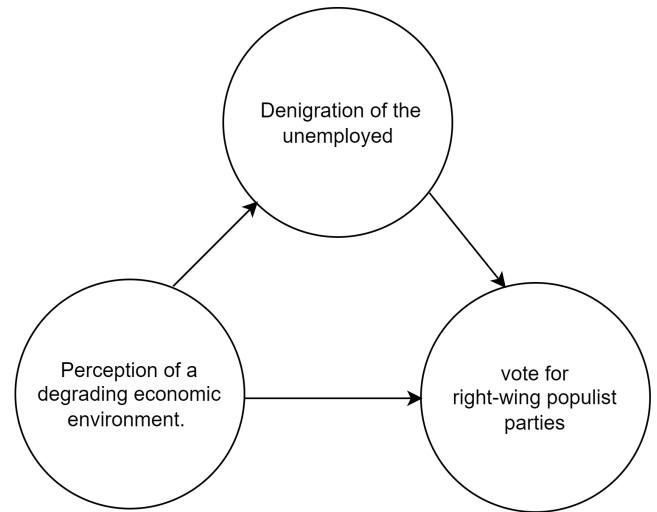
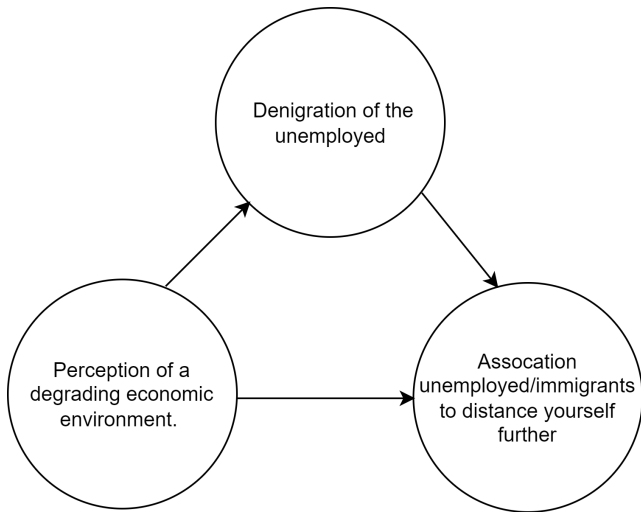


Figure 4.3: The four mediation models derived from Fig 4.2

an ordinal regression for these opinions measured on a Likert 5 points scale.

Finally, we perform a mediation analysis linked to the model Figure 4.2. From this model, we consider four mediation given in Figure 4.3. As control variables, we add standard demographic variables: Income, age, gender, education, type of work and unemployment.

## 4.3 Results

### 4.3.1 Social decline and fear of falling

We test in this section the fear of falling part of our model (Fig. 4.1 and 4.2). First, the perception of status decline (the difference between your own status and the status of "the family that you grew up") is a factor strongly associated with Le Pen's vote (Table 4.1). Unlike education, economic factors like income or unemployment are not significant. Le Pen voters tend to be young workers or craft workers. On the other hand, the perception of future status decline (the difference between my status and my status in 10 years) is not associated with the Le Pen vote. We will get back to this difference in the discussion section.

Is there an economic component to this feeling of status decline? This perception of status decline is correlated ( $\text{cor}=0.125$ ) to a perception of a degrading economic environment. Such a negative perception of the economy is very strongly associated with the Le Pen vote ( $t > 9$ ) (Table 4.2). On the other hand, such negative perception does not seem to be a driver of the Mélenchon vote. We must underline here that the question is notably subjective. People judge if the situation of the country (not their own) is getting better. Regardless of how this perception is grounded in objective reality, respondents anxious about status decline will undoubtedly consider "things are worse than a year ago".

We move now to relations between a perception of economic degradation and denigration of the unemployed and immigrants (see the model in Fig.4.2). Figure 4.4 shows Le Pen supporters consider far more often "the unemployed

are able to find a job if they really want" than Fillons' or Macrons' supporters. There is an apparent contradiction with the fact that they estimate it would be pretty hard for them to find a job (see Figure 4.5). The voters of northern départements (Aisne, Ardennes, Pas-de-Calais, Nord and Somme), where the Le Pen vote increased the most between 2012-2017 (see the previous chapter), also follow this surprising pattern. The same paradox can be found in table 4.3, where the perception of a degrading economic environment is strongly associated with the claim "the unemployed are able to find a job if they really want".

The next step of this distancing process is to associate this despised group with immigrants (see Fig. 4.2). The item "the unemployed are able to find a job if they really want" is a very strong predictor of "Immigrants come to France only in order to benefit from Social security." (Table 4.4). Actually, the correlation (without control variables) between the two statements is really high (0.404) and even higher for non-fn voters (0.413). Concerns about "Immigrants come to France only in order to benefit from Social security" is common among Fn voters (52.8 %).

### 4.3.2 Mediation analysis

In this section, we study the different mediation described in Figure 4.3 related to the model Figure 4.2. We start with "Economy is worst in France than 12 months ago" as the treatment variable, "The unemployed are able to find a job if they really want" as a mediator and with "Immigrants come to benefit from Social security" as the dependent variable (Table 4.5). The effect of this treatment variable is partially moderated. This treatment variable is also partially moderated with the Le Pen vote as the dependent variable (Table 4.6). However, in both cases, the mediated proportion is low.

With "Immigrants come to benefit from Social security" as a mediator, the mediation of "Economy is worst in France than 12 months ago" as a treatment variable seems stronger (Table 4.7) for Le Pen vote as the dependent variable. Still, the relation between a pessimistic view of the economy and the Le Pen

Table 4.1: Relegation and Le Pen vote, source: FES 2017

	Le Pen vote (first round 2017)	
	(1)	(2)
My social status vs family social status	-0.086** (0.032)	
My social status vs my future social status		-0.027 (0.046)
Income	0.00003 (0.0001)	0.00000 (0.0001)
Gender (1=male)	0.144 (0.146)	0.154 (0.148)
Age	-0.016** (0.005)	-0.016** (0.006)
Education (ref:primary)		
Education: Lower secondary	-0.407* (0.191)	-0.381 <sup>+</sup> (0.197)
Education: Secondary	-1.107*** (0.228)	-1.043*** (0.233)
Education: Tertiary	-1.681*** (0.245)	-1.574*** (0.249)
Profession (ref: not working)		
Farmer	0.467 (0.484)	0.535 (0.484)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm manager	0.661* (0.320)	0.615 <sup>+</sup> (0.320)
Professionals	-0.445 (0.379)	-0.467 (0.379)
Technicians	-0.024 (0.291)	-0.028 (0.295)
Service workers	0.592* (0.262)	0.679* (0.267)
Industry workers	0.616** (0.233)	0.705** (0.238)
Unemployed	-0.232 (0.312)	-0.157 (0.316)
Constant	-0.405 (0.335)	-0.405 (0.347)
Observations	1,440	1,366
Log Likelihood	-643.802	-617.598
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,317.604	1,265.195

Note:

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 4.2: Economic situation perception and populist vote, source: FES  
2017

	Le Pen vote (1)	Mélenchon vote (2)
Economy is worst in France than 12 months ago	0.849*** (0.087)	-0.127 <sup>+</sup> (0.068)
Income	0.00001 (0.0001)	-0.0001 (0.0001)
Gender (1=male)	0.119 (0.153)	-0.289* (0.134)
Age	-0.018** (0.006)	-0.021*** (0.005)
Education (ref: primary)		
Education: Lower secondary	-0.401* (0.203)	0.083 (0.214)
Education: Secondary	-1.090*** (0.242)	0.030 (0.231)
Education: Tertiary	-1.551*** (0.259)	0.257 (0.222)
Profession (ref: not working)		
Farmer	0.070 (0.546)	1.483 <sup>+</sup> (0.784)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm manager	-0.680 (0.581)	1.172 (0.767)
Professionals	-0.339 (0.523)	1.668* (0.757)
Technicians	0.202 (0.509)	1.871* (0.760)
Service workers	0.221 (0.491)	1.559* (0.752)
Industry workers	-0.272 (0.498)	1.451 <sup>+</sup> (0.751)
Unemployed	-0.143 (0.330)	0.149 (0.290)
Constant	-2.358*** (0.593)	-1.540 <sup>+</sup> (0.799)
Observations	1,434	1,434
Log Likelihood	-580.260	-727.535
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,190.520	1,485.070

Note:

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01,\*\*\*p<0.001

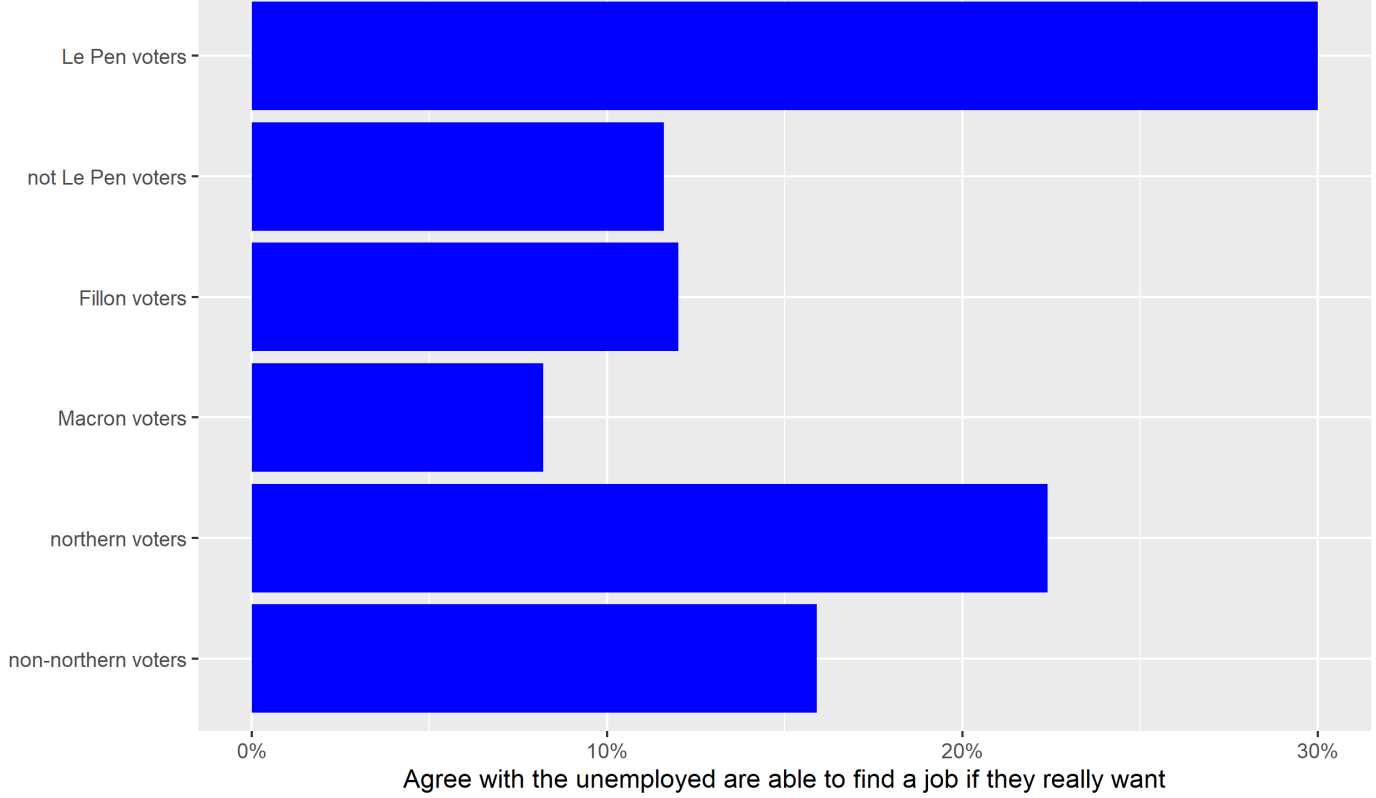


Figure 4.4: Perception of the ability to find a job for yourself and for others

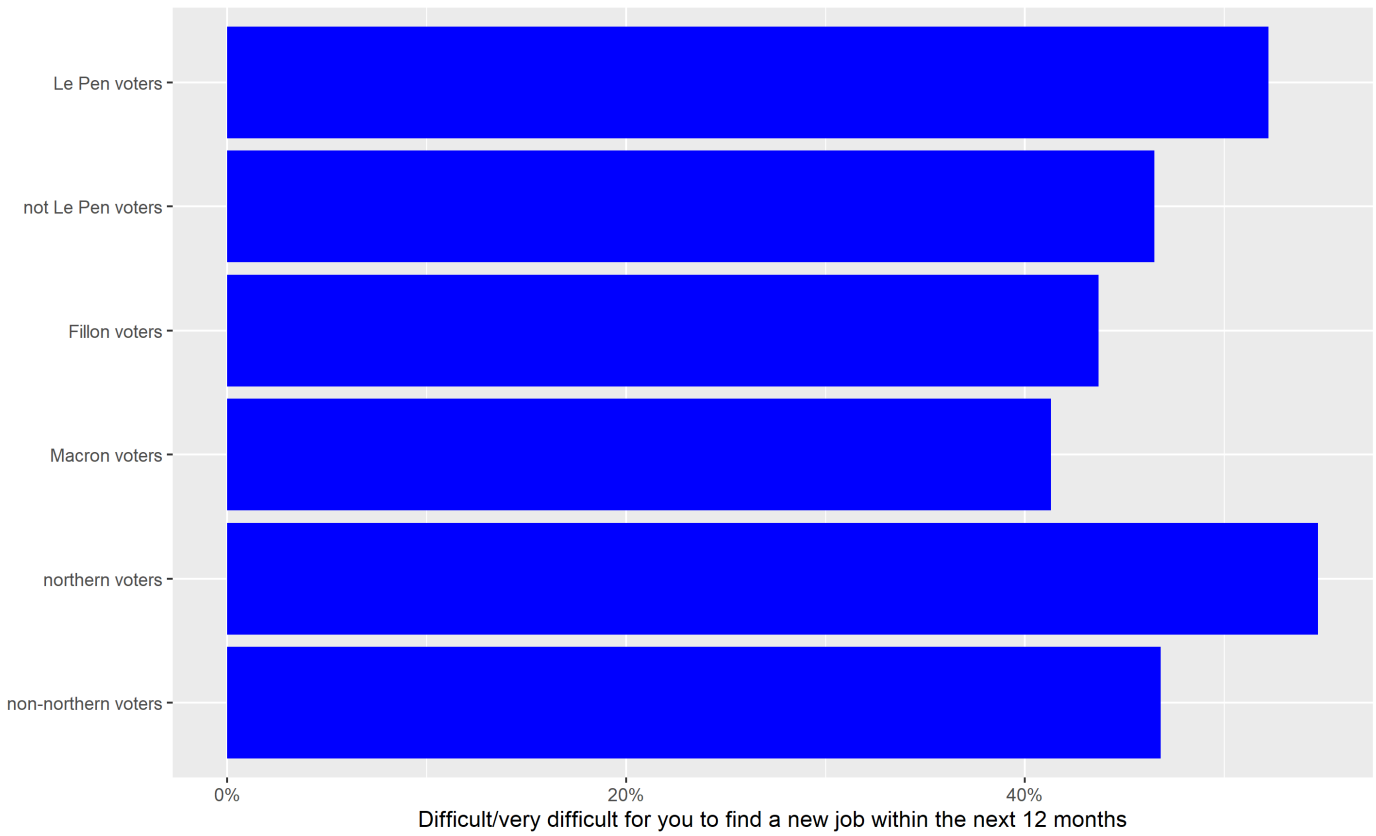


Figure 4.5: Perception of the ability to find a job for yourself



Table 4.3: Economic decline and denigration of the unemployed, source: FES 2017

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> "The unemployed are able to find a job if they really want"
Economy is worst in France than 12 months ago	0.259*** (0.044)
Income	0.0001 (0.0001)
Gender (1=male)	0.030 (0.090)
Age	-0.002 (0.003)
Education (ref: primary)	
Education: Lower secondary	-0.278** (0.099)
Education: Secondary	-0.641*** (0.099)
Education: Tertiary	-1.223*** (0.094)
Profession (ref: not working)	
Farmer	-0.384* (0.165)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm manager	-0.509*** (0.129)
Professionals	-0.664*** (0.119)
Technicians	-0.657*** (0.126)
Service workers	-0.372*** (0.105)
Industry workers	-0.686*** (0.112)
Unemployed	-1.419*** (0.194)
Observations	1,695

*Note:* Ordinal regression

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 4.4: Association and denigration of the unemployed and immigrants,  
source: FES 2017

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> "Immigrants come to benefit from Social security"
The unemployed are able to find a job if they really want	0.796*** (0.052)
Income	0.00001 (0.0001)
Gender (1=male)	0.129 (0.089)
Age	0.005 (0.003)
Education (ref: primary)	
Education: Lower secondary	-0.235* (0.093)
Education: Secondary	-0.851*** (0.090)
Education: Tertiary	-1.137*** (0.092)
Profession (ref: not working)	
Farmer	0.106 (0.164)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm manager	-0.242 <sup>+</sup> (0.128)
Professionals	-0.262* (0.116)
Technicians	0.062 (0.120)
Service workers	0.140 (0.103)
Industry workers	0.241* (0.114)
Unemployed	0.386 <sup>+</sup> (0.198)
Observations	1,728

*Note:* Ordinal regression

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

vote seems to be related to factors other than the burden of immigration on the welfare system. On the other hand, the effect on Le Pen’s vote of "The unemployed are able to find a job if they really want" as a treatment variable becomes non-significant with the mediation of "Immigrants come to benefit from Social security" with a proportion of 86% of mediation (Table 4.8), it seems the two items are strongly related in the mind of the Le Pen voters.

Overall if we find some mediation compatible with our model 4.2, it seems other factors are relevant to explain the relationship between economic pessimism and the Le Pen vote.

Table 4.5: Mediation analysis: Eco is worst → unemployed could find a job → Immigrants come for Social security, source: FES 2017

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> "Immigrants come to benefit from Social security"
avg med effect "The unemployed are able to find a job if they really want"	−0.0624***
avg dir effect "Economy is worst in France than 12 months ago"	−0.3794***
Total Effect	−0.4418***
Prop. Mediated	0.1407***

*Note:* +p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

## 4.4 Conclusion

Our results show individuals who feel an inter-generational status decline and a worsening economic environment tend to vote more for Le Pen. This relation does not seem to hold for left-wing populism (Mélenchon vote). Furthermore, those who are pessimistic about the economy tend to state the unemployed could find a job if they really wanted to, which is quite contradictory. The Le Pen voters are a lot more likely to endorse this

Table 4.6: Mediation analysis: Eco is worst → unemployed could find a job  
 → Le Pen vote, source: FES 2017

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> "Le Pen vote"
avg med effect "The unemployed are able to find a job if they really want"	0.001794***
avg dir effect "Economy is worst in France than 12 months ago"	0.029948***
Total Effect	0.031742***
Prop. Mediated	0.055911***

*Note:* +p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 4.7: Mediation analysis: Eco is worst → Immigrants come for Social  
 security → Le Pen vote, source: FES 2017

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> "Le Pen vote"
avg med effect "Immigrants come to benefit from Social security"	0.01218***
avg dir effect "Economy is worst in France than 12 months ago"	0.01922***
Total Effect	0.03140***
Prop. Mediated	0.38115***

*Note:* +p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 4.8: Mediation analysis: Unemployed could find a job→ Immigrants come for Social security → Le Pen vote, source: FES 2017

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> "Le Pen vote"
avg med effect "Immigrants come to benefit from Social security"	−0.0688***
avg dir effect "The unemployed are able to find a job if they really want"	−0.0108
Total Effect	−0.0796***
Prop. Mediated	0.8634***

*Note:* +p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

statement. However, they also think it would be difficult for them to find a new job.

Such "lunatic" and contradictory behaviours are typical for RWP supporters. For instance, RWP voters in low-unemployment countries like Switzerland or Austria follow similar patterns, according to ESS 2016 data. In an ethnographic study of FN voters (Marchand, 2017), Clémence, a young woman working at a pizzeria, claims, "I will always get by. Work, whoever wants it, he finds it." and then a few minutes later "there is no work, there is nothing anymore here, we must stop welcoming people at some point." One may explain this contradiction if we consider the tension due to the growing distance between expectations (perceived as legitimate) of a coming social promotion and a threatening and uncertain future. In Marchand (2017), many interviewees supporting FN underline they are in a "privileged" situation. Even if they are far from being rich and they complain about a "loss of purchase power" (Marchand, 2017, p.178), so far, "they managed" to avoid falling into poverty. This tension between expectation and objective future may explain why future decline is not significant in Table 4.1.

Another question raised by this chapter is why threatened and under pressure, individuals would transform shame and fear into anger and contempt

for people who are worst off than them. We will look at this question in more detail in chapter 8, by exploring the [Marx \(2019\)](#) findings. However, we can suggest here, drawing from ([Bourdieu, 1984](#), p.403), following a principle of "di-vision", the "declining petit bourgeois" (and the declining established working class) will oppose its "'simple', 'serious', 'honest' life" to the despised group to reassert the distance between him and them. In this regard, it is not surprising to find high correlations between the valorisation of "discipline" (at school) and denigration of the unemployed and immigrants (0.31 and 0.34).

Claiming these features of the social identity of a laborious, honest but unrewarded worker is a way to regain self-esteem ([Salmela & Von Scheve, 2017](#)). In this framework, it is, therefore, logical to stigmatise the unemployed with symmetrical flaws. To extend the ideas of [Salmela & Von Scheve \(2017\)](#), I would suggest this symbolic distancing is easier by stigmatising immigrants than native nationals. As a matter of fact, stigmatising people too similar to yourself may be a self-defeating strategy. This hypothesis is supported by the fact the association between "The unemployed are able to find a job if they really want" and the Le Pen vote seems to be mediated to a large extent by the variable "Immigrants come to benefit from Social security".

This also sheds some light on the hostility against social benefit, mainly present in the US context ([Hochschild, 2016](#)). Indeed this benefit may reduce the economic and, therefore, social distance between the low-paid workers and the unemployed. This threat may lead to a perception that "French people are less favoured" and to a feeling of unfairness: "Now I see so much injustice. It gets me angry but simply when you see this guy who had four wives, who received allowances at the expense of French people" ([Marchand, 2017](#), p.175).

However, we need to nuance our statement if this work shows the relations between economic pessimism, denigration of the unemployed and the immigrant, and the Le Pen vote. Our mediation analysis suggests other mechanisms or channels linking economic pessimism and Le Pen exist. Further research is therefore needed to understand how economic factors lead to

a vote that seems unrelated to economic motivations.

## Chapter 5

# The link between the income gap top earners-workers and the FN vote

### Abstract

This chapter concludes our study of how income evolution is related to the Le Pen vote variation at the local level. A strong and consistent relationship between an increasing top decile income and a decreasing Le Pen vote was found in chapter 3. Understanding better the origin of this correlation is the puzzle we want to explore in this chapter. We consider three hypotheses to make sense of this puzzle. First, it could be explained by a composition effect: Top decile increase could be the symptom of high-income people inflows in towns altering their social composition and, therefore, the Le Pen vote. Alternatively, the good fortune of the top earners could induce a consensual optimism regarding the economy, and such optimism may "prevent" the Le Pen vote, according to chapter 4. The last possible explanation of the puzzle is a contact hypothesis. An increase in the top decile is



correlated to a higher presence of the top earners and, therefore an increase of positive contact between people and them, reducing anti-establishment feelings linked to the Le Pen vote. Our empirical results seem to discredit the composition effect hypothesis and support the second hypothesis. The results are mixed regarding the contact hypothesis.

## 5.1 Introduction

Our empirical research in chapter 3 showed a robust and consistent association between the increase of the top decile income relative to the rest of the population and the decrease in the Le Pen vote at the local level. This negative association is the starting point of this chapter. Our research question is then to understand better the factors that could explain this negative association.

There is no simple theoretical explanation in the literature to interpret this correlation. There is a consensus in the literature that an increase in the wealth gap between the poor and the rich people tends to favour a "mobilisation of leftward sentiments" (Rydgren, 2003) pushing for more redistributive welfare policies (Pontusson & Rueda, 2010). However, not as much work has been devoted to understanding if a widening economic gap between the rich and the rest of the workers is a favourable circumstance for a stronger RWP. If a widening economic gap leads to more votes for the left, it may reduce the pool of potential voters for the radical right. Furthermore, such a gap may induce anti-establishment feelings. As we will see in the next chapter, there is a strong association between anti-establishment feelings and the RWP vote.

The empirical results in chapter 3 seem to contradict both previous statements for the French case, as a widening gap is concomitant to a lower RWP vote. We will attempt to make sense of this puzzle. First, we will look in the next section at the literature exploring the relationship between increasing

wealth by the rich and the RWP vote; we will then suggest three hypotheses to understand this phenomenon before describing our methodology.

### 5.1.1 Rich getting richer and the RWP vote

There is a gap between the theoretical literature and empirical literature regarding our research question. The theoretical literature about the relation between economic inequality and the RWP vote tends to consider income inequality a favourable factor to the populist vote (Stiglitz, 2012; Bartels, 2016). For Putnam et al. (2000), "the combination of declining social capital with the rising interpersonal inequality represented for Putnam the biggest threat to American democracy". After Brexit and the Trump victory, some scholars (Dorling, 2019; Eichengreen, 2018) were quick to point to the rise of inequality to make sense of the rise of populism.

Shayo (2009), justify this potential correlation by claiming people would identify with their class and nationality. The relative importance of each identity would depend on circumstances. In particular, income inequality would increase the national identity component for low-income people. The reason is that individuals would maximise the "utility" of their identities by discarding, to some extent, the ones with a decreasing status value. The estimation of the status value would be given by comparison to others groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The salience of the national identity would then favour a right-wing populist vote.

The empirical evidence literature linking inequality and populist vote "has been mixed and incomplete" (Gu & Wang, 2022). If the election of Trump seemed to justify the Putnam et al. (2000) pessimism, local empirical studies (Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2021) instead showed: "Long-term declines in employment and population—rather than in earnings, salaries, or wages—in places with relatively strong social capital propelled Donald Trump to the presidency and almost secured his re-election". Dettrey & Campbell (2013), by examining survey data over forty years, found the increased ideological polarisation in the US was mainly driven by political partisanship rather

than the result of increasing income inequality. [Proaño et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#) both found a raise of the top 10% decile income does not seem to affect the RWP vote.

Our results in chapter 3 confirm, to some extent, the empirical findings of the literature. However, these studies in the literature measure inequality at the aggregated national level, whereas inequality is gauged at the town level in chapter 3. Such methodology is relatively new in the literature for this research question. This may explain the disparity of our finding (a local increase in the top decile income is linked to a decrease in the RWP vote) with the literature ([Proaño et al., 2022](#); [Burgoon et al., 2018](#)). In this chapter, we want to extend this contribution by studying hypotheses that may shed some light on these results.

### **5.1.2 Inequality? Not my problem!**

As a first step to understanding the relation between rising income inequality and the RWP vote, we show here that wealth inequality is not a relevant concern for the Le Pen voters. Indeed interviews from FN voters ([Marchand, 2017](#)) indicate they do not know the FN economic, or political agenda or they are confused about it. Moreover, the evidence collected by [Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier \(2013\)](#) suggests that voters have little knowledge about the economy. So if people are unaware or have a distorted view of the actual level of inequality, does it really matter for the election results? Furthermore, [White & Trump \(2018\)](#) argues, using empirical data, that public opinion regarding the legitimacy of income differences is influenced by actual income inequality. When income differences are perceived to increase, people will tend to adjust to the new situation. The higher level of income inequality may become legitimate. If this claim is valid, it is, therefore, questionable to make comparative studies associating inequality levels and political choices in a set of countries.

To explore the relationship between economic inequality and the FN voters more precisely, we look at data from the French electoral study in

Vote 2017    Fillon    Le Pen    Macron    Mélenchon

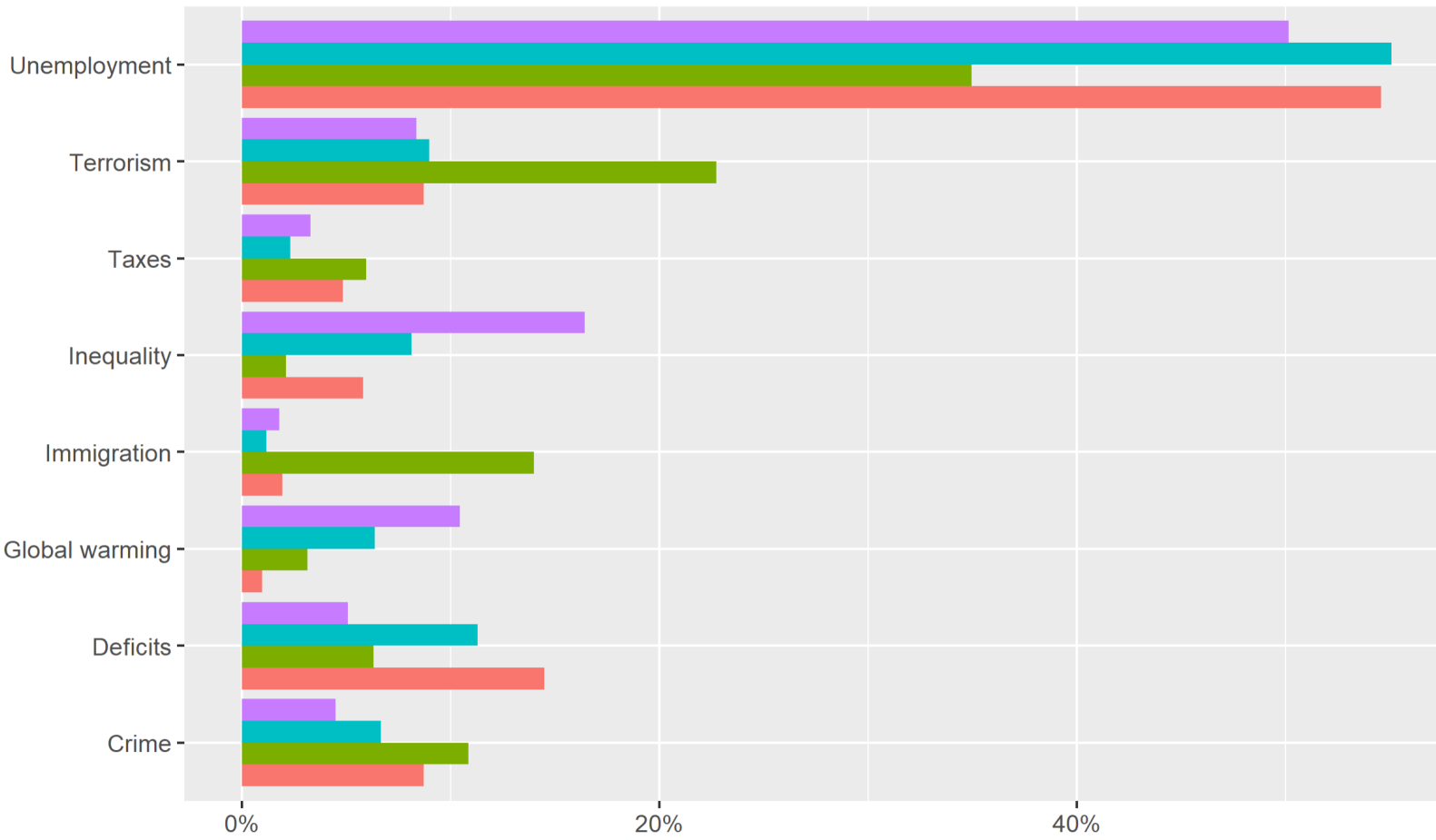


Figure 5.1: The main problem in France today for the voters of the four main candidates of the 2017 election

2017. Figure 5.1 shows the distribution of the replies to "What is the main issue in France today?" of the voters for the four main candidates of the 2017 presidential election. If unemployment is the number 1 problem for all the candidates, this reply is strikingly lower for Le Pen voters. Among the four groups of voters, the Le Pen supporters are the most concerned about terrorism, immigration, crime, and, maybe more surprisingly, taxes. On the other hand, Le Pen voters are by far the least concerned about "inequality". Even the conservative Fillon voters seem to care more about inequality. Inequality is a somewhat ambiguous term, but in a poll context, most French people would understand it as the difference in wealth and income between rich and poor people. This poll data indicate it is not that surprising not to find a positive correlation between the rising gap between the rich and the poor and a higher FN vote.

All of the elements of this section indicate the observed association is probably not the direct effect of income inequality on the Le Pen vote, as these voters do not seem to care about the level of inequality. Therefore to make sense of the negative association found in chapter 3, we should introduce some mediating or correlated factors between the widening income inequality and the Le Pen vote. We will formulate three hypotheses with such factors to try to explain this association.

## 5.2 Potential explanations

### 5.2.1 Composition effect hypothesis

For our first hypothesis, we consider if the observed correlation indicates a change in the social composition of towns where the Le Pen vote increased. It is quite clear rich people tend to vote less for Le Pen (Fourquet, 2017). So one may suggest decreasing income for the local top 10% may be just the symptom of a rich people exodus. However, such an exodus is unlikely to concern enough people to have a significant impact on the Le Pen vote. So to go further with this idea, we may consider if the decline of the top decile

income in a city is correlated to a particular turnover of the population. It could be linked to the outflow of non-Le Pen voters or the inflow of Le Pen voters. To check this hypothesis, we will need to control the outflow and inflow of the different social groups.

For the following two hypotheses, we draw insight from [Dal Bó et al. \(2018\)](#) who suggests "that economic anxiety may have triggered radical-right mobilisation by weakening social and institutional trust".

### **5.2.2 Inequality as a proxy of economic optimism**

For the second hypothesis, we ask an increase of the top 10% decile income is related to heightened economic expectations reducing RWP vote. According to [Steenvoorden & Hartevelt \(2018\)](#) "societal pessimism is distributed in a tilted U-curve, with the highest levels indeed observed among PRR voters, followed by radical left voters". Indeed, RWP voters demonstrate a widespread pessimism ([Hochschild, 2016](#); [Marchand, 2017](#)). Fear of future deprivation seems to be a defining feature of the RWP voters ([Jetten et al., 2015](#)). [Rovny & Rovny \(2017\)](#) showed the risk of losing one job is a better predictor of RWP vote than low income, while it is reverse for the far left vote.

