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► **To cite this version:**

Bruno Amable. The unsolved contradictions of the modernists. Economic policy expectations and political crisis in France 1978-2012. 2014. halshs-00973926

HAL Id: halshs-00973926

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00973926>

Submitted on 4 Apr 2014

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**The unsolved contradictions of the modernists. Economic
policy expectations and political crisis in France 1978-2012**

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2014.23



The unsolved contradictions of the modernists

Economic policy expectations and political crisis in France 1978-2012

Bruno Amable

University of Paris I Panthéon – Sorbonne & Institut universitaire de France

March 2014

Abstract:

This paper analyses the French political crisis since the late 1970s by investigating the links between the social structure and the economic policy expectations of the electorate. To this end, data on post-electoral survey are used to estimate structural models of political support to political parties for 1978 and 2012, and the estimation results are used to propose an analysis of the French crisis. The enduring French political crisis is found to be the expression of contradictions between the economic policies implemented by the successive governments and the existence of a dominant social bloc, i.e. a coalition of social groups that would politically support the dominant political strategy. Since 1978, both the right and the left have failed to find a solution to the contradictions between the policies they implemented and the expectations of their social bases, which are themselves inhabited by tensions and contradictions that evolve with the structure of French capitalism. The failure of all governing coalitions so far is a new expression of that of the “modernists” to take into account the expectations of the popular classes.

Keywords: France, political crisis, political economy, social base,

Résumé:

Ce papier analyse la crise politique française depuis la fin des années 1970 en étudiant les liens entre la structure sociale et les attentes de politique économique de l'électorat. A cette fin, les données post-électorales sont utilisées pour estimer deux modèles structurels de soutien aux partis politiques pour 1978 et 2012. Les résultats des estimations éclairent les raisons de la crise politique. Celle-ci est l'expression des contradictions entre les politiques suivies par les gouvernements successifs et l'existence d'une base sociale stable, d'un bloc social dominant, une coalition de groupes sociaux qui valideraient politiquement la stratégie politique dominante. Depuis 1978, la droite et la gauche ont échoué dans leur recherche d'une solution à ces contradictions, entre les politiques qu'elles souhaitaient mener et les attentes de leurs bases sociales, qui sont elles-mêmes traversées par des tensions et contradictions qui évoluent avec la structure du capitalisme français. Cet échec est une manifestation du retour des insuffisances de la stratégie des « modernistes » et de leur refus de prendre en compte les attentes des classes populaires.

Mots-clés : France, crise politique, économie politique, base sociale

JEL: P16

1. Introduction

At the time of the 1978 legislative elections, France had been governed by a right government coalition for 20 years. Following the first oil shock, GDP growth had slowed down from a 5.4% annual average between 1950 and 1973 to 3% for the 1974-1978 period, and unemployment had risen above 4%. The political and economic leaders were gradually changing their views on the economic situation, which was no longer perceived as a temporary slowdown due to energy price increases, but more as the entry into a new era characterised by increased competition and diminished expectations. The choice offered to the electorate could be summarised as an opposition between two types of economic policy and structural reform programs. On the left, a political alliance (*union de la gauche*), in spite of having broken up a year before and been awkwardly mended between the first and the second round of the elections, was still the main reference for a possible government coalition. The joint manifesto (*programme commun*) proposed a series of economic reforms based on the nationalisation of the bulk of manufacturing industry and banks, the development of industrial democracy and social protection, and a macroeconomic policy supporting income and effective demand growth. The ultimate aim was a gradual break-up (*rupture*) with capitalism (Beaud 1983, 1985). On the right, the main parties (post-Gaullist RPR and UDF) were redefining their economic policy orientations away from the support to effective demand and the search of external competitiveness through devaluations, towards wage austerity and the restoration of firms' profit margins, currency stability (the "strong Franc" policy), the fight against inflation and the decrease in state intervention, opposing the economic and social transformations of the *programme commun*. The right parties, in spite of an open rivalry between their respective leaders, kept their joint participation in a government coalition as a political objective without any credible alternative.

The environment of the presidential and legislative elections of 2012 could be described in very different terms. Since the late 1970s, left and right governments had succeeded one another and the growth trend had kept decreasing (1.8% on average for 1979-2012); the unemployment rate had climbed over 9% since the Great Recession. For the first time since the late 1960s, the main party of the left, the *parti socialiste* (PS) had entered the electoral competition without any predefined electoral alliance associating other parties on its left.¹ Furthermore, it promoted as one of its main economic policy objectives the return to "sound" public finance – a budget deficit under the 3% mark within one year and a balanced budget after 5 years – in order to regain the lost AAA credit rating. The realisation of the modest social part of the program was conditioned on improved macroeconomic performance. The right had become highly heterogeneous. The mainstream government parties RPR and UDF, which had merged to form the UMP, proposed a more or less moderate neoliberal policy orientation, the moderation aspect having been stressed after the Great Recession. But the UMP faced competition for the right electorate coming from: (i) the nationalist right party (*Front National*, FN), with an economic program blaming austerity imposed by Europe and the financial markets, and advocating the exit from the Euro to save the social protection system; (ii) the centre-right MoDem, which proposed labour market liberalisation and large cuts in public expenditure.

How can this significant change in the economic policy and political landscape be analysed? The change was particularly dramatic for the left. The main options of its economic program in the 1970s, such as nationalisations or the extension of social protection, were no longer present. Public finance orthodoxy and the restoration of investors' confidence, traditional themes for the right, had become predominant, and new topics, such as the preservation of the environment, had emerged.

¹ The communist party had either participated to previous left governments or supported the PS-led governments without participation.

One could argue that enduring mass unemployment, slow growth and increasing economic integration would impose a pressure to adapt to a new type of capitalism and that the economic policy style and economic institutions inherited from the post-war period would no longer be fitted to a new environment dominated by a rapid technological change and intensified international competition (Sapir 2004). This would make the economic policy expectations carried by the traditional left social base at the end of the 1970s impossible to satisfy, all the more so that this social base would be weakened by deindustrialisation and fragmented by individualisation. One could mention an abundant literature derived from Inglehart (1977, 1990, 1997) that explains such changes by the rise of post-materialist issues, as a consequence of the increase in income and wealth levels in developed countries. These transformations would imply a redefinition of the political competition away from the issues related to the distribution of material resources and class conflict, as well as a decline of the left-right divide based on the economic dimension.

However, the political difficulties experienced by all incumbent governments, the instability of the political party structure or the rejection in 2005 by 55% of the voters – 79% of the workers vs. 35% of the high-skilled² of a European Constitutional Treaty supported by all mainstream parties, suggest that the trouble for the political supply to adjust to voters' expectations is not the exclusive of the left, and that one witnesses neither the total disappearance of class voting nor a smooth transition to a new socio-political equilibrium.

A simple explanation would *directly* relate the political crisis to the economic situation. Indeed, since the 1970s, the growth slowdown, the constraints on public finance and the increase in unemployment have made the definition and the implementation of an economic policy more difficult, particularly since the Great Recession. But the postulate of a *direct* influence of the macroeconomic performance on political stability is in contradiction for instance with the failure of Lionel Jospin at the 2002 presidential election, after a term characterised by improved public finance and a significant drop in unemployment due to a more rapid growth.³

The basic postulate adopted in what follows is that the problems met by left as well as right government parties for the past three decades are linked to the impossibility to find a dynamic compatibility between on the one hand a stable social base and on the other hand an economic policy and structural reform program. The diversity of expectations among social groups and the constraints of the institutional and economic environment have made it impossible to find a mediation that would be supported by a sufficiently large socio-political coalition, a dominant social bloc (Amable and Palombarini 2009). The existence of contradictions between an economic modernisation strategy and the stability of a certain social structure has been a recurring problem in post-War France. To a large extent, the problems characterising contemporary France are similar to those met by the "modernists" in the post-War period (Gauron 1983), who failed to solve the contradictions between the consequences of the modernisation of economic structures and their will to limit the political power of the popular classes.

The analysis of the political crisis requires an investigation of the links between social structures and the economic policy expectations of the electorate, and of the influence of these on the potential political support of political parties. To this end, data on post-electoral survey are used to estimate structural models of political support to political parties for 1978 and 2012, and the estimation results are used to propose an analysis of the French crisis.

This paper is organised as follows. Section 2 exposes the main elements of the ongoing French political crisis. Section 3 presents the data and models used in the empirical estimations. Section 4 discusses the results of the estimation. Section 5 analyses the causes of the political crisis in the light of these results. Section 6 considers the attempts of the mainstream parties to deal with the

² Post-electoral poll, IPSOS, <http://www.ipsos.fr/ipsos-public-affairs/sondages/referendum-29-mai-2005-sondage-sorti-urnes>

³ The average annual growth rate was 2.5% for 1997-2002 against 1.2% for 1993-1996.

crisis and find stable social bases, in particular the modernist strategy. Section 7 concludes on the unsolved contradictions of the modernist strategy.

2. The ongoing French political crisis

There are many signs of the existence of an enduring French political crisis, defined as the vanishing of the space for mediation between the divergent expectations of the social groups that constitute the dominant social bloc (Amable and Palombarini 2009). All incumbent governments have failed to be re-elected after 1978. The two cases where one right government followed another were the expression of internal divisions and the manifestation of a craving for change: (i) an almost centre-left Chirac protecting the welfare state against the conservative Balladur and his neoliberal policy in 1995; (ii) Nicolas Sarkozy's program of *rupture* with the alleged immobility of Chirac's presidency in 2007. Also, since 1981, the electoral score at the French presidential election of "outsiders", defined as candidates with no concrete prospect for entering a government coalition or outside of the left and right mainstream parties,⁴ has considerably increased. Whereas they jointly obtained the support of 7.5% of the registered voters in 1974 and 8.2% in 1981, their combined score rose from 18% in 1988, to 32.6% both in 2007 and 2012 (Figure 1).⁵ In 2002, an outsider, *Front National's* candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, even reached the second round of the election while the former Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, candidate for the main party of the left (the PS), failed to do so.

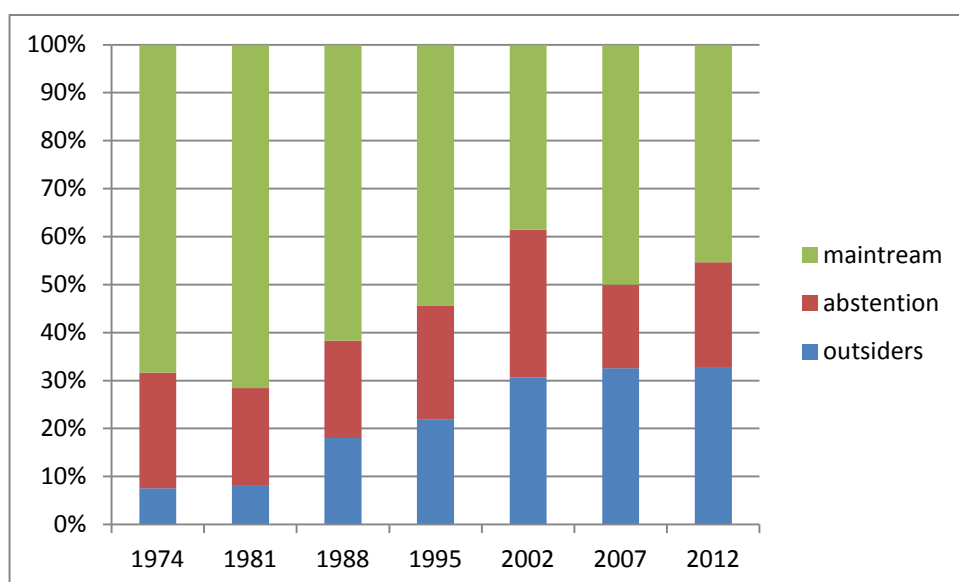


Figure 1. Vote distribution at the first round of the presidential elections in percent of registered voters. Data source: *Ministère de l'Intérieur*.

