ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Populist pragmatism: the nationalisation of local government strategies by the *Rassemblement National*

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Abstract

Existing studies have explored the territorialisation of the *Rassemblement National* (RN) in terms of its regional variation in patterns of support and mobilisation strategies. The extent of regional variation in its local government strategies, however, has been neglected. In this article, we make this enquiry through comparison of two municipalities run by the RN between 2014 and 2020. While similar in local demand and central party supply, the municipalities differ in their socio-economic context and political history. We ask if the party has responded to these contrasting contexts with different strategies of governing. We conduct a qualitative analysis of the policies introduced in both towns and draw on semi-structured interviews with government and opposition actors. In addition, we conduct a quantitative text analysis of their policy agendas, using a dictionary-based analysis to measure the extent of populist radical right ideology in each case. Our findings show that, as well as some limited regional variation in the prominence of their core ideological themes, there is a common emphasis from both on a governing style characterised by 'pragmatism'. We argue that the prioritisation of the national party aim of mainstreaming can be a force for the nationalisation of local governing strategies from populist radical right parties, as shown here in the case of the RN.

Keywords Populism · Far-right parties · Mainstreaming · Territorial politics · Local government · Rassemblement National

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Introduction

The study of populism is undergoing a 'localist turn' (Chou et al. 2021). As support has risen recently for populist parties, they have found increasing success in subnational elections and even entered positions of government responsibility. Recent research has sought not only to understand the local determinants of support (Fitzgerald 2018; Bolet 2021), but also the actions of populist parties once in local government power (Paxton 2019; Drápalová and Wegrich 2020). In France, the focus of this article, a breakthrough was achieved by the *Rassemblement National* (RN), then known as the *Front National*, at the municipal elections in 2014.[1] The party gained control of 11 mayoralties concentrated in two clusters: one in the north of the country and one in the south east along the Mediterranean.[2] Existing studies have shown the territorialisation of the RN in terms of their regionally varying patterns of support (Gombin 2015) and mobilisation strategies (Ivaldi and Dutozia 2018). Facing distinct socio-economic, cultural and political contexts in different regions, the party tailors their strategies in the pursuit of electoral support. How their strategies vary between different regional contexts once in control of local government, however, has been hitherto neglected.

In this article, we make this enquiry through a comparison of municipalities run by the RN between 2014 and 2020 in the north and south east of the country: Hénin-Beaumont in the Hauts-de-France (HDF, formerly Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie) region and Fréjus in Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur (PACA). While similar in local demand and central party supply (i.e. both have witnessed significant electoral successes for the RN and been given much support by the central party), the towns differ in their socio-economic context and political history. We ask whether these regional contextual differences also translate into differing governing styles. Based on the existing literature, we propose three competing hypotheses for the local government approaches of the RN. First, as a policy-seeking populist radical right (PRR) party, they could be expected to pursue the core ideology of the party, regardless of the regional context. Second, driven by the goal of mainstreaming, the central party may influence a moderation of the radical goals of the party in local government, again regardless of the regional context. Third, their governing practice may vary in radicalism/moderation depending on the regional context, as the different socio-economic contexts of the north and the south of the country make issues of identity, and therefore nativist policy, more or less salient. This article tests the validity of these three hypotheses—uniform radicalism, uniform moderation and contextual variation in radicalism/moderation.

To evaluate their governing approaches—to be specific, the extent of nativism, authoritarianism, populism and pragmatism in their policy outputs—we undertook

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[1] The party was known as the *Front National* (FN) until it changed its name in 2018. Both names are used in this article depending on the time period that is being discussed.