In chapter 4, we saw Le Pen voters tend to be a lot more pessimistic about their subjective assessment of the French economy. We can therefore ask if a visible improvement in the economic situation of the local top 10% may be seen as a good sign for the future of the local economy. Here we make the assumption the top 10% decile income is linked to a set of future economic opportunities for the workers, and these workers are aware of these potential opportunities. In [Hochschild \(2016\)](#), future Trump supporters are very concerned about the possibility of big companies creating jobs in their town. Sometimes it is not only for their own benefit but also for the good of their community. For instance, a mayor negotiating to sell his house for the installation of a gas plant asked for more jobs for locals as part of the deal ([Hochschild, 2016](#)).

So we will explore in the section results if the increase of the top decile

income is linked to an economic optimism "preventing" the FN vote.

### 5.2.3 The contact hypothesis

For the last hypothesis, we suggest positive contact between the top earners and the workers, and such contact would be detrimental to the Le Pen vote. The association found between a lower Le Pen vote and an increase in the top decile income may be spurious if this variable is a proxy for the odds of top earners-workers contact. We need, therefore, to control for the frequency of contacts to check the validity of the association found.

In the RWP literature, the contact hypothesis refers to how some positive interactions between immigrants and natives may reduce tension and, therefore, the RWP vote (Pettigrew, 1998). We consider here a different kind of contact. The independent variable of our puzzle is the local evolution of the top 10% decile income. So the higher this variable is, the higher the proportion of rich people at the local, and therefore the higher the chance of having contact between low-income and high-income people.

According Jesuit et al. (2009), income inequality would impact social ties. This decrease in social capital would induce an increase in RWP vote (Putnam, 1993). Lower social trust will reduce the tolerance for differences, (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Algan et al., 2018). It could be true that a higher Gini index indicates spatial segregation between low and high-income workers. However, a high local top 10% decile may signal the opposite, even if the median income is low. On the other hand, if there are no rich people in a town, inhabitants "have little reason to believe that they share common values [with the rich], and thus might well be wary of each other's motives" (Uslaner, 2002).

Brexit demonstrated clear geographic divergent dynamics of cities and towns (Jennings & Stoker, 2018). This spatial segregation between the high earners in the connected cities and the working class in the "periphery" would be a factor in the rise of populism (Guilluy, 2016). This spatial segregation may lead to anti-establishment feelings and, finally, FN vote.

If this hypothesis is relevant, it may explain why our results differ from [Burgoon et al. \(2018\)](#), and [Proaño et al. \(2022\)](#).

If positive contacts occur between people and affluent individuals, these contacts are likely to occur at work. In the modern world, where people spend a lot of time at home, there are not many more mandatory meetings that all social classes must attend, like church. For instance, spectators at sports events are spatially segregated depending on their ticket price.

[Godechot et al. \(2020\)](#) showed a dramatic and robust increase in the isolation of top earners at work in western countries. For two decades, there is also a clear upward trend in the RWP vote in Western countries [Heinö \(2016\)](#). The two phenomena could be related if the lack of positive contact with the top earners influences the RWP vote.

The [Allport et al. \(1954\)](#) original conditions for optimal contact are: (1) equal status of the groups in the situation, (2) common goals, (3) intergroup cooperation, and (4) the support of authorities, law or custom. A work environment could enable these positive factors for positive contact between groups. The recent works ([Pettigrew et al., 2011](#)) regarding the intergroup contact theory states similar conditions. The last three conditions seem to fit well the workplace. There is no equality of status between high-salary and low-salary workers. However, teamwork in a company may help to reduce the status differences, while isolation of the top earners in particular branches of the economy may enhance them.

Top earner isolation may influence their perception of the rest of the society, their solidarity feeling and their awareness of their needs ([Godechot et al., 2020](#)). Furthermore, the segregation between high-income workers and low/middle-income workers may exacerbate the frustration of being left behind.

A disconnection between the "elite" and the "people" ([Mudde, 2007](#)) may lead to anti-establishment feelings. We will study in chapter 6 the relationship between such anti-establishment feelings and the populist vote. We, therefore, ask if the presence of the top earners in a town and contact between them



and low-income workers is relevant to understanding the RWP vote in this town.

#### 5.2.4 Hypotheses

To shed some light on the link between the increase in the top decile income and lower vote for Le Pen vote, we consider three hypotheses. First, the growth of this independent variable would be a proxy indicator for a variation of the social composition of a city, influencing, therefore, the Le Pen vote of this city. Our research did not give much support to this hypothesis. Second, an increase in the revenue of the local top earners would entice general optimism about future economic opportunities, which seems to be negatively correlated to the RWP vote (see chapter 4). Last, a more prominent local presence of the top earners would diminish social and spatial segregation. This positive contact between social classes would reduce misunderstandings, tension, and status anxiety due to status differences. This would prevent anti-establishment feelings linked to the RWP vote (see chapter 6 for more details). The top decile income increase would capture an increase in the contact effect, which would explain the association found in chapter 3.

For the first hypothesis, we will try to show the correlation of our research question is not due to a change in the social composition where the Le Pen vote increased. If such an increase in the top decile income in a town were correlated, for instance, to the arrival of more educated people, it would be, therefore, not that surprising the Le Pen vote would increase, given more educated people vote less for Le Pen (Fourquet, 2017). Furthermore, the inflow or outflow of low-education people could also influence the Le Pen vote. We want, therefore, to control the social groups moving in and out of a given town to understand if these migration flows are related to the Le Pen vote.

Using MIGCOM census data, we will divide the workers living in a city either, as managers, intermediate professionals, workers and unemployed. Our thesis is that the inflow and outflow of social groups across towns did

not significantly impact the 2017 Le Pen vote. Hence our first hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1a** Turnover of managers, intermediate professionals, low-income workers, or unemployed is not associated with a significant change in the Le Pen vote at the local level.

To clarify this hypothesis, we do not ask if the Le Pen vote would be lower if, hypothetically, a huge number of educated people moved into a town. It is fairly obvious it would be. We ask if the social turnover in french towns in during 2012-2017 had a significant role in the 2012-2017 evolution of the Le Pen score. We also ask if this impact could explain the correlation increase of the top decile-lower Le Pen vote. As we should see, it does not seem to be the case, hence our second hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1b** Controlling for the turnover of managers, intermediate professionals, low-income workers, or unemployed does not eliminate the association between the evolutions of the top decile and the Le Pen vote.

Here we did here a simplifying assumption. We consider the arrival of managers had only an influence on the Le Pen vote as a composition effect. However, the arrival of managers may have an effect on economic optimism, or maybe contact of workers with these new managers has some effect on the workers (contact hypothesis). These two other hypotheses will be tackled independently. Still, we would like to disentangle the composition effect from other effects regarding the arrival of managers. In order to do that, we could estimate what would be the odds of these new managers voting for Le Pen and compute what is the 2017 rest of the town vote, removing the managers' vote.

**Hypothesis 1c** The arrival of new managers has an effect on the Le Pen vote other than the vote of these managers.

The second hypothesis states a relation between an improvement in the financial situation of the local top 10% and general optimism regarding the economic situation and future opportunities. We saw in chapter 4 that

subjective pessimism about the French economy is a significant predictor of Marine Le Pen support. We, therefore, want to check if:

**Hypothesis 2** Increase in the income of the local top 10% is associated with subjective optimism regarding the economy and future opportunities.

The state of the economy and future opportunities will then be two different dependent variables that we will test independently.

For the contact hypothesis, we consider the contacts that may occur from the physical presence of the top earners in neighbouring towns and the contacts due to the work environment:

**Hypothesis 3a** More contact between the low/middle-income workers and top earners in the work environment is associated with a lower vote for Le Pen.

Contacts between people and top earners may be more likely to occur in the town where people live. However, here it is difficult to disentangle the contact effect of the presence of some top earners in a town from the vote of these top earners, as both may have a negative impact on the Le Pen vote. Hence we will check only the presence of the top earner near this town.

**Hypothesis 3b** Higher presence of the top earners in a town and in its neighbourhood is associated with a lower vote for Le Pen in this town.

Finally, we check if this contact hypothesis may explain our puzzle:

**Hypothesis 3c** Controlling for the presence of top earners and occurrences of contacts between the low/middle-income workers and top earners make less significant the negative correlation between an increase of the top decile income and the Le Pen vote.

## 5.3 Methodology

### 5.3.1 Top earners turnover

In order to test hypotheses 1a, 1b and 1c, we then use the database Migcom about French towns (the unit of analysis in this section) provided by the INSEE. In particular, we want to explore if the outflow of high-income individuals (managers) or the inflow of low-income individuals (low-skill workers and unemployed people) has been an important factor in the increase of the Front National vote in 2017 by altering the social composition of towns. Moreover, we want to check if such a composition effect may explain the correlation between an increase in the top decile income and a decrease in the Le Pen vote.

MIGCOM is a database of the residence of households between 2013 and 2017, which enable tracking of the ingoing and outgoing movements of households each year between all French cities. The type of job of the head of household (manager, intermediate professions, worker, unemployed) is also available. We will use the net flux percentage (turnover) of these four categories to measure the changes in social composition in a town. For instance, if there are 100 managers in a city and ten new managers are moving in whereas seven are moving out, then the turnover will be +3% for this year.

We will use the turnover of managers, intermediate professions, workers, and unemployed as control variables to test hypotheses 1a and 1b. Suppose the increase in the top decile income correlates to a significative alteration in the cities' social composition, leading to an increase in Le Pen's vote. In that case, we expect to measure it through inflows/outflows of particular workers. For instance, if there is a decrease in the number of voters with a high cultural capital inducing a higher Le Pen vote ([Fourquet, 2017](#)), we would expect an outflow of intermediate professional workers.

To distinguish better between a potential composition effect of the arrival/departure of managers (an outflow of managers may reduce the number

of non Le Pen voters) and other effects linked to this turnover on the Le Pen vote, we distinguish the vote from these new managers from the others voters managers.

Given survey data (Fourquet, 2017), we can estimate 10% of managers voted for Le Pen in 2017. We, therefore, remove these new managers who arrived between 2012 and 2017 from the pool of voters to estimate what should have been the 2017 Le Pen vote without them. We then consider the 2012-2017 vote variation as a dependent variable computed with the 2017 vote filtered from the new manager vote. This enables us to see if there is an effect of the arrival of new managers, which is not due to a composition effect. In the model using the classical 2012-2017 vote variation, we implicitly assume that new managers vote like everyone else. We also added a model where the managers would never vote for Le Pen to test a limit case.

Regarding the control variables, we use, as usual, the unemployment level and the size of towns. The variation of immigration level, a central theme in right-wing populist parties, is included as another control. To avoid biases due to too small of managers' populations, we only consider cities with more than 1000 households according to the MIGCOM database. We also cluster the data at the département level.

### **5.3.2 Influence of the top decile income on the optimism about the state of the economy and future opportunities**

The unit of analysis in this section will be the respondents of the French electoral study 2017 (FES 2017). Testing hypothesis 2 is complex as the FES 2017 asks about the perception of respondents about the economy, but the FES does not provide the towns where these respondents live. So we are not able to measure the increase in the top decile income for the towns of these respondents.

However, the FES 2017 provides the département of residence and the size of the agglomeration, with nine modalities of population, where each respondent lives. An agglomeration is a central city associated with its suburb.

Fortunately, 80% of the respondents live in an agglomeration with over 20000 people. As a result, most of the respondents live in the most populous agglomeration of their département, and we can identify it. Quite often, we can also identify people of the second most populous agglomeration. If, for instance, the main agglomeration of a département is in the 100000-200000 bracket, and there is only one another agglomeration in the 50000-100000, then we can identify the respondents from this second agglomeration. To estimate the evolution of the top decile income in these agglomerations, we use the data about the income distribution for the arrondissements (county), which are a subdivision of the département. They fit well with the largest agglomerations.

We can not identify the location of respondents from the smallest agglomerations, so for them, we estimate the top decile income using a weighted average of the possible agglomerations where they could live. Fortunately, the differences between the economic dynamics of the small towns are small, so we get a reasonable approximation for these respondents. Like in the composition hypothesis, we cluster the data at the département level.

As a dependent variable of our ordinal regression model, we use the item "do you think the economy is worst than one year ago?" (5 modalities). This gives the subjective perception of the economy of respondents. We control for their income, education, type of job and age, as these variables could influence their objective perception of the economy. We also control for the size of the agglomerations where people live in some models, as these sizes may be correlated to the optimism of people, and we use those to build our independent variable.

One issue with this dependent variable is its focus on the present state of the economy. In order to get the expectations about future economic opportunities, we use the items asking to self-rate the status of the respondents and their future status in 10 years. The difference between these two scores, as an alternative dependent variable, gives an estimation of the forecast of their status evolution. This gives us a glimpse of midterm/long-term

expectations of people. However, it includes factors that are not economical in the appreciation of their own status, like, for instance, the expectation of having kids in a few years. We can assume, though, that for most people, the economic dimension is crucial in the assessment of status (Ensminger et al., 2003).

Obviously, it is possible, and even likely, that some unknown variables are correlated to the increase of the top 10% decile income and have an influence on the perception of the economy by people. Our point is the evolution of the top 10% decile is a proxy for a set of visible signs, and people interpret these signs as an omen for a good economic outlook. Our methodology is likely to underestimate the effect of the independent variable, given the approximations done in this model. The limitation due to data availability restricts our capacity to test our second hypothesis. On the other hand, a positive result would incite further research when better data is available.

### **5.3.3 Exposition to the top earners**

We use here census data provided by the CASD. The unit of analysis in this section will be the French cantons over the 1995-2017 period. The cantons are a set of towns or a quite large city which are more homogeneous than the towns themselves. Furthermore, our data for the work exposure to the top earners is at the canton level, so by adopting the canton level, we can test our hypotheses in a single model. Our dependent variable will be the Jean-Marie/Marine Le Pen vote in each canton during the different presidential elections (1995-2017). Our model will use classical panel regressions (within and first difference models), so we attempt to find a correlation between the evolutions of the independent and the dependent variables.

Unfortunately, this dataset does not provide the evolution of the top decile income at the canton level. We will therefore use as an alternative the evolution of the percentage of the canton population among the national top 10%. We will refer to this group as the "top earners". Of course, we will check if this variable is, like the local top decile evolution, negatively

associated with the Le Pen vote

For hypothesis 3a, we want to test if contact at work between the population and the top earners is crucial for the Le Pen vote. We use the same dataset, which showed a robust increase in the isolation of top earners at work in Godechot et al. (2020). We will also use the same traditional measures of exposure (Bell, 1954; Massey & Denton, 1988; Godechot et al., 2020) to the top earners at the canton level.

The exposure of a group  $g$  to a group  $h$  is defined by

$${}_gP_h = \sum_i \frac{n_{gi}}{n_g} \cdot \frac{n_{hi}}{n_i - 1}$$

Where  $n_{gi}$  is the number of workers of the group  $g$  in company  $i$  and  $\frac{n_{hi}}{n_i - 1}$  is the proportion of workers of group  $h$  in company  $i$ . We assume a worker can not be exposed to herself, so the number of workers in the company  $i$  is accounted as  $n_i - 1$  and not  $n_i$ . Here the group  $g$  could be workers in the national bottom quartile of income (low-income workers) or in the 25%-75% bracket (middle-income earners). Group  $h$  is the set of top earners in this canton. For each company, we get for low (resp. middle) income workers the proportion of colleagues who are among the top earners. The exposure index is then the weighted average over all the companies of the canton.

In order to test hypothesis 3b, we also look at the influence of the presence of top earners in the neighbouring cantons. We posit this influence is lower for cantons which are further away from each other. We define this function of the influence of the distance between the two cantons centres,  $c_1$  and  $c_2$  as  $\max(d(c_1, c_2) - 40km, 0)$ . So this influence decreases linearly and becomes null for cantons further than 40 kilometres. We also posit the more populous neighbours' cantons will impact the perception of neighbouring wealth for the canton of interest. So to determine how rich the cantons are near a given canton, we compute the weighted average of the presence of top earners in these neighbour cantons. The weights are the population of each canton multiplied by the influence function.



### 5.3.4 Spatial models

To complete the previous section's study, we use more advanced models to take into account the spatial correlation of our data. We frequently observe with spatial data a spatial autocorrelation of the residuals, i.e. a dependence between close observations. This dependence on observations can result either in a loss of efficiency of OLS (estimators will be unbiased but less precise, and tests will no longer have the usual statistical properties) or in biased estimators. If the model omits a variable spatially correlated to the variable of interest, there is thus an omitted variable bias. Depending on hypotheses about the type of spatial correlation between the independent and/or dependent variables, different models exist (Floch & Le Saout, 2018). The SAR model is given by the formula:

$$Y = \rho.WY + X.\beta + \epsilon \quad (\text{SAR Model})$$

The parameter  $\beta$  is the coefficient of the exogenous explanatory variables.  $W$  is a neighbour matrix with a null diagonal. It measures the influence of the values of the dependent variable  $Y$  in the neighbour cities to a given city.  $\rho$  is a parameter to measure the magnitude of this neighbour effect. The  $\epsilon$  error term is supposed to be free from spatial autocorrelation.

Compared to the SAR model, in the SEM model, the  $Y$  observations in neighbouring cities do not influence each other. On the other hand, the error term  $u$  is autocorrelated to the error in the neighbour cities. We estimate  $\lambda$  to measure this influence.

$$Y = X.\beta + u \quad (\text{SEM Model})$$

$$u = \lambda.Wu + \epsilon$$

In our case, the SAR model would assume a city with a high FN vote would tend to boost the FN in neighbouring towns, maybe by the activism of the FN supporters. The SEM model would assume some factors linked to the

FN vote are not included in the model and, therefore, part of the error term. However, these factors would be highly spatially correlated, and therefore, the SEM would be a way to control them to some extent.

## 5.4 Results

### 5.4.1 Top earners turnover

The results reported in the first column of Table 5.1 show the manager turnover does not seem to affect the Le Pen vote. Adding this control variable does not seem to modify the effect of the evolution of the top decile income as our independent variable. So the influence of this variable seems independent of the managers' turnover.

We try now to disentangle the composition effect of the arrival of these new managers from other effects linked to this arrival. As they are less likely to support Le Pen (Fourquet, 2017), we consider two hypotheses; the managers would not vote for Le Pen, and a more realist one where we assume 10% of them would vote for Le Pen (second and third columns Table 5.1). With these two hypotheses, the effect of the increase in the top decile income is still unaffected. Furthermore, we find the manager turnover would be positively associated with the Le Pen vote, which seems to indicate an effect independent from the composition effect. However, this effect is in the opposite direction compared to the expected direction of the contact hypothesis and the economic optimism hypothesis.

The last model, Table 5.1 considers the turnover of intermediate professions, workers, and unemployed. Here we find a positive association with intermediate profession turnover. However, this turnover is highly correlated to managers turnover, though, and as the effect of this manager turnover becomes significant and negative, we may therefore question the validity of this correlation. Regardless, the association with the top decile evolution seems still unaffected.

Overall, these results seem to suggest the association between the increase

of the top decile and the decrease in the Le Pen vote seems to happen regardless if this increase is due to an arrival of wealthy individuals or endogenous gains from the local top earners.

A decline in the top decile income may be a proxy to measure a status decline from the city in a general sense. How can we explain this effect by something other than bitterness due to the social status decline of the city? The variables in our model already take into account the changes in terms of present economic opportunities. However, the managers' turnover may be the symptom of **future** economic opportunities (or their lack of them). As these high-status workers are more mobile and maybe with better information, they may react faster than other workers. So lack of foreseeable economic opportunities may actually be a credible alternative explanation. This is the object of the next section.

#### **5.4.2 Top decile income evolution and confidence about the economy**

We saw in chapter 3 a strong and consistent correlation between the increase of the top decile income and lower Le Pen vote. There was no such clear-cut correlation over several elections with the lower deciles evolutions. We try to assess here the impact of such top decile income increase on the optimism about the economy and future opportunities.

Respondents from the FES 2017 are matched with their county (arrondissement), and the 2012-2017 evolution of the top decile income in their county. This evolution as an independent variable is associated with a subjective perception of an improvement in the economic situation (Table 5.2). In order to isolate this effect from the confidence due to belonging to a particular professional sector or to have a particular diploma, we add some classical demographic controls. While these control variables are relevant for the level of optimism, the association with the independent variable seems to hold. Adding the size of the town where the respondent lives do not seem to alter the result.

Table 5.1: Manager turnover and evolution of populist vote in French cities

	variation of Le Pen vote (2012-2017)			
	(1)	Le Pen's vote new managers=0%	Le Pen's vote new managers=10%	(4)
Managers turnover	-0.98 (1.42)	8.79*** (1.37)	4.18*** (1.24)	-3.68* (1.46)
int turnover				4.09*** (1.01)
workers turnover				-2.76 (3.71)
Unemployed turnover				1.76 (3.37)
$\Delta$ decile 1	-6.41*** (1.00)	-6.29*** (0.99)	-6.40*** (1.00)	-6.14*** (1.02)
$\Delta$ decile 5	24.50*** (5.92)	24.50*** (5.99)	24.57*** (5.99)	24.05*** (5.88)
$\Delta$ decile 9	-19.84*** (5.21)	-19.89*** (5.21)	-19.84*** (5.22)	-20.19*** (5.15)
$\Delta$ Unemployment	3.64 <sup>+</sup> (2.19)	3.34 (2.16)	3.42 (2.17)	3.30 (2.81)
$\Delta$ Immigration variation	-55.39*** (11.51)	-54.90*** (11.49)	-55.27*** (11.50)	-53.54*** (11.35)
Log(voting population)	-0.84*** (0.13)	-0.86*** (0.13)	-0.86*** (0.13)	-0.84*** (0.13)
Constant	10.40*** (1.04)	10.59*** (1.04)	10.58*** (1.06)	10.36*** (1.02)

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001  
Robust standard error(clusterized at the département level). In model 2 and 3, we estimate the 2017 Le Pen vote without the new managers. Their vote is set to 0% in model 2 and to 10% in model 3.

Let's consider the optimism regarding a future improvement of social status as an alternate dependent variable (Table 5.3). We find very similar results controlling or not for the size of the city. So in places where the top decile income increase, people tend to be more confident about the economic situation and future opportunities. So with both models, we found a correlation between an increase in the top decile income and optimism regarding the economy. So this seems promising a lead to understanding our research question, especially given the link between economic pessimism and the Le Pen vote found in chapter 4.

In the next section, we consider another hypothesis local exposure to the top earners would reduce the RWP vote.

### 5.4.3 Exposure to the top earners

We look here to check if the association increase of the presence the top earners and the decrease of the Le Pen vote is still effective if we control for the exposition of low/middle-income earners to top earners and a lower Le Pen vote. The top earners are defined as people with an income in the national top 10%. Given the evolution of the local top decile income is not available with this dataset, we use the proportion of the national top 10% present in each instead French canton (the unit of analysis). This alternative independent variable should be a reasonable proxy.

We consider the proximity of top earners as three control variables: the proportion of people in the neighbouring cities and also the proportion of top earners among colleagues at work of the low and middle earners (bottom 25% and 25%-75% groups). These last two similar control variables (exposition to low and middle earners) are both included in the same model to compare them as predictors (regression models separating these variables give very similar results).

Table 5.4 shows the result shows a panel regression (first difference and within models). Without the control variables, a higher proportion of high earners living in a canton is a predictor of a lower Le Pen vote. We found,

therefore, the expected association. This variable seems a good proxy for our independent variable.

Only the presence of the top earners in neighbouring cities seems to be associated clearly with a lower vote for Le Pen. Regarding the exposure at work with top earners, we find the expected association for the exposure of middle earners to the top earners at work for the first difference model, but the within model gives the opposite correlation! This suggests the results depend on some particular spatial/time trends that it is difficult to account for.

In the FD models, the effect of the presence of the top 10% disappears, supporting our hypothesis; however, the effect seems stronger in within models. Overall we get incoherent results. Our model does not take into account spatial correlations, though, so the next section will provide a more refined model aiming to control for these issues.

#### **5.4.4 Spatial models**

Table 5.5 shows the result of the spatial regression with the SEM model (Floch & Le Saout, 2018). This model is a within model where we take into account the spatial autocorrelation of errors. We used this model to attempt to make sense of the disparity between the FD and within models in the previous section.

Here again, the presence of the national top 10% is negatively correlated to the Le Pen vote. Controlling for the exposition of the low and middle earners to the top earners does not decrease this association. Furthermore, these expositions factors are positively correlated to the Le Pen vote contradicting our expectations. On the other hand, the increase in the presence of the top earners in a town or in the neighbouring towns is associated with lowering the Le Pen vote.

So if this presence is relevant, contact at work may not be the most relevant factor. The fact the presence of the top earners living in neighbouring cities (potentially 20km-30km away) is related in a consistent manner to a lower Le

Pen vote suggests our second hypothesis, stating the effect of an optimistic view on the economy, maybe more promising.

The result given by the SAR model is very close (Table 5.6). So the conclusion is the same as for the SEM model. Overall the evidence showing the top earner's income is related to the Le Pen vote because exposure to the top earner reduces the RWP vote is mixed.

## 5.5 Conclusion

To summarise our results regarding the first hypothesis: The negative effect of the "rich getting richer" on the Le Pen vote happens regardless of local gain of wealth or the arrival of high-income workers. The turnover of intermediate professionals, low-income workers or unemployed does not seem to influence the Le Pen vote significantly. So these results discredit the hypothesis of a correlation between an increasing top decile income and a social composition change in the cities that would be linked to a lower vote for Le Pen.

The good fate of the rich seems to induce optimism regarding the current and future economic situation (second hypothesis). The limitation due to data availability forced us to use a complicated methodology. However, the positive result, despite the approximations of our modelisation, is promising. Hopefully, some future studies with more refined data will look further in this direction.

For the contact hypothesis, the presence of top earners in neighbouring towns is relevant to the FN vote, according to our data. We get the same result as the top earners in the city but only for the spatial models. However, the results are mixed regarding the contact at work with such top earners. If our puzzle could be explained by positive contact between people and the top earners, it would make a lot of sense these contacts happen at work. So our results seem to support more the economic optimism hypothesis than the contact hypothesis.

It is always possible that managers' turnover is correlated to variables

Table 5.2: Improvement of the top earners' income and optimism about the economy

	Eco is worst than 1 year ago	
	(1)	(2)
2012-2017 variation of the top 10% decile	-2.387*** (0.042)	-1.278*** (0.051)
Income	-0.00004 (0.0001)	-0.00004 (0.0001)
Gender (0=male)	0.172 <sup>+</sup> (0.101)	0.182 <sup>+</sup> (0.099)
Age	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.007* (0.003)
Education: Lower secondary	-0.209 (0.127)	-0.248 <sup>+</sup> (0.128)
Education: Secondary	-0.561*** (0.132)	-0.569*** (0.137)
Education: Tertiary	-0.792*** (0.131)	-0.751*** (0.134)
Farmer	0.435* (0.183)	0.534** (0.189)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm manager	-0.445*** (0.131)	-0.278* (0.135)
Professionals	-0.203 <sup>+</sup> (0.119)	-0.074 (0.124)
Technicians	0.058 (0.119)	0.225 <sup>+</sup> (0.121)
Service workers	-0.058 (0.093)	0.064 (0.094)
Industry workers	-0.421*** (0.109)	-0.280* (0.110)
Unemployed	0.024 (0.185)	0.016 (0.187)
Control for the size of the town	No	Yes
Observations	1,322	1,322

Note: Source FES 2017, INSEE for decile data.

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Robust standard error(clusterized at the département level). The top decile evolution in the arrondissement where the respondent lives, is estimated by match making.



Table 5.3: Improvement of the top earners' income and optimism about the economy

	My status will improve in 10 years	
	(1)	(2)
2012-2017 increase of the top 10% decile income	6.134*** (0.091)	5.787*** (0.075)
Income	-0.00004 (0.0001)	-0.00004 (0.0001)
Gender (0=male)	0.167 (0.107)	0.167 (0.107)
Age	-0.052*** (0.004)	-0.052*** (0.004)
Education: Lower secondary	-0.189 (0.120)	-0.166 (0.129)
Education: Secondary	-0.001 (0.113)	-0.005 (0.123)
Education: Tertiary	-0.064 (0.108)	-0.100 (0.115)
Farmer	-0.028 (0.216)	-0.185 (0.200)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm manager	-0.448** (0.147)	-0.592*** (0.148)
Professionals	-0.175 (0.140)	-0.329* (0.140)
Technicians	0.069 (0.141)	-0.098 (0.140)
Service workers	-0.012 (0.129)	-0.169 (0.130)
Industry workers	-0.061 (0.134)	-0.213 (0.133)
Unemployed	0.880*** (0.231)	0.901*** (0.155)
Control for the size of the town	No	Yes
Observations	1,248	1,248

Note: Source FES 2017, INSEE for decile data.

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Robust standard error(clusterized at the département level). The top decile in the arrondissement where the respondent lives, is estimated by match making.

Table 5.4: influence of segregation (F0025xF9010), Within and FD models

dependent variable: Le Pen vote (1995/2002/2007/2012/2017)				
	Within models		FD models	
F9010p	-15.34*** (3.34)	-20.72*** (3.36)	-42.82*** (7.50)	-2.49 (7.48)
F0025p	-8.56*** (1.74)	-5.59** (1.72)	4.20 (4.03)	-14.39*** (3.99)
F2575p	3.73* (1.83)	1.15 (1.81)	12.83** (4.13)	-6.70 (4.09)
F2575xF9010		58.74*** (4.77)		-96.52*** (10.14)
F0025xF9010		62.75*** (5.62)		-16.09 (10.66)
F9010i		-95.09*** (6.55)		-375.85*** (14.72)
log(nb voters)	-2.04*** (0.32)	-1.39*** (0.31)	-18.98*** (0.88)	-17.91*** (0.86)
unemployment	-16.96*** (1.51)	-15.26*** (1.48)	105.78*** (2.92)	104.61*** (2.84)
secondary education	43.88*** (1.09)	39.39*** (1.07)	29.84*** (1.91)	20.74*** (1.89)
A level	50.82*** (1.25)	43.73*** (1.25)	-0.97 (2.61)	-7.99** (2.55)
Uni diplom	12.48*** (1.29)	11.78*** (1.25)	19.10*** (2.17)	12.07*** (2.14)
Constant			1.92*** (0.14)	1.80*** (0.14)
Observations	16,698	16,698	13,145	13,145
R <sup>2</sup>	0.30	0.34	0.17	0.22
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.11	0.16	0.17	0.22

Note: Robust standard error (clusterized at the département level) <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 5.5: SEM-within model (error in a town influenced by neighbours errors)

dependent variable: Le Pen vote (1995/2002/2007/2012/2017)		
log(inscritstot)	2.6***	2.6***
F0025p	-4.7***	-4.1**
F2575p	3.5**	3.7**
F9010p	-7.5**	-10.3***
F2575xF9010		9.5**
F0025xF9010		18.5***
F9010i		-13.5 <sup>+</sup>
Unemployment	-14.7***	-14.1***
Secondary education	23.6***	23.4***
A level	30.0***	29.7***
Uni diplom	8.9***	8.9***

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 5.6: SAR-within model (vote in a town influenced by neighbours' votes)

dependent variable: Le Pen vote (1995/2002/2007/2012/2017)		
log(inscritstot)	2.7***	2.7***
F0025p	-4.8***	-4.1**
F2575p	3.4**	3.5**
F9010p	-7.6**	-10.3***
F2575xF9010		9.5**
F0025xF9010		18.8***
F9010i		-13.3 <sup>+</sup>
Unemployment	-14.7***	-14.1***
Secondary education	23.5***	23.2***
A level	30.1***	29.8***
Uni diplom	8.8***	8.9***

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

not included in our model but strongly associated with the rise of the Le Pen vote. Nevertheless, we need to highlight if such variables existed; these variables would probably be already known in the literature. For instance, the crime rate may explain the movement of managers, but the crime rate is a poor predictor of right-wing populist vote (Coffé et al., 2007), and the literature is characterised by the lack of strong and consistent predictor for right-wing populist vote (Amengay & Stockemer, 2018).

## Chapter 6

# Downward mobility and gender gap vote

### Abstract

This chapter explores the link between inter-generational status decline and the right-wing populist vote. Using four data sets from European countries, we found a strong association between subjective status decline and populist vote for men but not for women. We do not find such a strong association with objective status decline. We consider three hypotheses to explain this disparity. First, status anxiety and the feeling of not getting their "fair share" for men would be associated with bitterness against women and minorities. Second, downward-mobile women would be more feminist and, therefore, less likely to support right-wing populism. Lastly, downward mobile men have a higher perception of external locus of control (attribution of failures to external causes) than women. This would impact their political inclinations. Our data supports only this last hypothesis; in particular, downward mobility and external locus of control for men seem linked to anti-establishment feelings and the populist vote. However,

downward mobility does not seem associated with a higher hostility to immigrants. These results shed some light on the puzzle of the gender gap vote (Immerzeel et al., 2015).

## 6.1 Introduction

### 6.1.1 Social status and right-wing populist vote

One striking feature of the RWP supporters is their pessimism Mayer & Perrineau (1992). This pessimism seems to nourish itself from a perception of loss and decline. In the literature about the RWP vote (especially in qualitative sociology), the words "status decline" (Gest et al., 2018; Hochschild, 2016; Nachtwey, 2018), "resentment" Cramer (2016), or "losers" (Kriesi et al., 2008), are widespread. These concepts are related to individuals' subjective social status, defined as their perceptions of their position within a hierarchy of social prestige.

Many ethnological works on the RWP vote have insisted on examining social status as a predictor of RWP vote (Hochschild, 2016; Gest, 2016; Gidron & Hall, 2017; Cramer, 2016; Minkenberg, 1998). For instance, (Gidron & Hall, 2017, 2020) already showed an association between low status and radical right support. However, the relation is not linear, and the "lower-middle" (Engler & Weisstanner, 2021) may be more prone to the lowest status individual to support RWP. This would suggest these men feel their social status is endangered; thus, anxiety related to the defence of this social status may have led them to endorse such positions. More precisely, these men support rationally populist policies because these policies are perceived as a symbolic but essential defence of their status.

