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France: The National Front's Impact on the Political System



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An Intelligence Assessment

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*EUR 85-10149
September 1985*

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An Intelligence Assessment

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This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office of European Analysis, with contributions from [redacted]

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 1 September 1985
was used in this report.*

Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, which dominates the extreme right of the political spectrum, has capitalized on rising popular dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties to leap into prominence just as French politics is entering a period of uncertainty:

- Public opinion polls and voting patterns indicate that the traditional dichotomy between left and right is breaking down.
- The Socialists seem certain to lose their majority in next spring's national elections, leaving the President (whose mandate extends to 1988) at odds with the legislature for the first time under the Fifth Republic.
- A new electoral law that will distribute parliamentary seats in proportion to votes received has produced uncertainty about how voting support will be translated into legislative strength.

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Le Pen, focusing heavily on emotional issues like immigration and law and order, has played on popular discontent and cleverly exploited the media to gain attention. To date, this has resulted in more press coverage than real power, but next spring the new electoral law will almost certainly allow the National Front to enter Parliament for the first time, giving Le Pen control over some 20 to 30 seats.

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We believe, however, that popular support for the National Front—currently about 10 percent—has peaked. The party faces several problems that will limit its support among the electorate:

- Its program is a simplistic and ineffective response to the central issue in the election—France's very real economic problems.
- Public opinion is not sympathetic to the party's views; judging by opinion polls, much of its support comes from protest votes, which are likely to move to one of the major opposition parties in an important national election.
- The party has failed to recruit experienced and popular leaders.
- The mainstream parties of the center and right are determined to gain and exercise power without the National Front, if possible.

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The National Front's importance will ultimately depend on the relative strength of the major parties:

- If—as we believe likely—the centrists and the rightwing neo-Gaullists win a clear majority of the votes in 1986, the National Front will remain only a marginal irritant.


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- On the other hand, if the mainstream opposition falls short of a working majority, it would be forced to choose between striking a deal with the Socialists or the National Front. If the centrists and neo-Gaullists opt for Le Pen—and we think there is a fair chance they would try—we believe he will strike a hard bargain. In our view, Le Pen's chauvinistic concentration on domestic matters might sidetrack the more cooperative attitude toward Atlantic affairs that has developed in France in recent years. 

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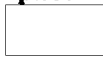
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**France:
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on the Political System**



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Introduction

The recent surge in support for rightist demagogue Jean-Marie Le Pen and his National Front could allow the extreme right to play a significant role in French politics for the first time since Gen. Charles de Gaulle launched the Fifth Republic in 1958. The rise of a far rightist party that can claim some 10 percent of the vote in national elections coincides with shifts in public opinion that are undermining the longstanding political structure based on four major parties—two on the left and two on the right. National Front fortunes have been further boosted by a new electoral law that will distribute seats within constituencies in proportion to each party's vote—a probable ticket into Parliament for the National Front, which has been kept out for nearly three decades by the old winner-take-all electoral system. These alterations in the French political framework are taking place as the country prepares for a legislative election next spring that is likely to usher in a political crisis: the Socialists will almost certainly lose control of Parliament, leaving France—for the first time under the strongly presidential Fifth Republic—with a president from a different party than the legislative majority. Amid the tensions that probably will prevail in the postelections period, Le Pen may be able to use the 20 to 30 deputies he is likely to have in Parliament to wield a disproportionate amount of influence.

straighten out the economy, and protect purchasing power. Social concerns and worries about personal safety were further down the list; international issues rated even lower. There has been some improvement in the gloomy polling results in 1985; but a sense of malaise remains, and we believe it will continue to breed support for extremist groups like the National Front during the runup to the 1986 election.

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At the same time, many French doubt that traditional leaders and political parties are capable of coping with the crisis:

- A June 1985 poll indicated that 53 percent of the population think the government is not very competent.
- Mitterrand's approval ratings are bumping along at record lows between 35 and 40 percent.
- In a December 1984 poll, 62 percent of the respondents said that politicians were not concerned with the truly important issues, and 82 percent said they thought politicians were liars.
- When asked, in a 1983 survey, which party was best at handling the issues, one-third of the sample had no opinion.

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One result of this disillusionment with politicians has been a slow drift away from the confrontation between left and right that has long characterized French politics:

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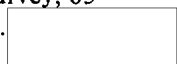
The Political Mood

The rise of the National Front owes much to recent shifts in the political mood. Results of public opinion polls over the last two years show that voters are deeply troubled by the failure of the Mitterrand government to deal with France's economic and social problems—a radical change from the euphoric early months of Socialist rule. Although the percentage of Frenchmen expressing a pessimistic view about the future shifts up and down from month to month, the average for the year was 58 percent in 1983 and rose to 66 percent in 1984. Concern about economic problems is particularly acute. When questioned in the autumn of 1984, a sample of the public said the government's top priorities should be to create jobs,

- In early 1985, only 37 percent of the public thought the distinction between left and right was meaningful (down from 43 percent in 1981), and 27 percent did not consider themselves to be either left or right in their political sentiments (up from 20 percent as recently as 1983).

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- Of those questioned in a September 1984 survey, 65 percent wanted less confrontational politics.



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Rise of the National Front

After 11 years of obscurity, the National Front leapt into prominence in 1983 by winning between 9 and 17 percent of the vote in a series of municipal elections. This support was considerably more than candidates from the extreme right had received during the last 30 years. In June 1984 the party won 11 percent of the vote in the European Parliament election, and in March of this year they scored 9 percent in nationwide local contests. The increased strength of the far right was strategically important because it often provided the margin to defeat a leftist incumbent. Le Pen's party did well by carefully selecting the areas where it would present candidates and stressing the

issues of immigration and crime that are more important in local elections than in national contests. For the established rightist parties the message seemed clear: if they wanted to tighten their grip on a majority vote, they would have to take the National Front into account. This electoral success has largely been the result of a favorable conjunction of circumstances, but it also draws strength from Le Pen's personal abilities and from longstanding historical conditions.