[2] At the subsequent 2020 municipal elections, eight of those 11 towns gained in 2014 were retained and three more were acquired—including the major city of Perpignan. The RN lost around 40% of its elected councillors, going from more than 1400 elected in 463 municipalities in 2014 to 840 elected in 258 municipalities in 2020.

a comparative qualitative analysis of secondary sources including newspaper articles and conducted 21 interviews with political actors in both towns under study. In addition, we conducted a quantitative text analysis of mayoral statements from the monthly newsletters produced by the municipality in each location in order to provide further evidence of the issue emphasis taken. Our results detail several differences in emphasis between the two regions regarding core PRR ideological themes. Yet, across both cases, 'pragmatism' is the most relevant theme with which to characterise the party's approach to local government. As a result, we argue that the prioritisation of the national party aim of mainstreaming is a force for the nationalisation of local governing strategies from the RN.

Expectations for the local government strategies of the Rassemblement National

Policy aims of populist radical right parties in local government

Our first hypothesis of a uniformly radical governing style stems from the theoretical assumption that PRR parties will seek to enact ideological policy changes when in (local) government. Radical right parties tend to prioritize the attainment of policy change regarding their 'niche' issues over other typical party goals, such as office-seeking and vote-seeking (Adams et al. 2006; Bischof and Wagner 2019). As 'niche parties', their issue emphases are likely to be even more fixed than those of mainstream parties (Budge 2015; Ezrow 2010; Meguid 2005), and we could therefore expect PRR parties in local government to seek policy that corresponds with their core issues.[3]

The core issues of the PRR party family arise from their central ideological traits of authoritarianism, nativism and populism. It is crucial that studies keep the three concepts analytically separate from each other, with particular care regarding the often misused populism (Hunger and Paxton 2022). Nativism, as Mudde (2007, p. 19) defines it, is 'an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ("the nation") and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state'. Authoritarianism is defined here as a preference for established authority and ordered society, as well as the severe punishment of any infringements to this order (Mudde 2007: 23). The influence of authoritarianism on the aims of the PRR is evident in the high salience of security policy.[4] The third core feature of the PRR is populism. According to the now dominant ideological definition, populism is

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[3] By 'policy' we refer not only to official decisions that are made and voted on during council meetings but also other actions which may be more symbolic and enter the realm of political communication. See Tables 3 and 4 in the Appendix for details of the key policies enacted in each town

[4] While we keep nativism and authoritarianism analytically separate, there is frequently overlap between them in the actions of PRR parties. Consider, for example, the targeting of particular ethnic minority groups under the banner of addressing problems of law and order.

a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde 2004, p. 543).

As a result, populist parties tend to discursively focus on the two antagonistic groups—the people and the elite—and advocate for the elevation of the authority of the former in relation to the existing representative form of democracy (Rovira Kaltwasser 2014; Mudde 2007, pp. 150–155). This has possible implications in terms of policy—in institutional reforms to substitute the existing representative democratic form for direct democratic instruments—as well as forms of discourse and behaviour that are challenging to establishment institutions and the 'rules of the game'. This challenge tends to take a plebiscitarian form, in which the populist actors proclaim themselves to be the embodiment and executors of the will of the people, and opposition to them is framed as its obstruction and vilified for this reason.

A further reason to expect an ideological policy programme from RN mayors is the precedent set by the (then FN) mayors who ran a handful of towns in the south of France in the 1990s. They implemented a classical authoritarian agenda of the far-right with a strong emphasis on sociocultural policies (Shields 2007, p. 263). This 'policy-seeking' approach focussed on the party's core ideology and was most obviously adopted in Toulon and Vitrolles through the adoption of nativist 'national preference' policies (Ivaldi 2007, p. 179). Our first hypothesis is based on an assumption of radical policy-seeking goals held by the RN in local government since 2014 in both the north and south of the country. As a result, we would expect RN mayors to target the core PRR ideology via issues of immigration (including integration and asylum) and security (i.e. law and order, policing), as well as policies or reforms that challenge the existing representative and liberal form of democracy.