However, this hypothesis needs to be considered with caution. For instance, Oesch & Vigna (2021) did not find any absolute or relative perception of decline of subjective status during the last decades among unskilled workers. So it seems we can not explain in a straightforward manner the rise of the populist vote by a decline in the subjective social status (regardless

of the origin of this perception) of the working class. Still, we are going to explore this idea in this chapter.

Hochschild's (2016) five-year study of right populism in Louisiana followed the status anxiety of a group of white men. She analysed the "Great Paradox": People who suffer the most from pollution and oil spills in Louisiana are the most likely to vote against environmental regulations. To solve this paradox, she uses the metaphor of a "waiting line". These white Americans are in a queue over their lifetime to attain the "American Dream". While they consider themselves deserving to be on a fast track, the waiting line is moving slower than expected. Despite their hard work and morality, these men are "being shoved back in line" apparently to make way for "line cutters" (black people, women or any group favoured by "the big government" or cosmopolitan society). Growing impatient and putting the defence of their status above their health, they favour populist parties promising to remove any help from line cutters, reduce big government, support business providing high-status jobs, and restore traditional moral values. This growing impatience evokes the "tunnel effect" described by [Hirschman & Rothschild \(1973\)](#), where the good fortune of others after a while becomes fuel for bitterness.

Among the works exploring the relationship between RWP vote and social status, some focused on the status decline over time ([Hochschild, 2016](#); [Gest, 2016](#); [Brogi, 2019](#); [Peugny, 2006](#)) instead of the absolute level of status. We will follow this approach, including the dynamic evolution of status in this chapter. The next section is focused on the relation between status decline and RWP vote.

### **6.1.2 Status decline and RWP vote**

According to [Gest \(2016\)](#), support for fringe right-wing populism is a consequence of social status decline:

People seem to be more frustrated by that which they have lost, than that which they never possessed. [...] [W]orking

class people's rebellion is driven by a sense of deprivation. The discrepancy between individuals' expectations of power and social centrality and their perceptions of fulfilment. More specifically, white working-class people are consumed by their loss of social and political status in social hierarchies. (p.16)

Two points need to be highlighted from this quote. First, social status is always "relational". It is the comparison of one to a social hierarchy that gives a sense of social status. [Runciman \(1966\)](#) developed this idea of unfavourable comparison in the concept of relative deprivation. This approach has been seldom tested since the 1980s, given the negative reviews ([Gurney & Tierney, 1982](#)) and the difficulty of getting appropriate data. The relation relative deprivation/ RWP support has been tested in some recent works though ([Poutvaara & Steinhardt, 2018](#); [Peugny, 2006](#); [Burgoon et al., 2018](#); [Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012](#)). All cited papers through different operationalisations found a significant effect.

The second point from the Guest quote is the dynamic dimension of the "loss" or the decline of status. Individuals are potentially more sensitive to a "decrease" in status than a "low" status that may not be problematic or "unfair" if an established hierarchy has been in place since always. This chapter aims to study a particular type of "status decline", which is inter-generational mobility as a factor of the Right-Wing Populist (RWP) vote. Inter-generational mobility will be, therefore, the comparison of oneself social status to the social status of the family where one grew up. For individuals experiencing downward intergenerational mobility, we will talk about the status decline or downward mobility.

It is quite clear RWP vote is often a protest vote against a "crisis" that would impact the well-being of individuals ([Nachtwey, 2018](#)), even if the nature of this crisis is often implicit or fuzzy in the public discourse. Therefore, we are going to review the literature on inter-generational mobility and well-being.



### 6.1.3 Downward mobility and subjective well-being

According to the literature, intergenerational downward social and income mobility has a negative effect on subjective well-being (SWB) (Nikolaev & Burns, 2014). However, the results across the literature are not entirely congruent. For instance, according Becker & Birkelbach (2018), intergenerational downward mobility does not attenuate life satisfaction. Potentially the use of slightly different independent and dependent variables and the study of different countries during different periods may be linked to these heterogeneous results.

There is, however, a broad agreement about the "asymmetric effect of income mobility: the losses of sliding on down are larger than the gains of moving up" (Dolan & Lordan, 2013). This asymmetry would be due to a perception of financial insecurity. Acute perception of risk for those "sliding down" would be a lot stronger than for those "sliding up".

Here we need to differentiate objective mobility from subjective mobility. Subjective status and objective status are two quite distinct things. According to a meta-analysis (Tan et al., 2020), objective SES and subjective status measures were moderately associated ( $r = .32$ ). The association with subjective well-being (SWB) is even weaker: The subjective status-SWB association ( $r = .22$ ) was larger than the objective status-SWB association ( $r = .16$ ) (Tan et al., 2020). Objective status and subjective status measures were moderately associated ( $r = .32$ ). This quite low correlation shows subjective and objective status are, therefore, two quite different things. So when we talk about intergenerational mobility, we need to specify if we consider objective or subjective mobility. In this chapter, we will consider both types of mobility as potential drivers of the RWP vote.

Overall there is a correlation between downward mobility and worst subjective well-being, but this relation is quite subtle according to the literature. The next section will consider a particular type of downward mobility: inter-generational mobility. Furthermore, we will examine how it relates to political leanings.

### 6.1.4 Inter-generational mobility and political leaning

We look now at the literature on the impact of inter-generational mobility on political leaning. There is a fair number of papers about the relationship between intergenerational mobility and left/right attitudes. [Gugushvili \(2019\)](#) found intergenerational mobility is associated with support for certain welfare state programmes. Upward mobility is associated with more left-wing attitudes (redistribution and the public sector). These attitudes translate into actual reported voting behaviour ([Clark & D'angelo, 2010](#)). It is worth noting here that in contrast to upward mobility /higher social status, the latter is associated with more right-wing opinions.

If upward mobility is associated with left-wing leaning, it is natural to ask if downward mobility is associated with right-wing support or even radical right-wing support. However, the literature on this precise question is quite sparse and recent. This chapter will therefore help to tackle this gap.

Young people who often fear downward mobility tend to support more "extreme right" and "extreme left" ([Mitrea et al., 2021](#)). One factor differentiating extreme left and right inclinations, in this case, is the lack of diplomas, which is related to extreme right support ([Mitrea et al., 2021](#)).

([Brogi, 2019](#)) showed an "increase of perceived downward intergenerational mobility in Italy and a great variation of these perceptions across Italian regions" during the last decades. Moreover, She found that the downward perception of intergenerational mobility has favoured the recent victory of the Northern League, while it seems to have no effect on the support for the Five Star Movement.

[Kurer & Van Staalduin \(2022\)](#) found also "difference between status expectations formed during childhood and outcomes realized in adulthood" is associated a higher chance of a RWP support for German voters. "Status discordance" caused by a mismatch between expectations and actual achievement would be therefore a factor of the RWP vote.

This chapter aims to extend the results of [Brogi \(2019\)](#); [Kurer & Van Staalduin \(2022\)](#). In particular, how can we make sense of this relation between

status decline and the RWP vote? According to [Mudde \(2007\)](#), two crucial features of RWP parties are ethnonationalism and the endorsement of a binary vision about 'the pure people' versus the 'corrupt elite'. Therefore it is natural to ask if the downward mobility is related to either ethnonationalism or a perceived division of pure people/corrupt elite. We will test if downward mobility is associated with these two features as dependent variables. Another question to explore is: Is this association status decline-RWP vote similar for men and women? Our results will show the surprising result downward mobile men vote more for RWP, but it is not the case for women. This result, to our knowledge, was not found yet in the literature. The origin of this difference is the object of the next section.

### **6.1.5 Why men?**

#### **A new hypothesis**

Many scholars highlighted the gender gap vote regarding right-wing populism ([Givens, 2004](#)). For instance, during the 2016 Republican primaries ([Strolovitch et al., 2017](#)), on average, across all GOP primaries and caucuses, 39% of men voted for Trump compared with 33% of women ([Inglehart & Norris, 2016](#)). Several hypotheses have been suggested to explain why women are less likely to support RWP: Women would be more religious, Feminist values or internalized gender stereotypes (avoidance of aggressiveness or extremism) would prevent such a vote, and finally, women would be under-represented in jobs categories that tend to support more RWP (manual workers and small business owners).

In this section, we consider a new hypothesis that may explain this gender vote gap: Downward mobility would increase the odds of supporting RWP parties for men but not for women. Therefore in any country where a large number of men feel a status decline, we could expect to observe such a gap. It is essential to understand the fact downward mobile men are more likely to vote for an RWP party could not be explained by the lower propensity of

women to support RWP. Here we compare men with a perception of status decline to men without such perception. Furthermore, if men were more likely to perceive such a status decline than women, it would not either shed any light on this disparity. Indeed we compare the odds of supporting RWP for each group of men regardless of the size of each group.

We will establish in the result section the association status decline and the RWP vote for men. We will also consider three distinct sub-hypotheses to understand why status decline would translate into an RWP vote only for men. The next sections will describe these hypotheses.

### **Populist masculinity and the backlash against gender equality**

The first hypothesis is to interpret downward mobile men RWP vote as a "backlash against gender equality" (Pease, 2020). A core goal of these populist parties would be "to make men great again" (Pascoe, 2017). According to Pease (2020) "All male populist leaders, from Trump in the United States to Duterte in the Philippines, are renowned for their misogyny and sexism as well as their hyper-masculine style of leadership". It is hard to deny this personality feature in some populist male leaders. However, the existence of publicly homosexual leaders like Fortuyn and Haider and long-standing women leaders like Giorgia Meloni, Pia Kjærsgaard, or Marine Le Pen (who presents herself as "quasi-feminist" Mayer (2017)) should invite us to nuance. For a large number of scholars, masculinity would be a source of self-respect for working-class men. But this symbolic refuge has tended to disappear or be deemed inappropriate in modern society. Hochschild (2016, p. 202) writes:

"It wasn't easy being a man. It was an era of numerous subtle challenges to masculinity, it seemed. These days a woman doesn't need a man for financial support, for procreation, or even for the status of being married. And now, with talk of transgender people, what, really, was a man?"

So the evolution of society would cause men to become insecure about their masculinity and their status. Especially competing with women for job

opportunities and status decline due to this fierce competition would seem "unexpected" or "unfair" for men. Could these men's frustration feelings be related to the RWP vote as suggested by [Hochschild \(2016\)](#)? This hypothesis will be considered in this chapter.

### **Feminism as a shield against the right-wing populism**

According to [Noble \(2020\)](#), there is a clear opposition between feminism and RWP. Indeed feminist voters tend to have a more left-wing political vote ([McCabe, 2005](#)]; [Hayes, 1997](#)). Feminism seems hardly compatible with the RWP support. For instance, [Elder et al. \(2021\)](#) highlighted the lack of support, 22%, for Trump in 2016 from "Feminist" voters against 77% for "Anti-Feminist" voters ("Not Feminist" voters stand at 61%). Therefore instead of focusing on the RWP vote by downward-mobile men, we could look at the reverse hypothesis: The absence of RWP vote by downward-mobile women. Could it be downward mobile women, who translate their frustration into feminist values, and these values would prevent them from supporting RWP? [Green & Shorrocks \(2021\)](#) showed the perception of discrimination against women is negatively correlated with the Brexit vote. Feminism aims to reduce inequalities between men and women. If we assume downward mobile women are the ones suffering the most from these inequalities, they could therefore be more likely to endorse feminist values and move away from RWP values. This will be the second hypothesis.

### **Declining opportunities and the backlash against the political elites**

[McVeigh & Estep \(2019\)](#) highlighted the massive decline of jobs for people without diplomas in the US during the 2009 crisis. If a large number of jobs with academic requirements had been created during the 2010-2015 recovery, the lost jobs without such requirements would never come back. [Gidron & Hall \(2017\)](#) showed a sharp decline in perceived social status for men without a college education over the last 30 years. Could this situation explain the link between the status decline and the RWP vote?

Such a decline was not observed for women with similar qualifications. [Autor et al. \(2017\)](#) showed convincingly that US regions more impacted by Chinese imports are more likely to be strongly conservative. The effect was statistically significant for regions with white male-dominated industries but not for "feminine" and "minorities" industries. Does the asymmetric gender-wise impact of this crisis related to the translation of status decline to a populist vote for men but not for women?

Women's increasing participation in the workforce, a diminishing (although persistent) salary gap and greater gender equality within the western cultural framework all acted to reduce social status inequality. However, the improvement in social status for a group may cause, to some extent, social depreciation for another group.

Our final hypothesis is related to the gender difference in the locus of control ([Sherman et al., 1997](#)). According to the psychology literature ([Sherman et al., 1997](#)), men tend to attribute their failures to external causes, whereas women tend to consider their own responsibility in their failures (internal locus of control). [Duru-Bellat & Kieffer \(2006\)](#) noticed the disparity of reaction between downward mobile women and men empirically. These women "judge their professional situation without bitterness" :

Even if it is objectively modest because it corresponds to an adaptation to their family constraints. Thus, this animator in a retirement home, baccalaureate level, and daughter of a surgeon explains that she chose to stop her studies from getting married and that it was following the death of her husband that she had to take a job to raise her children. Her current job is seen as an opportunity she has seized, and she appreciates it. She, therefore, does not experience bitterness in her objective downgrading in relation to her father and also in relation to her brothers and sisters. When asked if she considers herself to belong to the same social background as her father, she replies: "absolutely, at least in my head, if I'm not there at the material level, in my head,

yes".

We could ask, therefore: First, is a perception of external locus of control related to the perception of status decline? Second, is this relation different for men and women? Lastly, could it be the channel that could explain the link status decline and the RWP vote for men?

Another disparity between men and women is the gap between their objective mobility and their subjective mobility. Half of the men tend to subjectively overestimate or underestimate their job compared to the job of their father (Duru-Bellat & Kieffer, 2006). Does it mean the external locus of control for men tends to incite them to overestimate their difficulties and overestimate their success? Regardless of this gap between objective or subjective mobility leads to the question of the appropriate methodology to measure intergenerational mobility.

We will also explore other questions in this chapter to precise the features of the relation downward mobility-RWP vote like "is the association similar for men and women?" or "Is downward mobility favours hostility to immigrants or anti-establishment feelings that would translate into an RWP vote?" . The next section will state our different hypotheses regarding these questions. We will then describe our methodology and our data. The results section will show which hypotheses did or did not fit the data, and the conclusion will look at how we could extend this research.

## 6.2 Hypotheses

We are going to specify in this section our hypotheses about the relation between downward mobility and RWP vote. Our first hypothesis is the association between the downward mobility and the RWP vote. We need to define downward mobility clearly. Most of this chapter will be about perceived downward mobility: The perceived difference between one status and their family's status where they grew up. However, we will also use objective downward mobility, defined as the difference between the status

ascribed by society to a given individual and to his family. In order to operationalize objective mobility, we will use the status of the job of the individuals and of the job of the father as proxies of the overall status. This leads to two distinct hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1a:** Subjective Downward mobility is associated with the RWP vote.

**Hypothesis 1b:** Objective Downward mobility is associated with the RWP vote.

Our hypothesis is still slightly ambiguous. If we use inter-generational mobility as the independent variable and the RWP vote as the dependent one, and we find a negative correlation, we can understand it either as downward mobility increases the odds of supporting RWP or as upward mobility decreases the odds of supporting RWP. Our prime hypothesis is the former and not the latter. We will therefore test the correlation in both directions to check if this relation is symmetrical or if one type of mobility is more relevant.

The next question is if this relation holds for men and women. There is a lot of debate about the causes ([Immerzeel et al., 2015](#)) and the extent ([Mayer, 2015b](#)) of the gender gap in the RWP vote. Discovering a difference between men and women regarding downward mobility as a factor of RWP vote may open a new lead to understanding this gender gap.

**Hypothesis 2:** The association between downward mobility and RWP vote is stronger for men than for women.

As we shall see, the relation between downward mobility and the WP vote seems strong for men but not for women. We suggest four hypotheses to understand this result. These four hypotheses are summarized in [Figure 6.1](#). According to [Mudde \(2007\)](#), RWP would be characterized by ethnonationalism and the opposition between 'the pure people and the corrupt elite'. These two features of the RWP vote will be considered in our hypotheses. First, we look if downward mobility is related to ethnonationalism:



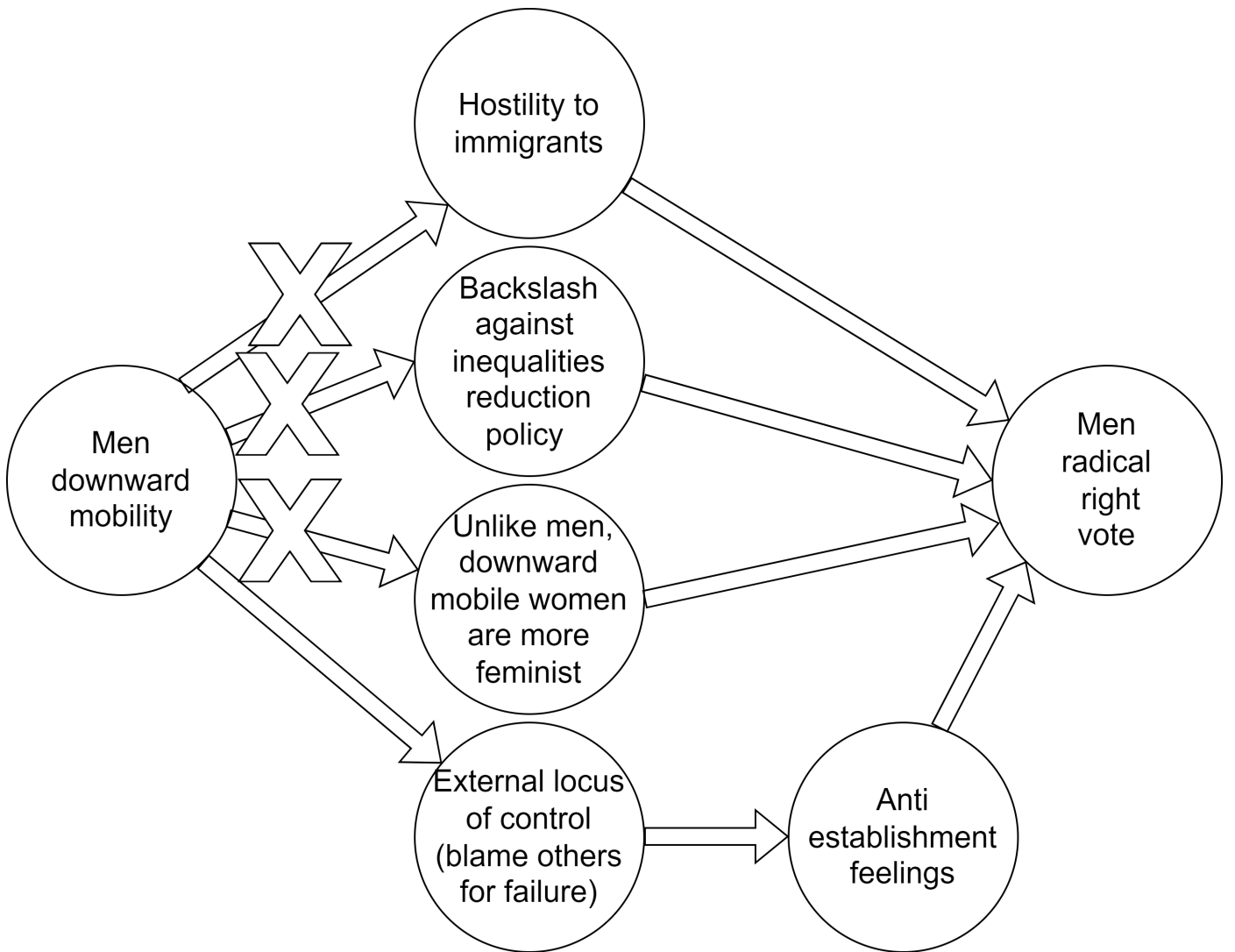


Figure 6.1: The four hypotheses to explain the link between men's downward mobility and RWP vote. Crosses indicate no correlation was found.

**Hypothesis 3a:** Downward mobility is associated with higher hostility to immigrants

Our empirical results will not support this hypothesis. Therefore we will not conjecture why and how these two variables could be linked. The second hypothesis is based on the assumption downward mobile men find it difficult to achieve the success they expect, and they would attribute this difficulty to some extent to the help aiming to reduce inequality which is provided to women and minorities. This men's resentment would lead to a "retrograde view" of the world (Bourdieu, 1984) and an RWP vote. A corollary of this hypothesis would be:

**Hypothesis 3b:** Downward mobility is associated with a lower perception of gender/minorities inequalities of opportunities.

We will see our data does not back up this corollary; therefore, the underlying hypothesis described earlier seems dubious.

The third hypothesis is status decline for women would be linked to an enhanced perception of gender inequalities. This would stimulate the development of "feminist values". These values being hardly compatible with the RWP agenda (Noble, 2020), it would prevent the RWP vote by downward mobiles women.

**Hypothesis 3c:** Downward mobility is associated with increased perception of gender inequalities, and this concern would prevent the RWP values and votes.

The last hypothesis to explain the observed gender disparity is linked to the external locus of control for men (Sherman et al., 1997). According to the psychology literature, men tend to attribute their failures to external causes, whereas women tend to consider more their own responsibility in their failures (internal locus of control). Therefore if men blame other people for their shortcomings, it could make sense they express their anger toward these people through the RWP vote.

**Hypothesis 3d:** Downward mobility is associated with a higher perception of external locus of control for men but not for women.

Our results tend to support this last hypothesis. In order to understand how downward mobility, external locus of control and the RWP vote are linked, we use the opposition between 'the pure people and the corrupt elite' as a component of RWP support (Mudde, 2007). If a man perceives his failures and difficulties as related to a group of powerful individuals that did not provide opportunities for success (external locus of control), it is not surprising this man will be dismissive and bitter about the "elites". These anti-establishment feelings could lead to the RWP vote. Hence, our last two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 4a:** Downward mobility is associated with a perception of corruption among the elites.

**Hypothesis 4b:** Perception of corruption among the elites is associated with the RWP vote

Here it would be helpful to define more precisely the "elites" and if RWP men are hostile in the same way to economic/political/cultural elites. Unfortunately, the data available does not enable us to tackle this question fully. According to the literature, RWP supporters seem hostile to cultural elites and political elites (Cramer, 2016) but not economic elites (Hochschild, 2016).

## 6.3 Methodology

### 6.3.1 The main independent variable: Subjective mobility

This section is about the operationalization of inter-generational mobility inspired by Mayer (2015b). We will test our hypotheses on several datasets: ISSP 2009 and 2019 (International Social Survey Programme), FES 2017 (French electoral study) and LITS 3 (Life In Transition Survey, Greek voters

only). As an illustration, we will pick from data from the ISSP 2009. Among the countries of this study, there are 15 European countries where the RWP vote is significant (see table 6.1).

To measure social status, [Gidron & Hall \(2017\)](#) used the 2009 ISSP question 44, asking the respondents to put themselves on the [1 : 10] scale, 10 representing the "top" of their society. The question 45 then asks respondents to put "the family that you grew up" on the same scale. A respondent, rating himself a five and then grading his family of upbringing with a six, feels clearly a decline in his social position. The difference between a respondent's social status and that of his family will be called the measure of inter-generational mobility for this particular individual. The inter-generational mobility is therefore measured on a [-9 : 9] scale. Figure 6.2 shows the density of this variable for men and women. Men have a slightly higher average social trajectory than women (0.44 vs 0.22). The variance is slightly higher for men. These findings are congruent with [Duru-Bellat & Kieffer \(2006\)](#) and [Kurer & Van Staaldin \(2022\)](#) results.

Figure 6.3 shows the distribution of inter-generational mobility for men and women depending on the respondent's age. There is a clear positive correlation between these two variables for men. A natural propensity for younger people to judge themselves as disadvantaged compared to their parents seems unlikely, given we do not get the same clear association for women (women under 25 feel their status is lower than their family status, though). Lower subjective social status is, therefore, probably at least partially a cohort effect.

To distinguish between the downward and upward effects, we will define downward mobility as equal to inter-generational mobility when it is negative and equal to 0 otherwise. Upward mobility will similarly be defined as a positive part of inter-generational mobility. In the section result, we will test if upward and downward mobility has a symmetrical effect. The subjective character of this measure of inter-generational mobility must be highlighted. The next section will consider other measures of mobility that are more

Table 6.1: Right-wing populist parties in Europe used for ISSP 2009

Countries	Right-wing populist parties
Austria	FPÖ, BZÖ
Belgium	Vlaams Blok, Front Nationa
Bulgaria	United Patriots, Attack, Volya, NFSB
Cyprus	New Horizons, Elam
Denmark	Danish People's Party
Estonia	EKRE
Finland	True Finns
France	FN
Croatia	HSP
Hungaria	MIEP, Jobbik
Italy	Lega Nord
Lithuania	TT
Netherlands	LPF, PVV
Norway	Progress Party
Slovakia	SNP, True Slovak National Party
Slovenia	SNS
Sweden	Sweden Democrats
Switzerland	SVP, SD, SFP, NA

Sources: [Bustikova-Siroky & Kitschelt \(2009\)](#); [Mudde \(2007\)](#); [Polk et al. \(2017\)](#)

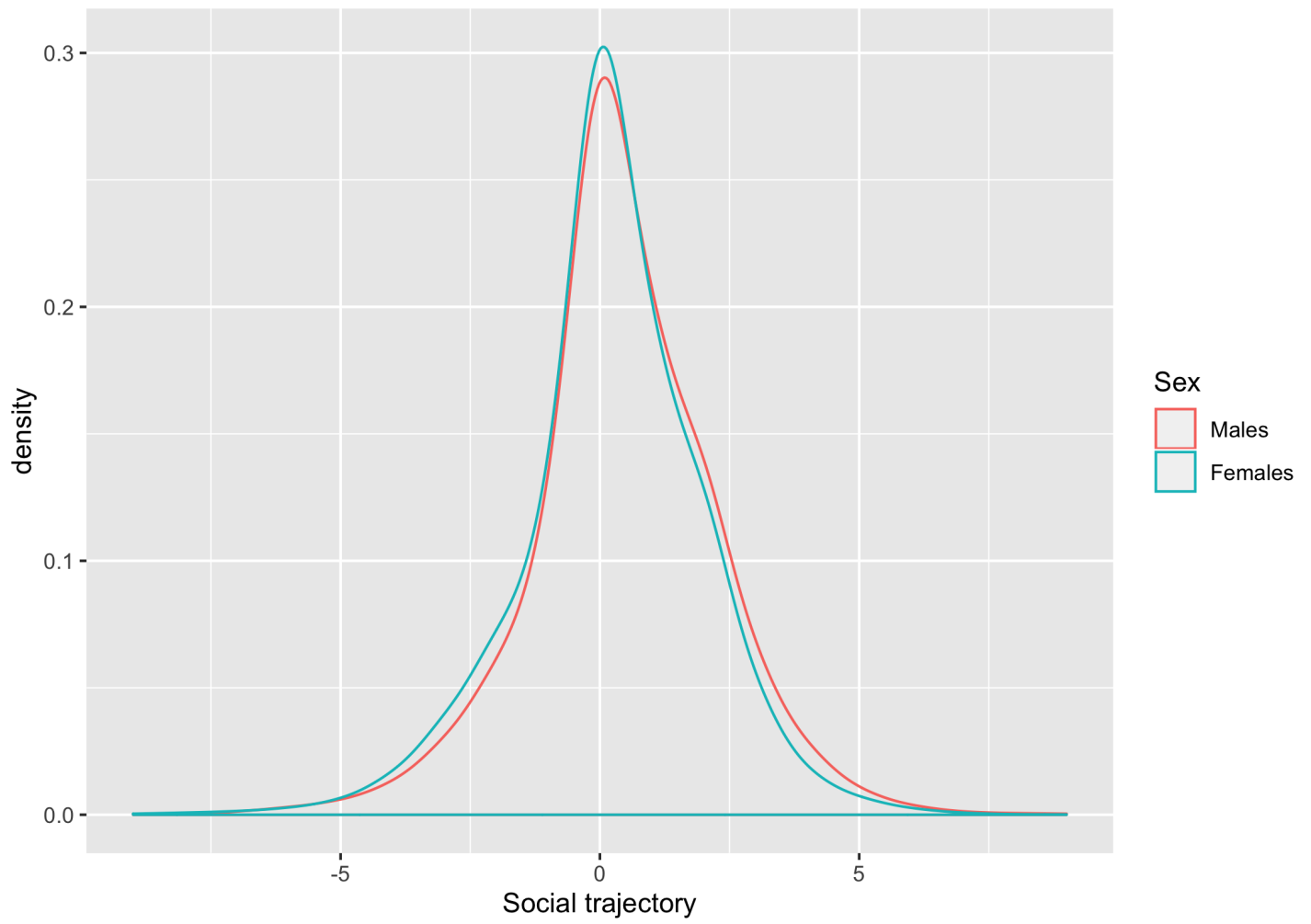


Figure 6.2: Frequencies of inter-generational mobility of men and women

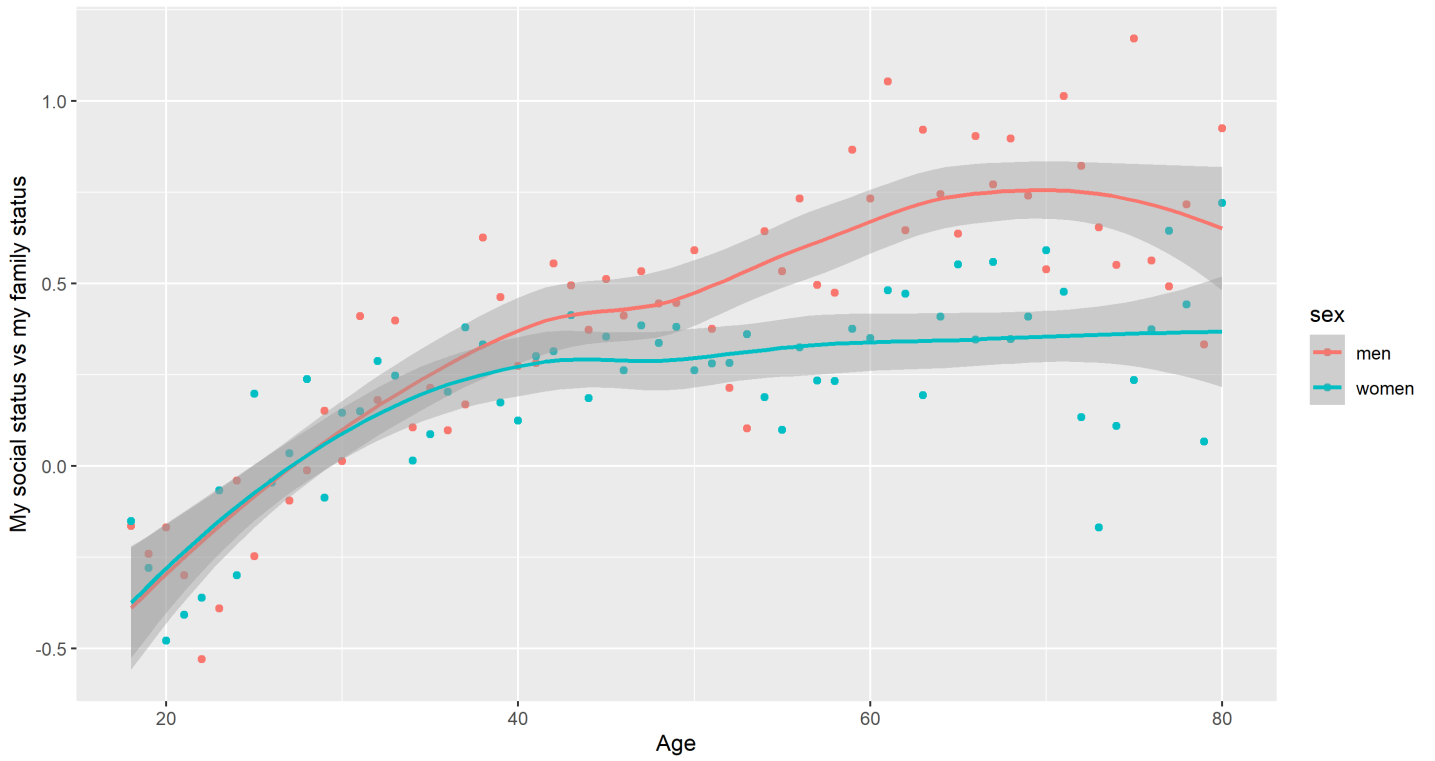


Figure 6.3: distribution of inter-generational mobility for men and women per age

objective.

### **6.3.2 Subjective and objective intergenerational mobility**

If inter-generational mobility is related to RWP support, we need to specify if we consider objective or subjective mobility. The inter-generational mobility defined in the previous section is clearly subjective. We will define objective mobility for men as the difference of status between "your job" and "your father's job" measured by ISEI and SIOPS indexes.

The SIOPS index is based on the perception of the prestige of a given job by a large panel of people. It is objective; in a sense, the prestige of your job does not depend on your judgment but on the external judgement of people.

The ISEI index aims to achieve a more objective approach. It posits the status of your job is related to your income controlling for your education (Ganzeboom et al., 1992), as we may want to distinguish between the prestige derived from work from the prestige associated with the education of the worker.

Ganzeboom et al. (1992) claim their approach gives a more stable measure of inter-generational mobility. Therefore if we assume status is passed from one generation to another, and the status level remains stable during the transmission, then ISEI seems a better model. One job where there is a clear difference between ISEI and SIOPS is the farmer job. Farmers' income and education are low, and so is their ISEI, but they get a better rating on the SIOPS scale.

To complete the subjective measures of inter-generational mobility presented in the previous section, we also use two alternatives, independent variables. The first one is based on the question: "If you compare this job to the job your father had when you were 16, would you say that the level of status of your job is..." (5 levels response from a lot worse to a lot better). Here only the dimension related to professional achievement from inter-generational mobility is considered. This measure will be used for the LITS 3 data for Greek voters as it is the only one available. Unfortunately,



we have the vote data only for the Greek respondents of this data set. Still, it provides us with an additional small sample to test our hypothesis.