The emergence of new parties and the decline of the old ones is not by itself a sign of political crisis. It could be the consequence of structural change taking place in French society: the

⁴ Until 1988, apart from marginal candidates, such as Bertrand Renouvin, a royalist candidate who obtained 0.17% of the votes in 1974, the bulk of the outsider votes went to the trotskyst and ecologist candidates. After the emergence of the *Front National* during the 1980s, the scores of Jean-Marie Le Pen dominated the outsider category until 2007. After that date, another category of outsiders became prominent: candidates who quit the respective government parties they belonged to form their own parties and, willingly or not, stayed outside of the mainstream left and right alliances: François Bayrou's MoDem at the Centre and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's *Front de Gauche*⁴ (FdG) on the left for instance. The ecologists evolved in the opposite direction, from the outsider to the insider category, after their participation to the PS-led government coalition in 1997

⁵ If one adds abstention, the support to mainstream parties' candidates has been under 50% of the registered voters since the early 2000s, reaching a low of 38.5% in 2002.

increase in income, wealth or education levels, deindustrialisation and the growth of the service economy, or any other social or economic change that would have for consequence the decline of some political demands and the emergence of new expectations, or the waning of traditional social coalitions either on the left or on the right. But other signs prove the existence of a crisis. Most new parties have been kept outside of the government coalitions. Elected presidents lose popularity at an increasing rate. It took nearly 11 years to Jacques Chirac (1995-2007) to reach a level of confidence of 20%, four years to Sarkozy (2007-2012) and a little over 18 months to Hollande (2012-). Such a low level was never even approached by any of their predecessors.⁶ All these elements reveal the difficulty to find a political equilibrium with a defined economic strategy supported by a stable social base. Turning to the main episodes of economic policy choices sheds a light on the difficulties that political supply has had to adjust to political demand.

After the 1981 victory, the left coalition government implemented a Keynesian-type economic policy fuelled by real wage⁷ and social benefits⁸ increases as well as public expenditure. Taking place at the worst of time, when the US and the other OECD countries implemented recessive policies to fight inflation, the French attempt to sustain economic growth led to a dramatic increase in the external deficit (Figure 2) and failed to curb unemployment (Figure 3). The Franc was devalued in October 1981 and June 1982, and *de facto* devalued by the re-evaluations of the *Deutsche Mark* and the Dutch *Gulden* in March 1983.

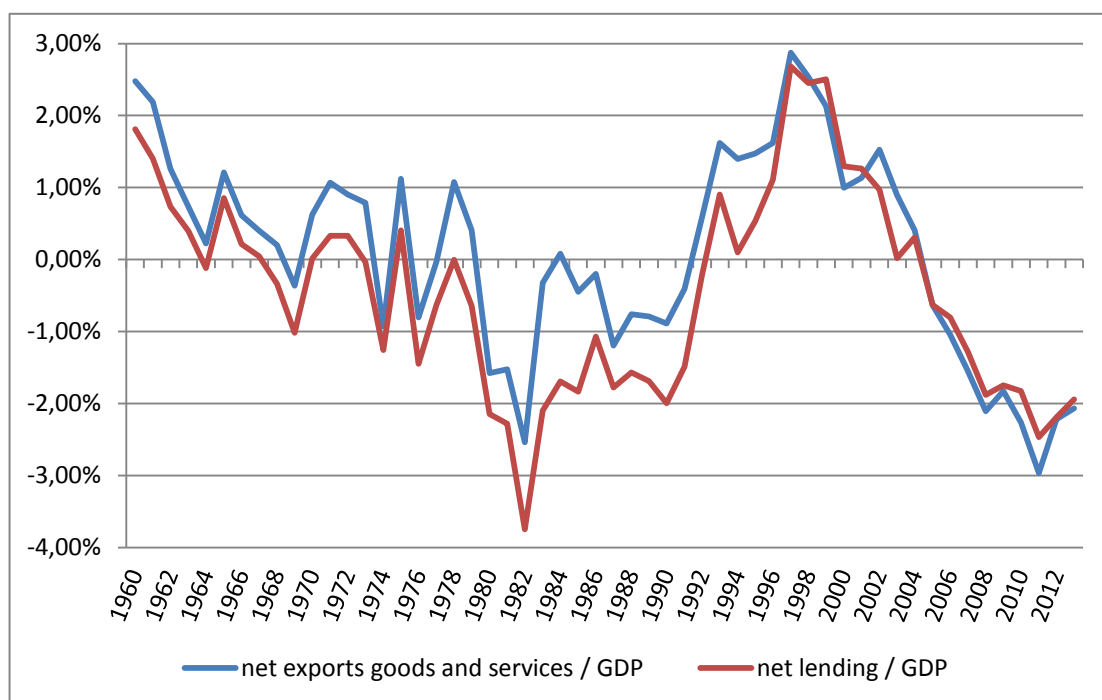


Figure 2. External balances. Data source: INSEE

At the same time, the main firms' professional association, the CNPF, launched a campaign for a reorientation of the economic policy, demanding a drop in social contributions and a weakening of the Auroux laws on industrial democracy. The worsening of the economic situation and the will not to antagonise private firms⁹ in order to foster investment led to a gradual reorientation of

⁶ Figures from TNS-Sofres, <http://www.tns-sofres.com/cotes-de-popularites>.

⁷ The minimum wage was raised by 10% in 1981.

⁸ Family benefits were increased by 50%.

⁹ The will of the new PS-led government to find a "historical compromise" with private firms was proclaimed by François Mitterrand in December 1981: '*Public authorities and firms' managers should not be opponents but partners*'. (Weber 1986 p.322)

economic policy in 1982, and eventually to the U-turn of 1983. The focus shifted to pegging the French *Franc* to the *Deutsche Mark*, promoting wage moderation, reducing public deficits and reorienting structural policy towards the creation of a business-friendly environment (Lordon 1997). This U-turn, often presented as an awakening to economic realities (Olivennes 1993) or a consequence of the necessity to implement a supply-side-oriented policy because of the external constraint (Sachs and Wyplosz 1986) was also a defeat inflicted to the economic and social policy of the left (Hoang-Ngoc 2005) that had negative consequences on the social support of left parties and led to the electoral defeat of 1986.¹⁰ This line of economic orthodoxy, later presented as a choice in favour of European integration, was followed with varying degree of strictness by all following left governments (1988-1993 and 1997-2002), with the same electoral consequences.¹¹

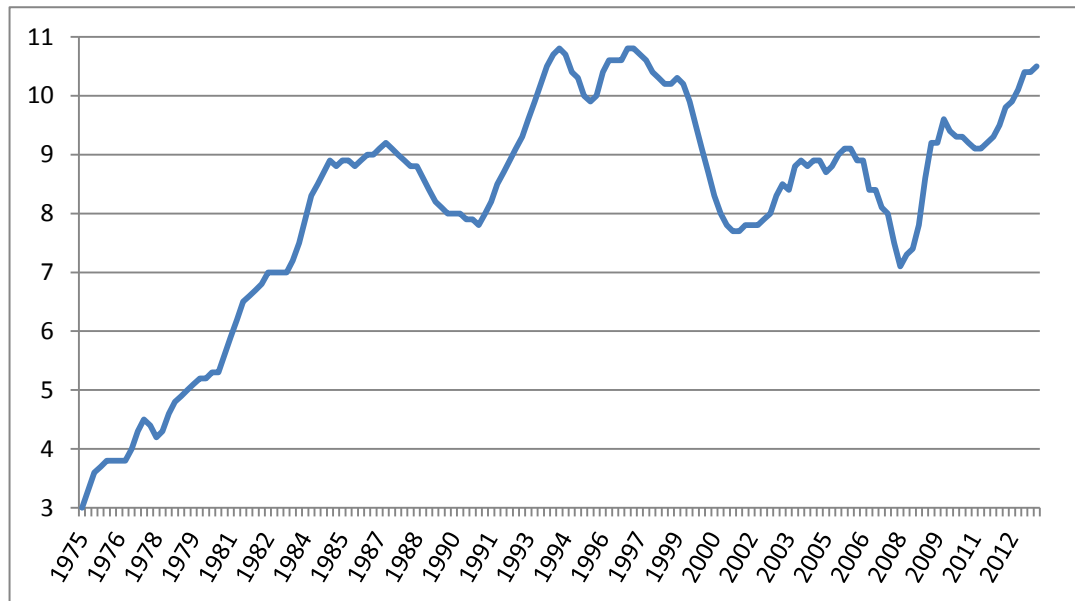


Figure3. Unemployment rate. Data source: INSEE

Another episode of failed electorate's expectations took place with the right. In the 1995 presidential campaign, Jacques Chirac's main rival belonged to the same party and was Prime Minister Edouard Balladur. The latter's economic policy was based on a mix of orthodox macroeconomics and neoliberal structural reforms. Capitalising on social discontent, Chirac adopted as the main theme for his campaign the necessity to fight growing inequalities (the *fracture sociale*). But whereas the electoral promise was to answer to the 'popular disarray' that 'threatened the country's unity',¹² Jacques Chirac, once elected, promoted the return to sound public finance and the reduction of social protection deficits as his government's main objectives. Once again, this U-turn, commonly presented as the necessity to incorporate in the government's priorities the economic realities and the external constraint,¹³ had negative electoral consequences.

Coming back to power in 1986, the right had radicalised its economic policy stance. Its economic program had already taken a neoliberal turn after 1978, to the point that the theme of the

¹⁰ The PCF left the government in 1984 but maintained its support.

¹¹ Although Lionel Jospin considered that the economic and social policy when he was Prime Minister (1997-2002) represented a break-up with the U-turn of 1983. This is only partly true (Askenazy 2011), and the electorate did not concur.

¹² Interview in the *Nouvel Observateur*, 12-18 January 1995

¹³ The dominant view was expressed in a report to the Prime minister (Balladur). Every national project must be realised taking into consideration a world that imposes its own rhythm and evolution: '*same as every other country, France must adjust*' (Minc, 1994, p.39). The same idea was expressed by Jacques Delors a decade before (Alexandre and Delors 1985, chapter 1).

last speech of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing for the presidential campaign of 1981 was 'less state' (Giscard d'Estaing 1984), in opposition not only to the supposedly "*dirigiste*" stance of the post-War French economic policy, but also the "*micro-dirigisme*" practiced during his own mandate.¹⁴ The influence of the "conservative revolution" in the UK and the US with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan was also present. Jacques Chirac had promised a "rather brutal" break-up¹⁵ with the economic policy previously implemented and the French economic model in general. Once elected, he launched a series of significant neoliberal reforms (Amable et al. 2012a) such as privatisations and labour market liberalisation. However, the hard line adopted by the right government antagonised so much the majority of the electorate, including a fraction of the social base of the right (Amable et al. 2012b), that the left came back to power after only two years.

The Balladur government also lasted two years (1993-1995) and faced a considerable opposition on the streets when it tried to implement reforms promoting labour market flexibility, in particular for the under-26.¹⁶ The following Juppé government also faced at the end of 1995 the most important social protest movement since 1968 when it tried to reform the pension system. In 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy was elected with a programme of "*rupture*" that stirred the enthusiasm of the supporters of a neoliberal turn in France and abroad.¹⁷ But the *rupture* proved to be more moderate than promised and by 2008, Nicolas Sarkozy's ambition was no longer to transform the French model in a neoliberal way but to oppose the idea that markets were always right and call for a moralisation of capitalism.¹⁸ The most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression had, at least temporarily, made the neoliberal project infeasible (Amable et al. 2012b) and Sarkozy had to build up compromises in order for some of the structural reforms to succeed (Amable and Palombarini 2014).¹⁹

The governments of the past four decades have experienced serious difficulties in meeting the expectations of the electorate. The left governments (1981-1986, 1988-1993, 1997-2002) promoted policies of wage moderation and "sound" public finance which failed to satisfy the expectations of their social base for a left economic policy. The right governments have been perceived as too extreme in their attempts to implement neoliberal reforms (1986-1988, 1993-1995), or too tame (2002-2007), leading to accusations of "immobility", or successively too adventurous and too cautious (2007-2012). In every case, the governing coalitions of the left and the right did not find how to implement an economic policy and structural reforms that would create their own social support.