By contrast, our second hypothesis is rooted in the drive of the RN to present a more mainstream image. By mainstreaming, we mean 'a process in which radical parties change to become more like mainstream parties' (Akkerman et al. 2016, p. 7). As pointed out by Moffitt (2022), pariah parties use the mainstreaming technique of presenting themselves as a legitimate and/or normal party, although the mainstreaming process may also involve other actors. In France, specifically in relation to the RN, this is known as the so-called *dédiabolisation* (de-demonisation) strategy (Shields 2014; Surel 2019). Instead of pursuing radical, ideologically infused policy, the party might use the local arena to demonstrate governing competence and moderation. As local governments tend to focus on valence issues and pragmatic problem-solving, such an approach is also more likely in this arena (Egner et al. 2018, p. 330). The local level of government can therefore be used as a *vitrine* or showcase for parties to demonstrate a reformed image of the party (Paxton and Peace 2021). For pariah parties like the RN who have been unable to participate in either national or regional governments due to a *cordon sanitaire*, local government is an alternative source of political strength. Our second—competing—hypothesis therefore builds on the assumption that the RN is

driven to project competence through their running of local governments in both the north and south of France. We therefore expect RN mayors to pursue a 'pragmatist' governing approach that comprises valence politics and a corresponding emphasis on moderation and competence.

Regional variation in salient issues and party competition

The extent to which the RN in local government pursue a radical policy-seeking approach or a 'pragmatist' mainstreaming approach might also vary between the north and south of the country. The first reason for such a divergence could be varying demand from voters in the different regions for the party's core ideological issues. In his research on voting for the party in the two strongholds of HDF and PACA, Huc (2019) broadly distinguishes two ideal-type FN electorates: a more working class 'precarious' electorate in the north and a more middle-class home-owning electorate in the south. As he points out, even in the media the north is considered to be the heartland of the social welfarist version of the party and the south east as the 'Identitarian' version.

That being said, the limited literature on the differences between RN voters in the north and south has highlighted the similar views held by their electorate nationwide. Across a number of classic far-right themes, RN voters actually express similar sentiments and preferences irrespective of geographical location. This is the case with insecurity, welfare dependency and globalisation where voters from both north and south agree with almost identical percentages to statements like 'unemployed people could work if they really wanted to' and 'there are too many immigrants in France' (Ifop-Fiducial 2017).[5] When asked for the most important reason they vote for the party, there are no significant differences between north and south, the most popular answers being dissatisfaction with other parties and its position on immigration (Ifop-Fiducial 2017).

Nevertheless, the contextual differences lead to differences in the *salience* of these far-right themes. Due to a higher share of migrants, including a more recently settled Muslim community and a significant expatriate (*Pieds-Noirs*) community, immigration and identity issues achieve a higher salience in the south.[6] As a result, the RN has tended to highlight these issues to a greater extent in campaign literature targeted at a southern audience. Ivaldi and Dutozia (2018, p. 1044) note that the party's 2015 regional election campaign in PACA emphasised the so-called 'identity' issues, targeted Muslims and embedded regional identity within a broader civilizational framework of Christianity. In the northern HDF region, by contrast, the party

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[5] There are some slight differences when it comes to 'traditional values'. On the question of same-sex marriage, those in the south were more reticent than their compatriots in the north. Turning to Islam, in the south east, 57% of respondents disagreed with the statement 'the Muslim faith is compatible with French Republican values' whereas in the north east, the figure was 53%. 85% of south eastern voters agreed that 'France is a Christian country' compared to 81% in the north east (Ifop-Fiducial 2017). See also '"Sudiste" et "nordiste", les deux électorats du FN', *Le Monde* 7 August 2013.

[6] *Pieds-Noirs* refers to the French (and other European) settlers in Algeria, many of whom felt compelled to migrate to France when Algeria gained indepedence. A large number of these people and their descendants settled in the south of France (Veugelers 2019).

emphasised distributional politics, and regional identity issues were instead framed in economic terms (Ivaldi and Dutozia 2018, p. 1040).