Finally, we also use the question "Would you say you earn much less or much more than deserved?" as the independent variable. This is not a proper measure of inter-generational mobility, but we include it as it could interest the reader. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume bitterness related to low pay will be exacerbated by the nonfulfillment of expectations related to social origin (Treiman, 1970).

### **6.3.3 Other dependent variables associated with status decline**

To understand how the status decline is related to the RWP vote, we consider other variables that may be related to the status decline. In particular, we look if the status decline is associated with higher hostility toward immigrants or anti-establishment feelings. For the former, we use two items from ISSP 2019 "rich countries' taxes should help poor countries" and "people from poor countries can work in rich countries" and two items from FES 2017, "French Muslims are French people like other" and "There are too many immigrants". Unfortunately, there is no such variable in ISSP 2009.

Anti-establishment feelings are measured with this ISSP 2009 item "To get all the way to the top in this country today, you have to be corrupt". Anti-establishment and anti-immigrant items are very correlated with the RWP vote. Classical ordinal regression is used to test these associations with these dependent variables, which are all on a five levels Likert scale.

To test if downward mobile men are dismissive of inequalities of opportunities or if downward women have a higher perception of these inequalities, we consider the 2009 ISSP items "How important is being born a man or a woman to be successful?" and "In this country, people have the same chances to enter university, regardless of their gender, ethnicity or social background".

Finally, to measure the perception of an external locus of control, we use these ISSP 2009 items: "How important is having political connections to be

successful ?" and "How important is giving bribes to be successful?". There is a clear link between the latter and the corrupt elites item; as we noted before, hypotheses 3c and 4b are connected.

### **6.3.4 Control variables**

The inter-generational mobility will be tested then as a predictor in a logistic regression analysis for men voting for right-wing populist parties. The other control variables considered will be income, education, occupation, location (Rural/Urban) and age. Income has been normalized for each country over men and women. The 9 main categories used for occupations will be Isco 88/2008 (conversion tables are used when necessary). The group "not in paid work/other" will be the base category to create 9 dummy variables for comparison. The category "craft and trade workers" is quite fascinating, given this is the group with the highest support for the populist right (18.5% for this sample) and also the group representing the "declining petty bourgeoisie", according to Bourdieu [Bourdieu \(1984\)](#). Suburbs, small cities, and the countryside will be compared to big cities as a base.

## **6.4 Inter-generational mobility as a predictor of populist voting: Results**

### **6.4.1 Men vs Women**

We test inter-generational mobility as a predictor of the populist vote for men and women using data from ISSP 2009/2019, FES 2017 and LITS3. [Table 6.2](#) indicates this predictor is statistically significant for men ( $p < 0.05$ ) but not for women. This pattern is confirmed by the data of FES17 and ISSP 2019 ([Table 6.3](#) and [6.5](#)). [Table 6.4](#) also shows a correlation between intergenerational mobility for men and the RWP vote for LITS3 data (Greek voters). The effect is rather weak, but it is not surprising, given the low

sample size. It is quite congruent with the previous results.

Overall the perception of downward mobility seems related to the RWP vote for men but not for women. Three others predictors seem relevant for the RWP vote. First, younger people tend to vote more for RWP parties. Second, these voters are less educated, but the effect is not linear. People who did not go to university tend to vote for RWP parties, but among these people, those who went to high school support more RWP than those with very low education levels.

Finally, to some extent, industry workers tend to support more RWP after controlling for other variables, although this trend only appears in some regression analyses. Given subjective downward mobility seems a lot more related to RWP vote for men than for women, we will consider mostly models involving men in the next sections.

We conclude this section by asking if the relation found means downward mobility is related to the RWP vote or if upward mobility prevents the RWP vote. In order to do that, we separate inter-generational mobility into two variables: The negative part is downward mobility, and the positive part is upward mobility. The former variable is negative when there is indeed downward mobility. Table 6.8 shows there is no association between upward mobility and the RWP vote; on the other hand, downward mobility is significant and close to the 5% level ( $p=0.051$ ). So it seems most of the association found is due to downward mobile men. The next section will compare subjective and objective downward mobility as a predictor of the RWP vote.

#### **6.4.2 Objective vs Subjective downward mobility**

Given that we saw the relation between the RWP vote and subjective downward mobility was only effective for men, we will focus on the population of men for this analysis in this section. Actually, all the non-reported regressions we tested with women did not show any kind of association.

We look now at our two objective measures of downward mobility for

Table 6.2: Intergenerational mobility and RWP support for men and women (ISSP 2009)

	Dependent variable: Right-wing populist support	
	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.068* (0.032)	0.004 (0.036)
Above lowest qualification	0.427* (0.181)	-0.146 (0.207)
Secondary completed	0.048 (0.193)	-0.177 (0.214)
Above secondary	0.001 (0.226)	-0.422 (0.257)
University degree	-0.031 (0.250)	-0.656* (0.293)
Income	-0.109 (0.090)	-0.238 <sup>+</sup> (0.142)
Age	-0.019*** (0.003)	-0.017*** (0.004)
Managers	-0.384 (0.275)	0.017 (0.324)
Professionals	-0.558* (0.281)	-0.533 <sup>+</sup> (0.307)
Technicians	-0.275 (0.246)	-0.291 (0.272)
Office workers	-0.220 (0.285)	0.010 (0.258)
Personal service, sale	-0.035 (0.283)	0.518* (0.235)
Agricultural/fishery worker	0.146 (0.333)	-0.281 (0.463)
Craft and trade workers	0.278 (0.224)	0.116 (0.343)
Plant and machine operators	0.379 (0.239)	0.018 (0.390)
Elementary occupations	0.050 (0.281)	0.211 (0.273)
Rural-Urban: Suburb	-0.079 (0.260)	-0.489 (0.351)
Rural-Urban: Small city	0.318 <sup>+</sup> (0.187)	0.393 <sup>+</sup> (0.223)
Rural-Urban: Countryside	0.204 (0.155)	0.182 (0.180)
Unemployed	-0.076 (0.154)	0.209 (0.173)
Constant	-0.742* (0.346)	-0.451 (0.381)
	171	
Fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	4,737	4,728

Note:

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.3: Relegation and 2017 Le Pen vote

	Le Pen vote (first round 2017)	
	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.145** (0.052)	-0.047 (0.040)
Income	0.0001 (0.0001)	-0.0001 (0.0001)
Age	-0.020* (0.008)	-0.015+ (0.008)
Education: Lower secondary	-0.328 (0.286)	-0.420 (0.266)
Education: Secondary	-1.288*** (0.368)	-1.070*** (0.301)
Education: Tertiary	-1.425*** (0.356)	-2.118*** (0.357)
Farmer	0.406 (0.630)	0.513 (0.772)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm manager	0.722 (0.489)	0.548 (0.438)
Professionals	-0.643 (0.553)	0.011 (0.508)
Technicians	-0.631 (0.492)	0.479 (0.389)
Service workers	0.757+ (0.407)	0.508 (0.365)
Industry workers	0.219 (0.343)	0.945** (0.341)
Unemployed	-0.303 (0.448)	-0.134 (0.452)
Constant	0.077 (0.596)	-0.060 (0.570)
Observations	674	765
<i>Note:</i>	+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01, ***p<0.001	

Table 6.4: Intergenerational mobility for men and women and RWP vote  
(Greece 2015, LITS data)

	Dependent variable: Vote for Golden Dawn or Anel			
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.339* (0.165)	0.028 (0.199)	-0.283+ (0.172)	0.094 (0.212)
Income			-0.0002 (0.0003)	0.0003 (0.0003)
Education (reference: lowest qualification)				
Above lowest qualification			1.915+ (1.139)	1.642* (0.725)
Secondary completed			2.126* (1.044)	0.521 (0.645)
Above secondary			1.797 (1.126)	0.740 (0.748)
University degree			1.704 (1.147)	-0.229 (0.916)
Rural			0.054 (0.460)	0.738 (0.508)
Constant	-3.338*** (0.551)	-2.803*** (0.595)	-4.765*** (1.171)	-3.510*** (0.796)
Observations	361	433	361	433

*Note:*

+p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.5: Intergenerational mobility and RWP support for men and women  
ISSP 2019 (provisional result)

	Dependent variable: Right-wing populist support	
	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.085* (0.037)	0.001 (0.041)
Secondary completed	-0.210 (0.197)	0.113 (0.229)
Above secondary	0.384+ (0.215)	0.411 (0.275)
University degree	-0.475+ (0.250)	0.143 (0.284)
Master	-0.848** (0.291)	0.410 (0.312)
Income	0.127 (0.101)	-0.221 (0.142)
Age	-0.015*** (0.004)	-0.015** (0.005)
Managers	-0.243 (0.370)	0.271 (0.388)
Professionals	0.276 (0.325)	-0.461 (0.339)
Technicians	0.431 (0.316)	0.003 (0.334)
Office workers	0.515 (0.365)	0.346 (0.326)
Personal service, sale	0.377 (0.342)	0.334 (0.307)
Agricultural/fishery worker	-0.059 (0.524)	0.875 (0.585)
Craft and trade workers	0.485 (0.313)	0.071 (0.485)
Plant and machine operators	0.838* (0.336)	0.827* (0.420)
Elementary occupations	0.004 (0.424)	0.241 (0.378)
Rural-Urban: Suburb	0.002 (0.230)	0.344 (0.267)
Rural-Urban: Small city	-0.065 (0.189)	0.704*** (0.213)
Rural-Urban: Countryside	0.243 (0.183)	0.416+ (0.234)
Unemployed	0.433 (0.324)	0.333 (0.347)
Constant	-3.683*** (0.496)	-3.901*** (0.543)
	174	
Fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,750	2,739

Note:

+p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.6: Intergenerational mobility and RWP support for men and women  
ISSP 2019

	Dependent variable: Right-wing populist support	
	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.051 <sup>+</sup> (0.030)	-0.005 (0.035)
Lower secondary	-0.573 (0.371)	-0.120 (0.375)
Secondary completed	-0.390 (0.376)	-0.232 (0.394)
Above secondary	-0.518 (0.368)	-0.229 (0.382)
Age	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.004)
Managers	-0.054 (0.290)	-0.216 (0.315)
Professionals	-0.127 (0.275)	-1.096*** (0.276)
Technicians	0.536* (0.269)	-0.146 (0.257)
Office workers	0.505 (0.315)	-0.154 (0.278)
Personal service, sale	0.383 (0.295)	0.090 (0.251)
Agricultural/fishery worker	0.695 <sup>+</sup> (0.358)	0.627 (0.434)
Craft and trade workers	0.846** (0.272)	-0.146 (0.367)
Plant and machine operators	1.277*** (0.296)	0.392 (0.386)
Elementary occupations	0.271 (0.380)	0.368 (0.306)
Rural-Urban: Suburb	0.167 (0.192)	0.425 <sup>+</sup> (0.249)
Rural-Urban: Small city	0.161 (0.164)	0.665** (0.211)
Rural-Urban: Countryside	0.437** (0.154)	0.585** (0.211)
Unemployed	0.104 (0.276)	0.466 <sup>+</sup> (0.282)
Constant	-3.433*** (0.564)	-3.598*** (0.618)
Fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	3,391	3,357

*Note:* 175      <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001



Table 6.7: Intergenerational mobility and RWP support for men and women  
ISSP 2019

	Dependent variable: Right-wing populist support	
	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.075* (0.034)	-0.012 (0.040)
Lower secondary	-0.631 (0.439)	-0.220 (0.437)
Secondary completed	-0.389 (0.441)	-0.162 (0.454)
Above secondary	-0.488 (0.444)	-0.235 (0.458)
Age	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.003 (0.005)
Managers	-0.317 (0.347)	-0.186 (0.398)
Professionals	-0.094 (0.316)	-0.963** (0.345)
Technicians	0.325 (0.309)	-0.167 (0.329)
Office workers	0.576 (0.352)	-0.180 (0.345)
Personal service, sale	0.243 (0.338)	0.158 (0.309)
Agricultural/fishery worker	0.248 (0.460)	0.563 (0.572)
Craft and trade workers	0.701* (0.304)	-0.259 (0.471)
Plant and machine operators	1.137*** (0.328)	0.589 (0.422)
Elementary occupations	0.280 (0.408)	0.500 (0.359)
Rural-Urban: Suburb	0.145 (0.219)	0.337 (0.279)
Rural-Urban: Small city	0.090 (0.181)	0.653** (0.228)
Rural-Urban: Countryside	0.355* (0.174)	0.347 (0.239)
Unemployed	0.121 (0.299)	0.324 (0.329)
Constant	-3.128*** (0.637)	-3.600*** (0.698)
Fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	3,391	3,357

Note: 176      +p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.8: Downward and upward mobility and RWP vote for men ISSP 2009

Dependent variable: Men Right-wing populist support		
Downward mobility	-0.093 <sup>+</sup> (0.048)	
Upward mobility		-0.055 (0.046)
Above lowest qualification	0.501** (0.173)	0.501** (0.173)
Secondary completed	0.117 (0.188)	0.104 (0.188)
Above secondary	0.123 (0.214)	0.112 (0.214)
University degree	-0.045 (0.243)	-0.042 (0.243)
Age	-0.018*** (0.003)	-0.018*** (0.003)
Income	-0.133 (0.088)	-0.137 (0.088)
Unemployed	-0.142 (0.257)	-0.083 (0.253)
Managers	-0.292 (0.253)	-0.298 (0.253)
Professionals	-0.544* (0.266)	-0.557* (0.265)
Technicians	-0.271 (0.230)	-0.278 (0.229)
Office workers	-0.097 (0.268)	-0.118 (0.267)
Personal service,sale	-0.003 (0.266)	-0.013 (0.266)
Agricultural/fishery worker	0.335 (0.302)	0.309 (0.302)
Craft and trade workers	0.309 (0.210)	0.294 (0.210)
Plant and machine operators	0.406 <sup>+</sup> (0.228)	0.388 <sup>+</sup> (0.227)
Elementary occupations	0.185 (0.263)	0.171 (0.263)
Rural-Urban: Suburb	0.371* (0.182)	0.368* (0.182)
Rural-Urban: Small city	0.257 <sup>+</sup> (0.151)	0.249 <sup>+</sup> (0.151)
Rural-Urban: Countryside	0.040 (0.148)	0.033 (0.148)
Constant	-0.963** (0.335)	-0.875** (0.331)
177		
Fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	4,737	4,737

*Note:*

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

men: The difference between the respondent's job status and the father's job status. We will use data from ISSP 2009, as it is the largest dataset, and provide questions about the job of the father. Job status is measured according to the Siops and the Isei indexes. For women, neither objective nor subjective measures of downward mobility are significant in predicting RWP support (Table 6.14). This confirms the link between women's RWP support and downward mobility is weak at best. We will therefore consider only men in the rest of the section.

In a simple model (Table 6.9), where only country-fixed effects are added, these objective measures are significant. Subjective measures (my job compared to my father's job and perceived inter-generational mobility) are significant at a higher level. Tables 6.10 and 6.12 show the regression results when classical control variables are added. Age is highly correlated with subjective downward mobility (see Figure 6.3), so we consider the regression with and without this control variable. With age excluded, all subjective measures of downward mobility are a strong predictor of RWP. These independent variables are still significant when we include the age variable. However, in both cases (with and without age), the difference in job status between the respondent and father fails to have any predictive power.

Table 6.9: Influence of social mobility to populist vote for men (simple model)

Measure of mobility	<i>Dependent variable: Right-wing populist support for men</i>			
	objective	objective	subjective	subjective
$\Delta$ Isei	-0.006** (0.002)			
$\Delta$ SIOPS		-0.010** (0.003)		
Your job vs father's job			-0.190*** (0.042)	
Intergenerational mobility				-0.094*** (0.024)
Country fixed effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	-1.215*** (0.161)	-1.240*** (0.161)	-0.687*** (0.207)	-1.305*** (0.141)
Observations	4,584	4,584	5,348	5,685
Log Likelihood	-1,570.563	-1,570.926	-1,816.604	-1,951.422
Akaike Inf. Crit.	3,173.126	3,173.851	3,665.208	3,934.844

*Note:*

+p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

### **6.4.3 The link between men's downward mobility and RWP vote**

We saw men's downward mobility seems to be strongly associated with the RWP vote. Therefore how can we explain this relation? Furthermore, how can we explain downward seems to be only relevant for men but not for women? We will consider four hypotheses to make sense of this gender disparity. They will be presented in the next sections.

#### **Men downward mobility and hostility to immigrants**

We saw a strong correlation between men's perceived downward mobility and RWP support. As immigration is a central theme of the RWP parties' campaigns, it is natural to imagine a relationship between downward mobility and immigration concerns. The object of this section is to examine this relation. We will use data from FES 2017, and ISSP 2019 as these surveys have questions related to immigration concerns. Only subjective downward mobility (my status vs family status) and the sample of men would be considered here, given perceived downward mobility seems correlated with the RWP vote for men only.

We start with two items asking about the level of agreement from ISSP 2019: "Rich countries taxes should help poor countries" and "People from poor countries can work in rich countries". These two five levels of statements will be our dependent variables in an ordinal regression. The men experiencing downward mobility do not seem to be especially more likely to be hostile to immigrants (Table 6.17) after controlling for other variables.

We get a similar result with data from the FES 2017 (Table 6.18). Here the two items used for the ordinal regression are "French Muslims are French people like others" and "There are too many immigrants in France". Again those experiencing downward mobility are not especially hostile to immigrants. Of course, it does not mean these socially declining individuals are not hostile to immigrants. A better description would be that downward-status

Table 6.10: Intergenerational mobility and RWP support for men (age var. omitted)

Measure of mobility:	Dependent variable: Right-wing populist support for men				
	objective	objective	subjective	subjective	subjective
$\Delta$ Isei	-0.0002 (0.003)				
$\Delta$ Siops		0.001 (0.004)			
Your job vs father's job			-0.141** (0.051)		
Intergenerational mobility				-0.079** (0.029)	
Earn what I deserve					-0.196** (0.069)
Income	-0.112 (0.093)	-0.112 (0.093)	-0.119 (0.088)	-0.113 (0.087)	-0.109 (0.089)
Above lowest qualification	0.524** (0.186)	0.524** (0.186)	0.595*** (0.173)	0.639*** (0.170)	0.623*** (0.176)
Secondary completed	0.267 (0.199)	0.272 (0.198)	0.341+ (0.185)	0.356+ (0.182)	0.321+ (0.189)
Above secondary	0.170 (0.231)	0.177 (0.230)	0.303 (0.211)	0.336 (0.210)	0.348 (0.215)
University degree	0.059 (0.259)	0.067 (0.258)	0.128 (0.241)	0.202 (0.239)	0.119 (0.245)
Managers	-1.371*** (0.411)	-1.385*** (0.411)	-0.313 (0.262)	-0.463+ (0.247)	-0.412 (0.264)
Professionals	-1.503*** (0.421)	-1.519*** (0.418)	-0.529+ (0.277)	-0.640* (0.262)	-0.584* (0.279)
Technicians	-1.322*** (0.400)	-1.329*** (0.399)	-0.274 (0.244)	-0.362 (0.226)	-0.368 (0.248)

Table 6.11: Intergenerational mobility and RWP support for men (age var. omitted) continuing

Office workers	-1.077*	-1.072*	-0.070	-0.177	-0.167
	(0.426)	(0.426)	(0.282)	(0.265)	(0.287)
Personal service,sale	-0.970*	-0.952*	-0.037	-0.008	0.044
	(0.426)	(0.429)	(0.284)	(0.264)	(0.286)
Agricultural/fishery worker	-0.663	-0.655	0.208	0.235	0.234
	(0.449)	(0.448)	(0.316)	(0.298)	(0.321)
Craft and trade workers	-0.675 <sup>+</sup>	-0.666 <sup>+</sup>	0.319	0.261	0.287
	(0.390)	(0.390)	(0.228)	(0.207)	(0.232)
Plant and machine operators	-0.722 <sup>+</sup>	-0.710 <sup>+</sup>	0.352	0.315	0.322
	(0.402)	(0.402)	(0.246)	(0.225)	(0.249)
Elementary occupations	-0.891*	-0.864*	0.068	0.143	0.152
	(0.429)	(0.434)	(0.282)	(0.261)	(0.283)
Rural-Urban: Suburb	0.239	0.238	0.320 <sup>+</sup>	0.331 <sup>+</sup>	0.339 <sup>+</sup>
	(0.195)	(0.195)	(0.182)	(0.181)	(0.184)
Rural-Urban: Small city	0.179	0.176	0.177	0.215	0.163
	(0.161)	(0.161)	(0.152)	(0.150)	(0.153)
Rural-Urban: Countryside	-0.102	-0.106	-0.034	-0.001	-0.034
	(0.160)	(0.159)	(0.149)	(0.147)	(0.150)
Unemployed	0.174	0.174	0.076	-0.018	0.047
	(0.267)	(0.267)	(0.253)	(0.253)	(0.259)
Constant	-0.612	-0.618	-1.326***	-1.791***	-1.226***
	(0.473)	(0.472)	(0.350)	(0.298)	(0.359)
Fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3,995	3,995	4,581	4,741	4,562
Log Likelihood	-1,306.197	-1,306.168	-1,475.322	-1,524.235	-1,467.121
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,680.393	2,680.337	3,018.643	3,116.469	3,002.242

Note:

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.12: Intergenerational mobility and Right-wing populist support for men (age included)

Measure of mobility:	Dependent variable: Right-wing populist support for men				
	objective	objective	subjective	subjective	subjective
$\Delta$ Isei	0.002 (0.003)				
$\Delta$ Siops		0.003 (0.005)			
Your job vs father's job			-0.096 <sup>+</sup> (0.052)		
Intergenerational mobility				-0.058 <sup>+</sup> (0.030)	
Earn what I deserve					-0.177* (0.069)
Income	-0.129 (0.094)	-0.128 (0.094)	-0.140 (0.090)	-0.125 (0.088)	-0.123 (0.090)
Education (Base: Lowest qualification)					
Above lowest qualification	0.358 <sup>+</sup> (0.189)	0.358 <sup>+</sup> (0.189)	0.467** (0.176)	0.502** (0.173)	0.486** (0.178)
Secondary completed	0.016 (0.206)	0.015 (0.206)	0.124 (0.191)	0.112 (0.188)	0.077 (0.195)
Above secondary	-0.063 (0.236)	-0.063 (0.236)	0.112 (0.215)	0.120 (0.214)	0.128 (0.219)
University degree	-0.205 (0.264)	-0.209 (0.264)	-0.098 (0.246)	-0.041 (0.243)	-0.133 (0.250)
Managers	-1.331** (0.412)	-1.335** (0.412)	-0.212 (0.265)	-0.282 (0.253)	-0.290 (0.267)
Professionals	-1.558*** (0.423)	-1.547*** (0.420)	-0.499 <sup>+</sup> (0.279)	-0.541* (0.266)	-0.547 <sup>+</sup> (0.281)



Table 6.13: Table continued

Technicians	-1.370*** (0.401)	-1.361*** (0.400)	-0.250 (0.247)	-0.265 (0.230)	-0.341 (0.251)
Office workers	-1.141** (0.427)	-1.123** (0.427)	-0.062 (0.284)	-0.103 (0.268)	-0.171 (0.288)
Personal service, sale	-1.091* (0.428)	-1.066* (0.431)	-0.093 (0.286)	-0.003 (0.266)	-0.028 (0.288)
Agricultural/fishery worker	-0.684 (0.451)	-0.698 (0.450)	0.247 (0.318)	0.321 (0.302)	0.250 (0.323)
Craft and trade workers	-0.735+ (0.391)	-0.739+ (0.390)	0.299 (0.230)	0.308 (0.210)	0.255 (0.234)
Plant and machine operators	-0.742+ (0.402)	-0.738+ (0.403)	0.367 (0.247)	0.400+ (0.228)	0.331 (0.251)
Elementary occupations	-0.953* (0.431)	-0.930* (0.436)	0.059 (0.284)	0.177 (0.263)	0.107 (0.285)
Rural-Urban: Suburb	0.296 (0.197)	0.297 (0.197)	0.358+ (0.183)	0.374* (0.182)	0.391* (0.185)
Rural-Urban: Small city	0.226 (0.162)	0.227 (0.162)	0.216 (0.153)	0.257+ (0.151)	0.212 (0.154)
Rural-Urban: Countryside	-0.071 (0.161)	-0.065 (0.160)	-0.003 (0.150)	0.041 (0.148)	0.010 (0.151)
Unemployed	0.036 (0.269)	0.033 (0.270)	-0.032 (0.255)	-0.123 (0.255)	-0.068 (0.261)
Age	-0.019*** (0.004)	-0.019*** (0.004)	-0.017*** (0.003)	-0.018*** (0.003)	-0.018*** (0.003)
Constant	0.449 (0.514)	0.441 (0.514)	-0.601 (0.376)	-0.940** (0.333)	-0.331 (0.394)
Fixed effects	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Observations	3,991	3,991	4,577	4,737	4,558
Log Likelihood	-1,289.961	-1,289.922	-1,459.935	-1,506.271	-1,449.655
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,649.923	2,649.844	2,989.869	3,082.541	2,969.311

Note:

+p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.14: Intergenerational mobility and RWP support for women (age omitted)

	Dependent variable: Right-wing populist support for men				
	objective	objective	subjective	subjective	subjective
$\Delta$ Isei	0.001 (0.003)				
$\Delta$ Siops		0.006 (0.005)			
Your job vs father's job			0.045 (0.058)		
Intergenerational mobility				-0.017 (0.033)	
Earn what I deserve					0.139 <sup>+</sup> (0.080)
Income	-0.211 (0.145)	-0.214 (0.146)	-0.153 (0.133)	-0.121 (0.124)	-0.228 <sup>+</sup> (0.135)
Above lowest qualification	0.116 (0.221)	0.122 (0.221)	0.016 (0.201)	-0.046 (0.185)	-0.017 (0.195)
Secondary completed	0.121 (0.231)	0.130 (0.231)	0.001 (0.212)	-0.036 (0.193)	-0.038 (0.206)
Above secondary	-0.134 (0.272)	-0.118 (0.271)	-0.230 (0.245)	-0.301 (0.230)	-0.252 (0.241)
University degree	-0.322 (0.310)	-0.303 (0.309)	-0.470 <sup>+</sup> (0.284)	-0.475 <sup>+</sup> (0.266)	-0.428 (0.277)
Managers	-0.884 (0.703)	-0.917 (0.703)	-0.010 (0.352)	-0.082 (0.308)	-0.073 (0.345)
Professionals	-1.643* (0.703)	-1.687* (0.701)	-0.509 (0.336)	-0.661* (0.296)	-0.747* (0.334)
Technicians	-1.231 <sup>+</sup> (0.679)	-1.243 <sup>+</sup> (0.679)	-0.196 (0.297)	-0.271 (0.250)	-0.293 (0.292)

Table 6.15: Table continued

Office workers	-0.954 (0.678)	-0.944 (0.678)	0.118 (0.290)	0.066 (0.239)	-0.003 (0.286)
Personal service, sale	-0.339 (0.667)	-0.277 (0.669)	0.674* (0.275)	0.540* (0.223)	0.511+ (0.272)
Agricultural/fishery worker	-1.086 (0.769)	-1.087 (0.766)	-0.100 (0.464)	-0.200 (0.416)	-0.076 (0.449)
Craft and trade workers	-0.920 (0.712)	-0.891 (0.712)	0.189 (0.366)	0.023 (0.329)	-0.0005 (0.366)
Plant and machine operators	-0.872 (0.751)	-0.855 (0.750)	0.142 (0.416)	-0.063 (0.383)	0.006 (0.416)
Elementary occupations	-0.724 (0.687)	-0.622 (0.691)	0.256 (0.315)	0.211 (0.261)	0.066 (0.313)
Rural-Urban: Suburb	0.218 (0.235)	0.208 (0.235)	0.302 (0.225)	0.337 (0.210)	0.286 (0.217)
Rural-Urban: Small city	0.056 (0.188)	0.044 (0.188)	0.188 (0.182)	0.139 (0.172)	0.100 (0.176)
Rural-Urban: Countryside	0.158 (0.181)	0.146 (0.180)	0.244 (0.176)	0.242 (0.164)	0.196 (0.168)
Unemployed	-0.116 (0.341)	-0.112 (0.341)	-0.231 (0.350)	-0.144 (0.310)	-0.106 (0.324)
Constant	-0.439 (0.730)	-0.453 (0.730)	-1.775*** (0.406)	-1.398*** (0.306)	-1.590*** (0.407)
Fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3,884	3,884	4,421	4,730	4,448
Log Likelihood	-988.423	-987.797	-1,116.213	-1,221.340	-1,146.672
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,044.846	2,043.594	2,300.426	2,510.680	2,361.345

Note:

+p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.16: Instances of RWP voters with higher or equal Siop than their father, but with an intergenerational decline of at least two points

Rwp voter job	Father's job
Carpenters and joiners	Construction and maintenance labourers: roads, dams
Construction and maintenance labourer: roads, dams	Construction and maintenance labourers: roads, dams
Welders and flamecutters	Freight handlers
Other physical and engineering science technicians	Assembling labourers
Miners and quarry workers	Farm-hands and labourers
Motor vehicle mechanics and fitters	Metal wheel-grinders, polishers and tool sharpeners
Other office clerks	Construction and maintenance labourers: roads, dams
Tool-makers and related workers	Locomotive-engine drivers
Cabinet-makers and related workers	Cabinet-makers and related workers
Technical and commercial sales representatives	Machine-tool setters and setter-operators
Machine-tool setters and setter-operators	Motor vehicle mechanics and fitters
Shoe-makers and related workers	Shoe-makers and related workers
Bus and tram drivers	Bus and tram drivers
Bakers, pastry-cooks and confectionery makers	Heavy truck and lorry drivers
Other finance and sales associate professionals	Stock clerks
Painters and related workers	Painters and related workers
Building and related electricians	Welders, and flamecutters
Machine-tool setters and setter-operators	Hunters and trappers
Welders and flamecutters	Weavers, knitters and related workers
Architects, town and traffic planners	Accounting and bookkeeping clerks
Legal and related business associate professionals	Machine-tool setters and setter-operators
Market-oriented crop and animal producers	Market-oriented crop and animal producers
General managers in construction	Bricklayers and stonemasons
Machine-tool operators	Bricklayers and stonemasons
Heavy truck and lorry drivers	Heavy truck and lorry drivers
Production and operations manager in manufacturing	Managers in transport, storage and communications
Market-oriented crop and animal producers	Market-oriented crop and animal producers
Painters and related workers	Other protective services workers
Computer programmers	Other computing professionals
General managers in construction	Managers in agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing
Tool-makers and related workers	Construction and maintenance labourers: roads, dams
General managers not elsewhere classified	Managers in transport, storage and communications
Bricklayers and stonemasons	Bricklayers and stonemasons
Electrical engineers	Other teaching associate professionals
Precision-instrument makers and repairers	Motor vehicle mechanics and fitters
managers in transport, storage and communications	Market-oriented crop and animal producers

Table 6.17: Intergenerational mobility and hostility to immigrants ISSP 2019

	Rich countries taxes should help poor countries	People from poor countries can work in rich countries
Intergenerational mobility	0.005 (0.015)	-0.008 (0.016)
Lower secondary	0.241 (0.195)	-0.099 (0.202)
Secondary completed	0.322 (0.196)	0.026 (0.204)
Above secondary	0.523** (0.194)	0.232 (0.202)
Age	-0.010*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)
Managers	0.357** (0.122)	0.129 (0.126)
Professionals	0.0001 (0.113)	-0.015 (0.118)
Technicians	0.253* (0.112)	0.215+ (0.118)
Office workers	0.245+ (0.142)	0.189 (0.147)
Personal service, sale	0.155 (0.124)	0.273* (0.129)
Agricultural/fishery worker	0.554** (0.188)	0.392* (0.198)
Craft and trade workers	0.219+ (0.112)	0.271* (0.118)
Plant and machine operators	0.144 (0.133)	0.329* (0.140)
Elementary occupations	0.116 (0.148)	0.027 (0.152)
Rural-Urban: Suburb	0.046 (0.091)	0.027 (0.093)
Rural-Urban: Small city	-0.014 (0.071)	0.093 (0.073)
Rural-Urban: Countryside	0.129+ (0.071)	0.299*** (0.073)
Unemployed	-0.204 (0.130)	-0.157 (0.137)
Fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	5,226	5,189

*Note:* +p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.18: Men downward mobility and hostility to immigrants FES 2017

	French Muslims are French people like other	There are too much immigrants
Intergenerational mobility	0.027 (0.039)	-0.048 (0.036)
Income	0.0001 (0.0001)	-0.0001 (0.0001)
Age	0.017*** (0.004)	-0.003 (0.003)
Education: Lower secondary	-0.412** (0.158)	0.287+ (0.154)
Education: Secondary	-0.923*** (0.152)	0.819*** (0.145)
Education: Tertiary	-1.418*** (0.147)	1.350*** (0.138)
Farmer	-0.577*** (0.027)	-0.283*** (0.036)
Craft workers, shop owners, firm managers	0.427+ (0.234)	-0.210 (0.228)
Professionals	0.239 (0.219)	0.431* (0.209)
Technicians	-0.112 (0.221)	0.484* (0.208)
Service workers	0.183 (0.240)	-0.593* (0.231)
Industry workers	-0.040 (0.181)	-0.036 (0.177)
Unemployed	-0.095 (0.105)	0.138+ (0.083)
Observations	665	636

*Note:*

+p&lt;0.1; \*p&lt;0.05; \*\*p&lt;0.01, \*\*\*p&lt;0.001

individuals are not more hostile to immigrants than people with similar profiles without this perception of downward mobility.

So if the RWP vote among downwardly mobile men is not the result of increased hostility to immigrants due to a perceived status decline, where does it come from this relation? One possible road to explore is maybe these downwardly mobile men are similar to the "small craftsmen and small shopkeepers" described by Bourdieu (1984) hanging on their family business and their "diminished" position and expressing their "resentment" in their "retrograde" "political choices".