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Le Pen's Political Skills. Probably the most decisive reason for the National Front success, in our view, has been Le Pen's ability to recognize and play upon popular fears, frustrations, and doubts. After 30 years as a minor player in the intrigues and schisms of politics on the extremist fringe, by a lucky coincidence Le Pen was able to establish himself as the predominant leader of the far right just as the Socialists were stumbling. Le Pen has also been able to capitalize on the voters' weariness with the same old faces. All of the major leaders—Mitterrand (Socialist), Georges Marchais (Communist), Valery Giscard d'Estaing and Raymond Barre (Union for French Democracy—UDF), and Jacques Chirac (Rally for the Republic—RPR)—have been prominent for a decade or more. As

the polling data shows, many voters feel that the politicians of all of the mainstream parties have failed to solve the country's problems. Le Pen has picked up on this dissatisfaction with the traditional parties and takes time off from flaying the left to lambaste the UDF and RPR for not being forceful enough in challenging the Socialists.

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Although many of Le Pen's views invite comparison with the Nazis, he has been skillful and shrewd, in our view, about making them palatable to French public opinion. Because he carefully avoids being specific

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about his extremist positions, press commentary is left to focus on the divisive and authoritarian implications of his statements. Earlier this year, for example, in fulminating against the Socialists' desire to grant independence to New Caledonia, he maintained that "a free nation cannot exist without geopolitical living space." Rival politicians who are Jewish, such as

Robert Badinter from the Socialist Party and Simone Veil from the UDF, are special targets of his ire, but Le Pen is too wily to attack them openly for being Jewish. When his supporters express themselves in

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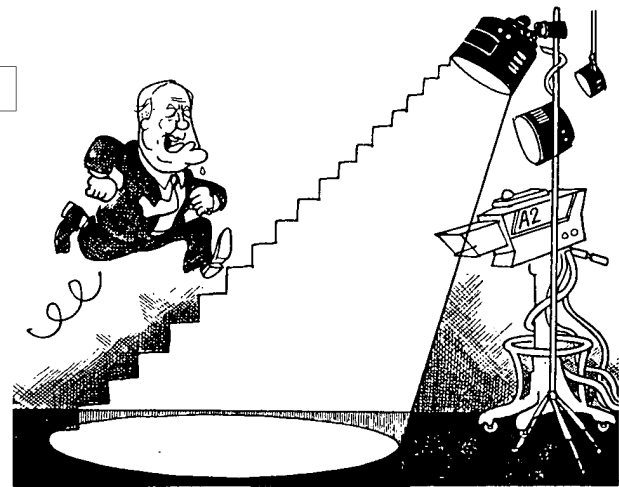
letters to newspapers or answers to telephone surveys, however, they are much less restrained. Le Pen may be cautious, but his supporters clearly have no trouble reading between the lines of his speeches. [redacted]

Le Pen probably has helped to vulgarize political debate in France, but he has not crossed the line between rhetoric and advocating the use of force. Although he stirs strong emotions, he is careful to avoid openly inciting his followers to violence. The disturbances that often disrupt the party's meetings, according to press accounts, are usually triggered by leftwing protesters. He insists he does not want to destroy the democratic system, but instead seeks to work within it. [redacted]

Le Pen and the Media. In our view, Le Pen's skill at exploiting the media has been an important factor in his successful bid for attention. Indeed, in many ways he is more prominent as a television and newspaper phenomenon than as a political force. Despite the extensive media coverage, his party still holds only a handful of posts. Ten seats in the European Parliament bring little power, and the old winner-take-all voting system left the National Front with only one victory in the 2,000 local contests earlier this year, despite winning 9 percent of the vote. [redacted]

In covering him, journalists have been torn between their attraction to a new and striking story and their concern about what he represents and what his rise might mean for the French political system. Except for the papers and magazines owned by rightwing press baron Robert Hersant, the media generally handle Le Pen with a mixture of suspicion and alarm. Few journalists sympathize with his views, and the broadcast networks are controlled by the Socialist government. During the runup to the local elections in March, for example, each day seemed to bring a more sensational story:

- One of the new members of the National Front's delegation to the European Parliament, Gustav Pordea, was accused of being an agent for Romanian intelligence.
- Several Algerians revived accusations about torture sessions carried out or ordered by Le Pen during the war for Algerian independence.



Le Pen exploits the media [redacted]

- Le Pen's wife cast doubt on his carefully cultivated image as a family man by revealing that she had left him because he kept her in virtual seclusion and claimed that she fears for her personal safety. [redacted]

In sum, the media attention to Le Pen has been something of a two-edged sword. Many voters are undoubtedly appalled by both his behavior and his views—his hard-hitting style does not conform to the dignified and aloof manner that the French have come to associate with leadership since the days of General de Gaulle. On the other hand, Le Pen has on occasion profited handsomely from being in the spotlight. During his first major television interview in February 1984, for example, he stunned the audience by observing a moment of silence during the broadcast for the victims of the Soviet gulag. After the program, his approval rating in the polls jumped from 9 percent to 16 percent. Even the accusations of torture may have improved his standing with those who resent the presence of so many Arabs in France. [redacted]

Le Pen has worked hard for his success. He has also benefited from historical forces and from a number of political and economic developments that were outside of his control. [redacted]