Another reason for such regional divergence could be the different structure of party competition between the two regions under study. This could in turn influence which party the RN perceives as its main rival and thus how it tries to convince voters. In PACA, the centre-right is clearly the dominant political force, and this has been the case since the late 1980s. After the 2014 local elections, the centre-right governed twice as many large towns (> 20,000 inhabitants) as the left and it controlled 5 of the 6 departments.[7] As a mainly right-wing territory, the RN attempts to compete with *Les Républicains* (LR) and capture its electorate in PACA. Its local election platforms often emphasise fiscal conservatism such as tax cuts and reducing bureaucracy, despite the party's apparent move leftwards on economic issues (Ivaldi 2015). The HDF region, in large part due to its industrial heritage, was for a long time a heartland of the left, although its influence has been waning since the late 1980s. Indeed, since the decline of the French Communist Party (PCF), the Socialist Party (PS) has seen its share of the vote gradually decrease to the benefit of both the centre and extreme right. This decline was again evident in the 2014 local elections when the left lost 12 of the 26 large towns it controlled in HDF.[8] Despite this loss of influence, the left (in particular the PS) is still perceived as the main electoral challenger in the region for the RN and this explains why their electoral material embraces a 'social-populist agenda of economic redistribution and state intervention' which also aligns with the attitudes and policy preferences of the party's northern elites (Ivaldi and Dutozia 2018, p. 1043), many of whom are based in Hénin-Beaumont.

As a result of these differences between the north and south in issue salience and party competition, our third hypothesis is that we will see distinctive governing practices and a variation in radicalism depending on the local context. More specifically, we would expect that nativism, particularly regarding Islam, will be more salient in Fréjus compared to Hénin-Beaumont. To sum up:

H1: RN mayors in both cases will pursue a radical governing approach with policy changes in line with PRR ideology;

H2: RN mayors in both cases will pursue a 'pragmatist' governing approach with an emphasis on valence issues and their own moral integrity and governing competence;

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[7] 'Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur: une région où le FN s'est implanté précocement' *Le Monde* 1 December 2015. After the 2021 departmental elections, the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence was also under the control of the centre-right LR.

[8] 'Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie: une région où la gauche est concurrencée par le FN' *Le Monde* 1 December 2015. Even more symbolic was the loss of the HDF regional government in the elections of 2015 which had been controlled continuously by the left since the introduction of regional elections in 1986. It must be remembered, though, that the left decided to step aside in the second round and allow a centre-right victory in order to block the possibility of the region falling to the FN. In the 2021 regional elections, the centre-right maintained control over the region.

H3: RN governing practice will vary in radicalism depending on the local context; nativism will be more salient in the southern case than the northern case.

Data and methods

This article adopts a comparative case study approach to test our expectations for the local governing approaches of the RN in the different contexts of the north and south of the country. Like previous research into the territorialisation of the RN (Ivaldi and Dutozia 2018; Huc 2019), we focus on the regions of Hauts-de-France (HDF) in the north of the country and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA) in the south. These regions present similarly high levels of support for the RN and have traditionally been seen as two bastions of the party. Within HDF and PACA, we select the specific cases of Hénin-Beaumont and Fréjus. These towns are representative of their respective regions, in terms of the typically contrasting economic and demographic characteristics. Hénin-Beaumont is a former coal mining town with a high rate of unemployment and low levels of immigration and diversity, whereas Fréjus is a relatively prosperous resort town, with a more diverse population as well as a sizeable community of *pieds-noirs* and their descendants.[9] Both municipalities have been led by an RN mayor following the 2014 municipal elections, who were re-elected in 2020. Furthermore, both were given significant attention from the central party in the 2014 election and during the first governing term as the two mayors, Steeve Brios and David Rachline, are important figures in the national party.