In order to illustrate this idea, we present the table 6.16, which shows the instances of RWP male voters with a job with a higher or equal SIOP index than their father's but a perception of downward mobility of at least two points. Most of these RWP voters have a manual job. But regardless of the son's job, it is actually quite striking the overwhelming majority of fathers had a job in either transport, construction, mechanics or agriculture.

### **Downward mobile men and perception of inequalities**

Our first hypothesis explores if downward mobile men tend to be more dismissive than the others men of the inequalities of opportunities. Hence if they were indeed bitter against the 'line cutters" (Hochschild, 2016) like women and minorities, they would be less likely to recognize "The chances to enter university depend on their gender, ethnicity and social background". However, Table 6.20 shows it is not the case, and they are less likely to think chances of success depend on gender (Table 6.19).

These results do not back up hypothesis 3b. Increased bitterness against the "advantages" of women and minorities does not seem to be the canal linking status decline and the RWP vote. Furthermore, some regression analysis (not reported here) fails to indicate a perception of inequalities (the two dependent variables of Table 6.20 and 6.19) as a good predictor of RWP vote for men. From Table 6.19, in order to save space, we will not report the regression coefficients of the control variables.

### **Downward mobile women, RWP vote and Feminism**

The next hypothesis is the perception of decline for women would be linked to an enhanced perception of gender inequalities. This would stimulate the development of "feminist values". The values would be hardly compatible with the RWP agenda (Noble, 2020). Hence, this will prevent RWP votes by downward mobile women. Our data does not back up this hypothesis.

First, the perception of gender as a mediating variable for the chances of success (a core feminist claim) is not related to higher chances of voting for an RWP party (Figure 6.4). If anything, women with stronger feelings of gender inequality tend to support more RWP. Explaining this surprising potential correlation is out of the scope of this chapter. However, these results are clearly not congruent with the previous hypothesis.

The second issue with our hypothesis is the relation between the status decline for women and "feminist values" is not clear. Table 6.20 shows the perception "The chances to enter university depend on their gender, ethnicity and social background" is related to intergenerational mobility for women. However, upward-mobile women tend to endorse more of this claim than downward-mobile women, which is the opposite of the considered hypothesis.

The results from table 6.19 contradict somewhat the previous results, downward mobile women consider more often women have less chance of success than men, but this association is rather weak. Overall the evidence that downward mobile women would be more feminist and therefore less likely to support RWP is not there as our data clearly dismisses this hypothesis. We move then to our last hypothesis, which is linked to the men's perception of an external locus of control.

### **Downward mobile men, external locus of control, RWP vote and anti-establishment feelings**

The object of this section is twofold: First, the comparison of the association between downward mobility and external locus of control for men and women (hypothesis 3d), and second the relation between downward mobility, anti-



establishment feelings and RWP vote (hypothesis 4a/4b).

According to the psychology literature (Sherman et al., 1997), men tend to attribute their failures to external causes, whereas women tend to consider more their own responsibility in their failures (internal locus of control). We will therefore consider, first, if the perception of external locus of control is related to the perception of status decline, second if this relation is different for men and women (hypothesis 3d)

We perform some ordinal regressions to check how downward mobility is related to a perception of external locus of control and how this relation differs for men and women. Two dependent variables will be used for the perception of external locus of control: "How important is having political connections to be successful?" and "How important is giving bribes to be successful?". The tables 6.21 and 6.22 indicate a strong association between men's downward mobility and the former and quite weak with the latter ( $p < 0.1$ ).

However, if we remove age among independent variables (which is strongly correlated to status decline), this association becomes stronger (table 6.23). In these three regressions (tables 6.21,6.22,6.23), there is no relation between women's downward mobility and these dependent variables. This result confirms the lower external locus of control of women found in the literature (Sherman et al., 1997). As these results seem to support the existing literature and hypothesis 3d, we move to the related hypotheses 4a and 4b: Downward mobility is associated with a perception of corruption among the elites, and this perception of corruption is associated with an RWP vote.

Mudde (2007) defines right-wing populism as a "thin-centred ideology" where ethnonationalism and the opposition between 'the pure people and the 'corrupt elite' are key. So if ethnonationalism is not especially related to downward mobile men as suggested by our empirical results, it is worth considering the relation between downward mobility and hostility to the "corrupt elite". Actually, it makes sense if one perceives declining status as "unfair"; one may feel, therefore, "betrayed" by the political elites who did

not help to create the expected opportunities to reach success. Furthermore, a disgruntled individual may consider instances of success for other people, especially politicians, to be due to the use of unethical means. Therefore, it makes sense to use the perception of a corrupt elite as a mediating variable in our model.

We will look then first at the association between downward mobility and the perception of a corrupt elite before the relation with the RWP vote. The dependent variable for the perception of a corrupt elite is "To get all the way to the top today, you have to be corrupt". This statement implies all individuals at the top must be corrupt and therefore endorse a binary vision of 'the pure people' versus the 'corrupt elite' described by [Mudde \(2007\)](#). But it is also related to a perception of external locus of control as in order to be successful; you are dependent on others if you need to resort to corruption to reach the top.

The association between a perception of status decline and the perceived widespread corruption among the elites is very strong for men (table [6.24](#)). This result contrasts with the lack of increased hostility of downward mobile men (table [6.17](#) and [6.18](#), hypothesis 4a). Furthermore, there is a robust relation between the perception of elite corruption and the RWP vote (table [6.25](#)), both for men and women.

We will not debate if this perception of corruption is a driver of the RWP vote or an inherent part of this vote, as suggested by [Mudde \(2007\)](#). However, understanding the relation of downward mobility-RWP through these anti-establishment feelings seems more promising than linking it to hostility toward immigrants, given our empirical study. To summarize these results, it seems downward mobility is related to the external locus of control for men only, and this may translate into a perception of corrupt elites linked to RWP support.

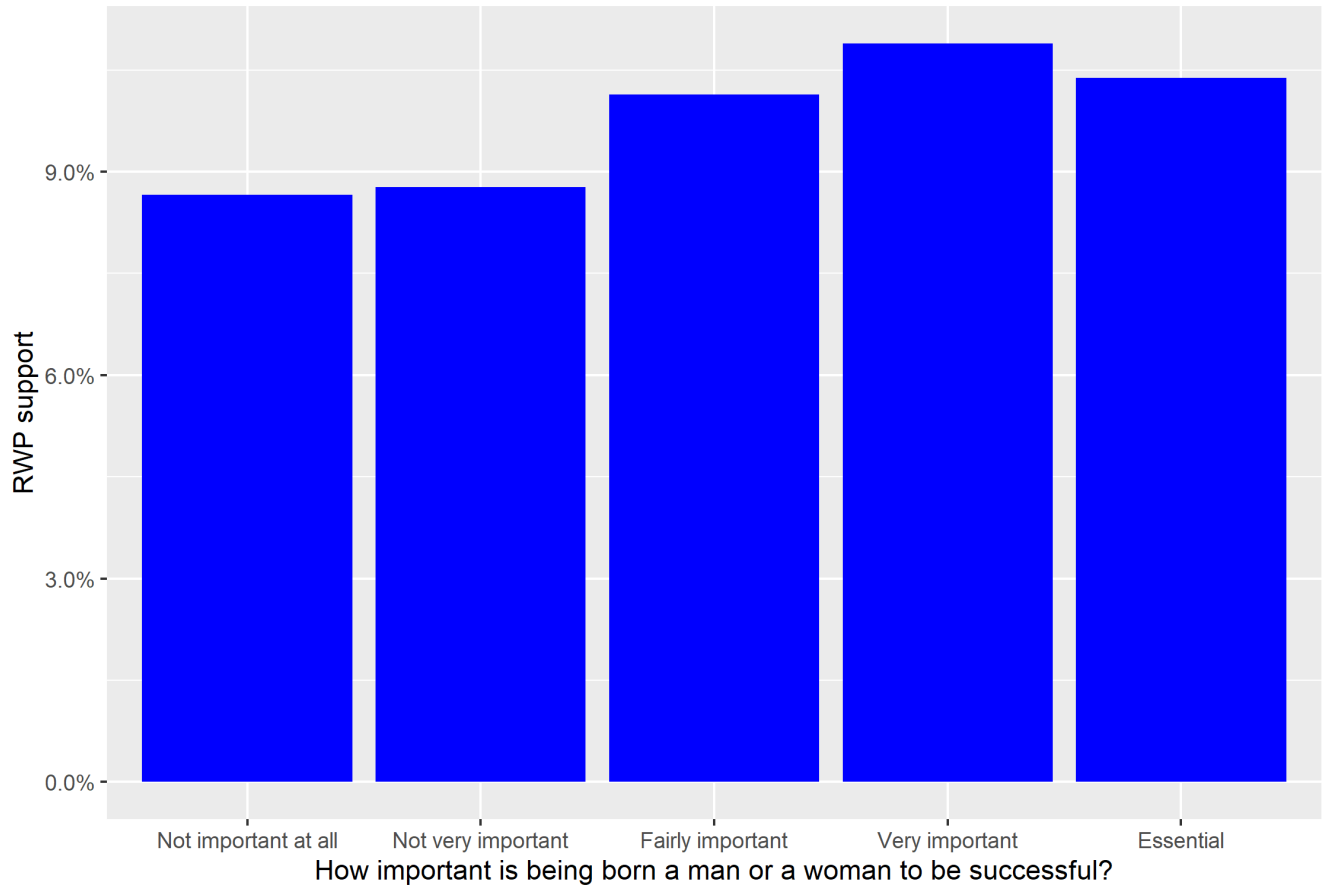


Figure 6.4: Perception of the gender gap in the chance of success and RWP vote for women

Table 6.19: Downward mobility and awareness of inequalities of opportunity  
1

	Being a man or a woman changes chances of success	
	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.013 (0.016)	-0.025 <sup>+</sup> (0.015)
Control variables	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	5,207	5,404

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01,\*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.20: Downward mobility and awareness of inequalities of opportunity  
2

	The chances to enter university depend of their gender, ethnicity and social background	
	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.013 (0.016)	0.039* (0.015)
Control variables	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	5,309	5,418

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01,\*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.21: External locus of control & Intergenerational mobility: need to have political connections

	Dependent variable: How important is having political connections to be successful?	
	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.041** (0.016)	-0.022 (0.015)
Control variables	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	5,239	5,297

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.22: External locus of control & Intergenerational mobility: need of bribes

	Dep. variable: How important is giving bribes to be successful?	
	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.033 <sup>+</sup> (0.018)	0.002 (0.018)
Control variables	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	4,854	4,912

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.23: External locus of control & Intergenerational mobility (age omitted)

	Dep. variable: How important is bribes to be successful?	
	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.039* (0.018)	-0.003 (0.018)
Control variables	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	4,859	4,914

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.24: External locus of control & perception of corruption

	Dep. variable: To get all the way to the top, today, you have to be corrupt	
	Men	Women
Intergenerational mobility	-0.054*** (0.016)	-0.038* (0.016)
Control variables	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	5,254	5,274

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 6.25: perception of corruption & RWP vote

	Dep. variable: RWP vote	
	Men	Women
To get all the way to the top, today, you have to be corrupt	0.276*** (0.043)	0.152** (0.049)
Control variables	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	4,590	4,498

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

#### 6.4.4 Mediation analysis

In order to check further hypotheses 3d, 4a and 4b regarding the link between downward mobility for men, external locus of control, anti-establishment vote and RWP vote, we perform a mediation analysis for the men surveyed in ISSP 2009. We already saw in the previous section the correlations between these variables through simple regressions.

Table 6.26 shows the mediation analysis with the status decline as a treatment variable, the item "How important is having political connections?" as a mediator, and the item "To get all the way to the top today, you have to be corrupt" as the dependent variable. There is some evidence the status decline variable is partially mediated (with a proportion of 14% of mediation). However, with the RWP vote as the dependent variable, there is not much evidence of a mediation (table 6.27).

If we consider now the item "To get all the way to the top today, you have to be corrupt" as a mediator, there is some evidence of a partial mediation (12% proportion of mediation) for the status decline (table 6.28). This confirms that men feeling a status decline are more likely to support RWP because, to some extent, they have a higher perception of the corruption of the elite.

Overall even though we find some evidence of mediation in our analysis, it seems the relationship between downward mobility and the RWP vote is also mediated by mechanisms other than external locus of control and anti-establishment feelings (see Figure 6.1). Therefore further research is needed to understand better the gender gap vote puzzle of this chapter.

### 6.5 Conclusion

The first result of this chapter is the strong association between men's downward mobility for men and the RWP vote and the absence of such an association for downward mobile women. The second result is: This downward mobility does not seem to be linked to increasing hostility toward

Table 6.26: Mediation analysis: Status decline → political connections are important → the elite is corrupt

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	"To get all the way to the top today, you have to be corrupt"
avg med effect "How important is having political connections?"	0.004210*
avg dir effect "Status decline"	0.025553*
Total Effect	0.029763***
Prop. Mediated	0.144126*
<i>Note:</i>	<sup>+</sup> p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 6.27: Mediation analysis: Status decline → political connections are important → RWP vote

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	"RWP vote"
avg med effect "How important is having political connections?"	−0.000248 <sup>+</sup>
avg dir effect "Status decline"	−0.005343 <sup>+</sup>
Total Effect	−0.005597 <sup>+</sup>
Prop. Mediated	0.036515
<i>Note:</i>	<sup>+</sup> p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01, ***p<0.001



Table 6.28: Mediation analysis Status decline → the elite is corrupt → RWP vote

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> "RWP vote"
avg med effect "To get all the way to the top today, you have to be corrupt"	-0.000716**
avg dir effect "Status decline"	-0.004759 <sup>+</sup>
Total Effect	-0.005475 <sup>+</sup>
Prop. Mediated	0.123151 <sup>+</sup>

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

immigrants or dismissal of the difficulties of women and minorities, which could potentially explain this RWP support. This is quite surprising as we tend to associate these two features with RWP supporters. Downward mobile women are neither inclined to more feminist values.

However, our last main finding is the relation between downward mobility, external locus of control, anti-establishment feelings and the RWP vote. If the results of our mediation analysis are quite mixed, they still validate our hypothesis. This gender gap vote is partially explained by men facing failures often reacting by blaming external causes and developing anti-establishment feelings. Still, other channels or mechanisms are likely relevant to understanding the link between downward mobility and the men's RWP vote.

It is also worth questioning, from a more theoretical point of view, the problematic imposed more or less implicitly by the dominant school of social mobility, i.e. a reference to a society where perfect mobility would reign as the archetype of a just society, making social fluidity the measure of the justice of society (Swift, 2004). This reference is in line with meritocratic ideology: once it is assumed that 'merit' is equally distributed across all social groups, social fluidity is a norm. But this assumes that the least

well-placed individuals on the social ladder, once they are 'deserving', will all be eager to move up.

Here a sociologist could be biased by assuming this meritocratic vision of the world is universal (especially one who is very liable to the academic system for her status ascent). Our results seem to indicate that many women internalized different norms, or at least some women seem more flexible to accept what may appear as a status decline if it comes with some compensation (Duru-Bellat & Kieffer, 2006).

These results could be fruitful for future research in several ways. Here we will consider a few highly speculative hypotheses related to downward mobility. First, the puzzle of the gender gap in the RWP vote is central in the literature (Immerzeel et al., 2015). This gap may be partially explained by the electoral reaction of men facing status decline, which has apparently no equivalent for women. However, this hypothesis would be only a partial explanation of the gender gap vote.

As a matter of fact, if we perform a regression with men and women with the addition of an interaction gender-status decline, we find the gender gap vote is still significant even if control for men's and women's status declines. Nevertheless, this hypothesis could help to tackle this puzzle and has not been considered before to our knowledge. Furthermore, as some authors (Mayer, 2015a) ask if this gender is closing at the moment in some countries, the variability of this gap across countries could be due to the variability of men's status decline perception depending on their location.

Obviously, it would be really helpful to understand under which conditions men feel a status decline. For instance, is the perception of downward mobility related more to economic factors or non-economic factors? The data available did not help much to tackle this question.

We must note though the item asking if you have a better job than your father seems very similar to inter-generational mobility. It is quite clear this item includes an economic dimension, so economic factors probably matter in the perception of decline. Furthermore, subjective decline seems a stronger

predictor than objective decline. So even if this perception of decline is related to economic factors, the time evolution of income may not be an accurate predictor of this feeling.

It seems the external observation of objective downward mobility is reductive. In particular, this objective measure of mobility does not consider other facets of status than the work. When asked, 'would you say that your job is the main factor in your social and professional success', 55% of respondents answered negatively (Duru-Bellat & Kieffer, 2006). The other factors considered equally or more important are, in order of frequency, family, friends and leisure activities. On the other hand, drawing hindsight from the Hirschman & Rothschild (1973) "Tunnel Effect", it would not have been astounding to find a relation between local economic inequalities and status declines feelings.

Finally, the status decline is obviously one factor, among others, that explains the RWP vote. However, if we look at the instances of the such vote in table 6.16 and the anti-establishment dimension of this type of populist, it seems similar to the Pujadist vote described by Bourdieu (1984). For a given national economic situation, this Pujadist vote may be more frequent in some social classes and some regions if downward trajectories are more likely.

We may therefore understand better the regional differences regarding the RWP vote, like the types of RN vote in the north and south-east of France, if we find the regions where the perception status decline is especially relevant. In particular, drawing hindsight from the results of this chapter, the RWP voters of these regions would not be especially hostile to immigrants but would be keen to stigmatize the "establishment".

The data of the 2022 election will be especially useful for this purpose, with the relative success of Zemmour in the south of France and the astounding performance of Le Pen in the north of France. The distinction between a middle-class RWP vote in the south and north with impoverished workers and unemployed supporting the anti-establishment RN is clear (Gombin &

[Rivière, 2010](#)). The next chapter will explore the phenomenon of the 2017 FN vote in the north of France.

## Chapter 7

# The FN upsurge in the north of France

### Abstract

The north of France is characterised by a dramatic increase in the Le Pen vote during the last two decades that did not happen anywhere else. This chapter aims to apply the findings of the previous chapters to this particular case. Shrinking industrial sectors, economic divergence, stigmatisation of the unemployed, and perceived status decline by men are all relevant to explain the Le Pen score. However, these factors do not seem sufficient to explain this FN breakthrough in the north. We consider, therefore, the 1980s mining crisis in the region to explain the strong reaction to the industrial crisis in the 2010s. The Le Pen vote increased more in the northern towns with a mining history. This historical dimension may help better to understand the performance of RWP parties in some regions in the US and UK.

## 7.1 Introduction

Marine Le Pen made her most impressive results in 2017 in the north of France. She managed to get half of the votes in some towns in the north of France. The Fn success in these places is relatively recent. For instance, in the former mining town of Calonne-Ricouart, Jean-Marie Le Pen realised a very modest performance of 17% in the first round of 2002 presidential, very close to the national average. Le Pen was behind the communist leader Robert Hue close to 20%. This result contrasts sharply with the 47.5% achieved by Marine Le Pen in 2017. Her 2022 score of 56.2% confirmed this trend further. Calonne-Ricouart is not an outlier, as many neighbouring towns had a similar drastic increase. How can we explain such a breakthrough of the FN that seems to only happen with this magnitude in the north of France? This question will be the puzzle we aim to explore in this chapter.

This chapter will be much more exploratory than the others as we attempt to use the findings of these previous chapters to make sense of the rise of the FN vote in the north of France. This will provide us with some frames that may be relevant to understand this case. This chapter is an initial step to finding promising future research directions. We will first consider the literature related to the FN electoral success in the north of France.

### 7.1.1 Literature

The literature regarding the 2017 FN rise in the north of France is relatively sparse despite this pattern's obviousness.

For Paxton & Peace (2020), the success of the FN in the north of France is related to its "mainstreaming" strategy at the local level. Northern mayors try to avoid controversial decisions and polemics. Local "government action was instead focused upon concrete changes to the local environment" and to "budgetary stability and tax reductions". The local FN administration seems "apolitical". They especially avoid any reference to race or immigration, especially Muslims, who are stigmatised by FN national leaders on TV. Even

the local mosque at Hénin Beaumont seems to have a good relationship with the mayor. This non-threatening image of the FN backed by concrete actions would explain its solid and consistent electoral results.

Given the nature of our research question, it is natural to look for geographical factors influencing the FN vote. Lévy (2002) was the first to establish a positive correlation between the FN vote and the distance to the main cities. The northern towns supporting the most Marine Le Pen are small (Hénin-Beaumont is the largest with 20 000 people) compared to the largest cities (Lille, Tourcoing, Roubaix) and quite far from them. Exploring geographically the features of these northern towns where a strong FN vote appeared during the last two decades may then help to understand the FN breakthrough in the north of France.

To explain why the towns far from the main cities tend to vote more toward the FN, Huc (2019), extending the work of Chalard (2006) makes a distinction between the chosen peri-urban, the constrained peri-urban and the suffered peri-urban with a higher FN vote in last two types. These two types differ, though, as inhabitants of the suffered peri-urban, experiencing a high economic precarity, are born there and wish to move to larger cities. On the other hand, inhabitants in the constrained peri-urban chose to quit unsafe large cities to buy a house in a calm place.

More precisely, Huc (2019) gives a two dimension typology of the places depending on their level of urbanity and their social composition (see figure 7.1). While the chosen peri-urban, the constrained peri-urban and the suffered peri-urban have a similar level of urbanity, they hierarchised depending of their social composition.

The suffered peri-urban would describe well the north of France periurban, where the proletariat and the sub-proletariat do not have any option to move out. On the other hand, the FN electorate in the South of France would be made up of middle classes, house owners for the most part. This constrained peri-urban is a constraint in the sense that the places chosen to move to have flaws: Pollution, bad reputation, longer commute to work (Huc, 2019).

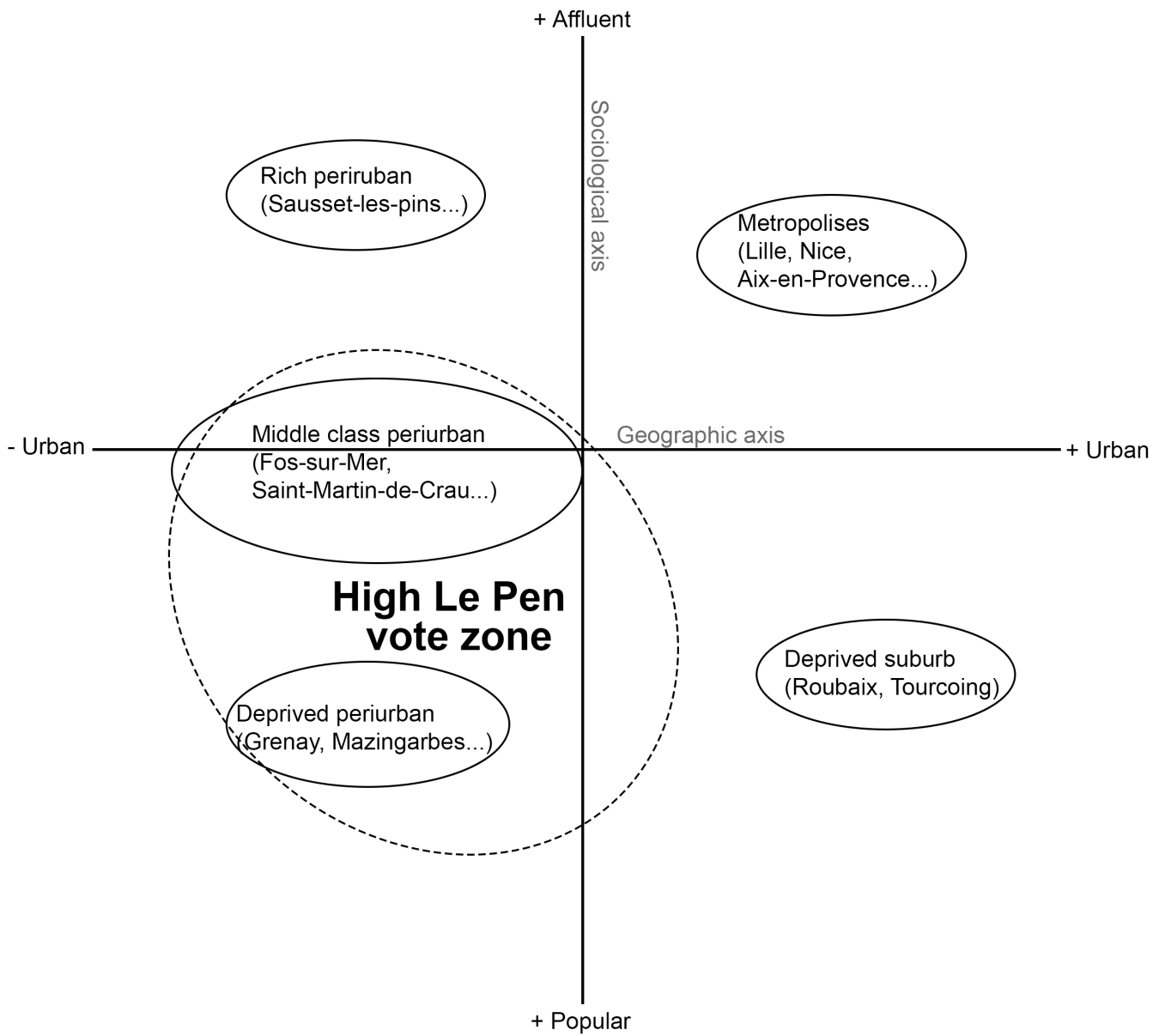


Figure 7.1: Typology of periurban (Huc, 2019)



Interestingly these two models still seem valid at a sub-city level. The polling stations in the poorest neighbourhood give the FN their best results in the north. On the other hand, the best scores of the FN are found in quite middle-class districts in the southeast (Huc, 2019). Gombin & Rivière (2010) confirms to some extent this north-south distinction. His multilevel analysis shows a contrast of a FN of Workers (mostly located in the south of France) and a FN of the inactive (mostly located in the north of France).

Guilluy (2016) proposed an alternative explanation to the correlation observed by Lévy (2002). Guilluy (2016) claims a massive exodus from the poor deprived suburbs to "la France périphérique" occurred during the last decade. The bitterness of the movers from the despised suburbs would translate into an FN vote. This hypothesis does not seem to fit the geographic distribution of the Le Pen vote (see the map figure 7.2). Indeed it does not explain why such a drastic increase in the Le Pen vote happened only in the north/north-east of France when problematic suburbs exist in almost all the regions.

### **7.1.2 Hypotheses to explain the FN breakthrough in the north of France**

There was an impressive upsurge in the FN vote during the 2017 presidential election in the north of France (see map figure 7.2). The breakthrough is even more impressive for the cities with the largest Le Pen vote increases. Figure 7.3 shows the towns where the Le Pen vote increased by 13 points or more. Every single city of these towns is in the north of France.

This chapter aims to explore if the results of the previous chapters may shed some light on this phenomenon. In chapters 2, 3 and 4, we suggested a relational model to explain the RWP vote of downward mobile individuals. We established industrial shrinking sectors, 1st-5th deciles divergence, and fear of falling are all factors linked to a higher Le Pen vote. We will then look at the relevance of each of these factors in the north of France.

Furthermore, chapter 6 established a relationship between the perception

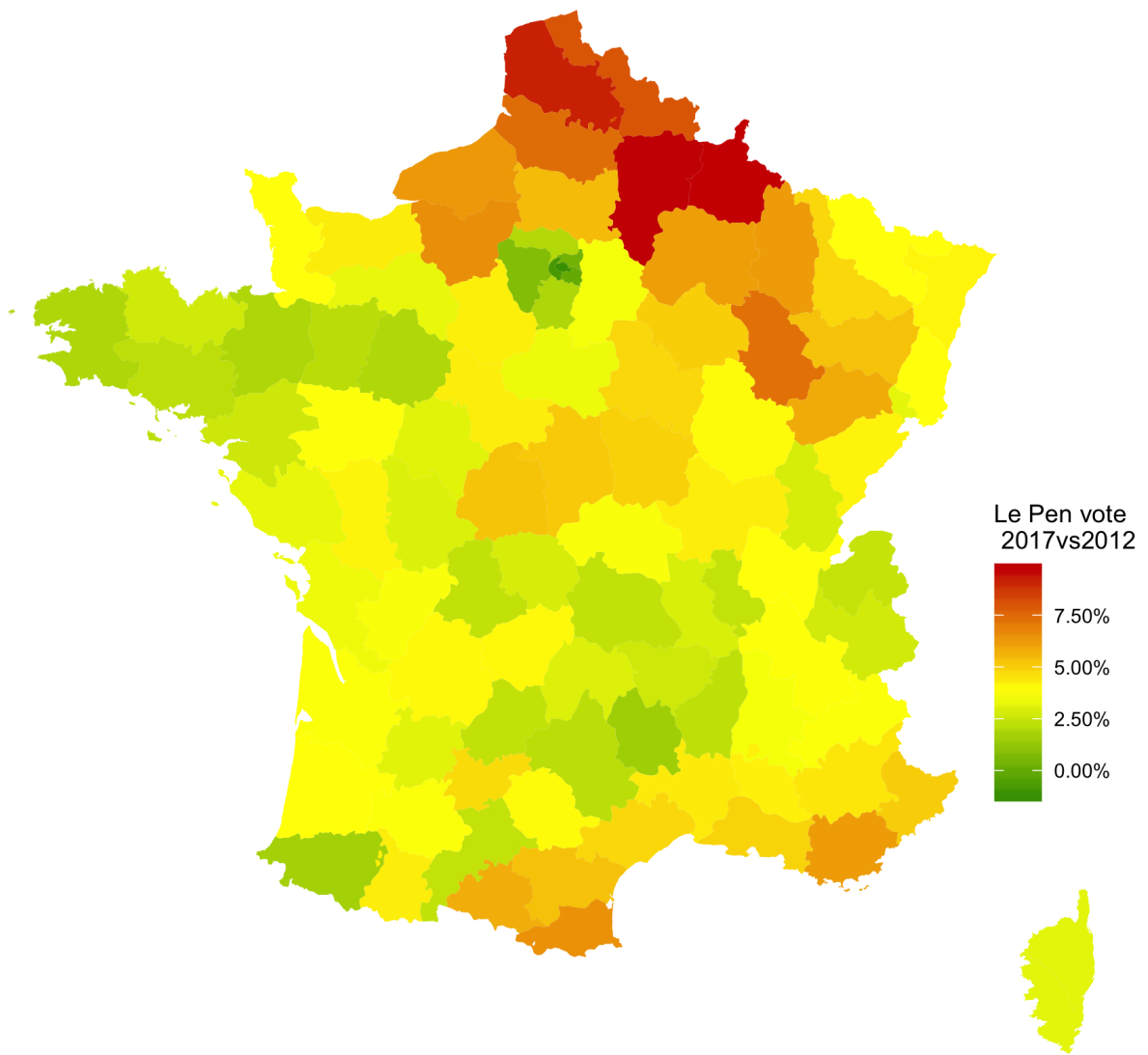


Figure 7.2: Le Pen vote variation between 2012-2017. For each département, the unweighted average is computed over all French cities (population > 2000).

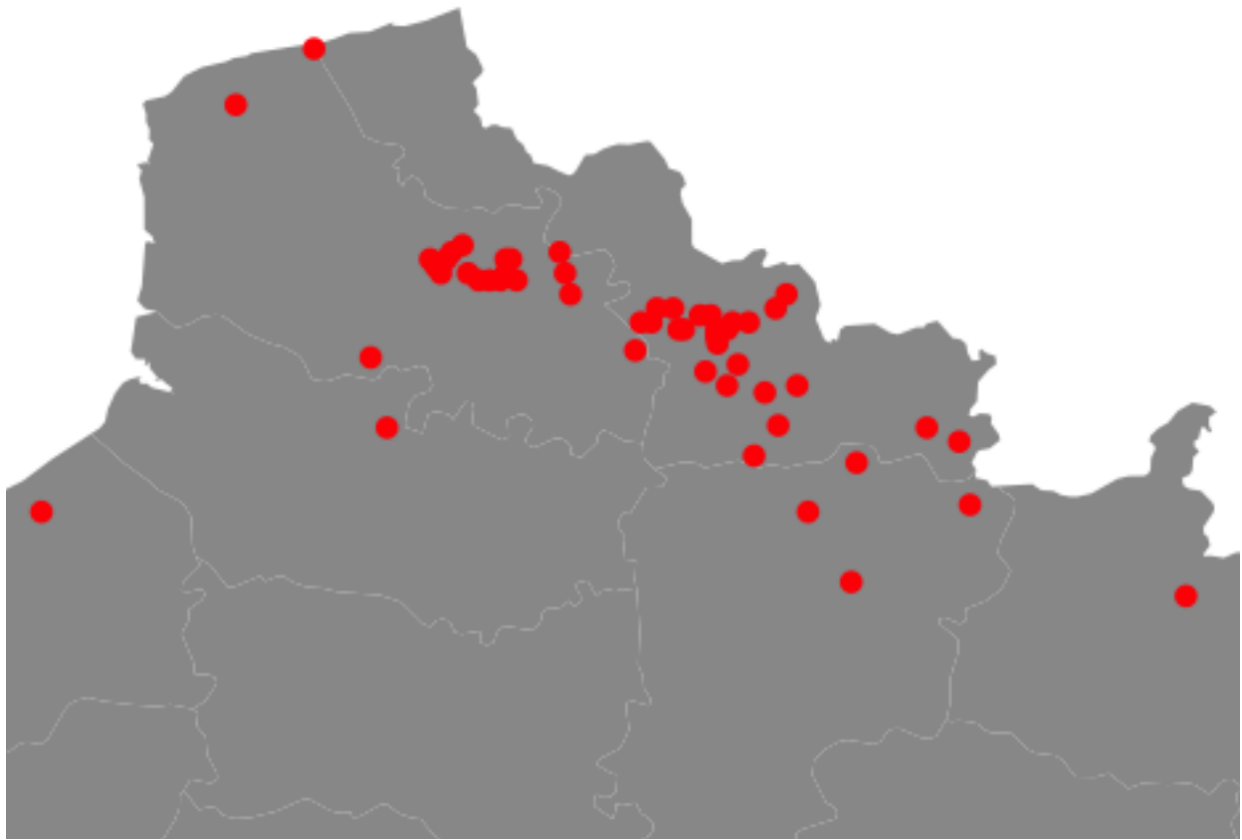


Figure 7.3: The 53 French cities where the Le Pen vote increase by more than 13% between 2012 and 2017

of status decline and the RWP vote for men. The status decline is defined as the difference between the own respondent's status and the status of the family where he grew up. Such a relationship did not appear for women. We, therefore, consider if the such pattern appears for the male Le Pen voters in the north of France.