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A Traditional Constituency on the Far Right. Ever since the revolution of 1789, there have been groups whose extreme nationalism has usually kept them out of the mainstream of political developments. From time to time, however, they have played a significant role. Napoleon established a tradition of leadership based on authority and national grandeur. In the years that followed, others sought to model themselves on him and lauded an idealized France, while condemning bureaucrats and politicians for besmirching their country. Their affection for tradition and order found a resonance among the broader public in times of rapid social and economic change, such as the period after the French defeat in 1940 when the Vichy government took over and during the turbulent last months of the Fourth Republic when the Poujadist movement rose to prominence. Usually, however, these extremist movements have been short lived and have made little lasting impact. Poujadist candidates—including Le Pen—polled over 11 percent of the vote in 1956 and got 52 seats, but two years later they dropped below 1 percent and disappeared from Parliament. Le Pen himself received less than 1 percent of the vote in the 1974 presidential elections, and in 1981 he was not even able to round up the 500 signatures of public officials required to qualify as a candidate. [redacted]

We believe that the decline of the old smokestack industries and the Socialists' efforts to encourage a transformation to an economy based more on services and high technology have created the kind of social and economic uncertainty that is fertile ground for a revival of the far right. Traditional terms of reference and expectations are becoming irrelevant. Industries such as steel and automobiles are a drain on resources rather than a source of jobs and pride. Unemployment rises and purchasing power falls regardless of whether the government in power is of the left or of the right. Government intervention, once the engine of growth and modernization, now appears to hinder progress. Mitterrand's policy of accepting short-term austerity as the price for a better foundation for long-term growth has not yet proved itself convincingly to the public. The result, as the polling data shows, is that political loyalties have weakened and many people are looking for new policy alternatives. [redacted]

The Protest Vote. There is also a tradition in France of casting a ballot for an opposition party—without necessarily agreeing with its ideology—as a protest against indifferent government. Before 1981 the Communists drew a large number of these votes, but, when they joined the leftwing governing coalition in 1981, protest voters had to seek another outlet. Exit polls taken after the June 1984 European elections revealed that the second most important reason people gave for voting for the National Front—after concern about the number of immigrants—was to demonstrate opposition to the leftist government. With the Communists back in the opposition, the National Front will have some competition for the protest vote, but they will still benefit from it because—unlike the Communists—they have never supported the Socialists' controversial program of economic austerity, which has disillusioned so many leftist voters. [redacted]

Opposition to Leftist Policies. We believe the National Front has also benefited from widespread disenchantment with the left. In 1981 the Socialists were swept into power on a wave of enthusiasm for new ideas and different leadership, even though many of the voters were not committed to every aspect of the leftwing program. After a heady year of attempted reforms, Mitterrand realized the costs were becoming excessive and retrenched. The government's decision to pursue structural modernization, even though this meant reining in living standards and accepting rising unemployment, alienated many voters. Some leftists thought he had backtracked too far, while most rightists still felt he had not gone far enough. After 1982 a large pool of voters rejected the government's policies—in an August 1983 survey, 53 percent of those responding thought the government's policy was wrong and was only aggravating the situation—and were looking for an alternative. The Communists withdrew from the governing coalition to try to dissociate themselves from the austerity policy; on the right Le Pen sought to draw disgruntled voters by outdistancing the mainstream opposition in criticizing the government. [redacted]

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Anatomy of the National Front

The Party's Program. Despite its success since 1983, so far the National Front, in our opinion, has presented neither a well-articulated ideology nor a detailed plan for governing France. Instead, Le Pen has endorsed broad concepts such as order, authority, and patriotism and presented himself as a man who speaks frankly about what is really troubling the average Frenchman. Thoughtful, nonpartisan commentators in France, like the academic expert on rightwing politics Rene Remond, think the problem with the party's platform is not that it is racist or fascist, but that it is too simplistic to be effective against the real challenges stemming from unemployment and the immigrants in France. According to press reports, Le Pen is aware that the failure to take a stand on a large number of issues is a source of weakness, and he has asked a sympathetic university professor to put together a detailed party program. [redacted]

Lacking an extensive platform, Le Pen relies on repeating several favorite themes in his speeches:

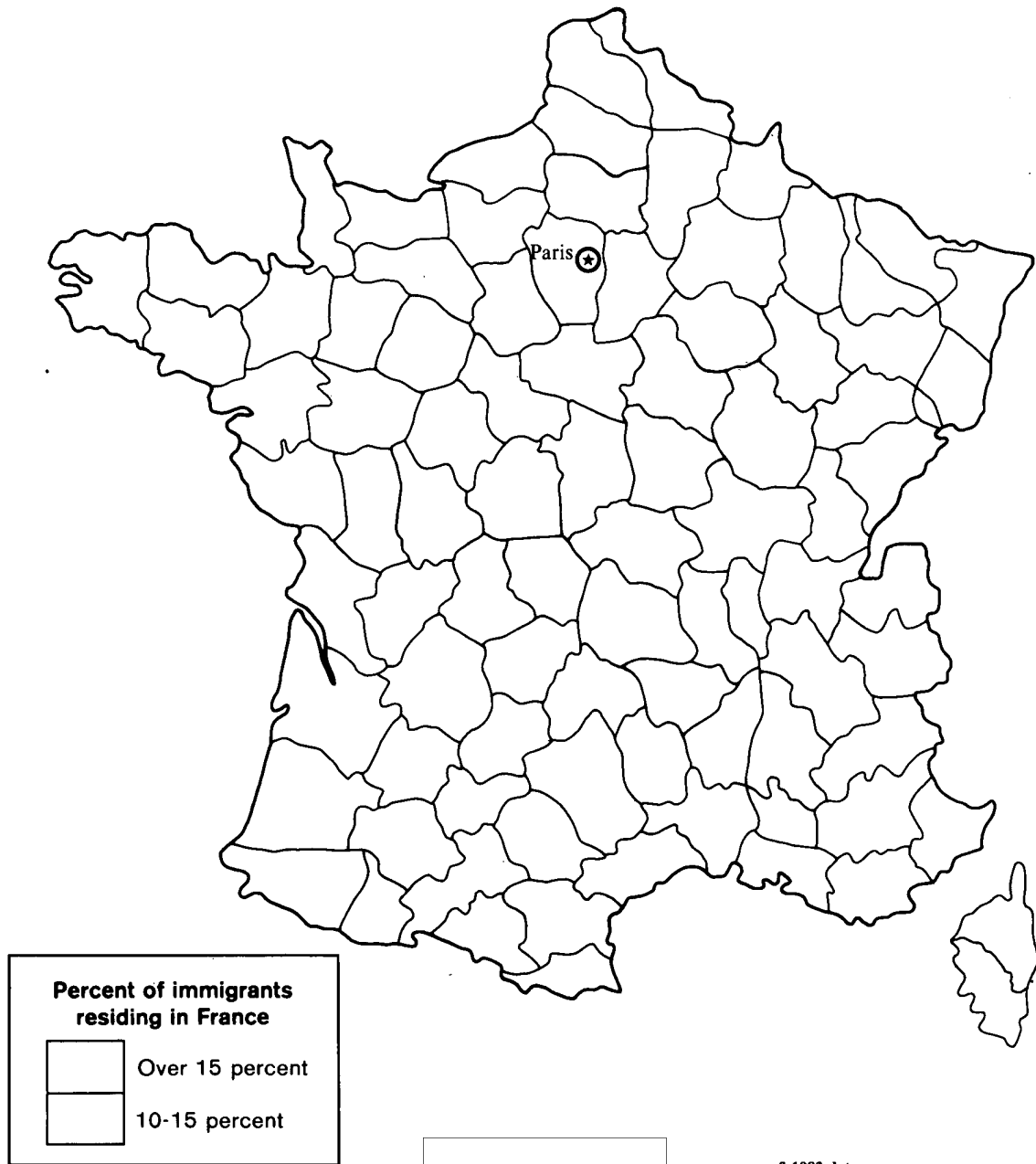
- **Nationalism** ("France and the French first"). Le Pen couples praise of traditional values that he considers endangered with calls for reducing the number of foreigners living in France ("2 million immigrants = 2 million unemployed") (see inset).
- **Anti-Communism.** In addition to his blasts at the French Socialists (whom he sees as little different from the Communists), he favors a tougher line toward the Soviets, backed up by an accelerated program of civil defense. Despite the vigor of his rhetoric, he does not advocate resorting to terrorism in the struggle against the left like some extreme rightwing groups elsewhere in Europe.
- **Restoring order.** Le Pen has called for strengthening the powers of the French President—already probably the most extensive of any elected official in Western Europe—and bringing back the death penalty. He also criticizes Justice Minister Badinter for being soft on crime. Another variation he plays on this theme is to deplore the "moral laxity" in France.

- **Reversing the decline in French population.** The National Front wants to increase family allowances and repeal the laws liberalizing abortion ("the genocide of French babies") pushed through by former Minister of Health Veil.
- **Reducing the role of the state.** Le Pen favors extensive denationalization of industry and restricting the government's control of education. [redacted]

Party Leaders and Members. If Le Pen's political skill is one of the National Front's chief assets, the weakness of its organization is, in our view, the party's chief liability. One of the things that sets Le Pen apart from past rightwing extremists is his ambition to build up a large-scale organization. He has had a good deal of success: membership of the party, according to press accounts, has grown phenomenally to about 50,000—up from 20,000 a year ago and 10,000 two years ago. Although the National Front has been able to draw voters from the other parties, it has had less success in recruiting experienced leaders. A review of the credentials of the party's governing board and local chairmen shows that, of the over 100 people who make up its national and local leadership, only one, besides Le Pen, has served in the national legislature; another seven have been in local government. None of Le Pen's closest aides are products of the elite schools that provide so much of French leadership (see inset). In March, Le Pen was able to find candidates for only three-fourths of the positions up for election in local contests. The social backgrounds of these candidates show the sources of the National Front's leadership at the local level and highlight their distance from the traditional political elite (see table). As has been shown, one of the results is that the party is less popular than Le Pen. The weakness of the National Front's organization makes it easier for Le Pen to dominate the party, but we believe it also means he will have trouble using it as a tool for mobilizing potential support. [redacted]

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Figure 1
Distribution of Immigrant Population by Department^a



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The Immigrant Issue

Le Pen sees the immigrant population in France as the source of many of the country's problems, and public opinion surveys show his calls for restricting immigration are one of the main reasons people support him. The issue is widely misunderstood, however. [redacted]

There are about 4.5 million immigrants living in France, according to official statistics, of which about 2 million are employed. Immigrants make up 8 percent of the population and 17 percent of the work force. About half of the immigrants currently in France came during the economic boom of the 1960s when the country's industries were desperate for labor. As a result, until recently the immigrant community has included a much higher percentage of single, young men than the overall population. [redacted]

Most of the immigrants have come from Spain, Portugal, and Italy and are well integrated into French society. Concerns about assimilation focus mainly on the 800,000 Algerians, 500,000 Moroccans, and 200,000 Tunisians. [redacted]

Immigrants usually work in low-paying jobs requiring few skills, such as construction and industrial assembly lines. They are concentrated in Paris and the old centers of the smokestack industries in the eastern half of the country (see figure 1). [redacted]

Public opinion surveys show that 42 percent of respondents overestimate the number of immigrants and 58 percent think there are too many of them.

