

The Impact of Extreme-right Parties on the Policy Orientation of Mainstream Parties in the area of Immigration: The Study of Electoral Competition in the French Presidential Election of 2002 and 2007

Saki Tomita (Mitsubishi Research Institute)

Keywords: extreme-right parties, election, issue competition, French politics, political competition, immigration policies

Election is an important element in the arena of politics, for it does not merely function as an institutional process of decision-making, but whose dynamics has the power to change the policy orientations of the established parties. In the study of immigration policies, the main subject has been the governing body and their policies to discuss their consequences on the society. However, less attention has been given to elections as a subject of analysis. The objective of this paper is to discuss the influence of the elections on the policies of immigration. It will apply the methodology established in the electoral analysis in order to explain how the rise of extreme-right parties influences the policies of mainstream parties.

The subject of this research is the French presidential election of 2002 and 2007, and their subsequent administrations. The two consecutive elections are interesting cases for the Front National (FN), the French extreme-right party experienced its best electoral performance followed by its worst. Moreover, in the following two administrations, the governing mainstream party embarked on hardline policies on immigrants most notably towards the Muslims. In terms of methodology, the notion of *issue competition* (Carmines and Stimson, 1993) will be used as an analytical tool. Issue competition describes an electoral situation in which there is a competition over the issues to attract the attention of the public. It is a useful tool to analyze extreme-right parties whose common tactic is to raise polemics over a selected issue to drive public attention, though it has not been widely used in the study of extreme-right parties. This study will thus integrate the two areas of study seeking to open a new perspective. It will use election polls, quantitative data of voters' behavior, public discourse of the governing party and the candidates' manifestos as subjects of study using the aforementioned analytical framework.

The study had two main findings. Firstly, it found that the success of the FN leader (LePen) in the 2002 election is attributed to his successful venture in framing immigration as the salient issue. This is revealed most clearly in the comparison of the manifestos of Chirac and LePen. While the former mentioned law and order, and unemployment as prime issues, the latter framed various social problems as rooting down to one; immigration. Immigration thus became the salient issue in the presidential campaign by which the extreme-right candidate succeeded in attracting voters. In fact, although only 30% of all voters supported LePen's ideas in general, immigration was voiced as the most important issue by 68% of his voters.

Secondly, it was found that the issue competition of 2002 and 2007 was different in their nature. In 2002, the competition developed over the saliency of the issue. In contrast, in 2007, it was already a given condition that immigration was the salient issue and the competition was over the ownership of that salient issue. The analysis of the

public discourse of the mainstream party during the administration of 2002-2007 demonstrates how it made its rightist shift in order to claim ownership back from the extreme-right party. The study of the public discourse during the administration by Sarkozy and his manifesto during the 2007 election, demonstrates how he used his public exposure as the minister of interior and as the electoral candidate in order to impress the voters with his competence vis-à-vis immigration. Consequently, in the 2007 election, he succeeded in gaining nearly half of the voters who originally voted for LePen in 2002.

The findings from the study have an important implication for the study of policies surrounding immigration. Although many policy studies of the administrative bodies thoroughly investigate the intentions and the consequences of the respective policies, it often does not give sufficient explanation for the decisive timing these policies are undertaken, or for the shift in the attitude of the administrative body. The electoral analysis has an explanatory power to address these two questions and thus adds an important perspective. This study stresses the importance of incorporating the domestic political struggle into the analysis of immigration policies. By regarding the political arena developed through the election as being a competition between the actors to market the attention of the voters, one is able to gain a better understanding of how the dynamics of the different parties and candidates influence policy orientations, and how voter sentiments are used in their materialization.

Reference

Carmines, Edward G., and Stimson James A., "On the Evolution of Political Issues," in William H. Riker.ed., *Agenda Formation*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993. 151-168.