

# Populism and France's militarisation

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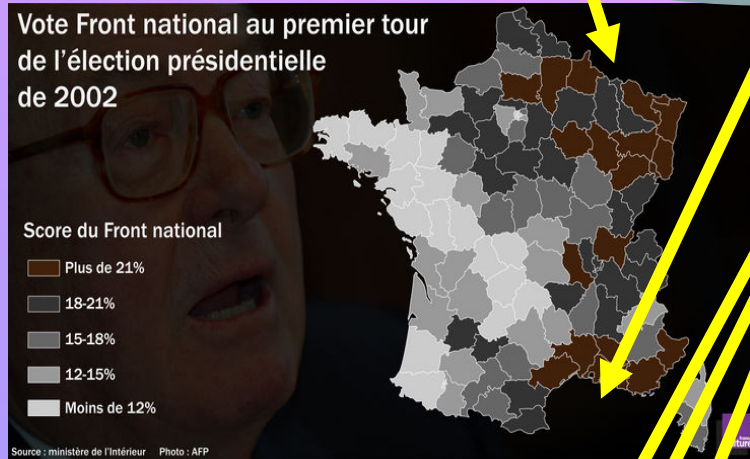


# Lay-out of the talk

- Consolidation of the right-wing in France :  
A thirty-years old process
- A mix of economic and political reasons
- France's militarism : two singularities
- linking militarism abroad and permanent state of emergency at home

# Rising influence of *front national*

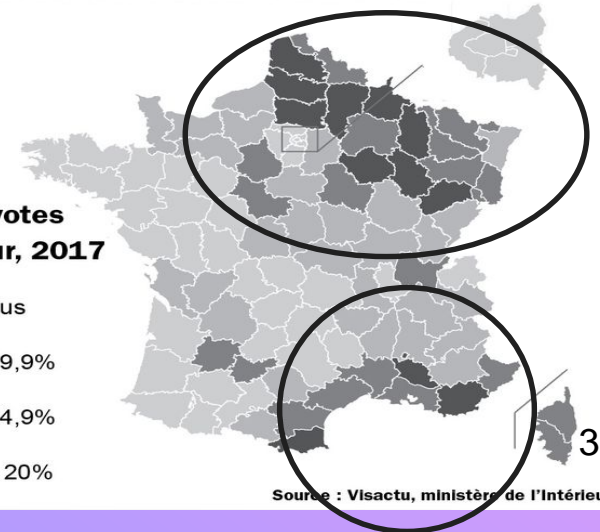
Vote for Le Pen



## La France de Marine Le Pen

### Part des votes au 1er tour, 2017

- 30% et plus
- de 25 à 29,9%
- de 20 à 24,9%
- Moins de 20%



Source : Visactu, ministère de l'Intérieur

C.Serfati, Populism and  
militarisation, 09

# Consolidation of the right-wing in France : A thirty-years old process

- A mix of economic and political reasons :
  - 1) Economic distress and social impoverishment :
    - Need not to reduce the rise of right-wing to economic drivers
    - Not only an ‘objective process’, but felt *subjectively* with the blurring of right/(social-democratic) left divide, both united to defend an austerity program and comply with Stability pact criteria
    - The difficulty of the left of the left to address

# Consolidation of the right-wing in France : A thirty-years old process

- A mix of economic and political reasons :
- 2) It is a long tradition in history of capitalism - and before - to use chauvinistic and jingoist pulsions to divide the working class. It was the case in France as in other industrialised countries
- The relations between political exploitation of xenophobia and 'needs of capital' are complex and not unilinear.

# Consolidation of the right-wing in France : A thirty-years old process

- 3) Socio-political context
  - The not yet resolved loss of colonial territories, foremost Algeria (over 1 million of French metropolitan left Algeria when she became independent in 1962) . Hatred against 'not real French', including of course, French born children from Maghrebian immigrants, has always been very strong, but
  - Discrimination is not only an extreme-right folly, but all sociological research shows that the 'second-(and now third) born-in-France discrimination overlaps with social discrimination (access to education, to jobs, to political positions, etc.)

# Consolidation of the right-wing in France : A thirty-years old process

- Not only an outcome of extreme-right, but also comes from :
  - xenophobic economic policy implemented for decades, and
  - inability/unwillingness by left government to address this situation (see the grotesque and frequent Socialist party's turnaround since 1986 of their promise to give the right of vote to immigrants in local elections. Often included in electoral programs, never adopted once the SP has been in charge of governments) .
- The *crisis of banlieues* (large cities' suburbs) is a social crisis politically-driven.

# Militarisation : Two singularities of France

- The long story of the role of the armies in France can be analysed against two singularities of France :
- a) The centrality of the military institution in the making and the consolidation of the French state, and
- b) the centrality of the state in social relations.
- Neither two are specific to France, (See C. Tilly, C.3 : How War Made States, and Vice Versa”, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, 1990) but...



# Two singularities of France

- ..The high degree to which they are central *AND* intertwined to-day is an outcome of France's historical trajectory, as a social process. That is, this double centrality – of the military institutions in the state apparatus and of the state institutions in social relations – has been built over centuries of social and political conflicts between and within classes

# Two singularities of France

- This centrality of the state apparatus has been evidenced by as opposed close observers as A. de Tocqueville and K. Marx
- “How it was possible for this part of the old régime to be taken over *en bloc* and integrated into the constitution of modern France, my answer is that the reason why the principle of the centralization of power did not perish in the Revolution is that **this very centralization was at once the Revolution's starting-off point** and one of its guiding principles” (*L'ancien regime et la revolution*).
- “The executive power with its **enormous bureaucratic and military organization**, with its wide-ranging and ingenious state machinery, with a host of officials numbering half a million, **besides an army of another half million – this terrifying parasitic body which enmeshes the body of French society and chokes all its pores** sprang up in the time of the absolute monarchy, with the decay of the feudal system which it had helped to hasten” (*Le 18 Brumaire de Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte*).

# Two singularities of France

Cumulative opportunities for the military to consolidate their power : The Gaullist regime (1958) :

- A turning point : the more prestigious soldier seized power through a ‘coup’ (and the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic institutions called a ‘permanent state coup’ by Mitterrand) .
- The army reinstalled at the heart of the political institutions, after being discredited for its massive support to Petain regime during WWII, then nasty colonial wars
- Based on :
  - Trade-off between crushing of the colonial army’s coup and military institutions increased embeddedness in the state apparatus, the economic development and the society
  - Strong macroeconomic growth ((‘golden age or *30 glorieuses*)

# Applying this analysis: the '2008 moment'

- Confluence of *three* dramatic changes in the economic and geopolitical setting :
  - Financial crisis morphing into a 'great recession' (M. Roberts) reflecting the internal limits to finance-dominated capitalist accumulation
  - Revolutionary movements shaking state apparatus in Maghreb and Middle-East ('Arab spring') in particular in countries where France interests are present (in some case dominant)
  - US and the world : The cumulative effects of unwinnable wars, financial crisis and the inability and unwillingness of the US Administration to rule the 'world disorder' (what is called a 'multipolar world', an imprecise notion)<sup>12</sup>

# Applying this analysis: the '2008 moment'

- France's military surge :
  - a) strong rise in military expenditures since the end of the 2000s,
  - b) increase in military operations abroad, mainly in its 'African backyard' and the related Middle-East,
  - c) more recently, the setting of a permanent state of emergency, as the political response to terror attack.

Thank you for attention