While these already studied factors seem to be relevant for the 2017 election in the north of France, they seem insufficient to explain the surge of the Le Pen vote in this region. The values of these variables in the north are not drastically different from the values in similar regions where Le Pen obtained modest results. Of course, this region is very industrialised, and the long-lasting consequences of the 2008 crisis led to an anxiety-provoking climate. However, why would this anxiety be much higher than in other similar regions?

As a starting point of our investigation, we can look at the map 7.3. The Le Pen breakthrough seems to be localised in small towns in a specific area. These towns are spread along a line passing by Béthune, Lens, Hénin Beaumont, Douais, and Valenciennes. This area described fits very well the mining areas of the region in the 1980s, which is presented in Figure 7.4.

At first glance, the correlation may seem quite spurious. The last mine closed in 1990. How can this historic crisis suddenly become relevant in 2017, at least 30 years later? Here we suggest the current industrial crisis may reopen the wounds of the past, or at least the anxiety related to this 2008 economic and industrial crisis is increased by the region's history. This particular mining history would be the specific feature of this region and made it especially receptive to the Le Pen campaign.

The mining identity of this region has been used for a very long time by the different political parties (Fontaine, 2019). However, in the second part of the XXth century, the image of miners is quite ambivalent. They are presented as heroes or martyrs by the radical left but are qualified as outdated archaism by some sociologists and the representatives of the "deuxième gauche" (Fontaine, 2019).

Given the mining closures decisions that occurred for the most part during a socialist government, the voters may be pretty cautious with the electoral promises of the left parties. A left vote may not represent any more of a classical protest vote for the proletariat. The quite centrist politics of François Hollande (2012-2017) probably did not help to dispel this mistrust.

The immigrant and French Muslims who arrived recently are not part of the mining history of this region, which may partially explain xenophobic stances in these towns (Fontaine, 2019). Testing this suggested hypothesis seems a challenge with either qualitative or quantitative methods. In this chapter, we will be less ambitious, and we will just check if indeed, former mining towns voted more for Marine Le Pen in 2017. The most simple explanation seems to us the recent industrial crisis combined with the mining history led to anxiety, translating into a right-wing populist vote. Understanding better the meaning of the tested correlation will be the object of future research.

### **7.1.3 Methodology**

Given the towns where the Le Pen vote increased the most in 2017 are in the Aisne, Ardennes, Nord, Pas-de-Calais and Somme départements (see figure 7.3), we will consider data from these regions. The dependent variable will be, in most models, the 2012-2017 increase of the Le Pen vote in the towns of these five départements.

For the independent variables, we consider, following chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6, the shrinking of the industrial sector, income divergence 1st-5th decile, stigmatisation of the unemployed and status decline feelings for men. For the most part, we will use the same methodology as for the study of the whole of France, and therefore we will refer the reader to those previous chapters. However, in some cases, the sample size is quite small, and therefore we can not add as many control variables as desired. For instance, in the 2017 French Electoral Study, only 28 men voted for Le Pen. For those, we have to use simplified models.



Figure 7.4: Former mining areas in the north of France

To test if places in the north with a mining history are more likely to have an increase in the Le Pen vote in 2017, we look at the percentage of miners who used to work in each town in the Nord and Pas de Calais départements. We will restrict our research to these two départements as mining was only significant in these two départements (Figure 7.4). The Aisne, Ardennes and Somme are much smaller départements, and the overwhelming majority of towns with a very strong Le Pen vote are in the Nord and the Pas-De-Calais. So including all five départements would not change the result of our regression in a meaningful manner.

As the pits began to close in large numbers in the 1960s (Fontaine, 2019) in the north of France, we need to get quite old data in order to get an accurate picture of the mining industry. We are therefore using the 1975 census data to compute the percentage of miners among all workers in each town in the Pas-De-Calais and the Nord départements.

We will look if the addition of this mining history variable will improve the predictive value of a model with the shrinking industrial sector as the independent variable. We will use the same control variables as in the previous chapters: the size of towns and the variation of income deciles, unemployment, and immigration over the 2012-2017 period.

## 7.2 Results

We first consider the effect of a shrinking industrial sector on the Le Pen vote in the north of France. As in chapter 2, we find a clear association between job losses in the industry and an increase in the Le Pen vote (table 7.1). Such a result is not surprising in this industrial region. However, it must be noted that the industrial shrinking has been as strong in other places.

For the reader's convenience, we reproduce the chart from the divergence chapter (Figure 7.5), comparing the northern 53 towns where the Le Pen vote increased the most compared to other French cities. In these towns, the income divergence between the working class and the middle class is

drastic. The first decile decreased by 3.5% (compared to a 5% increase in the rest of France). This divergence pattern present in the whole country, correlated with an increase in the Le Pen vote, is extreme in these northern towns where Le Pen had an overwhelming lead.

Table 7.1: Shrinking industrial sectors and evolution of populist vote in northern French cities (2012-2017). Source: Migcom data

	variation of Le Pen vote (2012-2017)
Shrinking industrial sector	15.72*** (4.04)
$\Delta$ decile 1	-37.90*** (4.01)
$\Delta$ decile 5	-8.37** (3.16)
$\Delta$ decile 9	27.54*** (7.10)
$\Delta$ Unemployment	2.32 (5.08)
$\Delta$ Immigration variation	-93.31*** (25.52)
Log(voting population)	-0.86*** (0.23)
Constant	14.05*** (2.03)
Observations	472
R <sup>2</sup>	0.25
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.24

*Note:* +p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01,\*\*\*p<0.001

The Le Pen voters in the north of France seem to stigmatise the unemployed as much as the Le Pen voters in other regions (see Figure 7.6). 30% of the Le Pen voters agree with the statement the unemployed are able to find a job if they really want, and the northern Le Pen voters do not seem to distinguish themselves in this regard. However, we note the Northern non-Le



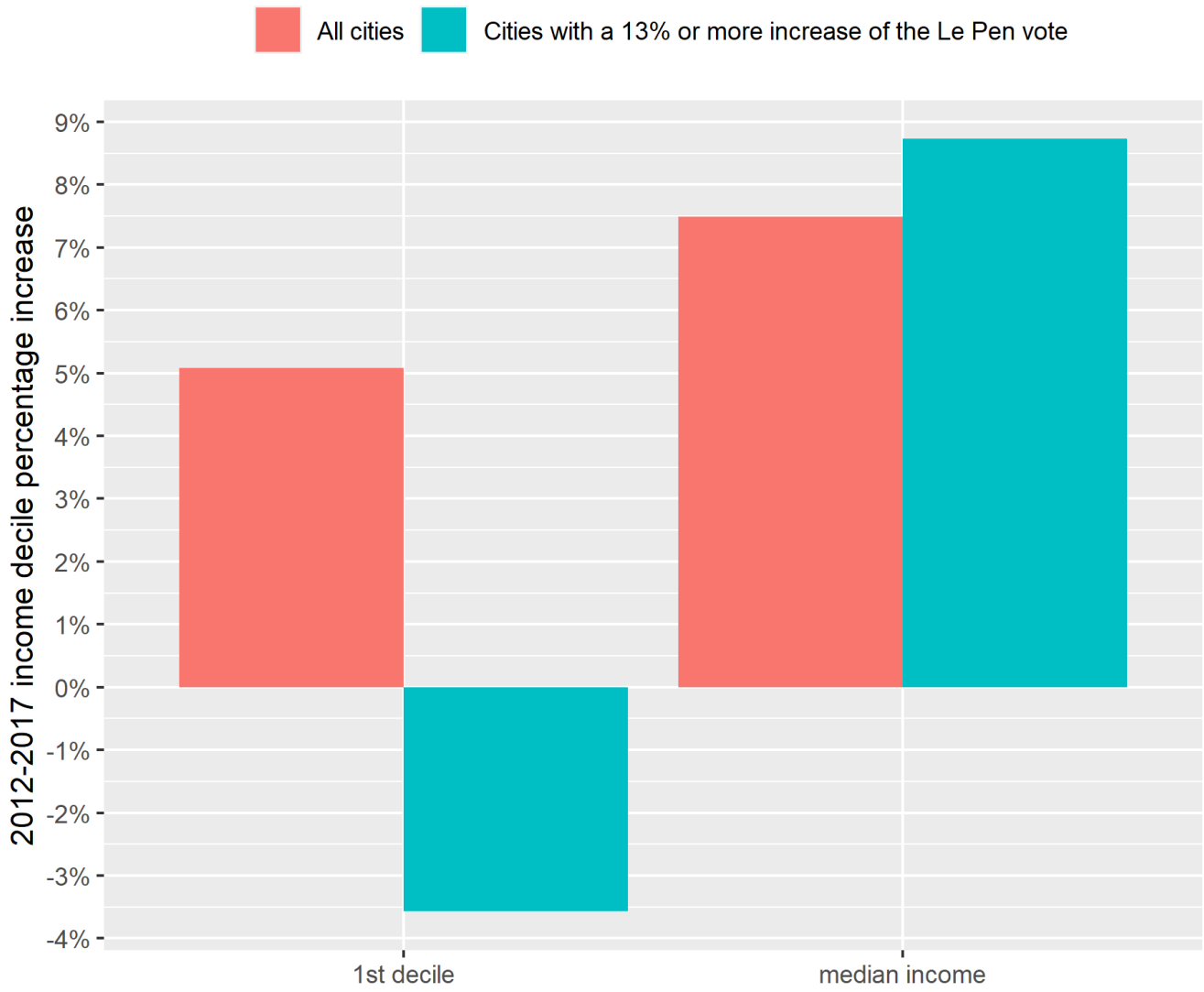


Figure 7.5: Income evolution for northern cities where the Le Pen vote increased by 13 pts (2012–2017) compared to the rest of France.

Pen voters seem to be more likely to stigmatise the unemployed compared to voters in other départements. This result is surprising, as the north of France is quite a poor region facing a lot of economic challenges. It is possible that stigmatising the unemployed is less socially acceptable, and it may induce a bias in the survey replies.

Table 7.2: Impact of the miners' history on the (2012-2017) Le Pen vote evolution in Nord/Pas de Calais French towns

	variation of Le Pen vote (2012-2017)	
	(1)	(2)
% of miners in the 70s		17.07*** (2.73)
Shrinking prof. sectors	19.83*** (4.80)	16.01*** (4.62)
$\Delta$ decile 1	-43.63*** (4.54)	-40.52*** (4.36)
$\Delta$ decile 5	27.04** (8.16)	25.42** (7.78)
$\Delta$ decile 9	-10.44** (3.60)	-10.90** (3.43)
$\Delta$ Unemployment	1.40 (6.09)	1.27 (5.80)
$\Delta$ Immigration variation	-95.63** (28.96)	-40.65 (28.97)
Log(voting population)	-1.00*** (0.27)	-1.22*** (0.26)
Constant	15.62*** (2.35)	17.14*** (2.25)
Observations	384	384
R <sup>2</sup>	0.29	0.35
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.27	0.34

*Note:* +p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

According to the last chapter, men's perception of status decline is linked to the RWP vote. Figure 7.7 shows indeed, such a relation occurs for men

living in the north of France. The north and western parts of France are where the Le Pen voters feel their status declined the most compared to the non-Le Pen voters, with in particular a sizeable 1.2-point difference between the two groups of men in the north. We should interpret this bar chart with caution, though, as the sample of men supporting Marine Le Pen in each region is small. For the north region, only 24 men voted for Le Pen. However, in this region, a t-test indicates a status decline significant difference between the Le Pen voters and the non-Le Pen voters with a 95% level of confidence. Still, this sample size is not enough to enable us to perform a regression analysis with a lot of control variables.

The main independent variable in this chapter is the proportion of miners in the 70s in towns in the Pas-De-Calais and the Nord départements. Table 7.2 shows a clear association between the presence of miners workers in a town in the 70s and the increase of the Le Pen vote at a three stars confidence level. Given the strength of the association, adding towns from Aisne, Ardennes, and the Somme would not alter the result in a significant manner. The shrinking of the industrial sector is still significant when we add the presence of miners. So it seems the effects of these two variables are independent of each other.

### 7.3 Discussion

This inquiry into the case of the Le Pen vote upsurge in the north of France confirmed the role of the explanatory factors tested in the previous chapters. The shrinking industrial sector, the stigmatisation of the unemployed, the status decline feeling for men and especially the economic divergence seem all important to understand the 2017 Le Pen performance in the North of France. However, all these factors seem not to be specific enough to this region to explain the 2017 Le Pen performance in the north of France.

While the "industrial history" Paxton & Peace (2020) has already been mentioned in the literature. To our knowledge, it is the first time the local

mining history has been tested in a rigorous manner in the literature. This variable seems very relevant to understand the surge of the Le Pen vote. Obviously, we should stay cautious about this strong correlation. It is tough to establish a situation that occurred 40 years ago has an influence on the recent elections. It is possible the surge of the Le Pen vote in these mining towns may be linked to features of these towns not directly related to the mining history. In-depth qualitative research is needed here to understand better the meaning of the correlation found.

However, to support our case, we looked at other places where Le Pen improved her score a lot in 2017. We found multiple occurrences of towns across France where the Le Pen vote drastically increased in 2017, with either a mining or textile crisis history during the 80s or the 90s. Further research is therefore needed to explore this hypothesis that may be helpful to understand other cases like, for instance, the Trump vote in the Rust Belt ([McQuarrie, 2016](#)).

If the industry sector bounces back at some point in the north of France, it will be exciting to check if Marine Le Pen will still outperform in this region.

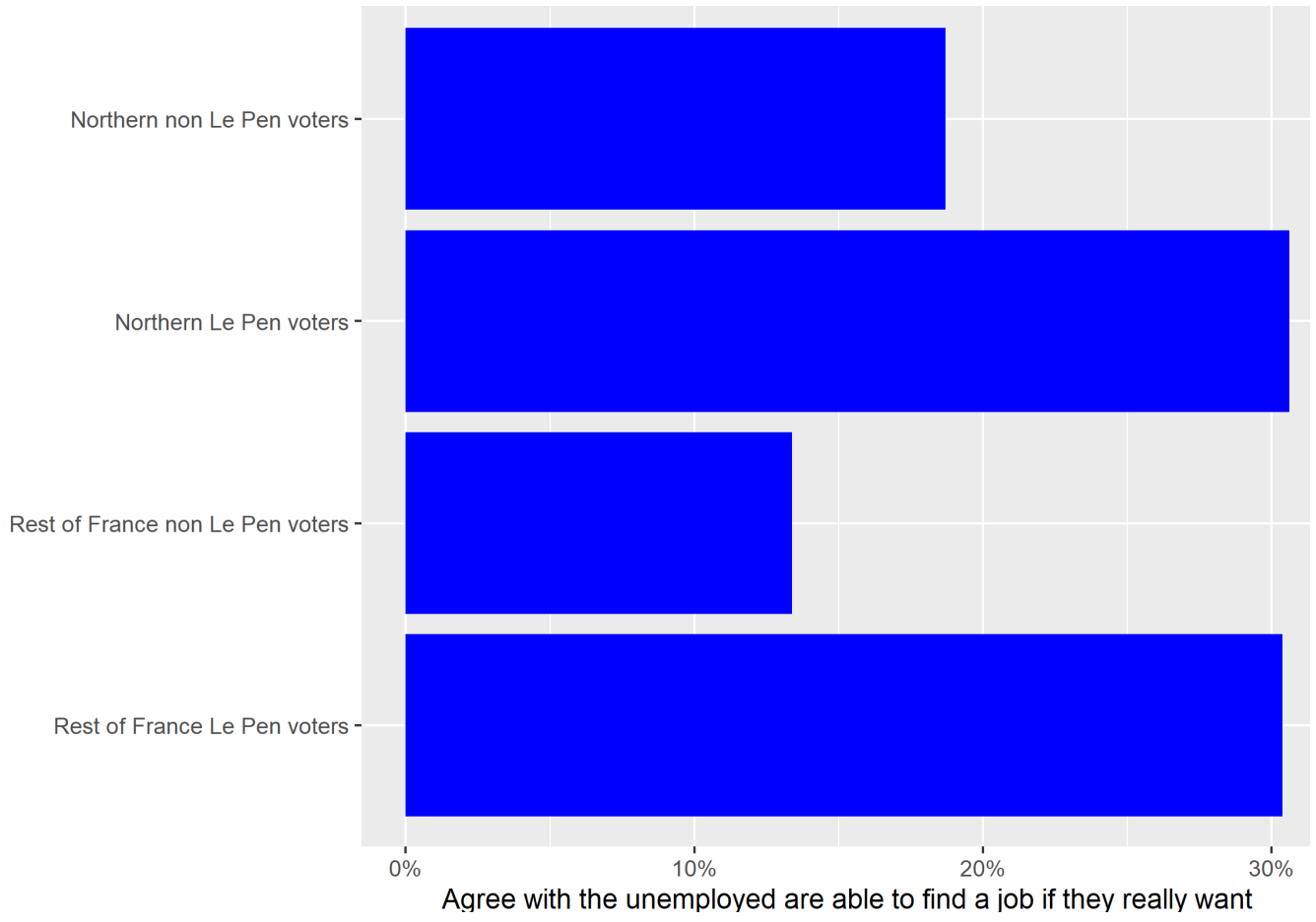


Figure 7.6: Perception of the ability to find a job for yourself and for others

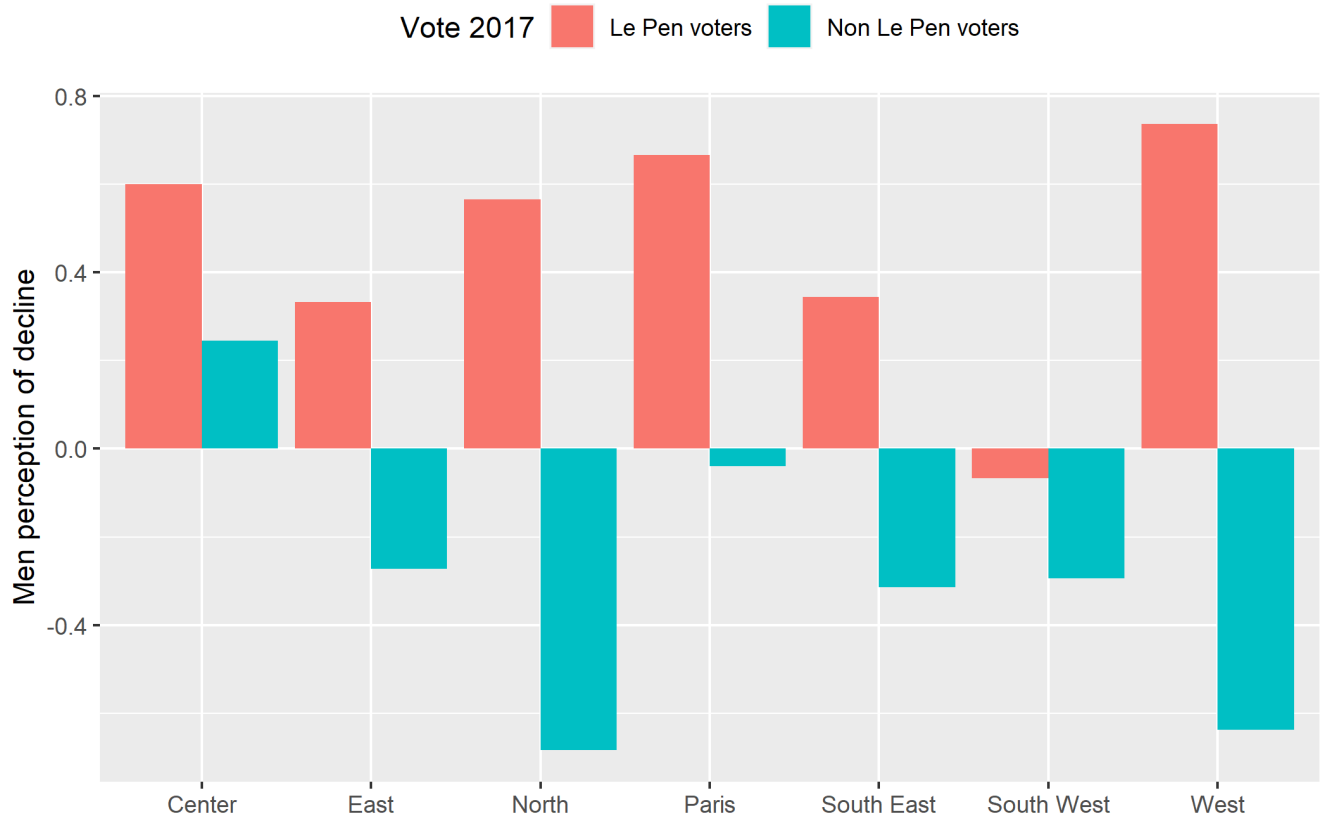


Figure 7.7: Average perception of decline for men by region (a positive number indicates subjective decline)

# Chapter 8

## Alternative Hypotheses

### Abstract

The previous chapters established a link between economic/status decline and the RWP vote. We proposed the fear of falling model to make sense of this relation. This final chapter aims to test alternative hypotheses to the fear of falling, describing the relation between economic/status decline and a switch to right-wing populist vote. According to these theories, immigrants can be seen as a threat to either customary "solidarity" [Wimmer \(1997\)](#), job market ([Autor et al., 2017](#)) or social capital ([Putnam, 1993](#)). Alternatively, right-wing populist support could be a "coping mechanism" ([Marx, 2019](#); [Pellicer, 2018](#)): People would convert their negative feelings due to economic frustration to violence and anger directed toward immigrants. Our results based on Dutch panel data only support the social capital hypothesis.

### 8.1 Introduction

We saw economic divergence (chapter 3) and status decline (chapter 6) are related to the RWP vote. We suggested a fear of falling interpretation in

chapter 4 to explain the mechanism of how this relational dynamic may lead to an RWP vote. However, other explanations are possible, and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Testing these other hypotheses from the literature is the aim of this chapter.

The paradigm linking social status/economic decline with the rise of populism is ubiquitous in the literature (Mayer, 2015b; Hochschild, 2016; Gidron & Hall, 2017; Gest et al., 2018). We consider here economic/status decline in a relational manner as any relative deprivation (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984) measured in economic/status terms and perceived as undeserved by the individuals. The frustration induced by a drop in the relative social hierarchy may be a factor in support of right-wing populism (RWP). Indeed using different kinds of operationalisations a growing number of papers found a correlation between economic relegation/social status decline and populist vote (Burgoon et al., 2018; Fourquet, 2019; Poutvaara & Steinhardt, 2018; Peugny, 2006; Mols & Jetten, 2016; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012; Gest et al., 2018).

Despite these promising empirical results, on the theoretical level, why social status decline or economic relegation may favour right-wing populism remains obscure. Several interpretations of this relation exist: Threatened customary "solidarity" (Wimmer, 1997), threat theory (Blumer, 1958), threatened social capital (Putnam, 1993) or a coping mechanism (Marx, 2019; Pellicer, 2018).

We want to test these theories using the 2010-2018 LISS dutch panel data. More precisely, we aim to check if crucial features of these theories are empirically true for new right-wing populist supporters of PVV (Party for Freedom, Netherlands). These features are a rise of concerns for immigrants threatening customary solidarity (threatened social contract), job market (threat theory), neighbourhood quality (social capital theory) and shame transformed into anger for the coping theory. Our contribution does not prove or even disprove any of these theories, but hopefully, these empirical results will help to refine them (or any theories using similar features).



Before describing in detail the theories, we will give a brief preview of our methodology to test these hypotheses. We will define "new supporters" as people who supported twice a mainstream party before switching to PVV. Four hundred respondents satisfy this definition in the LISS survey. Therefore this work also provides an insight into the motivation of first-time radical voters that may differ from regular supporters.

To illustrate how our methodology is useful in studying first-time voters, we ask if first-time voters for PVV are hostile to immigrants long before their switch to PVV or if their new populist leaning is concomitant to a recent increase of xenophobia. Figure 8.1 shows the average hostility of new PVV supporters toward immigrants with their level of agreement to: "there are too many immigrants" measured on a 1-5 scale. The level of agreement is measured every year in this panel data. We define year 0 for a particular new PVV supporter as the year when this respondent starts to support PVV. It also shows the hostility to immigrants during the years before and after the switch (negative and positive years). Five years before their switch, when they supported mainstream parties, they were, on average, far more hostile to immigrants than other mainstream party supporters (3.85 vs 3.05) and already close to their switch level (4.05).

So long before their first support for PVV, (future ) PVV voters are already more hostile to immigrants than other voters. This hostility increases during the months before their switch to the PVV. This simple example illustrates our methodology to examine the historical evolution of new PVV supporters' concerns to understand their motivations.

As a second example of our methodology, we ask if unemployment, as a particular case of economic relegation, is associated with a switch to PVV. The literature gives inconsistent results about the relationship between unemployment and populist vote. [Amengay & Stockemer \(2018\)](#) in a meta-analysis concludes: "In fact, regardless of the level of analysis, unemployment rates appear to be unrelated to the success of the radical right in the majority of cases". Indeed in our LISS sample, the correlation between unemployment

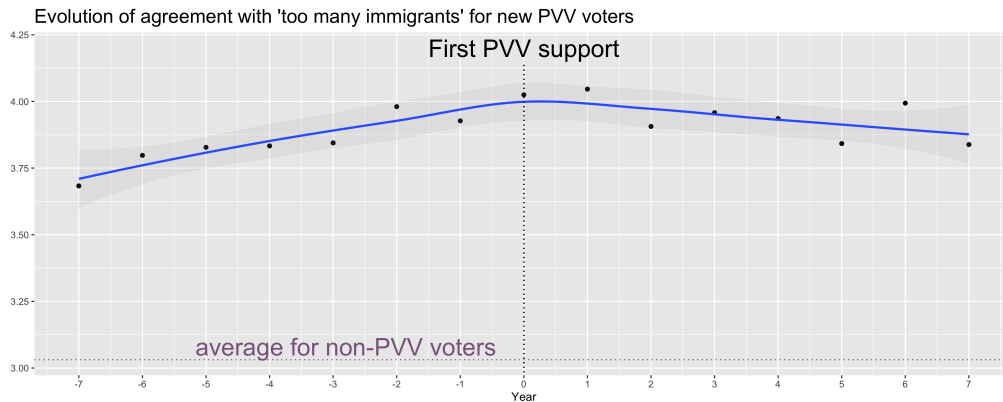


Figure 8.1: Average hostility against immigrants during the switch for PVV and during precedent, and subsequent years

and PVV is close to 0 (see table 8.1), but the situation for first-time voters is different. Figure 8.2 shows 5% of the new PVV supporters are unemployed during their switch year, while for this group, the unemployment proportion was only 2.5% five years before, close to the national average (the inclusion of inactive people explains the low percentages). So if unemployment may not be associated with a populist vote, it may be related to the trigger of a switch to a populist vote. We must, though, qualify this statement first, if more people are unemployed during the switch, the overwhelming majority of switchers are not unemployed (95%). Second, the quite small sample size (399) combined with the low rate of unemployment prevents performing a stringent statistical test. Finally, we did not include any control variables and fixed effects. This research will, therefore, propose more elaborate models with concerns about immigration and unemployment as independent variables.

These models will test if an increase in a given variable is associated with a switch to PVV. If, for instance, an increase in concerns about immigrants' presence in the neighbourhood is associated with a switch to PVV, this will support the social capital hypothesis. The chapter will be organised as follow: First, we will review the four hypotheses linking RWP vote and economic

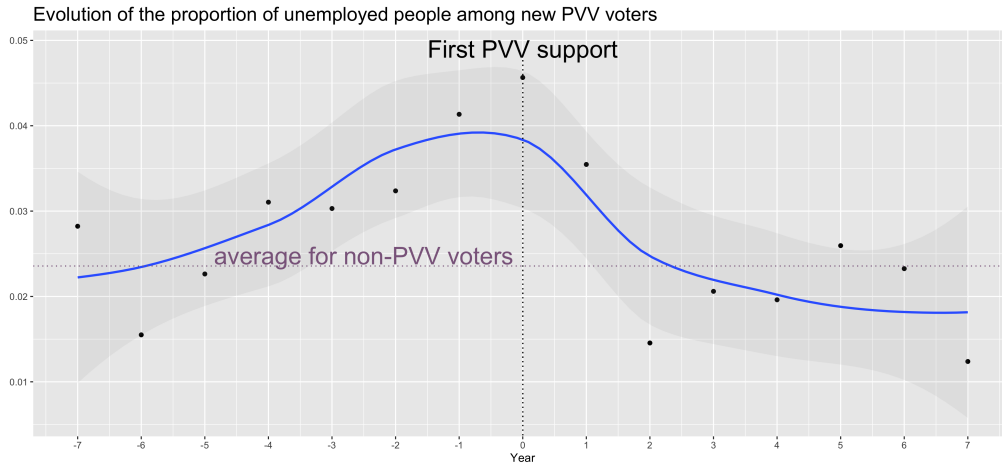


Figure 8.2: Proportion of unemployed people among new PVV voters during the switch for PVV and during precedent and subsequent years

Table 8.1: correlation between immigration concerns, unemployment and PVV support

	Immigration is bad for our neighbourhood	Lower social security for immigrants	Economy needs immigrants	Different cultures are good for society	Too many immigrants	Unemployed respondent	PVV support
Neighbourhood	1	0.279	-0.221	-0.398	0.567	-0.013	0.245
Security social	0.279	1	-0.298	-0.421	0.413	0.002	0.222
Economy	-0.221	-0.298	1	0.385	-0.360	-0.018	-0.244
Culture	-0.398	-0.421	0.385	1	-0.553	0.015	-0.297
Too many Im.	0.567	0.413	-0.360	-0.553	1	-0.009	0.330
Unemployed	-0.013	0.002	-0.018	0.015	-0.009	1	0.027
PVV support	0.245	0.222	-0.244	-0.297	0.330	0.027	1

relegation (threatened social contract, threat theory, threatened social capital, coping mechanism). Second, we will describe our methodology to test these hypotheses. The third section will give our results using 2008-2018 Liss panel data. Finally, we will discuss the limits of our study and how our work could help to refine these hypotheses.

## **8.2 Downward social trajectory and populist vote: The missing link**

We look here at the different potential mechanisms at the micro-level that may explain an association between downward social trajectory and RWP vote. While several papers show an association between status relegation and RWP vote ([Poutvaara & Steinhardt, 2018](#); [Peugny, 2006](#); [Burgoon et al., 2018](#); [Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012](#)), how exactly such relegation could induce a populist vote remained unclear. One may expect the low social/economic status would encourage voters to support radical left parties claiming the reduction of inequalities as their main objective. Also, if low-status voters think politicians will not provide any help, they may choose to abstain. To some extent, poor people tend to vote less ([Rosenstone, 1982](#)). So why could voters support RWP as a reaction to declining status? The literature proposed several potential explanations. These explanations can be summarised by four different hypotheses. The first two hypotheses state populist vote is motivated by material interests, while the last two are associated with self-esteem interest. The first and the third hypotheses consider the relation of individuals with their communities, while the other two are centred on the individuals.

[Wimmer \(1997\)](#) proposed immigration is seen as a threat by downward social groups to customary "solidarity" as an established economic distribution implicit agreement. In European countries, there is an "imagined community" which is the "outcome of a successful compromise of interests between different social groups: An exchange of the guarantee of political loyalty for the promise

of participation and security (Wimmer, 1997). According to Wimmer (1997) "xenophobia and racism should be seen as appeals to the pact of solidarity into which state and society have entered in modern nation-states and which in times of intensified social conflicts seems fragile in the eyes of downwardly mobile groups". If downwardly mobile groups feel this social compromise is undermined, they will not tolerate any additional threat. Immigrants are not just a threat because they may ask for their share of social privileges; they don't recognise (and are not even aware of) the previously established social compromise. They are an additional force for reform moving towards a new social compromise based on entirely new principles. These new principles may not fit the interests of downward mobile social groups. RWP vote is then a "consequence of a coping strategy that presents relative deprivation as an injustice, and a violation of norms of equality for which a group of others/strangers is blamed" (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012). The particular hostility against social benefits towards immigrants (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012) will make much sense if the Wimmer hypothesis is relevant. Recently Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou (2019) found an association between a far right vote and a perception of a breach of the "social contract".

Alternatively, immigrants may be seen as dangerous competitors in the job market, especially if they seem to accept wages lower than usual standards. This is a similar but distinct proposition from the Wimmer one to solve this paradox. In this case, immigrants do not need to be physically present to be a threat. Girard (2017) depicted towns with a 30% FN vote despite the absence of any immigrant families! However, in places where most jobs are connected to the uncertain global economy, relocation threats may be enough to trigger such defensive feelings. Autor et al. (2017) found evidence of higher populism in regions competing with Chinese exports. This hypothesis does not resort to any "imagined community" or "social contract" but follows market logic and can be described as a variant of the "Threat" hypothesis.

The third hypothesis suggests a connection between economic relegation, social capital and RWP vote. Putnam (1993) proposed membership in organ-

isations would foster tolerance. Membership is a form of social capital. The current research (Rydgren, 2009; Coffé et al., 2007; Veugelers, 2005; Poznyak et al., 2011) show mixed evidence about an association. We propose here a different hypothesis. Economic transformations inducing economic relegation would foster concerns about social capital among relegated individuals. Two mechanisms could potentially describe this process:

Firstly in a direct manner, failing individuals may look to increase their social capital as a substitute path for achievement. This pursuit may come with higher sensitivity to threats to social capital (immigration and insecurity) and ultimately leads to populist voting prioritising these two issues.