In order to analyse the reasons for the lack of support for the different economic policies followed by the successive governments for the past 30 years, it is necessary to turn to the expectations of the electorate and the structure of political demand.

3. From social structure to political preferences

In order to analyse the political demand, the simple theoretical framework represented in Figure 4 will be adopted. An individual's position in the social structure is assumed to influence her or

¹⁴ Managers accused the administration under Raymond Barre's government to intervene in the day-to-day management decisions of private firms in spite of having reduced macro-level *dirigisme*. (Weber 1986, pp.252-253)

¹⁵ Radio interview, Grand Jury RTL-Le Monde, 5 May 1984.

¹⁶ The attempt to introduce a labour contract for the under-26s that would derogate to the protections of the standard contract and include a wage under the minimum legal level.

¹⁷ E.g. *The Economist* (12 April 2007): 'France's chance. After a quarter-century of drift Nicolas Sarkozy offers the best hope of reform'.

¹⁸ Speech in Toulon, 25 September 2008.

¹⁹ Sarkozy fended off accusations of immobility by blaming the resistance of "intermediate bodies" (trade unions, parties, pressure groups, experts...).

his expectations with respect to economic policy. These in turn determine the political preferences and the degree of support to the different parties. One can also take into consideration the direct effect of the social position on the political preferences, representing support not mediated by policy expectations. For the purpose of the empirical investigations, the structure represented in Figure 4 defines a recursive model which will be estimated by structural equation modelling techniques.

The data used in the analysis come from two sources: the French post-electoral survey for 1978 (BDSP 1978) and the French electoral study for 2012 (Sauger, 2012). The latter is a post-election survey made during the 2012 elections comprising 2014 interviews, representative of the French population registered on the electoral roll. The former is the post-electoral study made in 1978 and has data for 4456 individuals.

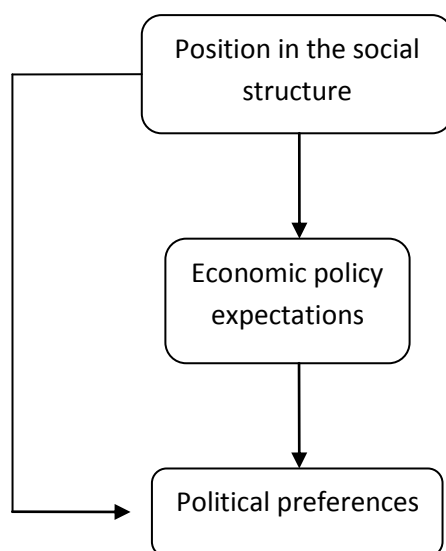


Figure 4. From social structure to political preferences

The questionnaires of the two surveys are not identical but possess sufficient common elements to have a comparable structure for 1978 and 2012. The position in the social structure will be mainly determined by six types of variables: sex, age, occupation, income levels, church attendance and the type of living environment. A few additional variables, specific to a survey, will also be taken into consideration.

Men will be the reference category. Five age brackets will be taken into consideration: 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54 (reference category) and over 55. Occupations will be defined with the help of the INSEE classifications in an almost identical way for the two surveys: farmers (reference category), managers, craftsmen and shopkeepers, high-skill public sector employees, high-skill private sector employees, medium-skill public sector employees, medium-skill private sector employees, foremen and technicians, public sector clerks, private sector clerks, service workers; skilled (blue collar) workers, unskilled (blue collar) workers, student, unemployed, retired. For the 1978 survey only, two additional categories could be taken into consideration: specialised workers (a category of unskilled worker executing a simple task in conveyor belt factories) and police and security forces. The level of household income is individualised by dividing it by the squared root of the size of the household in order to account for possible intra-household economies of scale. The survey samples are then divided by deciles, and the first income decile is taken as the reference category. The church attendance variable will separate individuals who attend at least twice a month from the others (reference category). The living environment will separate those who live in a rural area from the others (reference category).

Some variables of interest were only available in one of the two surveys. For 1978, the size of the firm in which the individual works is considered: small (under 50 employees), medium (50 to 500 employees, the reference category) and large (over 500 employees). Also, a question asked for the opinion on the future of the type of activity the individual was working in: decline, stability (the reference category) or expansion. For 2012, the wealth level could be taken into account. Five wealth brackets are considered: under 7,000 Euros (reference category), between 7,000 and 75,000 Euros, between 75,000 and 150,000 Euros, between 150,000 and 300,000 Euros and over 300,000 Euros. Respondents to the 2012 electoral survey are asked whether it would be easy or difficult for them or their partner to find another job should they lose the position they have. When the respondent has answered that it would be difficult or very difficult for her/himself or partner to find another job, the variable Household's employment risk takes a value of one, and zero otherwise. Another question concerns the likelihood of a decrease in household's income within the next 12 months. If this is considered very likely or likely, the corresponding risk variable takes the value 1.

The questions relevant for the policy expectations are mostly specific to each survey, but relate to general policy matters (taxes, income redistribution, public services, labour market regulation...) which are common to the two elections. The selection of questions for inclusion as variables in the models are thus based on the consideration of two elements: the relevance for the policy debate at the time of the election (e.g. the issue of nationalisations, a central element of the left economic program in 1978) and the presence of the same or a related question in the questionnaire for the other election (e.g. how positive nationalisations are considered in the 2012 survey).

In the 1978, the respondent is asked how favourable he or she would be to a series of policies. Four answers are possible: totally opposed, rather opposed, rather in favour, totally in favour, which will give as many categorical explanatory variables, with the "rather opposed" taken as the reference category. The policies concerned are the following: suppressing the advantages of many in order to reduce social inequalities; extending the nationalised sector even if this implies limiting the scope of the private sector; increase taxes to provide free public services (health, transports, school, etc.); limit the increase in your standard of living in order to curb inflation; prohibit any firing as long as an alternative job is not guaranteed; the establishment of foreign firms in France. Another question asks whether the suppression of the right to strike would be grave. Four answers are here again possible, according to the degree of gravity. Individuals finding it "rather grave" will be the reference category.

In 2012, four degrees of appreciation of the nationalisations are considered, from very negative to very positive. "Fairly negative" will be the reference category. For the opposition to the single employment contract,²⁰ four answers from totally favourable to totally opposed are available. "Rather opposed" will form the reference category. An important social protection reform of the Sarkozy presidency concerned the pensions. The reform led to a significant union-led contestation in autumn 2010 and one electoral promise of PS candidate François Hollande was to partially reverse it. One question of the survey asked the respondent to appreciate the fairness of the reform, grading it between 0 and 10. For all variables of that type, the grade itself will be the explanatory variable. Two other questions deal with taxation and redistribution. One asks whether the respondent approves or disapproves government intervention to reduce income inequalities. Five answers are possible: totally agree, rather agree, neither agree nor disagree, rather disagree (reference category), totally disagree. Another question asks the degree of approval of an increase in VAT (grading it between 0 and 10). The issue of increasing the VAT in order to finance social protection, allowing for a decrease in social contributions and a drop in the labour cost, had been a debate before and during the

²⁰ The proposition to replace all open-ended and fixed-term contract by a single open-ended contract with diminished protection was made by economists in the early 2000s (Cahuc and Kramarz 2004) and taken up in the respective manifestos for the presidential election of Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP) in 2007 and François Bayrou (MoDem) in 2012.

electoral campaign, opposing Nicolas Sarkozy, who was in favour of it, to the left, opposed to it. Finally three questions ask for the respondent position on strengthening the power of the EU vs. the power of the French state, increasing or decreasing the number of nuclear plants, and increasing or decreasing the number of civil servants. The answers are grades between 0 and 10 for the degree of support to the proposition.

In order to consider possible divides linked to culture and lifestyles, besides those based on economic policy issues, as in the now popular bi-dimensional representation of the political space (Kitschelt, 1993, 1994), variables reflecting social values have been incorporated in the analysis. According to the bi-dimensional view, a new cultural divide, not independent of social structural determinants, opposes authoritarian values and communitarian conceptions of justice to the values of cultural liberalism, internationalism, and gender equality (Bornschier, 2010). This would split the traditional left and right social bases.

In the 1978 survey, a question concerns the possibility for an under-18 girl to take the pill without the consent of her parents. Four answers, from totally opposed to totally favourable were possible. The “rather opposed” will be the reference category. Another question asked whether the respondent would prefer to work more in order to earn more money or to work less even if this implies earning less. This question is interesting since the choice to work and earn more will become a very popular presidential campaign slogan for Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007, aimed at the working classes preoccupied with their low purchasing power and taken to appreciate particularly the values of hard work as opposed to laziness. Finally a question asked whether school should give the sense of discipline and effort or form people with an open and critical mind. Categorical variables corresponding respectively the “work more to earn more” and “form people with an open mind” will be considered.

For 2012, social values are identified with the help of four questions, asking about the approval with the following propositions: homosexual couples have a right to adopt children; in a society, there must be a hierarchy with leaders; the unemployed could find a job if they really wanted to; there are too many immigrants in France. Categorical variables corresponding to approval will be considered.

Political preferences are appreciated with the answer to the question about the degree of sympathy of the respondent for the different political parties. Taking as a dependent variable the degree of sympathy for a party rather than the vote makes it possible to consider the potential support rather than the electoral outcome for a single election. Besides, the response rate to the sympathy question is usually higher than the corresponding rate for questions about the vote. This is particularly true for the 2012 elections where nearly all the respondents (over 97%) have given an answer to the question on the degree of sympathy, whereas only 83% have given an answer on their vote for the first round of the election. The information content of the sympathy question is also higher. Respondents give a grade to all parties whereas the vote goes by definition to one party only. Also, a certain degree of strategic voting for the first round can be expected both on the right and on the left, leading to a certain blurring of the respective social bases of the different parties and a probable underestimation of the potential support of small candidates/parties, the ecologists in 2012 for instance.