The empirical focus of the article comprises two parts. Firstly, we rely on a comparative qualitative analysis of secondary sources from the period 2014–2020 using keyword searches of two national newspapers which have paid close attention to the local political activities of the RN (*Le Monde* and *Libération*), and the main regional newspapers for the two areas in question (*La Voix du Nord* and *Var Matin*). Keyword searches were made via the Europresse database, covering the entire period of the first governing term (April 2014 to March 2020), using the string: [town name] AND [mayor's surname]. For Hénin-Beaumont + Brios, this returned a total of 1483 articles and Fréjus + Rachline returned 812 articles. The corpus was then further refined by selecting relevant articles that dealt with policy issues and other decisions made by these RN-led municipalities. We also consulted other accounts of their time in government, cognisant of the fact that these were often written by political opponents of the party (Di Méo 2015; Farel et al. 2015; Tondelier 2017; VISA 2015, 2017, 2020). Following Mudde's (2007) conceptualisation of populist radical right ideology, we assessed this material for the relative focus upon the core concepts of nativism, authoritarianism and populism, as well as looking for 'pragmatism' in the policy outputs across the two cases. Table 1 outlines the main features of each concept, while Tables 3 and 4 in the Appendix detail the key policies enacted in both Hénin-Beaumont and Fréjus and whether these can be classed as nativist, authoritarian or populist (or a combination thereof), or 'pragmatist'. These

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[9] The municipality in Fréjus makes a significant effort to commemorate the French presence in Algeria and events during the war such as the 1962 Isly massacre. See Table 4 in the Appendix.

Table 1 Main features of populist radical right ideology, and pragmatism

Dimensions	Definition	Features
Nativism	The belief that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ("the nation") and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state.	Anti-immigration Welfare chauvinism Ethnocentrism
Authoritarianism	The belief in a strictly ordered society in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely. In this interpretation, authoritarianism includes law and order and "punitive conventional moralism."	Law and order Traditional values
Populism	A thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.	People-centrism Anti-elitism Direct democracy
Pragmatism	Emphasis on non-positional issues, such as the fight against corruption, increased transparency, as well as their own competence, performance and moral integrity.	Competence Responsibility Dedication

Source Authors' own elaboration, based on Mudde (2007) and Zulianello (2020)

secondary sources were complemented with additional qualitative data garnered through semi-structured interviews with 21 local government actors from both the governing and opposition parties in the two cases. Representatives from the governing parties were in positions of responsibility as deputy mayors and opposition actors were elected as local councillors. The interview questions were adapted from the surveys of European mayors conducted by the POLLEADER network with a focus upon their policy outputs (Heinelt et al. 2018). We also interviewed two local journalists in each location for further context. As the interviews were conducted on condition of anonymity, those interviewed are not identified by name.

In addition, we conducted a quantitative analysis of the mayoral statements made within the newsletters issued by the local governments between 2014 and 2020 during the first electoral mandate. The newsletters were issued on a near monthly basis throughout this period, resulting in 64 editions of *Hénin-Beaumont C'est Vous* available for analysis and 57 copies of *Fréjus le magazine*. The municipality sends these newsletters to all local residents and promotes them heavily on their social media

channels. We assess the extent to which the mayoral statements that open each newsletter contain various ideological concepts (again: nativism, authoritarianism, populism and pragmatism). To do so, we follow a dictionary-based quantitative text analysis. Such an analysis represents text as data and performs word counts to measure the extent to which documents belong to a particular category (Grimmer and Stewart 2013; Pauwels 2011). The dictionaries were created based on those used in existing studies of PRR parties (Pauwels 2011; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011), along with a close reading of each of the newsletters to ensure that the particularities of the local French contexts were captured.[10] We then used the Quanteda package in R for pre-processing of the data and to count how often each dictionary term occurred in the statements (Benoit et al. 2018). *T* tests were then conducted to see whether the mean number of mentions of the various concepts significantly differed between the mayoral statements from Hénin-Beaumont and Fréjus. The results are summarised in Fig. 1 and Table 2.

Findings

To what extent have the RN pursued an ideological, or rather 'pragmatist', approach in local government, and to what extent have these approaches varied cross-regionally? In this section, we discuss our empirical findings from both the qualitative content analysis based on secondary sources and interview data, as well as the quantitative text analysis based on data from the monthly newsletters. Our discussion is divided into four themes that correspond to the constituent parts of PRR ideology (nativism, authoritarianism and populism) as well as what we have termed 'pragmatism'.