Secondly, during economic change, some successful workers may move to newly gentrified districts and leading to an apparent "surge" of immigrants or low-status people in undesirable parts of this city. This hypothesis is a variation of the Putnam (1993) one. (Rydgren, 2009; Coffé et al., 2007; Veugelers, 2005; Poznyak et al., 2011) show mixed evidence about an association between social capital and populist vote. Furthermore, the empirical findings from chapter 5 do not support the idea that high-status individuals moving in and out of towns are strongly linked to the variation of the populist vote. Potentially more complicated models considering the interaction between social capital and economic relegation may give different results.

The final explanation is RWP vote may be the "outcome of coping with the self-esteem and shame threats emerging from downward social trajectory" (Pellicer, 2018; Marx, 2019). RWP vote may then be an "antidepressant" (Hochschild, 2016, p.226) as "exposure to populist rhetoric decreases shame about unfavourable personal financial situations" Marx (2019). Social status decline due to personal financial situations may lead to uncomfortable encounters.

According to Pellicer (2018), individuals experiencing stressful encounters can use four different coping strategies. They can ignore these feelings and be problem-focused, changing the meaning of the situation. If they fail to achieve the former or the latter, they experience shame and be tempted to

withdraw from the uncomfortable situation. If it is not possible, the last option (leading to the RWP vote) is to judge the situation as unfair and feel angry about it. As it may not be possible to express this anger in most social situations, this anger may "become "displaced" towards other, weaker targets" (Pellicer, 2018). Using social identity framework (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and "displaced aggression" (MarcusNewhall et al., 2000), this new approach will posit individuals "externalise responsibility" "to turn negative self-conscious emotions into anger." Anger being a lot more enjoyable than "shame," individuals would then feel compelled to perform this "displacement" (Bourdieu, 1993, p.1414). This hypothesis will be compelling if individuals are unable to understand the roots of their anxiety issues.

As it is difficult to gather appropriate data, empirical tests of these hypotheses remain rare. Marx (2019) showed priming effect of exposure to populist rhetoric leads to anger about financial difficulties (apparently unrelated to politics). On the other hand, Marx (2019) did not find such exposure to populism would induce shame. Shame measurement is far from being "straightforward" though (Marx, 2019). Marx also did not study the relation between shame or anger with direct support or vote to RWP.

Our contribution is to test 3 critical features of the first three hypotheses: National preference for welfare (threatened customary "solidarity"), immigrants perceived as detrimental to the economy (threat theory), immigrants perceived as detrimental to the neighbourhood (social capital). The first three hypotheses can, therefore, be characterised by a particular concern that should theoretically favour a switch to a populist vote. So we will empirically test if, indeed, new support for RWP is associated with an increase of particular concern.

Regarding the last hypothesis claiming RWP vote could be a coping mechanism "to turn negative self-conscious emotions [like shame] into anger" Pellicer (2018). The critical point here is RWP vote would help individuals to feel better. RWP vote would be, therefore a catharsis to evacuate negative emotions. We will need to check if a short-lived increase in happiness is

concomitant to an RWP vote (coping mechanism). We tried to operationalise this variable, but we faced several operational difficulties in testing this hypothesis:

First, the time scale of this ‘emotional transaction’ (Pellicer, 2018) is unknown. Does the potential soothing effect of the RWP vote fade quickly or last several years? As we don’t know exactly “when” people did switch from mainstream parties to RWP, a measure of life satisfaction a few months before the RWP support claim may already include the soothing effect if people already or are close to operating such political shift. Also, happiness may obviously also fluctuate depending on factors unrelated to the RWP vote. Finally, we can not exclude declining life satisfaction causes RWP vote with or without a soothing effect for such a vote, hence a reverse causality issue.

For all these reasons, it seems unrealistic to measure happiness variation after a vote with just survey or panel data. We, therefore, did not test the fourth hypothesis. Qualitative methods seem better suited, and further research is needed to tackle this question.

### **8.3 Methodology**

Our goal is to isolate the concerns and emotional reactions that may favour a shift from a mainstream party to RWP. We will focus in this study only on “new” supporters of PVV in the 2008-2018 LISS panel. A new supporter is defined as someone who claimed at least twice to be close to another political party before switching to PVV for the first time. After this first support for PVV, we do not differentiate between voters who keep such a stance and the ones who revert to mainstream parties. We make the reasonable assumption factors favouring switching are at least as strong for the first allegiance shift as for any other subsequent shift. We will then only consider new supporters and respondents who never supported PVV during 2008-2018 (but supported at least another party once) as a comparison base. 399 new PVV supporters



are included in our sample.

To test our first three hypotheses (threatened customary "solidarity", threat theory, and social capital), we look for an association between our dependent variable new support for PVV and the rise of specific associated concerns. This leads to the three following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** An increase in negative judgement regarding the presence of immigrants in the neighbourhood is associated with a switch to PVV support.

**Hypothesis 2:** An increase in demand for a national preference regarding welfare is associated with a switch to PVV support.

**Hypothesis 3:** An increase in a perception of the negative impact of immigration regarding the economy is associated with a switch to PVV support.

We use, therefore as independent variables the following questions asking the level of agreement on a 1-5 scale:

- Legally residing foreigners should be entitled to the same social security as Dutch citizens.
- Some sectors of the economy can only continue to function because people of foreign origin or descent work there.
- It does not help a neighbourhood if many people of foreign origin or descent move in.

The second statement is not entirely satisfying. "immigration causes an increase of unemployment for native Dutch people" would have been preferable to test the threat hypothesis. Still, someone anxious about losing his job because of immigration is especially likely to be dismissive about any positive impact of immigration on the economy. So this item seems a reasonable proxy. Table 8.1 shows this variable is correlated to PVV vote and correlated to other immigration concerns.

Figure 8.3 shows the average agreement for these three statements of switch voters to PVV (year 0) and during the years before and after the

switch. One statement about the cultural dimension of the hostility against immigrants has been added for completeness. For every statement, new PVV voters are significantly more hostile to immigration than average voters. Actually, such hostility was almost as strong five years before the switch. A classical survey methodology recording only year 0 replies may be, therefore, misleading. Hostility to immigration may be only a prerequisite to voting for RWP, and we must inquire which other factors favour the activation of such disposition.

Our dependent variable will be the dummy variable first PVV support. As we are interested in the conditions which lead to switching to PVV, we will exclude all data after the first PVV support (we only consider the year 0 and before of Figure 8.3 curves). Old PVV supporters and respondents who did not support any party will also be excluded from the regression analysis. Unemployment and "have a partner" will be included as control variables, using linear interpolation for the missing values. As we try to explain vote variation by variation of independent variables, we will not include constant or quasi-constant variables (like diploma or sex). As income is an antecedent variable in our economic relegation hypothesis, it will also be excluded. As income is missing for the majority of respondents, it is, unfortunately, difficult to do any interesting analysis with this variable.

In the next section, we will perform a longitudinal linear probability regression and a longitudinal logistic regression with random effect. For each regression, we will test a "within" and a "first difference" model. The "first difference" will measure the influence of a recent increase, while the "within" looks at increases over a longer period. For instance, given the bell shape of the unemployment proportion for the first-time PVV supporter (figure 8.2), we would expect a stronger effect of unemployment in the within model than in the first difference one. For the first difference model, if the data is missing for the previous year, we use the first precedent available year to measure the variation. To limit biases induced by this method, we add dummy variables for the number of lagged years used. Fixed-year effects will

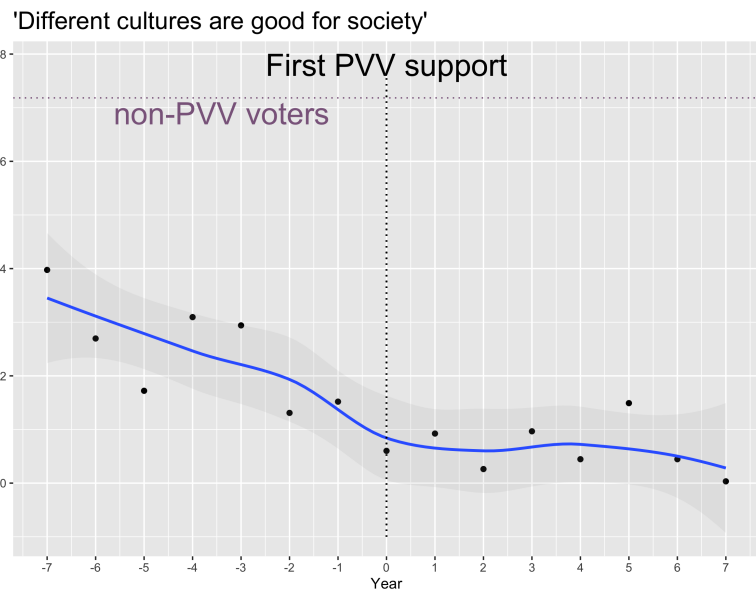
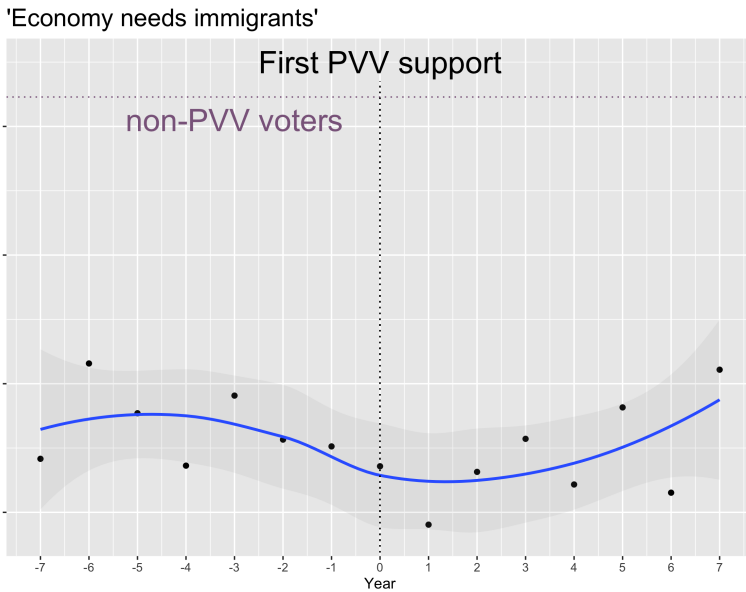
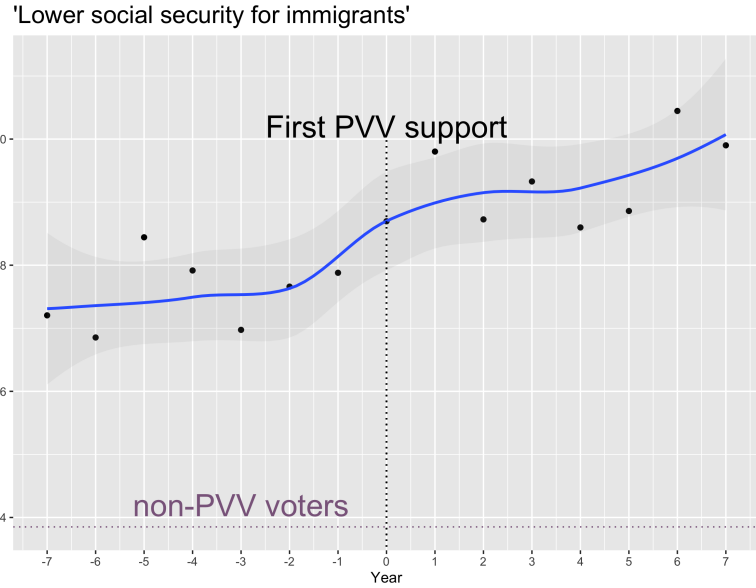
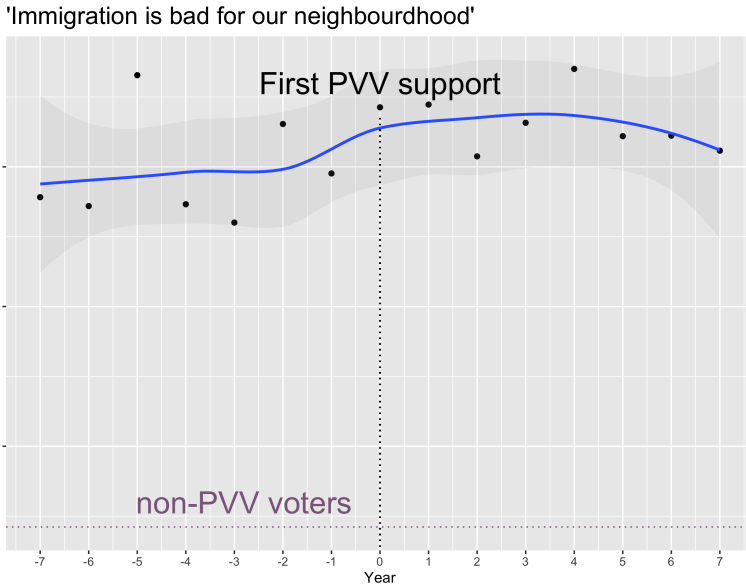


Figure 8.3: Average agreement of new PVV supporters with "immigrants are bad for neighbourhood", "Lower social security for immigrants", "eco needs immigrants" & "people of different cultures are good for society" during the switch for PVV and during precedent and subsequent years. The purple line is average for non-PVV supporters.

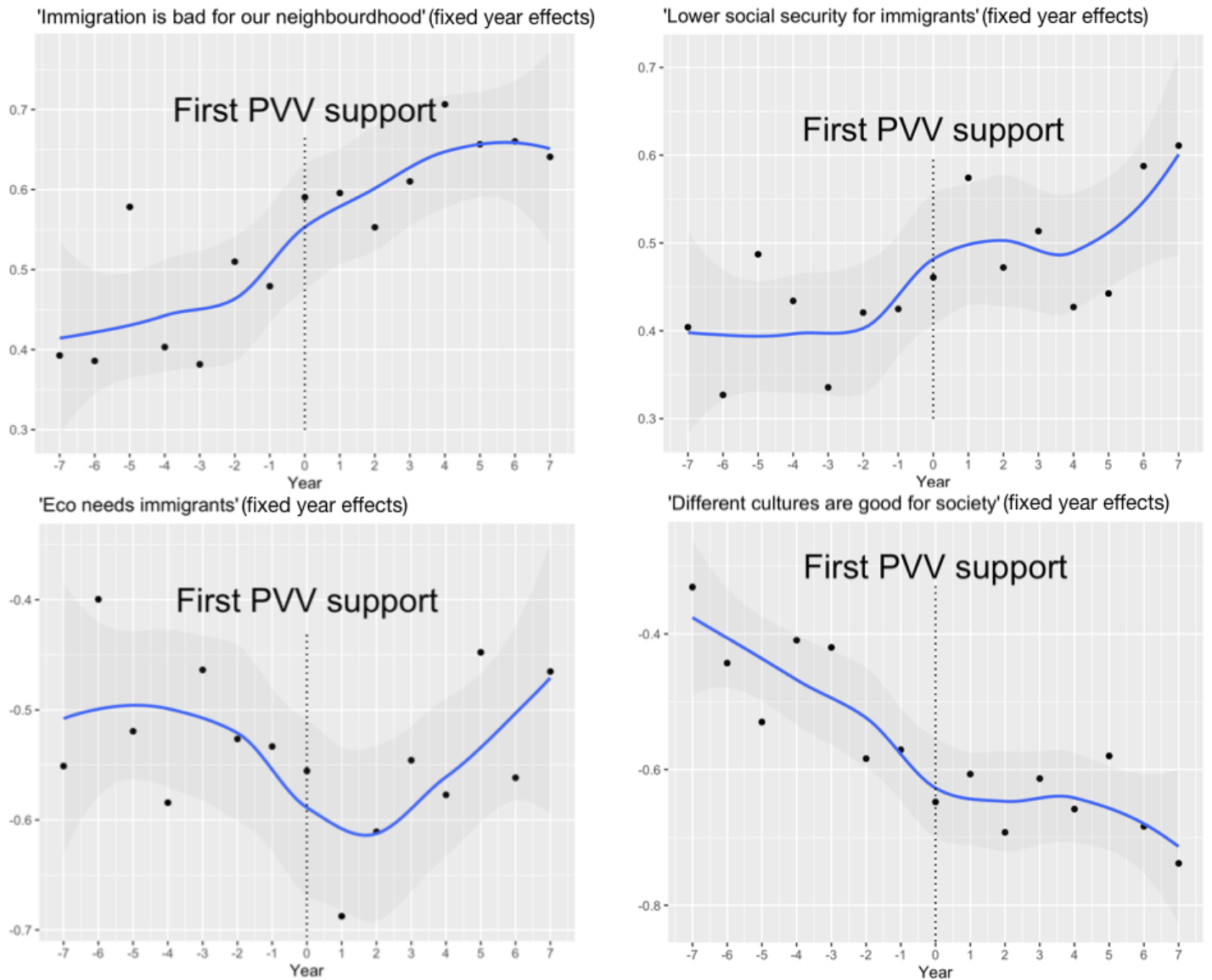


Figure 8.4: Fixed year effect model (0 level on the Y axis is the average for non PVV supporters). Average agreement of new PVV supporters with "immigrants are bad for neighbourhood", "Lower social security for immigrants", "eco needs immigrants" & "people of different cultures are good for society" during the switch for PVV and during precedent and subsequent years.

be included in the analysis. Figure 8.4 shows the same curves as in Figure 8.3, but with the addition of a fixed year effects correction.

## 8.4 Results

The linear probability model and the longitudinal logistic regression used to test the three hypotheses (threatened customary "solidarity", threat theory, social capital) are given in table 8.2, 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5

Among the three concerns associated with our hypotheses 1,2, and 3, only the impact of immigration on the quality of the neighbourhood increases in a significant manner during a switch to PVV. "Economy needs immigrants" and "Lower social security for immigrants" do not seem to increase when people switch to PVV. "Immigration is bad for our neighbourhood" is a far stronger predictor for first difference models than for within models indicating PVV switches are characterised by the recent increase of this variable. On the other hand, the cultural variable "Different cultures are good for society" is a better predictor for within models. Figure 8.4 suggests cultural anxiety may increase a couple of years before the switch. In the within models including all variables, this predictor seems the strongest, while "immigration is bad for our neighbourhood" is dominant in first difference models. "Too many immigrants" and "Asylum should be easier" are significant in every model. As a control variable, unemployment is also significant in within models.

## 8.5 Discussion

Among the three hypotheses considered, threatened customary "solidarity", threat theory, and social capital, our results show only consistent support for the latter. A clear limitation of this contribution is the lack of external validity. We only consider data from Netherlands during the last decade; it would be interesting to see if similar results can be observed in other European countries.

Table 8.2: Increase of immigration concerns as factors switch to RWP support  
(FD LPM)

	First vote for PVV						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Immigration is bad for our neighbourhood	0.003*** (0.001)						0.003** (0.001)
Lower social security for immigrants		-0.001 (0.001)					-0.0004 (0.001)
Economy needs immigrants			0.001 (0.001)				0.001 (0.001)
Different cultures are good for society				-0.002 (0.001)			-0.001 (0.001)
Too many immigrants					0.003** (0.001)		0.002+ (0.001)
Asylum in Netherlands should be easier						-0.003* (0.001)	-0.002+ (0.001)
Unemployed	0.004 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)
Have a partner	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)
Fixed year effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	0.015*** (0.001)	0.015*** (0.001)	0.015*** (0.001)	0.015*** (0.001)	0.015*** (0.001)	0.015*** (0.001)	0.015*** (0.001)
Observations	24,089	24,089	24,089	24,089	24,089	24,089	24,089
R <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.002
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.0002	0.0002	0.0002	0.0005	0.0004	0.001

Note:

+p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01,\*\*\*p<0.001

Table 8.3: Influence of segregation to populist vote (within LPM)

	First vote for PVV						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Immigration is bad for our neighbourhood	0.310* (0.122)						0.187 (0.125)
Lower social security for immigrants		-0.114 (0.112)					-0.020 (0.113)
Economy needs immigrants			-0.064 (0.112)				0.011 (0.113)
Different cultures are good for society				-0.588*** (0.149)			-0.501*** (0.152)
Too many immigrants					0.426*** (0.128)		0.287* (0.133)
Asylum in Netherland should be easier						-0.427*** (0.129)	-0.333* (0.131)
Have a partner	-0.904* (0.440)	-0.900* (0.440)	-0.907* (0.440)	-0.913* (0.440)	-0.916* (0.440)	-0.896* (0.440)	-0.914* (0.439)
Unemployed	1.438* (0.651)	1.428* (0.651)	1.434* (0.651)	1.454* (0.651)	1.464* (0.651)	1.460* (0.651)	1.501* (0.651)
Fixed year effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	29,771	29,771	29,771	29,771	29,771	29,771	29,771
R <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.0004	0.0004	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.002
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.330	-0.330	-0.330	-0.329	-0.329	-0.329	-0.328

Note: †p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 8.4: Increase of immigration concerns as factors switch to RWP support  
(FD random effects)

	First vote for PVV						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Immigration is bad for our neighbourhood	0.191** (0.062)						0.160* (0.063)
Lower social security for immigrants		0.027 (0.057)					0.008 (0.057)
Economy needs immigrants			-0.041 (0.057)				0.054 (0.057)
Different cultures are good for society				-0.108 (0.077)			-0.087 (0.078)
Too many immigrants					0.162* (0.067)		0.117+ (0.068)
Asylum in Netherland should be easier						-0.124+ (0.066)	-0.099 (0.066)
Have a partner	0.219 (0.423)	0.200 (0.423)	-0.204 (0.423)	0.209 (0.423)	0.200 (0.423)	0.212 (0.425)	0.236 (0.424)
Unemployed	-0.029 (0.313)	-0.034 (0.312)	0.030 (0.312)	-0.026 (0.313)	-0.035 (0.312)	-0.030 (0.312)	-0.015 (0.312)
Fixed year effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	-20.479* (9.590)	-20.488 (541.043)	20.487 (541.015)	-20.490 (540.829)	-20.486 (540.506)	-20.493 (540.708)	-20.486 (539.215)
Observations	24,147	24,147	24,147	24,147	24,147	24,147	24,147
Log Likelihood	-1,854.7	-1,859.3	-1,859.1	-1,858.4	-1,856.5	-1,857.6	-1,850.8
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	3,921.331	3,930.469	3,930.175	3,928.745	3,924.847	3,927.137	3,963.898

Note:

+p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001



Table 8.5: Increase of immigration concerns as factors switch to RWP support  
(random within model)

	First vote for PVV						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Immigration is bad for our neighbourhood	0.103 (0.095)						0.028 (0.096)
Lower social security for immigrants		0.172* (0.082)					0.109 (0.083)
Economy needs immigrants			-0.029 (0.086)				0.036 (0.087)
Different cultures are good for society				-0.482*** (0.109)			-0.431*** (0.111)
Too many immigrants					0.207* (0.098)		0.116 (0.101)
Asylum in Netherland should be easier						-0.261** (0.100)	-0.204* (0.101)
Have a partner	-0.450 (0.323)	-0.446 (0.323)	-0.455 (0.323)	-0.460 (0.324)	-0.449 (0.323)	-0.441 (0.323)	-0.442 (0.325)
Unemployed	1.156** (0.369)	1.154** (0.369)	1.155** (0.369)	1.182** (0.370)	1.165** (0.369)	1.175** (0.369)	1.200** (0.370)
Fixed year effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	-21.503* (8.845)	-21.483 (861.577)	-21.492 (15.697)	-21.491 (859.579)	-21.505 (17.480)	-21.499 (861.026)	-21.502* (10.444)
Observations	29,771	29,771	29,771	29,771	29,771	29,771	29,771
Log Likelihood	-1,913.743	-1,912.188	-1,914.275	-1,904.871	-1,912.113	-1,910.863	-1,900.401
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	3,982.006	3,978.894	3,983.070	3,964.262	3,978.745	3,976.245	4,006.828

Note:

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

According to our investigation, job insecurity concerns and threatened solidarity do not have a causal role in the switch to PVV, but we will certainly not claim they are not involved in the populist vote. For instance, these two concerns seem a lot higher one year after the switch (Figure 8.4). It is hard to tell if such a pattern is a statistical artefact or if, as a reverse causality phenomenon, the switch to PVV helps to develop such concerns. Maybe the item "Economy needs immigrants" is not a good proxy to measure the interaction between job insecurity and immigration. Using another longitudinal study with a more suitable question to inquire about job insecurity would be beneficial. Still, this item is correlated to support for PVV and therefore, it is interesting to study its correlation with a switch to PVV.

Regarding our positive result, the association between the switch to PVV and the increase of concerns about immigration in the neighbourhood, several interpretations are possible. Is it merely the translation of uncomfortable proximity with immigrants? Does it measure a vague "insecurity feeling" characteristic of right-wing populist voters (Fourquet, 2017)? Or is it the symptom of the reverse gentrification phenomenon due to economic transformations (where population flux may involve immigrants or not)?

While the item "different cultures are good for society" was not directly useful to test our four hypotheses, its correlation with a switch to PVV would be interesting for the readers concerned with the "cultural backlash" hypothesis (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). As this hypothesis is outside of the scope of this paper, we will not comment on it, but we will just note the regression analysis and (Figure 8.4) suggest the increase of cultural backlash happens **before** the switch to PVV.

The coping hypothesis may provide an intriguing perspective on the RWP voters' psychology. Would individuals switch to vote for a stigmatised party for a short relief of their frustration? This is an open question, and tackling it is a tough methodological challenge. Unfortunately, we did find a reasonable methodology to tackle it with the data of the LISS panel. This hypothesis

seems actually ill-suited for survey methodology. If the emotional benefit of a PVV switch is short-lived, we may not be able to measure it. Psychological on-field experiments or interviews seem more appropriate to explore this question

# Conclusion

The word decline is quite ubiquitous in the literature on the RWP vote, but measuring the amount of status or economic "decline" of an individual and knowing her vote is a methodological challenge. In particular, it's difficult to grasp the time dimension of decline in survey which is the most common source of data in the quantitative literature.

In this PhD, we attempted to explore different types of declines. We looked, therefore how different economic/status relation between social groups has influence the RWP vote. The two main contributions are a relational model linking the economic transformation status decline presented in chapters 2,3, and 4 and the Le Pen vote and how downward mobile men tend to vote more for RWP parties (chapter 6). We will summarise these contributions here and give directions to extend this research.

For the economic transformations involved in our relational model, we first think of course to the globalisation of trade and the relocation of businesses. Here the hindsight given by the work of [Autor et al. \(2017\)](#) was crucial to the introduction of the shrinking professional sectors in our model. However, other transformations may be equally important (mass unemployment, weakened unions, use of subcontractors...). Unfortunately, our type of methodology made it very difficult to isolate the individual effect of each transformation on the size of the professional sectors or on the Le Pen vote. Some particular economic transformations are likely involved in occurrences of RWP vote rises which seem hard to interpret because these transformations are challenging to measure in a quantitative manner. Maybe

qualitative methods would be better suited to understand which economic transformations are relevant.

In particular, we did not tackle in this PhD the relation between the pressure at work and the RWP vote. The recent economic transformations may induce increasing pressure on individuals. For some jobs sectors, the pressure linked to overtime hours and the increasing drudgery of work may not be measured by the unemployment rate in this sector. To make things more complicated, pressure by itself does not seem to translate to an RWP vote. Otherwise, the Le Pen vote would not be that low in Paris (the same remark could apply to capital cities). If we can venture a hypothesis here, we would suggest the pressure at work may interact with a lack of recognition or the lack of future prospects.

One striking result of this PhD is the strong and consistent relationship between the income divergence of the first versus the fifth income deciles and the Le Pen vote. This relation occurred during different elections despite the regions where Le Pen made significant progress being different in each election. The fact this economic divergence was extreme precisely in towns where the Le Pen vote surged in the north of France convinced us even more of the relevance of this variable.

We interpreted it as an economic divergence between a declining working class and the rising middle class, but further work with more fine-grained data would be needed to identify precisely the "winners" and the "losers" (Kriesi et al., 2008) in this economic divergence. In particular, are the losers keen to vote for Le Pen, the unemployed, the industry workers, the part-time workers or the retired people?

Unfortunately, we were not able to test this economic divergence association in other EU countries (besides Denmark, but with a too small sample of towns). Knowing if this association holds or not in different European countries would help us to understand it better. Hopefully, given the current harmonisation process of national statistics at the European level, data to measure economic divergence at the local level will soon be available in

different countries.

Considering the economic divergence factor could help us to understand why many RWP electoral breakthroughs happened during affluent times and even when unemployment was at a historically low level. Phenomena named "the wealth paradox" by [Mols & Jetten \(2017\)](#). We think of course, first to the US and the UK examples in 2016, but also Spain in 2019, Denmark in 2015, the Netherlands in 2002, and Australia in 1998, among others. These cases of apparent economic prosperity may hide economic divergence between social groups. This idea seems especially promising as most of the RWP breakthroughs mentioned happened during economic recoveries, 4-7 years after an economic crisis.

The last part of our model is the fear of falling into a despised group like the unemployed. This fear would translate into anger ([Marx, 2019](#)) and symbolic distancing ([Salmela & Von Scheve, 2017](#)) from this despised group. This symbolic distance is very apparent in FN supporters interviews ([Marchand, 2017](#)) when they distinguish themselves as "hard-worker" and "law-abiding" citizens comparing themselves to the Active Solidarity Income recipients. Here these explicit and implicit comparisons seem to follow a principle of di-vision ([Bourdieu, 1984](#)) that our empirical results in chapter 4 support. This hostility to the unemployed is also present in the Fn discourse in an implicit manner. For instance, the slogan "2 million unemployed is 2 million immigrants too many" ([Igounet, 2017](#)), could be understood as an association between the unemployed and the unworthy immigrants.

This hostility to welfare benefits is also evident in qualitative American studies ([Hochschild, 2016](#)). We found out statistically, the RWP voters tend to consider often the unemployed "could find a job if they really want". However, this result is probably only one facet of this symbolic distancing by the RWP voters. These ways to distance and distinguish oneself need to be studied quantitatively in a more systematic manner.

If the three parts of our relational model (shrinking professional sectors, economic divergence and the fear of falling) give a coherent description of

the extent of the RWP vote of declining social groups, we must admit it seem insufficient to explain the puzzle of the upsurge of the Le Pen vote in the north of France. If the economic divergence was very high in the north of France, the other two factors were only marginally higher compared to similar regions. We, therefore, introduce the mining history of this region to explain its particular sensitivity to the 2008 economic and industrial crisis. The geographic correlation with the 2017 Le Pen vote is striking. Of course, we should question the validity of this correlation given how old is the mining history. It reminds us of the theory linking the FN success in France's southeast to the presence of "pieds noirs" (French nationals who came back from Algeria after its independence, Comtat, 2006).

We also looked at two other potential explanations of this puzzle: the geographic presence of Muslims operationalised the localisation of mosques and the replacement of high-paid jobs in the industry by low-paid and insecure jobs in the services. The significance of the former was not compelling enough and the data did not enable us to test fully the latter. Still, as this data may interest the reader, we report them in the appendix.

The continuous decrease of the Le Pen vote in Paris is, in a way, a symmetrical puzzle to the upsurge of the FN in the North of France and could have been an object of study in this PhD. Jean-Marie Le Pen achieved a score of 13% in the first round of the 1988 presidential election, and the Le Pen score decreased in each election since then to less than 5%.

Why did Marine Le Pen underperform so much in Paris? As for the north of France, we could ask if this underperformance is the result of a composition effect with a modification of the Paris social composition. This hypothesis seems unlikely, though, given the social diversity of Paris. Another possibility is the Le Pen vote may be stigmatised as too popular for most Parisians. The fact Paris is the only French département during 2022 presidential where Zemmour outperforms Le Pen with 8% of the votes may be a clue of this snob-ism against Le Pen. Another possibility is: The Parisians, rightly or wrongly, perceived themselves as the winners of globalisation (Kriesi et al.,

2008). Unlike the RWP northern supporters and their pessimistic mindset, this Parisian optimistic view of the future would help to overlook "temporary" difficulties. This optimism may act as a shield against an RWP protest vote. Of course, professional failure exists in Paris like everywhere else; however, its cost of living leads to a departure to another city when one gives up finally to the hope of making a career there; the RWP switch happening therefore after the departure from Paris.

The second main contribution of this PhD is the strong association between men's downward mobility for men and the RWP vote and the absence of such an association for downward mobile women. This disparity may help to shed some light on the gender gap puzzle (Immerzeel et al., 2015). If indeed, only men react to status decline by supporting RWP parties. This could help to explain the larger propensity of men to support such parties. However, it does not seem to explain the potential recent closing of this gap (Mayer, 2015a). We found downward mobile men were still more likely to vote for Le Pen in 2017, despite more women than men voting for Marine Le Pen in the 2017 election (Fourquet, 2017). Still, it is possible downward mobility is only one of several factors involved in the gender gap vote.

Regarding men's downward mobility, it does not seem to be linked to increasing hostility to immigrants or dismissal of the difficulties of women and minorities. While the former and latter are unmistakable characteristics of the RWP supporters, the link between downward mobility and the RWP vote seems to go through an independent channel.

Our original hypothesis linking the downward mobility, external locus of control, anti-establishment feelings and the RWP vote might be this channel. Given the different socialisations received by men and women, men would perceive their failures as unexpected and unfair. They would then blame others, especially political elites for these failures (external locus of control), leading to anti-establishment feelings and, finally a, RWP support. Indeed we found significant correlations between these elements, and our mediation analysis gives some support to our hypothesis.



This gender vote question took another turn during 2022 presidential. Men are twice more likely than women to vote for Zemmour, while Le Pen secured one-quarter of the women's votes (Dabi, 2022). Once the FES 2022 data is available, it will be exciting to check which of the two candidates attracted the vote of the downward mobile men and women. So far, Marine Le Pen would be our guess, given the impressive performance of Le Pen in the north of France. Indeed we found in chapter 7 the gap of status decline perception between men supporting and not supporting Le Pen was a lot higher in the North than in the South-east of France.

Another direction to extend this research would be to understand better the cause of this perception of subjective decline by men. Clearly, from the chapter 6 results, this perception is distinct from narrow criteria measuring an objective decline. Given subjective decline was especially strong when the respondent had a father with a manual job, it suggests this perception could be linked to the declining status of the job of the head of the family. Potentially this subtle decent of the father may lead to a particular early socialisation and induce a pessimistic mindset.