Data for the following parties are available for 1978: the *parti communiste français* (communist party PCF); the *parti socialiste unifié* (unified socialist party PSU);²¹ the far left, not a party but a movement composed mostly of Trotskyite parties; the *parti socialiste* (socialist party PS); two parties which compose the UDF, the formation of President Giscard d’Estaing: the *Centre des*

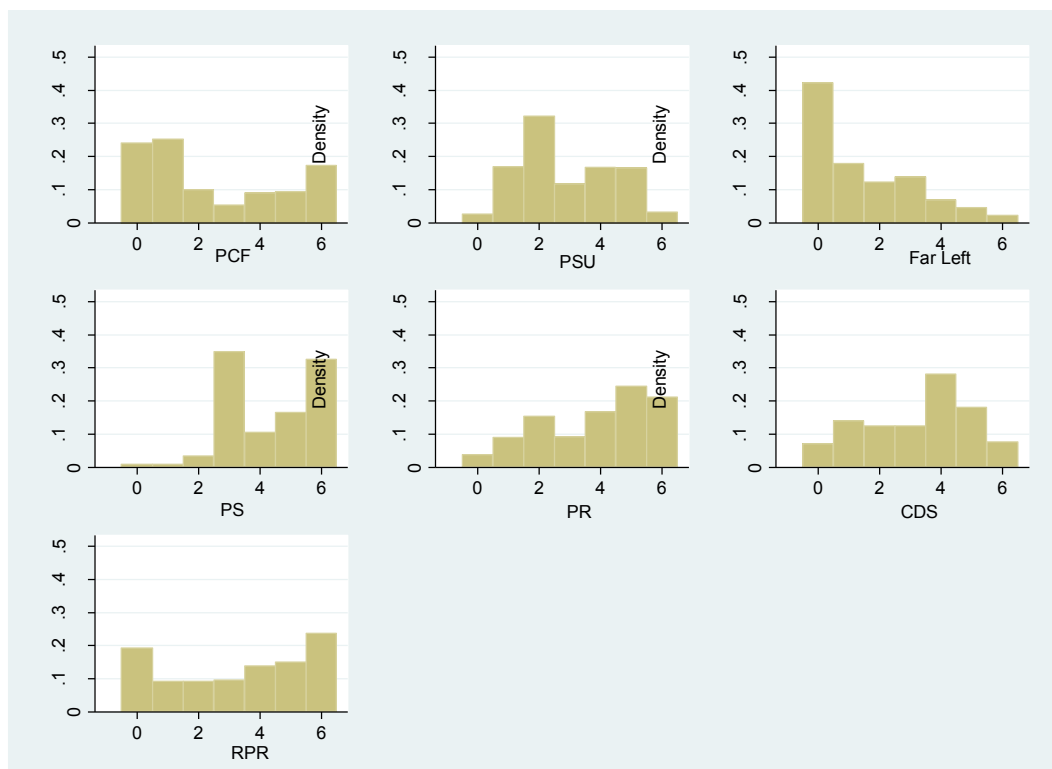
²¹ The PSU represented the so-called “second left” whose origins could be found in the opposition both to the French colonial wars of the 1950s and to the Soviet Union. It was characterised by an opposition to the “bureaucratisation” of society. Michel Rocard was First Secretary of the PSU between 1967 and 1973, before joining the PS.

democrats sociaux (CDS) and the *parti républicain* (PR); the *rassemblement pour la république* (post-Gaullist party RPR). For 2012, the parties were the *Front de Gauche* (radical left),²² *Europe-Ecologie les Verts* (EELV, ecologists), the PS (mainstream left), the MoDem (Centre), the UMP (mainstream right) and the *Front National* (FN, radical right). Each party was given a grade between 0 and 6 in 1978 and between 0 and 10 in 2012.

The distributions of grades for each party are featured in Figures 5 and 6. One can notice the overall good opinion that respondents express on the PS in 1978. On average, “extreme” parties gather more low grades than mainstream parties (e.g. the far left in 1978). This is particularly true for the FN in 2012; nearly half the respondents give the FN a zero grade.

The empirical models for 1978 and 2012 are estimated with the maximum likelihood method, with probit or ordered probit estimations depending on the variable considered. Ordered choices will be taken as categorical variables when they are explanatory variables (e.g. the degree of approbation of government’s intervention to reduce inequality in the degree of sympathy for a party equations), except when these choices are a grade between 0 and 10. The linearity of the answer scheme makes it acceptable to consider the grade itself and not the grade categories as explanatory variables. Grades will be taken as an ordered choice variable when they enter as dependent variables in the model (e.g. in the equations determining the influence of the social position on the evaluation of the fairness of the pension reform for instance).

The estimation of the model starts with the inclusion of all possible paths, i.e. all possible explanatory variables in every equation. After having estimated the complete models, likelihood ratio tests were performed to check the significance of the various explanatory paths within the model (i.e. the significance of variable coefficients in the model’s equations). The successive application of likelihood ratio test led to the rejection at the 5% level of 543 paths for the 1978 model and 588 paths for the 2012 model. This led to more parsimonious and easily interpretable models than the unconstrained models.



²² Strictly speaking not a party but a union of left parties including among others the PCF.

Figure 5. Histograms of party grades in 1978.

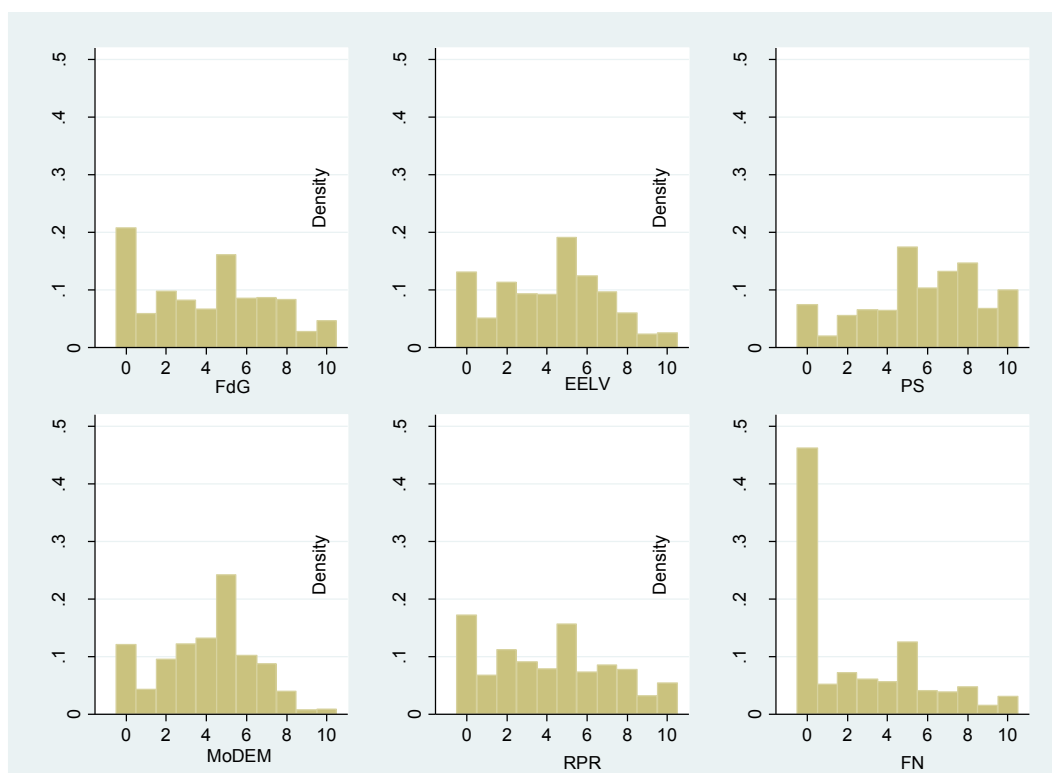


Figure 6. Histograms of party grades in 2012.

4. Estimation results

Estimation results for the restricted models are presented in Tables 1 to 3 for 1978 and Tables 4 to 6 for 2012. Starting with the sympathy towards political parties in 1978 (Table 1), one notices the existence of a strong divide on economic issues along the traditional left-right opposition: nationalisations, industrial relations and social conflict (the right to strike), income inequalities, austerity and the fight against inflation as well as employment protection. Left positions on these issues were mostly defended by the young, the low and middle incomes, the working classes and public sector employees (Tables 2 and 3). On the other side, one found the support of high incomes, seniors, churchgoers, managers and shopkeepers, high-skill private sector employees and inhabitants of rural areas for right economic policy options. These findings confirm the existence of a traditional class-based support for left and right economic policies respectively. One may also note that the answers to the question on taxes and free public services, although a classical problem in the political economy of public goods,²³ very imperfectly reflected this classical opposition. Not only was the matter hardly relevant to differentiate the support to the different parties, but also the social base for this type of policy was particularly difficult to identify or interpret according to income inequalities (table2).

²³ See for instance Bergstrom and Goodman (1973) or Persson and Tabellini (2000), chapter 3.

	PCF	PSU	Far left	PS	PR	CDS	RPR
Suppress the advantages of many to reduce social inequalities							
Totally in favour		0.167*** (0.048)		0.140*** (0.048)		-0.145*** (0.049)	-0.152*** (0.050)
Broaden and develop the nationalised sector							
Totally against	-0.166*** (0.064)	-0.141** (0.065)		-0.431*** (0.059)		0.200*** (0.064)	0.319*** (0.066)
Rather in favour	0.446*** (0.061)	0.347*** (0.060)	0.394*** (0.057)	0.414*** (0.055)	-0.608*** (0.054)	-0.427*** (0.061)	-0.532*** (0.062)
Totally in favour	0.989*** (0.076)	0.425*** (0.072)	0.713*** (0.068)		-0.953*** (0.069)	-0.661*** (0.076)	-0.758*** (0.077)
Raise taxes for free public services							
Rather in favour					-0.109** (0.054)		
Totally in favour							-0.175** (0.080)
Limit your standard of living to curb inflation							
Totally against	0.252*** (0.052)	0.169*** (0.050)			-0.218*** (0.051)		
Rather in favour			-0.168*** (0.052)			0.201*** (0.050)	
Totally in favour						0.216*** (0.073)	
Forbid layoffs until a new job is found							
Totally against		-0.204** (0.081)	-0.213** (0.089)				0.251*** (0.085)
Rather in favour						-0.286*** (0.065)	
Totally in favour	0.188*** (0.050)			0.138*** (0.049)	-0.241*** (0.049)	-0.440*** (0.063)	
The establishment of foreign firms							
Totally against	0.187*** (0.053)						
Rather in favour			-0.164*** (0.056)				
Suppress the right to strike							
Very grave	0.426*** (0.051)	0.371*** (0.055)	0.215*** (0.053)	0.312*** (0.053)	-0.396*** (0.050)	-0.436*** (0.049)	-0.460*** (0.055)

Rather not grave		-0.236*** (0.077)		-0.279*** (0.078)			0.310*** (0.080)
Not grave at all	-0.248** (0.105)	-0.257** (0.105)		-0.390*** (0.104)	0.238** (0.100)		0.272** (0.106)
A minor girl could take the pill							
Rather agree				0.170*** (0.053)			
Totally agree		0.116** (0.049)					
Work more to earn more		-0.194*** (0.047)	-0.155*** (0.050)				0.248*** (0.048)
School should open people's mind	0.175*** (0.050)	0.282*** (0.049)	0.187*** (0.054)		-0.112** (0.051)	-0.146*** (0.050)	-0.302*** (0.051)
Age							
18 to 24	0.196*** (0.068)		0.476*** (0.072)	-0.138** (0.066)	-0.440*** (0.073)	-0.259*** (0.071)	-0.181*** (0.070)
25 to 34			0.234*** (0.057)		-0.216*** (0.058)		
35 to 44		0.188*** (0.057)			-0.173*** (0.063)		
Over 55						0.272*** (0.055)	
Lives in a rural area		-0.216*** (0.070)					
Churchgoer	-0.395*** (0.067)	-0.144** (0.064)	-0.215*** (0.072)	-0.399*** (0.065)	0.294*** (0.064)	0.459*** (0.064)	0.346*** (0.066)
Income							
6 th decile			-0.295*** (0.084)				
7 th decile			-0.309*** (0.083)				
8 th decile			-0.302*** (0.086)				
9 th decile			-0.354*** (0.083)				
10 th decile			-0.228*** (0.081)	-0.284*** (0.072)			
Occupation							
Craftsman, shopkeeper						-0.203** (0.096)	
Private sector intellectual profession	-0.473** (0.201)						
Public sector intellectual profession		0.448*** (0.095)		0.193** (0.098)			

Public sector clerk	0.284*** (0.076)		0.173** (0.079)	-0.203*** (0.076)		
technicians		-0.321*** (0.105)	0.222** (0.097)			
Skilled workers	0.400*** (0.082)				-0.228*** (0.078)	
specialised workers	0.351*** (0.084)	0.223*** (0.086)		-0.258*** (0.082)		-0.247*** (0.085)
workers	0.363*** (0.099)	0.265*** (0.100)		-0.222** (0.096)	-0.212** (0.095)	-0.238** (0.099)
Police or church		-0.586** (0.233)			0.416** (0.193)	
student					0.474*** (0.159)	
Works in a declining industry	0.171*** (0.065)		0.201*** (0.065)	-0.144** (0.064)		-0.217*** (0.066)

Table 1. Support to political parties in 1978. Significance levels: *** 1%, ** 5%, * 10%.