Over half are convinced that immigrants receive more in social benefits than they pay in taxes. In the public mind, concentrations of immigrants are also associated with unemployment, crime, and high failure rates in schools. National Front attacks on foreigners feed on and encourage the perception that neighborhoods with a high proportion of immigrants are plagued with social problems because of the presence of Arabs rather than because of poor working and living conditions. [redacted]

In fact, there is at least a grain of truth in National Front accusations that immigrants are a source of crime: according to press accounts, immigrants are responsible for about one-third of the petty crime in France. On the other hand, because of the high percentage of young males, they have not been a major burden on social programs like family allowances, health insurance, or pensions. They tend to be the victims of unemployment—not its cause—and their jobless rate is twice that of the overall population. [redacted]

Academic studies suggest that the challenge of dealing with immigrants is likely to be permanent; indeed, it may be getting worse. Some restrictions on new immigration are already in effect, but foreign workers now in France are increasingly staying longer and trying to bring in their families. This is changing the social profile of the immigrant community and will eventually increase the burden on the social security system. [redacted]

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National Front Candidates for the March 1985 Local Elections ^a

Social Background	Percent
Liberal professions	14.0
Small businessmen	11.0
Company presidents	10.5
Senior executives	8.0
Clerks	8.0
Midlevel executives	7.0
Retired	7.0
Civil servants	6.0
Salesmen	6.0
Workers	5.0
Retired military	5.0
Farmers	4.5
Teachers	3.5
Paramedics	2.0
Journalists	1.0
Housewives	1.0

Le Pen draws his supporters from a wide variety of special interest groups, and we believe he will have difficulty reconciling their diverse priorities as the party tries to work out a platform. According to press reports, groups that have attached themselves to his bandwagon include fundamentalist Catholics who support his crusade against abortion, racists who worry about the presence of Jews and Arabs in France, conservatives nostalgic for the days of Petain or even the monarchy, and nationalists who have never forgiven the government for giving up Algeria.

Profile of National Front Voters. By renouncing violence and making a major effort to build up an organization, Le Pen has widened the appeal of the extreme right. National Front support cuts across traditional political alignments, reflecting, in our view, the appeal of his attack on politics as usual. According to public opinion polls, the sources of the party's support are broad, if shallow, and derive from

a segment of French life that is rarely seen by tourists or diplomats: a world of crowded public housing projects, frustrated ambitions, and fear about the impact of change. Surveys published in the French press show that National Front voters are fairly evenly distributed across social, age, and educational groups, although they are most numerous among small businessmen, white-collar workers, and professionals. A February 1984 poll showed that 29 percent of its supporters were working-class voters demonstrating their concern about deteriorating neighborhoods and competition for jobs from foreigners. Geographically, National Front voters tend to come from large cities and the industrial regions of the north and east—areas of high immigrant populations (see figure 2, compare with figure 1 showing immigrant population).

Although National Front voters represent a variety of social backgrounds, they do not reflect overall French public opinion. According to polls taken at the time of the party's first national electoral breakthrough in June 1984, 38 percent of Le Pen's supporters listed immigrants as the issue that most concerned them. Only 8 percent of the total number of voters agreed that the immigration problem was the top priority. The main concerns of the general voting population were, on the contrary, high unemployment (listed by 28 percent of those responding) and protection of purchasing power (listed by 21 percent). Another survey, taken later that year, showed that most French think the causes of crime are unemployment and poor housing rather than the presence of immigrants. In addition, 51 percent of those responding to an April 1984 poll disagree with Le Pen's opposition to abortion.

The approximately 10 percent of the electorate who have voted for the National Front probably are a soft base of support. Polls of National Front voters show that only 50 percent consider themselves to be on the extreme right of the political spectrum; 27 percent class themselves as mainstream right and 15 percent as center. Exit polls taken during the June 1984 European elections, in which the party received 11 percent of the vote, indicate that only about 7 percent

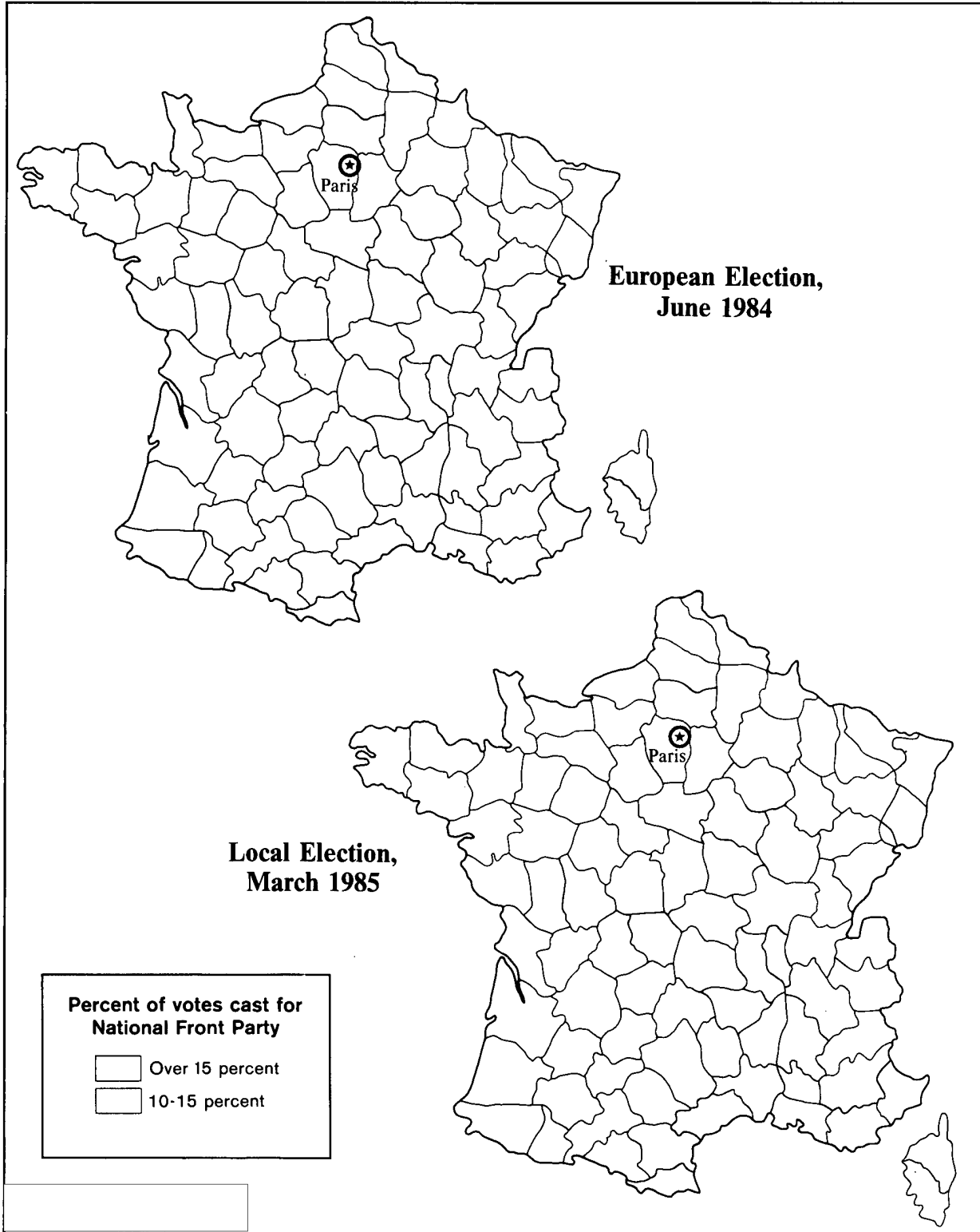
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Figure 2
Distribution of National Front Vote by Department