Finally, we will conclude this PhD by highlighting how using geographic structure help to understand better the "whole story" in this field. The extensive use of the surveys obfuscates essential facts like, for instance, the remarkable progression of Le Pen in the north of France. We hope the maps will return to the place they deserve in the literature.

# Appendix A

## Additional material for the North of France

### A.1 Mosques in the north of France

We give here some additional material that will complete the study of the FN vote in the North of France in the chapter 7. Muslims are often presented as a "problem" (Tiberj & Brouard, 2005) and "failed and incomplete French citizens" (Fredette, 2014). They are central in the FN rhetoric. The French law restricts a lot of the possibility of performing censuses about race or religion (Préteceille, 2009). However, we managed to do a map showing the mosques' locations in North France (figure A.1). We used the google map api to get the coordinates of these mosques. Most of the mosques are situated in two areas.

First, many mosques are in a zone with many towns with a Le Pen vote higher than 40%, in the former mining area near Arras. Many mosques are located in this zone despite the absence of a large city here (the larger towns are Béthune, Lens, Hénin Beaumont, Douais, and Valenciennes). Many industry workers live in this zone.

Second, a lot of mosques are in poor large cities in the suburb of Lille (Tourcoing, Roubaix, Villeneuve-d'Ascq). In these three cities, many immi-

Legend  Mosque  2017 Le Pen Vote >40%

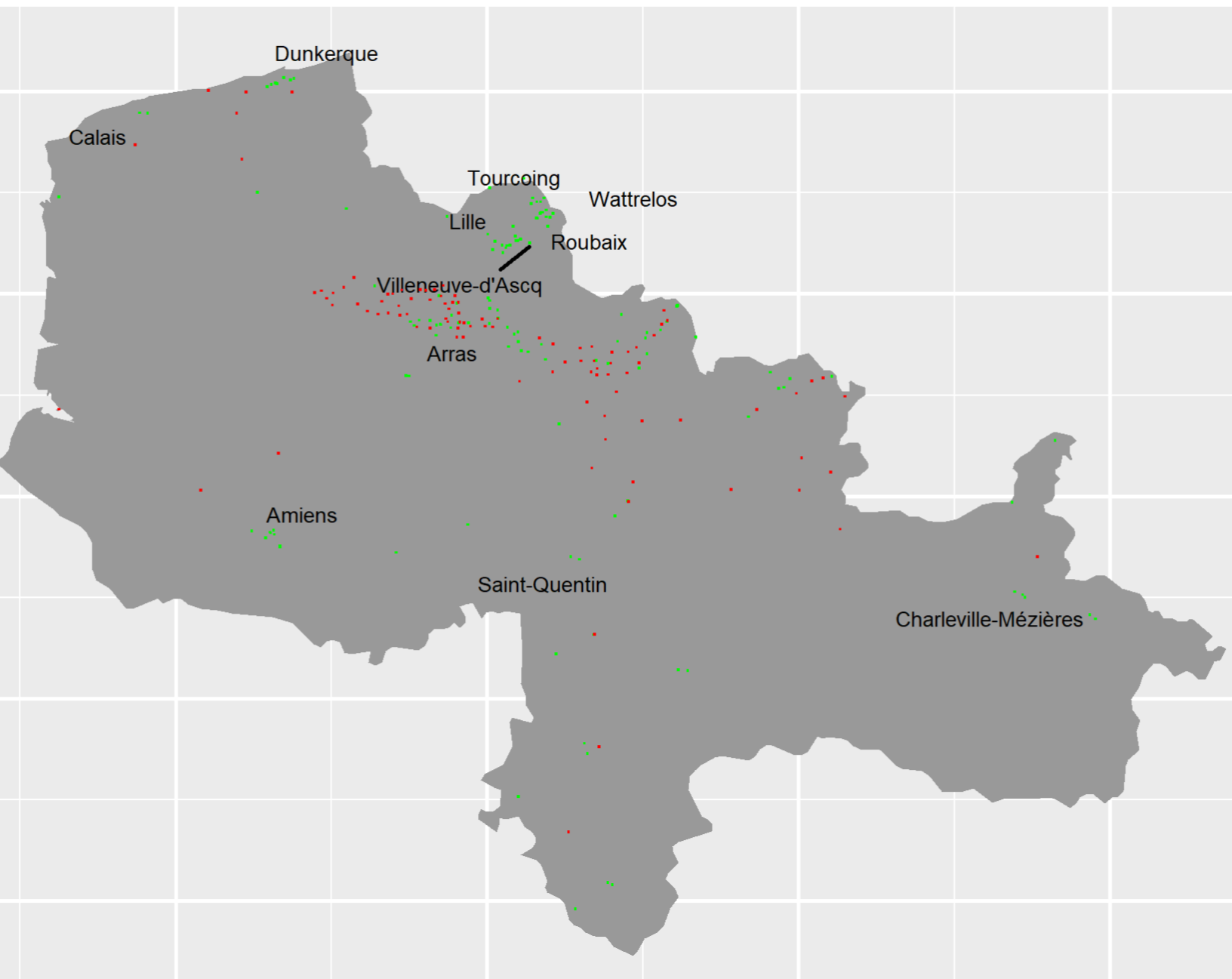


Figure A.1: Location of the mosques and the high Le Pen 2017 vote in the north of France

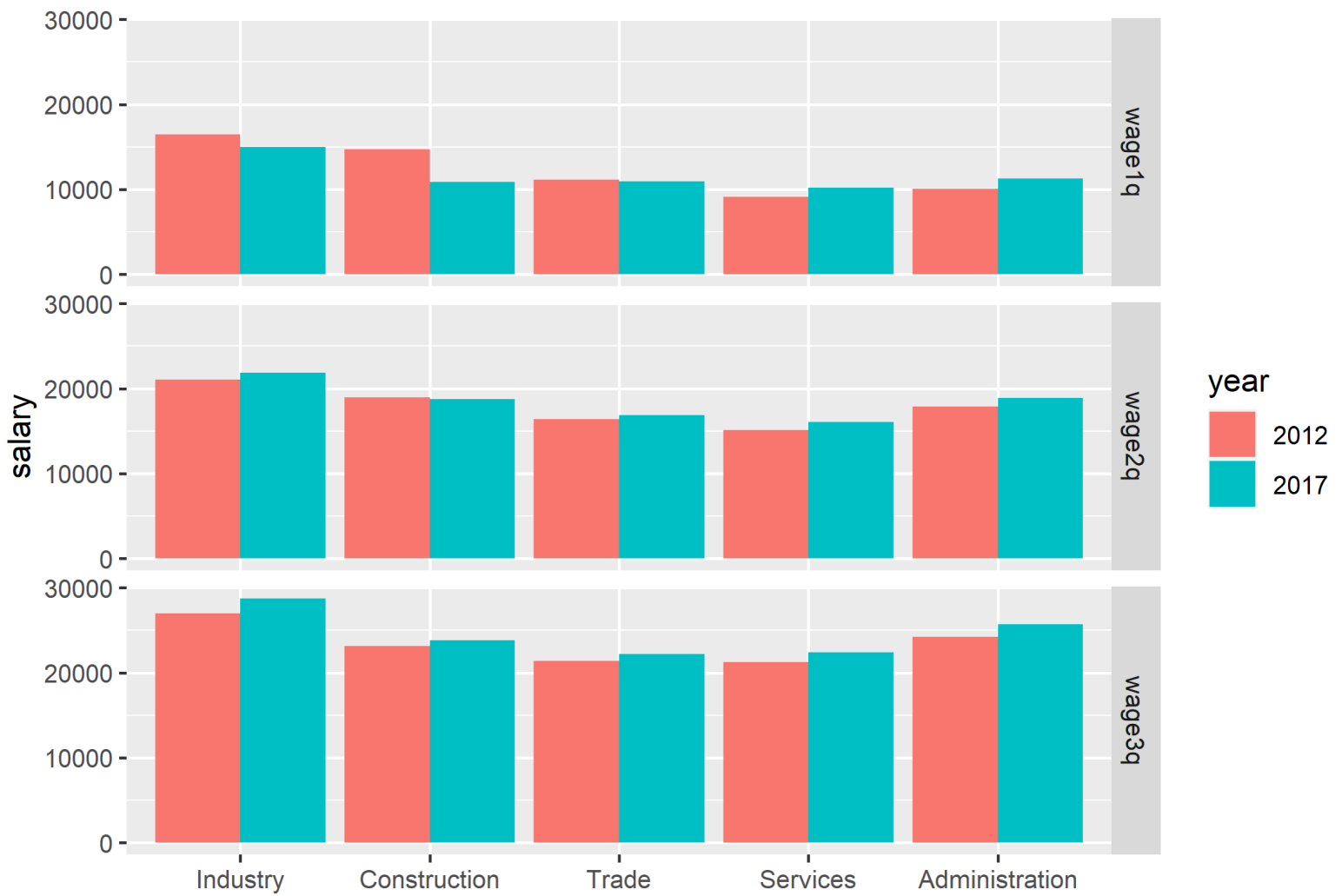


Figure A.2: 2012-2017 evolution 1st, 2nd and 3rd quartiles of income per job sector in the North of France. Source: Dads

grants and French people of immigrant origin work in the service sector. The Le Pen vote in these three poor cities is low, and also in Lille.

It seems we need to distinguish two different situations in this region. First, a sizeable Muslim presence may be perceived as problematic if they occupy similar industry jobs as the French natives. However, where Muslims occupy a service position, mainly for the benefit of Lille inhabitants, they may not be seen as threatening. If we wanted to test the correlation between the Le Pen vote and the Muslim presence, we would need to consider an interaction with the typical jobs of these Muslims. It isn't easy, though, to gather adequate data, and the sample size would limit our ability to infer some conclusion.

## **A.2 The disappearance of good jobs in the industry and the construction**

Figure A.2 shows the distribution of income (1st quartile, median and 3rd quartile) per sector (industry, construction, trade, services and administration) for 2012 and 2017. We first notice industry is the sector with the highest wages. It is especially true for the low wages of the first quartile in 2012.

First-quartile wages in the construction sectors were also very high in 2012. While most workers' salaries increased between 2012 and 2017, the first quartile wages in the industry and especially in the construction sector, decreased a lot (these wages do not account for inflation). On the other hand, the industry and construction wages increased a lot for the third quartile. This is very similar to the economic divergence pattern observed in chapter 3.

The chapter 7 data indicate a shrinking of the industrial and construction sectors in the north of France. So it seems a lot of relatively well-paid jobs disappeared in the industry and the construction sectors between 2012 and 2017. A lot of these jobs belonged to the first-quartile workers, who probably

did not have high diplomas. Unemployment was quite stable in this region during this period. So if these former industry and construction workers did not leave the region, they probably got a service or trade job with a lower salary. As a matter of fact, administration jobs are probably out of reach, given their cultural capital. This conjecture illustrates well the relational model proposed in chapter 2. However, our data did not enable us to track the professional trajectory of these former industry and construction workers. It is not surprising though these professional categories tend to support Marine Le Pen ([Fourquet, 2017](#)).

## **Appendix B**

### **Alternative measure of the economic divergence**

In chapter 3, we operationalize economic divergence as the evolution of the gap between the first and the fifth decile and we check the correlation of this independent variable with the evolution of the Le Pen vote. Here we present the results with the gap between the second and the fifth decile instead, the results are very similar.

Table B.1: Deciles evolution and populist vote in French cities (2012-2017).  
 $\Delta$  is variation during 2012-2017 period

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> variation of Le Pen vote (2012-2017)
$\Delta$ decile 2	7.12*** (2.00)
$\Delta$ decile 5- $\Delta$ decile 2	11.63** (3.52)
$\Delta$ decile 9	-8.02*** (1.63)
$\Delta$ Unemployment	1.20 (1.49)
$\Delta$ Immigration variation	-20.88** (7.47)
Log(voting pop)	-0.78*** (0.09)
Constant	10.96*** (2.54)
Observations	4,945

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001  
Robust standard error (clusterized at the département level). Source: INSEE



Table B.2: Deciles evolution and Le Pen vote in French cities (2002-2007-2012)

	variation of Le Pen vote	
	(2002-2007)	(2007-2012)
$\Delta$ decile 2	2.39 (1.79)	-0.20 (1.59)
$\Delta$ decile 5- $\Delta$ decile 2	5.54** (1.76)	-1.74 (1.78)
$\Delta$ decile 9	-1.75 (1.30)	-2.36* (1.09)
$\Delta$ Unemployment	-0.28 (0.40)	-0.23 (0.24)
$\Delta$ Immigration variation	0.66* (0.25)	-0.10 (0.29)
Log(voting pop)	-0.25*** (0.07)	-0.75*** (0.07)
Constant	-0.58 (2.68)	18.89*** (2.18)
Observations	4,313	4,296

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>p<0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001  
Robust standard error (clusterized at the département level). Source: INSEE

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# Résumé en Français

## Une approche relationnelle du vote populiste

Dans cette thèse, nous tenterons d'utiliser une approche relationnelle pour mieux comprendre le vote populiste. Nous voulons ici opposer la sociologie qui considère le monde comme des "substances ou des processus" à la sociologie relationnelle qui considère des "relations dynamiques et évolutives" (Emirbayer, 1997). En particulier, "les modèles fondés sur les acteurs rationnels et les normes, les divers holismes et structuralismes, et les analyses de variables statistiques" appartiennent à la première.

Bourdieu considérait la promotion de la sociologie relationnelle comme l'un des " [éléments] les plus essentiels de [son] travail " (Bourdieu, 1988). Un excellent exemple de sociologie relationnelle est son étude des écoles d'élite (Bourdieu, 1988). Les actions et la stratégie d'une école comme Sciences Po ne peuvent être comprises que si l'on considère les actions d'autres écoles d'élite apparentées comme l'ENA, l'ENS ou Polytechnique. Étudier Sciences Po dans le "vide" pourrait conduire à des interprétations essentialistes.

Dans son œuvre, Bourdieu a montré un net dédain pour les "analyses de variables statistiques" classiques comme la régression, car elles masquent les relations entre les agents que nous voulons étudier. Ce doctorat utilisera beaucoup l'analyse de régression. Cependant, nous ajouterons des variables visant à saisir les relations entre les individus.

Dans les théories sociales vues au début de cette introduction, nous pouvons remarquer qu'elles suggèrent des "modèles substantiels" (Emirbayer,

1997) des décisions de vote. Les individus obéissent à des préférences et à des normes internalisées pour prendre des décisions indépendamment de leur environnement actuel. En particulier, ces modèles tendent à donner une image d'un état stable des électeurs. Toutefois, ils ne sont pas bien conçus pour décrire une situation électorale dynamique telle que la montée en flèche d'un parti de droite. L'"ascension fulgurante" de 2002 (van Holsteyn & Irwin, 2003) de "Pim Fortuyn" aux Pays-Bas en serait un exemple extrême.

Pour Mudde (2007), le populisme de droite se compose de trois valeurs fondamentales : Le nativisme, l'autoritarisme et le populisme. En outre, trois cadres existent dans la recherche sur le populisme (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2013) : Le populisme en tant que "stratégie politique", en tant que "style discursif" et en tant qu'"idéologie politique". "idéologie politique". Nous utiliserons le cadre de l'idéologie politique de Mudde, qui est flexible et permet une classification aisée des partis. Mudde (2007) définit le populisme comme une idéologie "finement centrée" dans laquelle le champ politique est défini comme l'opposition entre "l'élite corrompue" et le "peuple pur". Les partis populistes prétendent rendre le pouvoir au "peuple". Le populisme en tant que "thin-centered". L'idéologie populiste peut se combiner avec diverses autres philosophies, telles que le néolibéralisme ou le protectionnisme.

Une approche dynamique et relationnelle de l'étude du vote du PTr semble alors mieux adaptée. Dans cette approche, nous considérons les relations et les interactions des différents agents sur le terrain pour comprendre le comportement de chacun d'entre eux. Par exemple, dans le domaine des universités/écoles d'élite d'un pays, on ne peut pas comprendre la stratégie et les décisions d'une université particulière sans prendre en compte les stratégies et les décisions des autres universités (Bourdieu, 1988).

La définition du populisme dans la littérature a toujours été un "défi" (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2013). Dans cette thèse, nous tenterons d'éviter cette difficulté en étudiant les électeurs des partis clairement identifiés comme populistes. Cependant, pour montrer l'avantage de l'approche relationnelle, nous pouvons tenter l'exercice de donner une définition relationnelle du



populisme dans les démocraties occidentales. Tout d'abord, nous pouvons observer qu'être "populiste" en tant qu'homme politique n'est pas une qualité substantielle comme l'est le fait d'être riche. Être "populiste" est un stigmaté attribué par d'autres personnes. En outre, ce stigmaté est attribué sur la base de propositions ou d'idées "populistes" particulières émanant de ces hommes politiques stigmatisés.

Afin de définir les politiciens populistes, nous devons d'abord identifier les personnes qui leur attribuent ce blâme. Dans les démocraties occidentales, il existe clairement deux groupes de partis politiques que l'on pourrait décrire comme le courant dominant de gauche et le courant dominant de droite. Ces partis défendent un programme aligné sur les intérêts de la classe moyenne/supérieure économique pour le courant dominant de droite et de la classe moyenne/supérieure culturelle pour le courant dominant de gauche.

Il existe des sujets de désaccord entre ces deux groupes, par exemple la réduction de la semaine de travail pour le courant dominant de la gauche ou la réduction de l'impôt sur la fortune pour le courant dominant de la droite. Cependant, il existe des sujets consensuels entre la gauche et la droite, comme l'opposition à la peine de mort en Europe de l'Ouest. Un homme politique soutenant la peine de mort serait qualifié de populiste.

Cela nous donne une définition relationnelle de l'homme politique populiste : Un homme politique qui défend des propositions contraires aux plateformes de la gauche et de la droite. En effet, tout homme politique français soutenant des propositions en dehors du consensus dominant, comme la peine de mort, la sortie de l'Union européenne, la légalisation du cannabis ou l'utilisation des banques centrales pour rembourser la dette nationale, serait facilement qualifié de populiste.

Cette définition met en évidence une difficulté particulière : Une femme politique soutenant la peine de mort ne serait pas qualifiée de populiste si elle était une femme politique. qualifiée de populiste si elle était américaine. En fait, c'est probablement davantage un politicien américain opposé à la peine de mort qui risque d'être qualifié de populiste. Comme le consensus

entre les partis traditionnels peut varier d'un pays à l'autre et d'une période à l'autre, des personnes très différentes peuvent être qualifiées de populistes, et il est donc difficile d'essayer de trouver une définition substantielle du populisme.

En effet, le fait que le populisme soit une idéologie au centre mince [Mudde \(2007\)](#) où un leader comme Marine Le Pen peut facilement changer de position sur des thèmes économiques "secondaires" comme l'euro n'aide pas cette quête d'une définition substantielle. En outre, les groupes dissidents peuvent s'écarter du consensus de différentes manières. Il est difficile de mettre en évidence ce qui est partagé entre la gauche populiste française (France Insoumise) et la droite populiste française (Front National) car elles sont en désaccord sur la plupart des sujets (réductions d'impôts, déficit, police, écologie, immigration, politiques de chômage, questions sociétales et de discrimination...).

Nous sommes donc convaincus que l'adoption d'une approche relationnelle permet d'éviter les difficultés liées à la définition du populisme et de percevoir de nouvelles directions de recherche. Nous utiliserons donc différentes approches relationnelles pour aborder notre question de recherche. Cette thèse explorera donc les liens relationnels entre l'économie et le vote en faveur du PTr. Sa principale contribution sera un cadre relationnel permettant de comprendre comment le PTr est lié aux transformations économiques. Ces transformations induiraient une divergence entre les groupes "gagnants" et les groupes "perdants", et les membres du groupe "perdants" craignent de tomber dans un groupe de statut inférieur subjectivement associé aux immigrés. Les groupes de perdants se traduisent par des secteurs professionnels en perte de vitesse. Nous appliquerons ce cadre de "peur de tomber" au chapitre 7 pour comprendre l'augmentation spectaculaire des votes de Marine Le Pen en 2017 dans le nord de la France.

Nous présenterons également trois contributions secondaires. Premièrement, nous explorerons différentes hypothèses pour expliquer la corrélation négative entre l'augmentation du revenu du décile supérieur local et le vote

Le Pen. Deuxièmement, nous montrerons que les hommes qui éprouvent le sentiment d'un déclin du statut intergénérationnel sont plus susceptibles de soutenir le populisme, ce qui n'est pas le cas des femmes. Plusieurs hypothèses seront envisagées pour expliquer cette disparité. Dans le dernier chapitre, nous testons plusieurs hypothèses alternatives suggérées dans la littérature liant le déclin du statut économique et le vote en faveur du PRF.

Pour un grand nombre de chapitres, nous utiliserons des données concernant la France et le vote Le Pen. Comme nous ne disposons pas encore des données économiques pour 2022, nous ne prendrons en compte que la période 1995-2017, et nous nous référerons à son parti sous le nom de FN (Front national) avant qu'il ne change de nom pour devenir le Rassemblement national. Comme le FN avait une situation proche du monopole du populisme de droite pendant cette période, et que ses deux candidats étaient Jean-Marie et Marine Le Pen, il est facile de faire des comparaisons temporelles. Nous aimerions vérifier si nos conclusions dans le cas français sont toujours valables dans d'autres pays. Cependant, nous n'avons pas pu trouver de données comparables pour effectuer des comparaisons pertinentes dans de nombreux cas. Néanmoins, nous examinerons plusieurs pays de l'UE en utilisant le programme d'enquêtes internationales 2009/2019 dans le chapitre 6, ainsi que des données néerlandaises (enquête LISS). La section suivante fournit un plan détaillé pour le doctorat.

## Plan

**Chapitre 1:** Le chômage n'est pas un bon prédicteur du vote en faveur du Fn

Dans ce chapitre, nous testons la relation entre le chômage et le vote menace-Le Pen en 2017 à l'aide de plusieurs opérationnalisations aux niveaux individuel et cantonal. En utilisant l'étude électorale française de 2017, nous montrons que le chômage au niveau individuel n'est pas un prédicteur

significatif du vote Le Pen. Au niveau des cantons, l'ampleur du chômage n'est pas un facteur prédictif significatif du vote Le Pen 2002/2007/2012/2017 (modèle longitudinal), en utilisant les variables indépendantes suivantes :

- nombre de licenciements/nombre de travailleurs
- nombre de licenciements de 10+/nombre de travailleurs
- nombre de licenciements de 10+/nombre de travailleurs -nombre de personnes quittant leur emploi/nombre de travailleurs (turnover)

Les interactions avec la proportion d'immigrants sont également testées. Le chômage n'est donc pas un facteur explicatif du vote Le Pen. Notre modèle de peur de tomber, présenté dans les trois chapitres suivants, explorera des mesures alternatives de l'insécurité économique.

**Chapitre 2** : Des secteurs professionnels en perte de vitesse Ce chapitre constitue la première partie de notre modèle, qui inclut le rétrécissement des secteurs professionnels, la divergence des revenus entre les groupes et la peur de tomber dans un groupe méprisé en tant que facteurs explicatifs du vote en faveur du PTr. Nous opérationnalisons les groupes de personnes subissant une relégation économique en raison de transformations économiques structurelles dans un secteur donné en tant que perte d'emploi dans des "secteurs professionnels en perte de vitesse".

Notre variable indépendante est donc le montant de la perte d'emploi dans les secteurs professionnels en déclin divisé par le nombre d'emplois dans ces secteurs. [Dancygier & Donnelly \(2013\)](#) suggèrent que cette variable est liée au vote populiste. Nous examinerons en particulier si une telle relation existe pour les secteurs de l'industrie, de la construction, des services et du secteur public. Nous avons constaté que cette relation est pertinente pour le secteur industriel.

Comme nous nous attendons à ce que les difficultés et le stress des travailleurs des secteurs en décroissance soient plus élevés s'ils ne disposent pas du capital culturel approprié pour s'adapter aux transformations économiques, nous vérifions si l'effet de la décroissance des secteurs est conditionné par le niveau de capital culturel ([Bourdieu, 1984](#)). Nous incluons donc l'interaction

perte d'emploi dans les secteurs professionnels en déclin/niveau d'éducation.

### **Chapitre 3** : La divergence économique

La deuxième partie de notre modèle étant basée sur une perspective relationnelle, nous examinons la divergence entre les revenus des différents groupes sociaux. Selon [Hirschman & Rothschild \(1973\)](#), l'anxiété liée au statut ne proviendrait pas d'un écart croissant entre les riches et les pauvres, mais les gens se compareraient à des personnes ayant un statut socio-économique similaire. Par conséquent, nous pensons qu'une telle divergence économique favoriserait la peur de la chute, qui sera abordée en détail au chapitre 4.

Étant donné que les données dont nous disposons limitent notre capacité à mesurer la divergence entre les différents groupes sociaux, nous utiliserons comme indicateur la divergence de revenus entre la classe ouvrière et la classe moyenne montante. Cette divergence est rendue opérationnelle par l'évolution sur cinq ans de la différence entre le revenu du cinquième décile et celui du dernier décile au niveau de la ville. La variable dépendante est la variation des votes Le Pen 2012-2017/2007-2012/2002-2007 par ville.

Toutes les périodes étudiées montrent une forte corrélation entre la divergence des revenus et l'augmentation du vote Le Pen. Cette divergence est particulièrement drastique dans les villes du nord de la France, où Le Pen a réalisé des performances très impressionnantes en 2017. Un résultat secondaire est une corrélation négative entre l'augmentation locale du revenu du décile supérieur et le vote Le Pen. Ce dernier point fera l'objet du chapitre 5.

### **Chapter 4**: La peur de tomber

À l'instar de [Peugny \(2006\)](#), nous suggérons que la mobilité subjective vers le bas est liée au soutien du populisme. En tant que dernière partie de notre modèle, la peur de tomber dans un groupe méprisé" pousserait les individus à affirmer une distance symbolique entre eux et les individus dont le statut perçu est inférieur (chômeurs et immigrés). Tout d'abord, nous vérifions si les personnes qui soutiennent le populisme ont tendance à

ressentir un déclin de leur statut social. Deuxièmement, nous vérifions si le soutien au PRF est également associé à la perception d'une détérioration de l'environnement économique. Troisièmement, nous vérifions si la perception d'une détérioration de l'environnement économique est liée à la vision des chômeurs comme "non méritants" ("ils pourraient trouver un emploi s'ils le voulaient vraiment").

Pour les variables indépendantes, nous opérationnalisons la perception subjective du déclin du statut social comme la différence entre le statut personnel et le statut familial. Autres variables indépendantes : "l'économie est pire qu'il y a 12 mois", "mon emploi est pire que celui de mon père".

Après contrôle, il existe une forte association entre le sentiment de déclin social, le soutien au Parti travailliste pour les hommes, le vote en faveur de Le Pen (pour les hommes et les femmes) et le fait que "l'économie est pire qu'il y a 12 mois" (pour les hommes et les femmes) et que "les chômeurs sont capables de trouver un emploi s'ils le veulent vraiment" (pour les hommes et les femmes).

**Chapitre 5** : Le lien entre l'écart de revenu entre les hauts salaires et les travailleurs et le vote FN

Le chapitre 3 a mis en évidence une relation solide et cohérente entre l'augmentation du revenu du décile supérieur et la diminution du vote Le Pen. Mieux comprendre l'origine de cette corrélation est l'énigme de ce chapitre. Nous envisageons trois hypothèses pour donner un sens à cette énigme. Premièrement, elle pourrait s'expliquer par un effet de composition : L'augmentation du décile supérieur pourrait être le symptôme d'un afflux de personnes à hauts revenus dans les villes, modifiant leur composition sociale et, par conséquent, le vote Le Pen. Par ailleurs, la bonne fortune des personnes à hauts revenus pourrait induire un optimisme consensuel à l'égard de l'économie, et cet optimisme pourrait "empêcher" le vote Le Pen, conformément au chapitre 4. La dernière explication possible de l'énigme est une hypothèse de contact. Une augmentation du décile supérieur est corrélée

à une plus grande présence des hauts revenus et, par conséquent, à une augmentation des contacts positifs entre les gens et eux, réduisant ainsi les sentiments anti-establishment liés au vote Le Pen. Nos résultats empiriques semblent discréditer l'hypothèse de l'effet de composition et soutenir la seconde hypothèse. Les résultats sont mitigés en ce qui concerne l'hypothèse du contact.

**Chapitre 6** : Mobilité descendante et l'écart de vote entre les hommes et les femmes

Nous nous demandons si ce sentiment de déclin du statut est un facteur pertinent pour le vote en faveur du PTr. De manière surprenante, il semble que la réponse soit positive pour les hommes, mais négative pour les femmes. Ce résultat semble se confirmer pour les différents ensembles de données testés (ISSP 2009/2019, FES 2017, enquête Life in Transition).

Afin de comprendre l'origine de cette disparité, nous cherchons d'abord à savoir si ce sentiment de perte de statut est enraciné dans un déclin économique objectif. Nous mesurons le déclin objectif du statut pour les hommes comme la différence de statut entre "votre emploi" et "l'emploi de votre père", mesurée par les indices ISEI et SIOPS. Nous vérifions si le déclin du statut objectif est fortement lié au soutien du PRF. Nous vérifions également si le sentiment de déclin social en 2017 est plus fort dans les départements où les revenus ont stagné entre 1994 et 2016 (en utilisant le revenu moyen par canton-ville). La relation entre le soutien au populisme et le déclin du statut objectif est faible. Il n'y a pas de corrélation entre la perception d'un déclin du statut social et une croissance plus faible des salaires dans les départements français.

Une autre constatation intéressante est la suivante : Alors que les hommes qui ressentent un déclin générationnel de leur statut sont plus susceptibles de voter pour les partis du PTr, ils ne sont pas plus susceptibles d'être hostiles aux immigrés. Nous testons trois hypothèses susceptibles d'expliquer cette disparité entre les hommes et les femmes. Premièrement, l'anxiété

liée au statut et le sentiment de ne pas recevoir leur "juste part" pour les hommes seraient associés à l'amertume à l'égard des femmes et des minorités. Deuxièmement, les femmes en mobilité descendante seraient plus féministes et, par conséquent, moins susceptibles de soutenir le populisme de droite. Ces deux hypothèses n'ont pas donné de résultats probants. Toutefois, la caractéristique spécifique de ces hommes en mobilité descendante est leur sentiment anti-establishment, qui est généralement fortement corrélé au vote en faveur du populisme. Cela pourrait s'expliquer par le locus de contrôle externe des hommes observé dans les expériences de psychologie (Sherman et al., 1997). Nous effectuons une analyse de médiation pour vérifier que la relation entre le déclin du statut et le vote en faveur du PRF est influencée par les éléments indiquant un lieu de contrôle externe pour les hommes.

#### **Chapter 7:** La poussée du FN dans le nord de la France

En 2017, c'est de loin dans le nord de la France que Marine Le Pen a le plus amélioré son score. Dans ce chapitre, nous explorons si les résultats des chapitres précédents permettent d'expliquer cette percée du FN. En effet, nous observons dans le nord de la France une diminution du secteur industriel, une divergence des revenus, une stigmatisation des chômeurs et un sentiment de perte de statut pour les hommes qui votent pour Le Pen. Cependant, ces variables dans cette région ne semblent pas atteindre des valeurs radicalement différentes de celles d'autres régions françaises similaires (à l'exception de la divergence économique).

Nous devons donc prendre en compte d'autres facteurs pour comprendre l'ensemble de l'histoire de ce cas. L'un des facteurs potentiels est l'histoire minière de la région. Bien que l'histoire soit ancienne (la plupart des mines ont fermé dans les années 70 et 80), elle reste pertinente pour comprendre la politique dans le nord de la France. Conséquence de la crise financière de 2008, la crise industrielle peut réactiver une histoire traumatisante où les gouvernements de gauche ont joué un mauvais rôle et ont alimenté un vote anti-establishment. Nous avons constaté que le vote en faveur de Le Pen en



2017 était significativement plus élevé dans les villes du Nord ayant un passé minier.

### **Chapitre 8 : Hypothèses alternatives**

Ce chapitre examine trois hypothèses alternatives proposées par la Commission européenne.

Ce chapitre examine trois hypothèses alternatives proposées dans la littérature pour décrire la relation entre le déclin du statut économique et le vote populiste de droite. Selon ces théories, les immigrants peuvent être considérés comme une menace pour la "solidarité" coutumière (Wimmer, 1997), le marché de l'emploi (Autor et al., 2017) ou le capital social (Putnam, 1993). Par ailleurs, le soutien aux populistes de droite pourrait être un "mécanisme d'adaptation" (Marx, 2019; Pellicer, 2018) : Les gens convertiraient leurs sentiments négatifs dus à la frustration économique en violence et en colère dirigées contre les immigrés. Cependant, les données disponibles n'étaient pas suffisantes pour tester cette hypothèse.

Pour notre recherche empirique, nous utilisons les données du panel LISS (Pays-Bas), qui pose la même question aux individus chaque année (2008-2018). Notre variable dépendante est une opérationnalisation du "premier vote pour le PVV" : Soutien à un parti traditionnel pendant au moins deux ans, puis soutien au PVV ("passage au PVV"). Nous effectuons une régression logistique longitudinale avec effet aléatoire pour déterminer si le passage au PVV est concomitant à la montée d'une préoccupation particulière représentant l'une des trois menaces associées aux théories proposées dans la littérature.

Variables indépendantes : 3 préoccupations liées à l'immigration (questions demandant le niveau d'accord sur une échelle de 1 à 5) :

- Hypothèse de "solidarité" coutumière : Les étrangers résidant légalement dans le pays devraient avoir droit à la même sécurité sociale que les citoyens néerlandais.

- Hypothèse de la menace sur l'emploi : Certains secteurs de l'économie ne peuvent continuer à fonctionner que parce que des personnes d'origine ou de descendance étrangère y travaillent.
- - Hypothèse du capital social : Le fait que de nombreuses personnes d'origine ou de descendance étrangère s'installent dans un quartier n'apporte rien de bon.

Nos résultats ne font que confirmer l'hypothèse du capital social.