As expected, “cultural” divides reflected only in part the economic policy oppositions. The school issue split the electorate along traditional left-right lines although, when one turns to the social support for this question, one notices a skill- and income-based divide cross-cutting the usual partition of the left and right social bases. This is also true, but to a lesser extent, for the “work more to earn more” question. Other cultural issues mattered less for the left-right opposition: the pill question for instance. Partisans and opponents on this issue were divided mostly according to age and income levels, the young and more affluent respondents being more liberal than the others.

Also, the literature stressing the emergence of a cultural divide has insisted on the consequences it would have for the left (Lipset, 1981; Kitschelt, 1988) splitting the “old left”, focused on economic issue and with a social base consisting of traditional working class groups, from a “new left”, with a social base composed of more educated and better off individuals, more concerned with post-materialist values. The results of Tables 1 to 3 show that societal issues produced a rift within the traditional base of the right as well, based on skills and income levels. The better-off and more skilled fraction of the right social base, high-skill private sector employees and high income individuals, sided with the better-off and more skilled fraction of the left base on these cultural issues against a fraction of the traditional base of the right (shopkeepers, churchgoers, seniors...). This proximity was limited to cultural issues and did not extend to economic policy matters.

	Suppress the advantages of many	Broaden and develop the nationalised sector	Raise taxes for free public services	Limit your standard of living to curb inflation	Forbid layoffs until a new job is found
woman			-0.120*** (0.037)		
age					
18 to 24		0.201*** (0.060)	0.144** (0.058)	-0.132** (0.060)	0.208*** (0.064)
25 to 34			0.113** (0.044)	-0.156*** (0.046)	
Over 55		-0.186*** (0.045)			
Lives in a rural area					-0.294*** (0.057)
retired				-0.146*** (0.052)	-0.172*** (0.053)
Churchgoer	-0.201*** (0.051)	-0.555*** (0.056)		0.332*** (0.051)	-0.343*** (0.053)
income					
4 th decile				0.169*** (0.065)	
5 th decile				0.210*** (0.064)	
6 th decile				0.272*** (0.068)	
7 th decile	-0.131** (0.064)			0.249*** (0.069)	-0.155** (0.069)
8 th decile		-0.166** (0.067)		0.325*** (0.069)	-0.191*** (0.071)
9 th decile				0.245*** (0.070)	
10 th decile	-0.152** (0.062)	-0.258*** (0.065)		0.503*** (0.067)	
occupation					
Manager		-0.529*** (0.143)			-0.842*** (0.139)
Craftsman, shopkeeper		-0.319*** (0.090)	-0.263*** (0.082)		-0.461*** (0.086)
Public sector intellectual profession		0.285*** (0.086)			0.183** (0.088)
Private sector high-skilled		-0.299*** (0.096)			-0.350*** (0.095)
Public sector clerk technicians		0.238*** (0.071)			
		0.211**			

		(0.088)			
Skilled workers	0.144**	0.355***		-0.234***	0.355***
	(0.066)	(0.071)		(0.065)	(0.074)
specialised workers		0.281***	-0.157**	-0.290***	0.252***
		(0.073)	(0.065)	(0.066)	(0.074)
workers		0.469***		0.161*	
		(0.084)		(0.082)	
Service workers		0.314***			0.306***
		(0.086)			(0.086)
Police or church	0.334**				
	(0.163)				
Student	0.309**				
	(0.150)				
Works in a small firm		-0.188***	-0.093**		-0.173***
		(0.046)	(0.041)		(0.046)
Works in a declining industry	0.136**	0.266***		-0.134**	0.124**
	(0.055)	(0.056)		(0.054)	(0.060)

Table 2. Policy expectations in 1978 (a). Significance levels: *** 1%, ** 5%, * 10%.

The direct influence of social structural characteristics on party support was also strong. Church attendance and age did not only strongly influence policy preferences or cultural values, they also directly influenced the degree of sympathy towards one or the other party. Churchgoers were strong supporters of the right, and the young were broadly favourable to the left. The working classes were strongly supporting the left, mostly the communist party and the far left. The level of income played a more moderate role, influencing only the degree of sympathy towards the far left, which was strongly decreasing with affluence. The causes for the strength of this direct influence may be either the inability of the questions on economic policy and cultural values to adequately reflect the expectations of the electorate, or the strong links between social structure and party sympathies independently of specific economic or cultural issues.

	Establishment of foreign firms	Suppression of the right to strike	Pill for minor girl	Work more to earn more	School should favour critical sense
woman		0.295*** (0.043)	-0.125*** (0.040)	-0.133*** (0.045)	-0.115** (0.049)
age					
18 to 24	0.331*** (0.060)		0.836*** (0.071)	0.285*** (0.071)	0.917*** (0.080)
25 to 34	0.244*** (0.047)		0.631*** (0.053)		0.527*** (0.063)
35 to 44	0.333*** (0.052)		0.232*** (0.057)		0.178*** (0.069)
Lives in a rural area	-0.108** (0.054)	0.244*** (0.055)	-0.149*** (0.056)	0.140** (0.062)	-0.172** (0.069)
Unemployed		-0.192** (0.093)	0.300*** (0.092)	-0.206** (0.099)	0.374*** (0.102)
retired		0.173*** (0.051)	-0.125** (0.059)	0.300*** (0.058)	-0.220*** (0.073)
Churchgoer	0.284*** (0.052)	0.341*** (0.052)	-0.585*** (0.054)	-0.145** (0.059)	-0.243*** (0.066)
Income					
6 th decile			0.150** (0.067)		
7 th decile			0.270*** (0.068)		0.221*** (0.077)
8 th decile			0.376*** (0.070)	-0.278*** (0.076)	
9 th decile		-0.177** (0.072)	0.274*** (0.072)	-0.201** (0.078)	0.280*** (0.082)
10 th decile	0.152** (0.062)		0.462*** (0.069)	-0.244*** (0.073)	0.411*** (0.078)
occupation					
Manager	0.432*** (0.130)				
Private sector intellectual profession		-0.546*** (0.187)	0.444** (0.178)	-0.722*** (0.207)	0.994*** (0.209)
Public sector intellectual profession		-0.970*** (0.098)	0.373*** (0.086)	-1.060*** (0.106)	1.073*** (0.103)
Private sector high-skilled	0.365*** (0.091)		0.234** (0.096)		0.389*** (0.112)
Public sector high-skilled		-0.380*** (0.125)			0.379*** (0.138)
Private sector		-0.251***	0.183***		0.215***

clerk		(0.061)	(0.057)		(0.070)
Public sector clerk		-0.375***		-0.242***	0.346***
		(0.074)		(0.075)	(0.082)
technicians		-0.527***		-0.219**	0.317***
		(0.102)		(0.098)	(0.106)
Skilled workers		-0.377***			
		(0.077)			
specialised workers		-0.157**			0.176**
		(0.073)			(0.080)
workers		-0.243***			
		(0.080)			
Student		-1.223***	0.606***	-0.862***	1.432***
		(0.191)	(0.169)	(0.171)	(0.242)
Works in a large firm		-0.197***		-0.200***	0.165***
		(0.060)		(0.061)	(0.064)
Works in a small firm		0.211***			
		(0.045)			
Works in a declining industry	-0.139**	-0.119**		-0.209***	
	(0.054)	(0.059)		(0.064)	

Table3. Policy expectations in 1978 (b). Significance levels: *** 1%, ** 5%, * 10%.

Results for 2012 (Table 4 to 6) also show strong economic policy-based divides between the left and the right. Somewhat surprisingly considering the evolution of the past decades, the issue of nationalisations, central to the economic policy debate of the late 1970s, still represent a source of opposition between the left and the right. One must however bear in mind that the financial crisis of 2008 has given rise to a renewed interest for the question of the nationalisation of the banking sector for instance. The difference with respect to 1978 is that the support to nationalisations is less clearly identifiable in terms of social structural characteristics. In 1978, nationalisations were favoured by the traditional social base of the left (working classes, public servants) and strongly disliked by the traditional social base of the right (churchgoers, seniors, high incomes). In 2012, fewer *groups* emerge as clear opponents or supporters of nationalisations. These are still strongly supported by public servants and opposed by high-income individuals, but the *specific* support of the working classes for instance seems to be less strong. This is not the consequence of a general lack of interest or support however. Remarkably, a majority of respondents express positive opinions on that topic, which was not the case in 1978.²⁴ The lack of specific support of the working classes for nationalisations is therefore the consequence of other categories becoming on average more favourable to them rather than the result of a declining inclination of workers for that policy option.

Other issues reflect the classical left-right economic policy divide: the appreciation of the pension reform, the opposition to state intervention for reducing inequalities or the extent of the public sector (increasing the number of civil servants). The social structural divides on such issues are also as expected: opposing high- income individuals to the bulk of the wage-earners. New themes, such as the opposition to nuclear energy, are also integrated in this divide. As can be seen in Table 4, this supposedly post-materialist issue divides the electorate along very traditional left-right lines. Furthermore, one cannot read an opposition between the “new” and the “old” left according to expectations derived from the literature on this topic that states the existence for left parties of a trade-off between “traditional” left economic policy options and “new” cultural or environmental

²⁴ Only 35% of the respondents express a negative opinion on nationalizations.

themes.²⁵ The nuclear energy issue is without surprise an important determinant of the sympathy towards the ecologist party (EELV). But if one considers the *Front de Gauche*, which includes the communist party, as the paragon of the “old” left, because of its positions on the traditional economic policy divide, one sees that opposition to nuclear energy mattered more for its support than it did for the socialist party, certainly less focussed on allegedly “old left” economic policy since the U-turn of 1983. Some societal values issues do not cross-cut the left-right divide either: the appreciation of the will of the unemployed to find a job and the sentiment on immigration. The link with the economic policy cleavage is much weaker in the case of the question on the adoption right of homosexual couples, but one sees nevertheless that a favourable position of this issue brings more sympathy towards the *Front de Gauche*. This suggests that “old” and “new” left politics are not as substitute to one another as one may think.²⁶

Contrary to what could have been expected on the basis of the new themes included in Marine Le Pen’s manifesto, the support for the FN appears to be based on very traditional right economic policy preferences – negative opinion of nationalisations of state intervention against income inequalities, support of the nuclear program – and “authoritarian” societal values the unemployed could find a job, there are too many immigrants – (Table 4). The latter is not surprising, but the former questions the importance of the U-turn made by the FN on its economic policy stance (Shields 2013). The FN had promoted an opposition to public intervention in the economy since its foundation in the 1970s and adopted an ultraliberal position on issues such as taxation and redistribution, advocating a flat income tax and a limitation of the public expenditure to 25% of the GDP, all this coupled with a nationalist attitude with respect to foreign trade and labour immigration. Only in the mid-2000s did the economic discourse of the FN change, adopting some themes of the left critique of neoliberalism such as the negative consequences of European integration for the ability to implement a pro-active budget policy, and the impact on growth and employment, or for the possibility to keep a generous social protection system. The results documented in Table 4 point out that this change has had little consequences on the pattern of support for the FN.²⁷

A few issues lead to a profile of sympathy towards the different parties which departs from the traditional left-right opposition. The first one is European integration. Support for an increase in the power of the EU against the power of the national state is likely to bring support to EELV, the PS and the MoDem. Opposition to such an evolution brings strong support to the FN. The FdG is in an intermediate position in this respect. The VAT increase is another topic that breaks the traditional political alliances. Supporters of this policy measure are more likely to feel sympathy for EELV, MoDem and UMP. Finally, the importance for society to have a hierarchy with leaders, an issue which should be representative of the cultural divide (Kriesi 2010), does not lead to a support for a priori authoritarian parties such as the FN or even supposed incarnations of “old” politics such as the FdG, but to mainstream left, right and Centre parties UMP, PS and MoDem.

²⁵ For instance, analysing media content on the political supply, Bornschier (2010) found that mainstream social democratic parties had undergone a New left transformation.

²⁶ See also Rohrschneider (1993) on this point.