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of the voters said they would vote for the National Front in the coming legislative elections. Neither Le Pen's approval ratings in public opinion polls nor the percentage of the electorate intending to vote for the National Front in 1986 have grown dramatically over the last two years (see figure 3).

International Links. We believe that, due to its nationalistic orientation, the National Front does not give much priority to cultivating international ties. Uniquely French in its origins, its concerns are almost entirely domestic. The party is not a member of any like-minded international organization that could provide advice or financial assistance. Le Pen's occasional attempts to forge links with other rightwing parties in Europe have met with only limited success—most notably in the European Parliament where the National Front's 10 representatives have formed a group that includes five members from the neofascist Italian Social Movement and one sympathetic Greek.

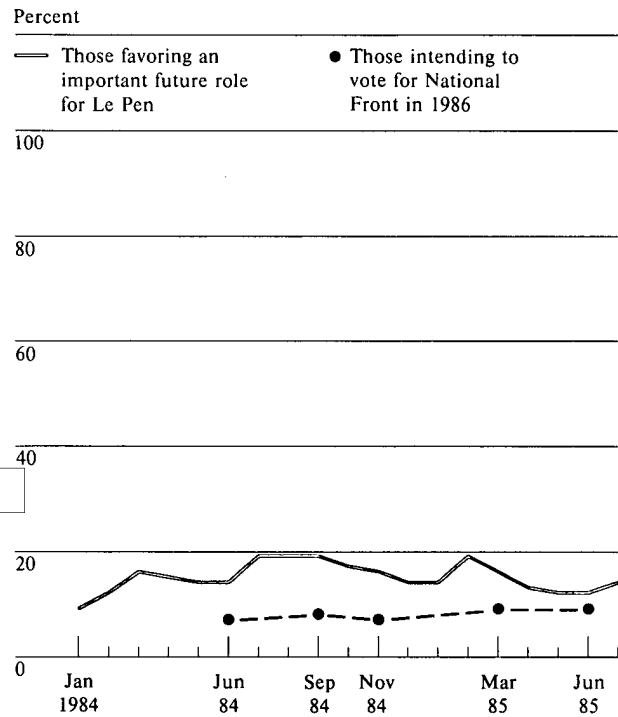
Le Pen's efforts to spread his message abroad have stirred up the same controversies that characterize his appearances in France. According to reports from the US Embassy in Athens, his trip there in December sparked rioting and demonstrations by leftists as well as protests from the local Jewish community. In March the US Embassy in Bern reported that Swiss authorities withdrew permission for a speech by Le Pen because of concern that there might be violent protests.

Responses of the Other Parties

Le Pen's success in the polls and media has forced the four major parties to assess what the rise of the National Front means for them. Le Pen has brought new issues into the national political debate and drawn voters from across the political spectrum. Each of the other four main parties has reacted differently, but all are torn between condemning the National Front and using its newfound popularity for their own benefit.

The mainstream opposition's strategy is to keep the National Front isolated on the fringe of French politics, and, in our view, they have been generally successful. During the local elections in March, National Front voters switched over to the RPR and UDF candidates in the second round to defeat leftist

Figure 3
Le Pen's Popularity and Intentions to Vote for the National Front



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candidates, according to US Embassy reporting; the RPR and UDF, on the other hand, refused to reciprocate. The following month, the RPR and UDF signed an agreement that they would campaign together and govern together in 1986—without the National Front. According to the US Embassy in Paris, the mainstream opposition plans to play to the concerns of National Front voters, but will claim that the RPR and UDF will be in a better position than Le Pen to win the election and do something about France's problems. To vote for Le Pen, they will maintain, is to divide the opposition and play Mitterrand's game by denying the parties of the center and right a convincing victory. The Embassy reports, however, that the

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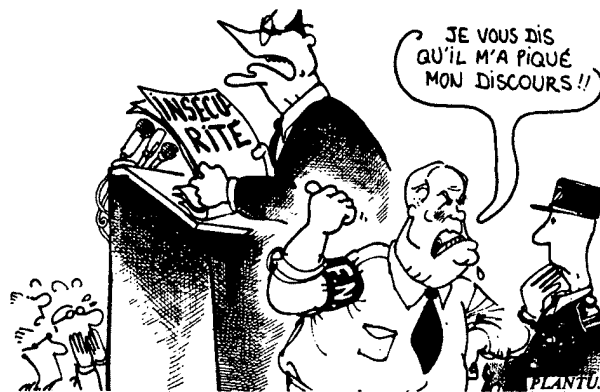
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moderates of the UDF are less enthusiastic than the RPR about making an open appeal for extremist support. [redacted]