²⁷ Mayer (2013) also finds that Marine Le Pen’s supports are ideologically and socially very similar to her father’s.

	<i>Front de gauche</i>	<i>Europe Ecologie – Les Verts</i>	<i>Parti socialiste</i>	<i>MoDem</i>	<i>UMP</i>	<i>Front National</i>
No adoption for homosexual couples	-0.164** (0.065)					
The unemployed cannot find work	0.214*** (0.066)	0.127** (0.064)	0.252*** (0.063)	0.209*** (0.062)	-0.366*** (0.064)	-0.304*** (0.067)
No need for a hierarchy with leaders in society			-0.230** (0.103)	-0.213** (0.106)	-0.398*** (0.108)	
Immigrants are not too many in France	0.490*** (0.072)	0.437*** (0.069)	0.325*** (0.069)		-0.401*** (0.069)	-1.078*** (0.081)
Single employment contract						
Strongly in favour					0.228** (0.106)	
Strongly against	0.147** (0.072)					
Sarkozy's pension reform was fair	-0.103*** (0.011)		-0.071*** (0.010)	0.033*** (0.010)	0.165*** (0.011)	
government's intervention to reduce income inequalities						
Strongly approve	0.142** (0.066)	0.300*** (0.062)	0.171*** (0.064)		-0.203*** (0.062)	-0.229*** (0.067)
Rather disapprove	-0.513*** (0.133)		-0.380*** (0.126)			
Strongly disapprove	-0.393*** (0.128)	-0.249** (0.118)	-0.355*** (0.118)			
Increase VAT		0.032** (0.016)		0.075*** (0.016)	0.043*** (0.016)	
Increase the power of the EU		0.060*** (0.011)	0.053*** (0.011)	0.045*** (0.011)		-0.084*** (0.012)
Keep on building nuclear plants	-0.043*** (0.012)	-0.110*** (0.012)		-0.029** (0.012)	0.047*** (0.012)	0.039*** (0.012)
Increase the number of civil servants	0.065*** (0.015)	0.056*** (0.014)	0.061*** (0.014)		-0.073*** (0.014)	
Wealth: over 300 000 Euros	-0.286*** (0.083)		-0.170** (0.078)			
Income: 3 rd decile		0.262** (0.105)				
Occupation						
High-skill public service						-0.365** (0.147)
High-skill private sector						-0.319** (0.146)
Public sector clerk				0.201** (0.094)		
Unemployed					-0.271** (0.113)	
Risk of income loss	-0.188*** (0.064)	-0.126** (0.062)	-0.223*** (0.061)			0.149** (0.067)
women		0.166*** (0.059)			0.173*** (0.060)	

Age			
	18 to 24	-0.323***	
		(0.116)	
	25 to 34		0.240***
			(0.091)
	35 to 44		0.167**
			(0.075)
	over 55		-0.280***
			(0.067)
Churchgoer	-0.302**		
	(0.123)		
Lives in a rural area		-0.120*	
		(0.062)	

Table 4. Support to political parties in 2012. Significance levels: *** 1%, ** 5%, * 10%.

A notable difference with the 1978 situation is the weak direct importance of some social structural characteristics on party support. Individuals with high wealth levels are still more likely to dislike left parties (FdG); respondents between 25 and 45 are more favourable to the MoDem than others; high-skill individuals dislike the FN. The support of the working classes and the young to the left is no longer observable independently of the economic policy preferences and societal values. This may be the result of a better design of the questions on economic policy or cultural values in the 2012 survey, which would have a better explanatory power of the sympathies towards parties than in 1978, or a consequence of the so-called de-alignment or de-structuring of the traditional relationship between social structural determinants and political preferences.²⁸

Turning to the support to the economic policy options, the cleavages, splitting the working classes and the public servants apart from the managers, shopkeepers and private sector high- and medium-skill employees, are more or less unchanged on a certain number of key economic policy issues: pension reform, state intervention against income inequality or the increase in VAT. The working classes appear somewhat less supportive of nationalisations or the extension of the public service than public sector employees, and they are not particularly sensitive to the nuclear energy issue. They do not particularly disapprove the need for hierarchy in society, unlike public servants, or anti-immigration positions. Furthermore, they express negative opinions on the job search effort of the unemployed, similarly to shopkeepers. The same configuration is found on the question about the extension of the power of the EU, shopkeepers and the working classes are opposed to it; managers and high- and medium-skill employees are in favour of it.

The core social base of the right, more limited than that of the left in 1978, appears relatively stable, composed of churchgoers, managers, craftsmen and shopkeepers, high skill private sector employees and individuals with high incomes or wealth levels. They express unsurprising policy preferences: against nationalisations and the extension of the public sector, in favour of the pension reform and a VAT rise, disapproving state's intervention against inequalities; they have negative opinions of the job search effort of the unemployed and consider positively the existence of a hierarchy in society.

²⁸ E.g. Dalton et al. (1984), Dalton (1988), Franklin et al. (1992).

	Opposed to the single employment contract	Pension reform	Against state's interventio n on inequality	Increase VAT	Increase the power of the EU	Nuclear energy
Wealth						
Over 300,000 Euros	-0.207*** (0.077)	0.169** (0.074)		0.279*** (0.078)	0.216*** (0.069)	0.316*** (0.081)
150,000 to 300,000 Euros			0.152** (0.064)	0.150** (0.063)		0.233*** (0.069)
75,000 to 150,000 Euros						0.176** (0.088)
7,000 to 75,000 Euros						0.155** (0.072)
Income						
4 th decile					-0.153** (0.077)	
5 th decile					-0.348*** (0.107)	0.363*** (0.107)
6 th decile		0.181** (0.076)		0.191** (0.079)		0.151** (0.075)
7 th decile				0.378*** (0.108)		
8 th decile		0.192** (0.082)		0.286*** (0.083)		
9 th decile		0.304*** (0.086)		0.295*** (0.088)		0.251*** (0.085)
10 th decile	-0.241** (0.102)	0.459*** (0.102)	0.395*** (0.098)	0.340*** (0.104)		0.285*** (0.098)
Occupation						
Craftsman, shopkeeper		0.274** (0.118)				
Manager		0.660*** (0.220)	0.577** (0.227)	0.650*** (0.216)	0.608*** (0.227)	
High-skill public service					0.425*** (0.098)	-0.400*** (0.100)
High-skill private sector		0.378*** (0.109)	0.433*** (0.113)	0.345*** (0.111)	0.458*** (0.105)	
Medium-skill public	0.377*** (0.093)				0.391*** (0.086)	-0.565*** (0.086)
Medium skill private			0.283** (0.125)	0.265** (0.120)		
Private sector clerk						
Service workers	-0.371*** (0.118)					

Unskilled worker	0.234** (0.107)				
student			0.394*** (0.147)	0.493*** (0.151)	
Unemployed	-0.299*** (0.103)				
Former unemployed	-0.106* (0.054)	-0.131** (0.056)			-0.213*** (0.053)
Retired			0.186*** (0.053)	0.144*** (0.051)	0.241*** (0.054)
Risk of income loss	-0.299*** (0.053)		-0.203*** (0.052)	-0.162*** (0.052)	
Employment risk					
Woman			-0.206*** (0.051)		
<hr/>					
Age					
18 to 24		0.490*** (0.109)			
25 to 34		0.328*** (0.082)			
35 to 44		0.309*** (0.070)			
over 55	-0.390*** (0.055)			0.144*** (0.051)	
Churchgoer	-0.264*** (0.099)	0.410*** (0.089)			0.252*** (0.089)
Lives in a rural area				-0.112** (0.052)	

Table 5. Policy expectations in 2012 (a). Significance levels: *** 1%, ** 5%, * 10%.

	Nationalisations	Increase the number of civil servants	Homosexuals' adoption rights	Unemployed could find a job	No need for hierarchy in society	Not too many immigrants
Income						
2 nd decile				-0.344*** (0.093)		
4th decile						
5 th decile				-0.235** (0.095)		-0.438*** (0.155)
6 th decile	-0.178** (0.082)			-0.418*** (0.135)		
9 th decile	-0.207** (0.092)			-0.234** (0.095)		
10 th decile	-0.438*** (0.101)	-0.405*** (0.091)				
Occupation						
Craftsman, shopkeeper		-0.277** (0.117)		-0.328** (0.145)		
High-skill public service	0.302*** (0.113)	0.433*** (0.101)	-0.788*** (0.132)	0.814*** (0.140)	0.595*** (0.143)	1.008*** (0.125)
High-skill private sector			-0.486*** (0.136)			0.796*** (0.132)
Medium-skill public	0.385*** (0.097)	0.421*** (0.087)	-0.705*** (0.117)	0.509*** (0.112)	0.453*** (0.128)	1.050*** (0.108)
Medium skill private			-0.312** (0.154)			
Foreman, technician						0.532*** (0.131)
Public sector clerk			-0.200* (0.104)			
Private sector clerk			-0.259** (0.107)			
Service workers				-0.371*** (0.137)		
Skilled worker				-0.252** (0.098)		
Unskilled worker				-0.271** (0.120)		
student				0.574*** (0.185)		
Unemployed				0.338*** (0.127)		
Former unemployed	0.127** (0.057)	0.171*** (0.051)		0.247*** (0.067)	0.236*** (0.085)	
Retired			0.354*** (0.080)			-0.220*** (0.084)
Risk of income	-0.120**	-0.139***		0.237***		-0.149**

loss	(0.058)	(0.052)	(0.066)	(0.068)
Employment risk		0.109** (0.052)		
Woman		0.125** (0.050)	-0.284*** (0.067)	
Age				
18 to 24		0.246** (0.101)	-0.726*** (0.142)	0.642*** (0.143) 0.519*** (0.135)
25 to 34			-0.396*** (0.106)	0.321*** (0.106)
35 to 44			-0.433*** (0.093)	0.246*** (0.094)
Churchgoer		-0.291*** (0.088)	0.706*** (0.117)	-0.378** (0.178)
Lives in a rural area		-0.126** (0.052)	-0.173*** (0.064)	-0.195*** (0.068)

Table 6. Policy expectations in 1978 (a). Significance levels: *** 1%, ** 5%, * 10%.

To sum up, a large part of the traditional economic policy opposition between the left and the right is still very much present in 2012. A few issues have led to divides that cross-cut the traditional opposition between the social bases of the left and the right: the right for homosexual couples to adopt children, the attitude towards immigration and European integration. One observes on these issues a divide based on occupation and income that unites the high-skilled and affluent fractions of the left and right social bases to their more popular fractions. However, some cultural issues lead to divides which parallel the left-right opposition on economic policy.

5. Interpreting the political crisis

These results shed some light on the difficulties experienced by the successive left and right government coalitions over the past four decades. Following a popular line of argument at the time, the victory of the left in 1981 was interpreted by its central actor, François Mitterrand, in the following terms: the political majority had caught up with the sociological majority. The interpretation was that the 5th Republic had been inhabited by an increasing tension between economic modernisation and archaic political and social structures (Gauron 1983). Started after the Second World War, the rapid transformation of a still largely rural society into an industrial and urban capitalism called for a social-democratic evolution which the 5th republic had for the most part tried to prevent, particularly after 1970, when the conservative forces increasingly turned towards a neoliberal and authoritarian conception of society (Gauron 1988). The contradictions between on the one hand an economic modernisation movement which deeply altered the social structure and the power relations between social groups, and on the other hand conservative forces which prevented a social and political evolution which would hurt their interests and clash with their values had given bursts of tension such as May 1968 and fuelled social conflict and an intense political opposition between the right and left during the 1970s.

But this contradiction was not the exclusive of the right, it was common to all the “modernists”, from the left or the right. Gauron (1983) defines “modernism” as a particular form of ideology adopted by a generation that had refused the defeat of 1940 and was opposed to both economic “Malthusianism” and the risk of a communist domination. The modernists tried in the post-War period to adapt the economic structure of France to the modern evolution of capitalism, including an opening to the world competition and a rapid industrialisation, but refused at the same time at least all the social and political consequences of this modernisation since it would have given the working classes, and in particular their main political party the PCF, a role that they were not

prepared to admit. The most that modernists would accept in that direction was “social dialogue”, i.e. negotiation within certain intangible economic and power structures. The figurehead of modernism was Pierre Mendès-France, whose influence on the French political life, both on the left and on the right, extended far beyond his brief stint as a President of the Council of Ministers for a few months in 1954-55, a period during which he refused to accept the support of the communist deputies. The political isolation of the PCF, condemned to stay outside of any governing coalition was considered by François Mitterrand as the main reason for the political instability of the 4th Republic and the impossibility for the left to govern durably.²⁹

The contradiction between the evolution of the economic and social structures promoted by the modernists and the refusal of some of the most significant social and political consequences explains the failure of the left modernisation led by Pierre Mendès-France during the 4th Republic (Gauron 1983). The intensification of this contradiction during the 5th Republic explains the failure of the right in 1981. The strategy of a political alliance between the PS and the PCF, adopted during the 1970s, was the recognition that a modernisation project excluding the working classes would be a dead end. The victory of the left in 1981 was therefore seen as a much delayed alignment of the social and political realities to the unavoidable consequences of the evolution of capitalism.

This diagnostic of a match between the sociological and political majorities had, according to Lipietz (1984) for instance, the consequence to lead the left to believe that the problem of its social base was already solved, neglecting the tensions within the left bloc between on the one hand the expectations of a state-controlled economy protecting existing jobs, and on the other hand the demands for autonomy and an alternative mode of development. However, the findings exposed in the previous section show that these tensions were not dominant in 1978. The left social bloc was relatively compact around the working classes and the public sector employees, with expectations of a “traditional” left policy. In the late 1970s, the social base of the left had strong expectations of an economic program based on the extension of social protection and a greater control of the economy by the state as well as a macroeconomic policy favouring the growth of employment and real wage for the majority of the wage-earners. The left parties were, until 1982-1983, quite radical in their principles. The PS still kept the break-up with capitalism as one of its aims in its 1980 manifesto and advocated in October 1981 (i.e. *after* the electoral victories of May and June) a gradual break-up with the dominant order (Beaud 1985).

The change in focus of the economic policy of the left government initiated after June 1982 was followed by the more brutal U-turn of March 1983, which marked the adoption of an austerity policy, tagged “rigour” in order to conceal the proximity of the new economic policy stance with that of the preceding right government. The choice was thus made to adopt an economic policy radically at odds with the expectations of the bulk of the social base of the government parties. Attributing the failure of the Keynesian policy followed in 1981 to the lack of external competitiveness of the French productive system, the left governments chose to focus on the supply side in order to “modernise” the economy. Growth and employment would come from a restored competitiveness obtained through private investment. This called for a compromise with the business sector through a rehabilitation of the social role of the “entrepreneur”. The *désinflation compétitive* (competitive disinflation) policy implied that the real wage increase expected by a large fraction of the wage-earners had to be postponed until the return of foreign competitiveness. The latter was to be the outcome of a massive investment effort made by firms, both private and public, which implied significant wage moderation in order to increase profit margins. The change was sudden and the real wage of the working classes, after having strongly increased in 1981, slowed down in 1982 and dropped in 1983 (Beaud 1985). The same applied to the retired and the unemployed. The decrease in inflation and the improved economic situation enabled more substantial real wage increases after the mid-1980s (Figure 7), but the broad supply-side policy orientation was confirmed when the left

²⁹ Mitterrand (2010) p.29.

came back to power in 1988 and, to a lesser extent thanks to a more favourable world growth context, in 1997. Considering the expectations of a sizeable part of the left social base, staying in power while keeping such an economic policy in the long term would imply for the PS and the mainstream left in general to search for an alternative social support.

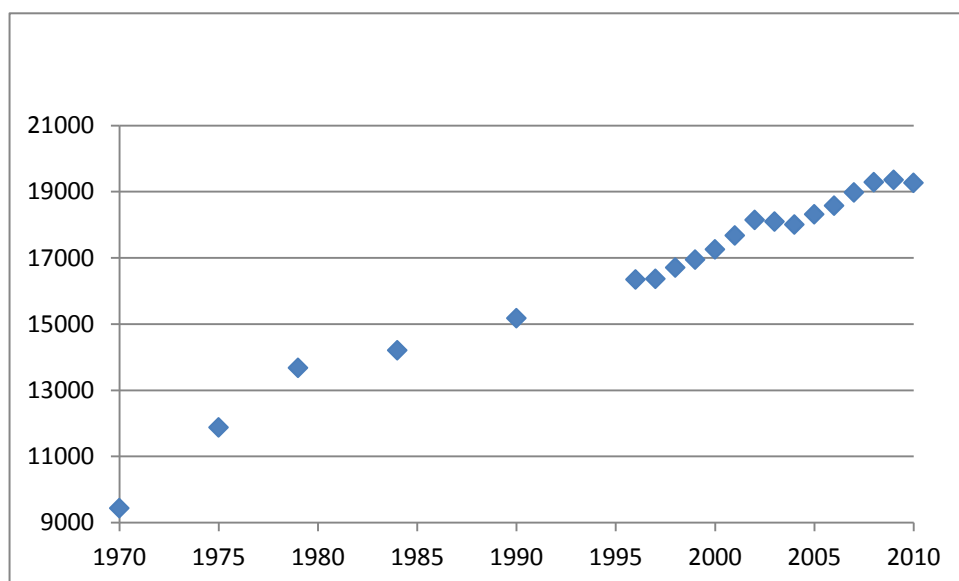


Figure 7. Median individual annual standard of living in 2010 Euros. Data source: INSEE

Furthermore, the U-turn of 1983 did not simply mean that the objective of a gradual break-up with capitalism was discarded; it represented a choice of certain structural reforms which defined a particular type of capitalism. The right's project for the French economy can be broadly defined as neoliberal since the late 1970s.³⁰ But the model of capitalism of France, at least until the 2000s, was a continental European model (Amable 2003), whose main characteristics in terms of social protection, regulation of the labour market and involvement of the state in the economy, had been strengthened by the first measures taken by left government of 1981. This corresponded to the expectations of the social base of the left. But the following left governments implemented structural reforms, particularly in the financial system and product market regulation, which weakened some of the main characteristics of the model and the associated institutional complementarities (Amable 2003, 2009, Tiberghien 2007, Amable et al. 2012a). In particular, they never questioned the privatisations launched by the right government of 1986-1988; the Jospin government (1997-2002) even privatised more companies than any previous right government. This was bound to antagonise again the social groups supporting the left, but the PS-led governments preserved, at least until 2012, the institutions that were central to the post-war social compromise and crucial for the stabilisation of their social base: social protection and the employment relationship (Amable et al. 2012b).

The right governments (1986-1988, 1993-1997, 2002-2012) were no more successful than the left in finding a stable social support. The failure of the radical neoliberal policy implemented in 1986 could be explained by the narrowness of the social base for such a project. If the issue of nationalisations roughly split the electorate in two halves in 1978,³¹ other issues, such as labour market flexibility, indicated that there did not exist a political majority for a radical neoliberal turn. In 1978, only 20% of the respondents were opposed to prohibiting layoffs unless alternative jobs were found. This explains why the privatisation programs launched by the right in 1986 and pursued by all following governments never met the type of social protest that structural reforms, particularly

³⁰ Neoliberalism should not be mistaken for *laissez faire* and involves a significant involvement of the state, albeit in order to preserve a competitive market order (Amable 2011).

³¹ 39% of the respondents were in favour of the extension of the nationalized sector, 45% against it.

regarding labour market deregulation or social protection, met under the Chirac (students, rail workers), Balladur (CIP), Juppé (social protection reform) and Villepin (CNE, CPE) governments. Reforming these areas corresponded to the expectations of a fraction of the traditional social base of the right (managers, shopkeepers, high-skill private sector employees), but was considered with some apprehension by the more moderate fraction of this base (medium-skill employees and clerks of the private sector) and led to a strong opposition from the categories affected by the various reforms (most notably the young).

The right tried to reconcile two contradictory objectives with limited success: (i) implement radical structural reforms to satisfy the neoliberal core of its social base, and (ii) preserve the bulk of the French social model to appease the fears of the more moderate fraction of that base (Amable et al. 2012b). Also, the emergence of the FN during the 1980s and 1990s signalled the rise of the immigration issue in the political debate, which represented a new divide for the social base of the right: the more educated fraction did not express so strongly the anti-immigration feelings that the less affluent part of that base entertained. After the alleged immobility of the second Chirac presidency (2002-2007), the 2007-2012 Sarkozy presidency represented an attempt to find a compromise between the diverging expectations of the right social base: (i) a neoliberal breakup implying an increase in labour market flexibility while (ii) maintaining part of the social system, (iii) some elements of anti-immigration policy, and (iv) an attempt to improve the standard of living of the working classes, neglected by the mainstream left, through a tax cut on extra-hours. In fact, the attempt to soothe the contradictions within the right social base was acknowledged in the slogan of Sarkozy's 2012 presidential campaign: *la rupture tranquille* (the easy-going break-up).

6. The perpetual return of the “modernist” project

Tensions inhabiting the social bloc of the right stem from the contradictions between economic structural change and its social consequences. Before 1981, the most conservative part of the right's social base resisted the social implications of the modernisation of the French model of capitalism. Right governments managed until that date to find a meditation between the desire for stability of social relationships expressed by the most traditional part of its social base with the expectation of economic modernisation coming from the most successful social groups. The solution of the problem was expressed in Giscard d'Estaing's slogan for the 1974 Presidential campaign: *le changement sans le risque* (change without risk). That solution prevailed politically for 23 years (1958-1981), in spite of sometimes intense social contestation.

A similar problem, leading to different tensions, was present after 1986. Structural change was still implying risks, but of a different kind. Economic modernisation took the form of neoliberal reforms, and the new implied risks were borne by the bulk of the wage-earners. A new type of mediation, associating structural reforms with the preservation of the most significant aspects of the French social model, had to be found, as exemplified by Sarkozy's attempts to find a French-style flexicurity (Amable et al. 2012b) instead of the simple labour market flexibility promoted by the Chirac government in 1986. However, partly because the Great Recession severely reduced the possibilities for implementing that type of solutions, the search for such mediation was not successful.

The strategy of the left was different and is reminiscent of the “modernist” project of the “non communist” left during the 4th Republic. The strong contradiction between the expectations of the left bloc and the economic policy followed by left governments had led the PS to envisage very early on a change in the social coalitions and political alliances that could support the type of government policy that they considered feasible. The figurehead of this option in the 1980s was Jacques Delors, who can without any doubts be considered as a modernist, who had been social affairs advisor to Prime Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas under the de Gaulle presidency in the 1960s, Minister of finance between 1981 and 1984 under the Mitterrand presidency and would

become President of the European Commission between 1985 and 1995, at the time of the completion of the single market and monetary unification. His views on the economic policy of the left were exposed in a book (Alexandre and Delors 1985) published shortly after he left the government and before he joined the European Commission, at a time when he could '*speak his mind*' without taking care of '*tactics, precautions or imperatives of opportunity*' (p.221). The book is a violent charge against the economic policy options favoured by *programme commun*, nationalisations in particular,³² but also the macroeconomic policy or more generally state intervention in the economy. It even takes on board part of the neo-conservative rhetoric against the welfare state, stating that the first effect of the protection granted by modern societies to their citizens is to weaken them. The 'burden' of social protection is presented as inhibiting risk taking and innovation, and unemployment benefits would be '*nothing less than a powerful disincentive to work*' (p.56). The book bemoans the '*civil wars*' and the '*centrist void*' that make France the victim of extremism: communism on the left and populism on the right. It advocates a management of the economy away from wildcat liberalism and socialism, a '*historical compromise*' that would guarantee soft transitions between '*the wise of each side*' (p.28).