The RPR. We believe Paris Mayor Chirac's party is the most concerned about the National Front, because it has both the most to lose and the most to gain from the rise of the far right. At present, Le Pen's success hurts the RPR by cutting into its constituency (25 percent of those who voted for Chirac in the presidential election of 1981 voted for the National Front in the 1984 European elections), and Chirac's support in the polls has been dropping precipitously in recent months. On the other hand, Le Pen's appearance on the political scene means that Chirac no longer suffers the opprobrium of being the most extreme candidate on the right. Looking to the future, Chirac probably hopes that—as the candidate whose approach and program most closely resemble Le Pen's—he stands to profit if National Front voters decide the party has no chance of winning and want to cast a vote that will matter. Capturing Le Pen's supporters could make the Mayor of Paris the dominant partner in the coalition that is likely to be victorious in 1986. Chirac's position is a delicate one, though: catering to Le Pen's supporters alienates his more moderate allies in the UDF; but embracing the UDF would abandon the extreme right constituency to the National Front. [redacted]

Chirac appears to be relying on a two-track strategy to deal with the dilemma; he will keep Le Pen at arm's length while trying to court National Front voters. Having refused to form a nationwide electoral alliance with Le Pen, he has promised, in conjunction with the UDF, not to ask the National Front to join a governing coalition in 1986. At the same time, Chirac has spoken out more forcefully on issues—such as law and order and immigrants—that preoccupy those who have voted for the National Front. In addition, he has taken a more nationalistic stance on some international issues—for instance, by playing up the threat that the entry of Spain and Portugal into the European Community poses to French farmers. [redacted]

The UDF. Chirac's flirtation with the National Front is unacceptable to most members of the UDF, a loose-knit coalition of parties of the center and moderate right. According to public opinion polls, most UDF voters—along with most of the public—oppose any



Chirac steals Le Pen's issues, "I'm telling you—he swiped my speech." [redacted]

cooperation between the established rightist parties and the National Front. Veil and former President Giscard have refused to deal with Le Pen; Barre has met with him, but nothing has come of the encounter. In the past, the growth of the National Front has taken votes away from the UDF, but not as much as from the RPR. Polls show that only 15 percent of those who voted for Giscard in 1981 switched to the National Front in 1984. [redacted]

Although the UDF has less in common ideologically with the National Front than the RPR, it, too, might profit from Le Pen's efforts to push his way into the political mainstream. As long as National Front candidates are seriously in the running, they draw more votes from the RPR than from the UDF, and this strengthens the UDF's influence in the opposition coalition. Should the National Front lose momentum, on the other hand, the UDF might inherit a sizable number of its voters, since polls now show that Barre is ahead of Chirac as the second choice of National Front supporters. [redacted]

The Socialists. The left tends to see Le Pen as a useful example of the dangers attending a return to power by the right. The National Front has only limited appeal for leftist voters, and surveys show that 6 percent of those who voted for Mitterrand in 1981 backed Le Pen in the 1984 European elections (another indication of how Le Pen's appeal cuts across traditional alignments). Public statements by Socialist leaders make it clear that, while they are genuinely

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concerned about the dangers of the extreme right, they also see the National Front as a convenient bogeyman for scaring an apathetic and dispirited leftist electorate back into the Socialist fold. [redacted]

In our view, Mitterrand believes that the Socialists will lose their absolute majority in the legislature in 1986. With the collapse of the union of the left—the strategy that led to victory in 1981—his goal, in our view, is to encourage the divisions among the opposition and then use elements of the fragmented legislature to forge a new coalition in which the Socialists would still play an important role. Having the National Front in the legislature serves his purposes by dividing the votes of the center and right and rallying the left. [redacted]

The Communists. Marchais and his party are vehement opponents of the National Front, but, in any case, the Communists will only be on the fringes of the political scene in 1986. The party is preoccupied with its own internal struggles and collapsing base of support; it has little energy left to devote to analyzing and countering the National Front. Instead, the Communists make ritual denunciations of Le Pen and anyone who deals with him, and lambaste Mitterrand for the electoral reform that will enable the National Front to enter Parliament for the first time. Although polls reveal that only 2 percent of those who voted for Marchais in 1981 shifted to Le Pen in the 1984 voting, the National Front will compete for the non-Communist protest vote that has gone to Marchais in the past. It is highly unlikely that the Communists will have much bargaining power in the new parliament, and their contribution to the political maneuvering that will go on in the new legislature probably will be limited to rhetorical confrontations with the National Front. [redacted]

Prospects for 1986

The rise of the National Front, in our view, is a symptom of increasing fragmentation in the French party system and a harbinger of uncertainty and instability in the future. The traditional framework of French politics—with competing coalitions on the left and right—may be dissolving. Indications that the political framework is changing include not only the rise of the National Front, but also the breakdown of the union of the left and the continuing rivalry among

Chirac, Barre, and Giscard for the leadership of the mainstream opposition. Nor is Le Pen the only one trying to take advantage of a breakdown in the left-right dichotomy and the public's desire for a new approach. President Mitterrand—by appointing Laurent Fabius as Prime Minister and governing without the Communists—gives every impression of trying to construct a more centrist, pragmatic, and nonpartisan appeal. If he is successful, he may take some of the wind out of Le Pen's sails, but he has probably not left himself enough time to effect such a fundamental change before the election next spring. [redacted]