However, the book also stated that such an economic compromise had not found its social and political expression. The same diagnostic would be made in 1995, when Delors renounced to take part in the presidential campaign because he had no hope of finding the political majority necessary to support the economic policy he wanted to implement. The centre parties were allied to the right since the beginning of the 5th Republic, and the PS was not ready to relinquish its electoral alliance with the PCF. A previous attempt to reshuffle the party alliances had taken place after the debacles at the 1993 (legislative) and 1994 (European) elections, when ex-Prime Minister Michel Rocard³³ called for a "big bang" that would break up the divide between the left and the right, without any effect. All subsequent attempts to question the left-right divide have been limited to a handful of left (right) individuals participating in a right (left) government.

However, lack of success of the break-up of the left-right divide did not mean that the option was dropped from the agenda of the mainstream left or that the problem of finding a stable social base was ignored. In 1999, Lionel Jospin had mentioned the possibility of finding a rather fuzzy "new alliance" between the working and middle classes and the "outsiders" (Rey 2004). More realistically, the middle classes have become the core support of the PS, and a new definition of the social base would imply to rely on the fraction of the left base less concerned with structural reforms or supply side-oriented macroeconomic policy and aggregate the elements of the social base of the right that would be likely to support such policies. In the political context of the early 2010s, such an option would require a political alliance between the PS and at least parts of EELV, MoDem and possibly the moderate fraction of UMP. More importantly, a viable strategy would demand a social base united by common expectations. Such expectations should not be characteristic of the left-right divide.

The consideration of the results of Tables 4 to 6 give some indications on the type of political demands that the new political alliance could address. A certain number of issues favour the emergence of a *bloc bourgeois* (Amable et al. 2012b, Amable & Palombarini 2014), i.e. a social coalition of the educated upper and middle classes. The first of these issues is that of European integration. It is a significant determinant of the sympathy for EELV, the PS and MoDem. Further European integration is supported by educated and affluent groups, which do not support a radical left economic policy, which is also the case of the bulk of the supporters of EELV and even more so for the MoDem. The European integration issue is a powerful factor of division for the left, as has been shown at the time of the 2005 referendum on the European constitutional treaty, but also for the right. European integration promotes an economic model which is compatible with the pro-

³² Delors, like Michel Rocard, were opposed to a 100% participation of the state in nationalized firms. They preferred a 51% participation.

³³ Figurehead of the "second left", hostile to the communist party, Michel Rocard always considered himself as the political heir of Pierre Mendès-France.

market and pro-globalisation options chosen by the mainstream left – free trade, free mobility of capital, wage moderation, orthodox monetary policy, “sound” public finance, labour market flexibility – while at the same time preserving a certain degree of social protection (the European social model, an “active” welfare state, etc.), at least in theory.

When one looks at the expectations regarding economic policy, the sympathy towards EELV comes from individuals favourable to public spending, but less favourable to redistribution and not so hostile to the pension reform. In this respect, the potential social base of the ecologists is closer to that of the Centre (MoDem) than that of the radical left or even the PS. The ecologists’ support is found among citizens culturally progressive but only partly supporting left economic policies. Sympathisers of the MoDem are close to those of the PS regarding cultural values and hold centrist or conservative positions on economic policy expectations. The increase in the power of the EU is relatively supported by individuals with high wealth levels, managers and high-skill employees of the private and public sectors as well as students, medium-skill public servants and the retired. A very similar support can be found for the proposition to increase the VAT. The opposition to such measures gathers the broad low income groups. There may therefore exist a skill- or income-based social alliance that would support only part of the right’s economic policy propositions (pension reform, VAT...) or share some of the left societal values (homosexuals’ rights, attitude towards immigrants...) and be united on issues such as European integration against other social groups more inclined to support the radical left or right. One finds thus a possible policy line for the *bloc bourgeois* with European integration as its main element, involving possible structural reforms (cf. the appreciation of the pension reform) or labour market flexibilisation, while keeping a moderate degree of income redistribution or social protection.

The necessity to find such a social coalition was “theorised” by an influential think tank close to the PS during the 2012 Presidential campaign (Terra Nova 2011). They identified sociological reasons for the decline of social democracy, the main one being the decline of the working class.³⁴ The latter is described as culturally conservative, when not outright xenophobic, and clinging to allegedly outdated economic beliefs in a left economic policy based on income equality and social protection: *‘the model of society supported by social democracy – the social market economy, around the construction of the welfare state – is as such no longer compatible with the new globalised world’* (p.6). Therefore, the mainstream left should give up *‘the historical coalition of the left...uniting the popular classes (workers, clerks) and the lower middle classes’* (p.52) and look for a new social base, ‘France of tomorrow’, with ‘progressive’ cultural values and an ‘outsider’ socio-economic status (young graduates, women, minorities). The extension of this somewhat narrow “outsider” base, taken to welcome labour market flexibility, which is questionable in the light of the results of Table 5,³⁵ should be made in the direction of the educated middle classes, which would share cultural values with the left. This would imply to drop social and economic propositions too characteristic of the left (*‘a strong and protective state, public services, social protection’* p.12) and focus on a narrative based on cultural values.

The policy implemented by the Ayrault government in the first two years after the election of François Hollande in 2012 confirms this broad orientation (Amable and Palombarini 2014). The economic policy took an employer-friendly direction; the main objective being to encourage private investment in order to build new productive capacities and restore competitiveness, elements taken to be necessary conditions for employment growth. The parallel with the economic policy stance of the PS-led governments in the 1980s, after the U-turn, is striking. The supply-side orientation of the economic policy was confirmed by François Hollande himself, who endorsed Say’s law – supply creates its own demand – in a press conference in February 2014, thereby putting to rest any hopes for a Keynesian policy during his mandate. At the same time, the most significantly left-oriented

³⁴ This decline seems to be grossly exaggerated however. Workers still represented 22% of the employed workforce in 2009 (29% in 1982). (Data from *Enquêtes emploi*, INSEE)

³⁵ See also Amable (2013).

policy measure taken was to grant homosexual couples the possibility to be married. The policy options of the Hollande presidency are therefore culturally progressive and economically orthodox.

Terra Nova (2011)'s prescriptions about the neglect of the working classes were followed by François Hollande. One of the first industrial problem he had to solve with was the future of the Mittal Steel plant in Florange. During the campaign, Hollande had vowed not to follow the footsteps of Nicolas Sarkozy, who had reneged on his 2007 campaign promise to have Mittal Steel keep the Gandrange plant operating.³⁶ Faced with the prospect of a closure of the Florange site, an alternative solution, favoured by the left of the PS, was to nationalise the plant. Hollande never believed in this solution, nor did he in the future of the Florange site. He rejected the alternative solution, promoted by his Minister for industrial recovery, and let Mittal Steel mothball the blast furnaces. When a journalist pointed out to him that such a decision could entail significant electoral costs, Hollande's answer was simply: '*among blue-collar workers, yes, but it does not matter*'. (Amar 1994 p.65).

The possible constitution of a *bloc bourgeois* as a dominant social coalition raises the question of the potential opposition to such a bloc. On the political side, both the radical left and the radical right would be kept out of government coalitions. One can hardly find common elements among their respective social bases in Tables 4 to 6. Lack of support to radical opposition to European integration is the only possible common element among supporters of the radical left and right. But no cultural and economic policy preferences are common to supporters of the radical left and the radical right. The former are characterised by expectations of a left-oriented economic policy and culturally progressive values.³⁷ The latter express opposite preferences. Therefore, these results confirm Mayer (2011)'s finding that there is no "horseshoe" representation of the political space whereby "extremes" would somehow meet. If the FN can indeed draw the support of some fractions of the popular classes, the social orientation of the economic program of the FN seems to matter little in this phenomenon. The appeal to economically conservative positions on the tax system or the size of public intervention has a more significant influence. The fraction of the popular electorate having some sympathy for the FN is therefore characterised by conservative inclinations both in the societal and economic dimensions.

Nevertheless, the U-turn in the economic policy stance of the FN, from ultra liberalism to a defence of social protection, could be interpreted as a long-term search for mediation in order to unite a social groups kept outside of the *bloc bourgeois*, toning down the culturally conservative elements of the manifesto, which are taken for granted by the core social base of the FN anyway, and emphasising elements likely to win over social groups for which the economic dimension matters significantly. A successful mediation, if it can be found, would not imply a blatantly infeasible *political* alliance between the radical right and the radical left, but would more probably involve the FN attempting to become the dominant political party representing the social groups excluded from the *bloc bourgeois*.

7. Conclusion

The enduring French political crisis has been interpreted as the expression of contradictions between the economic policies implemented by the successive governments and the existence of a dominant social bloc, i.e. a coalition of social groups that would politically support the dominant political strategy. Since 1978, both the right and the left have failed to find a solution to the contradictions between the policies they implemented and the expectations of their social bases,

³⁶ The plant was closed shortly after Sarkozy's election.

³⁷ One may draw a parallel with Germany. Bowyer and Vail (2011) show that supporters of the radical left party *die Linke* are not simply 'the losers' from economic modernisation but citizens sharing similar beliefs regarding economic policy.

which are themselves inhabited by tensions and contradictions that evolve with the structure of French capitalism.

Under the Hollande presidency, the mainstream left seems to have chosen a possibility that has been considered for at least three decades: a renewal of their social base, implying in due course a change in political alliances. The corresponding dominant social bloc, the *bloc bourgeois*, would be based on skilled middle and higher classes, and would express culturally progressive values and expect social-liberal economic policies. The mainstream left would not aim to represent the interests of the working classes, taken to be culturally regressive and expressing economic policy demands that would be outdated or impossible to satisfy in the context of a globalised economy.

This option is not radically new. It corresponds to a strategy followed by the “modernists” in the post-War period, described in the following way in Gauron (1988): *‘the modernists have remained “mendelist” in their refusal to take into consideration the communist votes, that is in the end to take into account the expectations of the working class. They imagined their own “modern” wage-earning class, made of technicians, high-skilled, service sector employees, white collars; they gave themselves new social, feminist, autonomist, ecologist movements... that mobilise this “modern” wage-earning class. The working class and its world remain alien to them’* (p.288, our translation).

Gauron (1988) considered that the success of the left governments would be conditioned on the removal of two obstacles: (i) a strong communist party, which scared the more moderate part of the possible extended social base of the left, and (ii) the modernists’ exclusion of a fraction of the wage-earners (the working classes) from the benefits of the reforms. Removing both obstacles implied a PS strongly anchored to the left. However, the removal of the first obstacle seems to have consolidated the second one, and left the “modernist” strategy as the easiest option to follow for the PS, in a context where policies that would correspond to the expectations of the traditional left bloc have been made increasingly difficult to implement within the constraints defined by European integration and several decades of liberalisation, two structural constraints that the action of PS-led governments has either favoured or not hindered very much. However, the political solution of the *bloc bourgeois* is no guarantee that the contradictions between the social consequences of “modernisation” and the chosen political strategy are solved. This problem doomed the first attempts of the modernists.

The right seems to have a problem resembling that of the left during the 4th Republic and face itself the same two obstacles mentioned by Gauron (1988), with the FN replacing the PCF. The findings of the empirical analysis performed in this paper would tend to indicate that a strategy analogous to that of François Mitterrand for the left, a union of the rights, would meet its social base provided an adequate mediation could be found. This would, on the basis of the results exposed above, be possible considering the relative proximity in the cultural values and economic policy expectations of the respective supporters of the FN and the mainstream right. However, as shown by the failure of Sarkozy, the Great Recession and its aftermath as well as the evolution of French capitalism, in a slow transition from a continental European to a neoliberal model, make such a mediation increasingly difficult to find. On the other hand, the same evolutions, by intensifying the difficulties of the popular classes, could facilitate the emergence of a bloc of outsiders to the *bloc bourgeois*.

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