We believe the National Front will have a limited—but potentially important—influence on the French constitutional crisis looming in 1986. Le Pen has seized advantages from situations that were not of his making in the past, and he may have the opportunity to do so again next year. In our view, the party's vote is likely to be less than 10 percent in the legislative elections, due to its limited program, organizational difficulties, and the softness of its support. Its drawing power could increase, though, if the economy deteriorates dramatically or if the mainstream rightist parties exasperate the voters by continuing to devote so much energy to internecine struggles. Even a small block of National Front deputies could play a decisive role if the RPR and UDF are not able to get a parliamentary majority. [redacted]

Given the limited appeal of the National Front and the weakening of traditional political alliances, we believe there are two probable scenarios for the outcome of the 1986 legislative elections:

- In our view, the most likely result of the elections under the new system of proportional representation is that the RPR and UDF will get a narrow majority of the seats (see figure 4). This would allow them to control both Parliament and the Cabinet without having to depend on the National Front. Confined to the sidelines, the National Front will try to build on its past successes in drawing the RPR to the right. For instance, Le Pen might try to goad Chirac into confronting Mitterrand openly and throw up obstacles to working with the Socialists.

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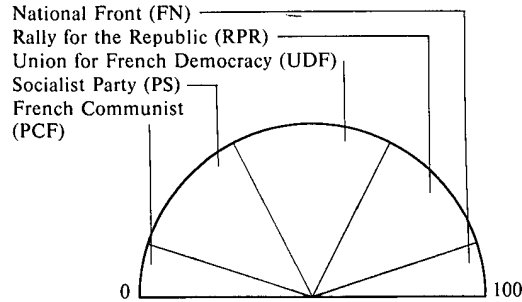
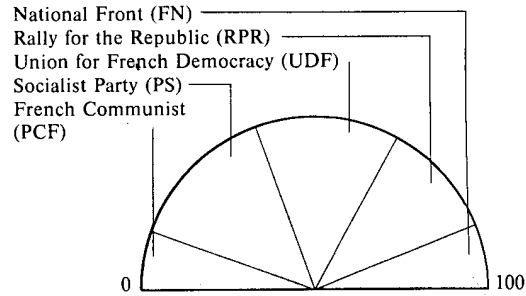
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Figure 4
Possible Outcomes of 1986
Legislative Elections

Percent of seats

RPR-UDF Gets Majority

Hung Parliament No Majority
Possible Without National Front

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The National Front would also be potential allies for those in the RPR and UDF who favor a more nationalistic foreign policy. We anticipate, however, that after a few years of rule by the RPR and UDF—especially if they can generate an economic recovery—many of the factors that gave rise to the National Front will be undercut, and the party probably will slip back into obscurity.

- It is less likely, in our opinion, but still possible, that no party or coalition of parties will end up with a working majority in the legislature. A shift of only a few percentage points in the results could dramatically alter the possibility of organizing a majority with the National Front (see figure 4). The chances of such an outcome would increase if the Socialists are able to increase their vote and the rightist leaders continue to bicker among themselves. In this case, Mitterrand probably would attempt to strike a deal with the RPR and UDF. If the Socialists could find enough partners in the UDF and RPR to make up a majority, the National Front would remain in the political wilderness. If Mitterrand's ploy failed, the legislature would be plunged into confusion and deadlock. Le Pen is shrewd enough and ruthless enough to take full advantage of such a situation. His price for cooperation would be high: concessions on appointments and policy—especially in the areas

of immigration policy and law and order. In our view, any arrangement between the UDF/RPR and the National Front would be controversial and probably highly unstable.

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We believe it unlikely that the Socialists will be able to swing the electorate around enough to win an outright majority in the legislative election. Should they do so, however, Le Pen and the National Front probably would continue to play a spoiler role among the opposition parties. A leftist government provides the far right with plenty of easy targets, and Le Pen might even manage to maintain his party's current level of popularity. Although in the short term the National Front might wield a disproportionate amount of influence in an opposition distressed and divided by the loss of what seemed a sure victory, Le Pen would be left with little or no influence on national policy.

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Implications for the United States

Whatever the role of the National Front in 1986—a minor irritant or a spoiler with a major potential for upsetting the political system—we believe France is likely to be preoccupied with internal affairs over the next year or so. The main threat to US interests would

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come if the National Front contributed to an atmosphere of political uncertainty by encouraging and exploiting instability as well as indulging in nationalist posturing. [redacted]

Under the Socialists, France, in our view, has moved quietly, but steadily, toward closer cooperation with NATO through policies such as supporting the deployment of Pershing II missiles in West Germany, organizing a Rapid Action Force that could be sent to the front on short notice, and urging the West Europeans to contribute more to their own defense.' These policies have been carried out not only because President Mitterrand has decided they are in the French national interest, but also because Mitterrand was backed up by majorities in the legislature and by public opinion. [redacted]

We believe French support for these policies that further US interests could be endangered if the outcome of the 1986 legislative elections puts the National Front in a pivotal position. Although the National Front does not have a carefully considered program for foreign affairs, its nationalistic approach and drive to repudiate the Socialists' work could make France a more difficult partner in the Atlantic Alliance. Le Pen has made favorable comments on American economic policy in press interviews and is virulently anti-Soviet, but we believe his influence would work in favor of a more truculent and independent foreign policy. Le Pen's influence would have a negative impact not only on the substance of French policy, but also on the manner in which it is carried out:

- The French consensus that favors a strong national defense and limited cooperation with NATO could be damaged in the period of confusion that might well follow the elections. An inward-looking and more nationalist France could be less cooperative in NATO and the European Community. The French Government might also take a more protectionist stance on trade issues.

[redacted]

- The President's authority in foreign policy may well be challenged, making decisionmaking uncertain. Crucial support for French foreign policy—such as the defense budget—might be held hostage to political rivalries. [redacted]

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