Nativism

One might think of local government as an arena where nativist policy is difficult to implement due to its limited policy competences regarding immigration. Mayors are, however, able to actively intervene in policy related to migrants and their integration (Flamant 2020). Moreover, PRR parties are able to use the power of local government office more subtly to signal 'national preference' and a hostility to outgroups.

Signalling opposition to Islam and Muslims in particular has become a common theme for these parties and the RN is no exception. Since taking over the reins of local government in 2014, a number of RN mayors have hit the headlines for actions and policies designed to exclude Muslims.[11] In our two cases, however, such hostility has only been present in Fréjus. There, the mayor, David Rachline, exploited the issue throughout his mandate, including several attempts to delay and frustrate the completion of a mosque—a key policy pledge during his election campaign in 2014

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[10] The dictionary of terms within each category can be found in Table 5 in the Appendix.

[11] For example, in the town of Hayange, the mayor has organised a 'Pig Festival' (*fête du cochon*) and in a number of other towns, such as Beaucaire, the town council has attempted to remove the possibility of offering alternative food options in school canteens when pork is on the menu (VISA 2015, 2017).

(Farel et al. 2015). Fréjus was also one of the many towns that issued a ban on full-length swimwear for women on its beaches during the so-called 'Burkini affair' in the summer of 2016 (Chabal 2017). Likewise, in May 2018, Rachline decided to freeze the subsidies given to a community centre that was preparing food for the homeless during Ramadan on the basis that it was supposedly only aimed at Muslims. Massive cuts were also made to the subsidies that went into supporting local community centres (*centres sociaux*) in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods of the town, with some being forced to close down. The RN electorate is keenly aware that they mainly serve the communities in the poorer suburbs, many of whom are ethnic minorities. Rachline has exploited the nativist sentiment of 'I pay while the children of others get the benefits' (Di Méo 2015, p. 38). These examples of nativist policy in Fréjus are in line with our assumptions about identity and anti-Muslim sentiment being more prevalent in the south. In Hénin-Beaumont, there is little evidence of decisions being taken to signal opposition to Muslims.[12] Indeed, a local opposition councillor has even admitted that relations between Steeve Briois and the local Muslim community are quite good, as shown by the permission he gave for the expansion of a local mosque (Tondelier 2017, p. 69).

Opposition to asylum seekers and refugees, on the other hand, is uniform across the two towns in our study. Despite having no formal power to actually refuse displaced migrants, RN-led municipalities have made it clear that they are opposed to welcoming those seeking international protection in France. The adoption of a charter against the acceptance of refugees/asylum seekers ('*Ma commune sans migrants*') that was proposed by the national party in September 2016 was approved by all RN-run municipalities (Front National 2016).[13] This followed a decision in Hénin-Beaumont one year earlier when a motion opposing asylum seekers was approved by the local council. When asked about the charter, one deputy mayor was particularly frank about its symbolic value:

> That is actually one of the very few political things we have done. But it's all about the symbolism. We can't deny the personal tragedies these people [asylum seekers] have lived through. But we're a town with an unemployment rate of 20% and a very high percentage of people living in poverty. We have a demand for social housing that can't be met, because we simply don't have enough accommodation available compared with the number of people on the waiting list. And we're being asked at the same time to welcome external populations, who are themselves very poor and who may be in a difficult situation – but we too have people in difficult situations.[14]

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[12] The sole example was opposition to a subsidy for a Muslim-run fast food restaurant that didn't serve alcohol.

[13] This initiative was spearheaded by Steeve Briois, mayor of Hénin-Beaumont. See the press release https://rassemblementnational.fr/communiques/creation-de-lassociation-des-maires-ma-commune-sans-migrants/

[14] Interview with deputy mayor in Hénin-Beaumont. All interviews were conducted in French and quotes have been translated into English.
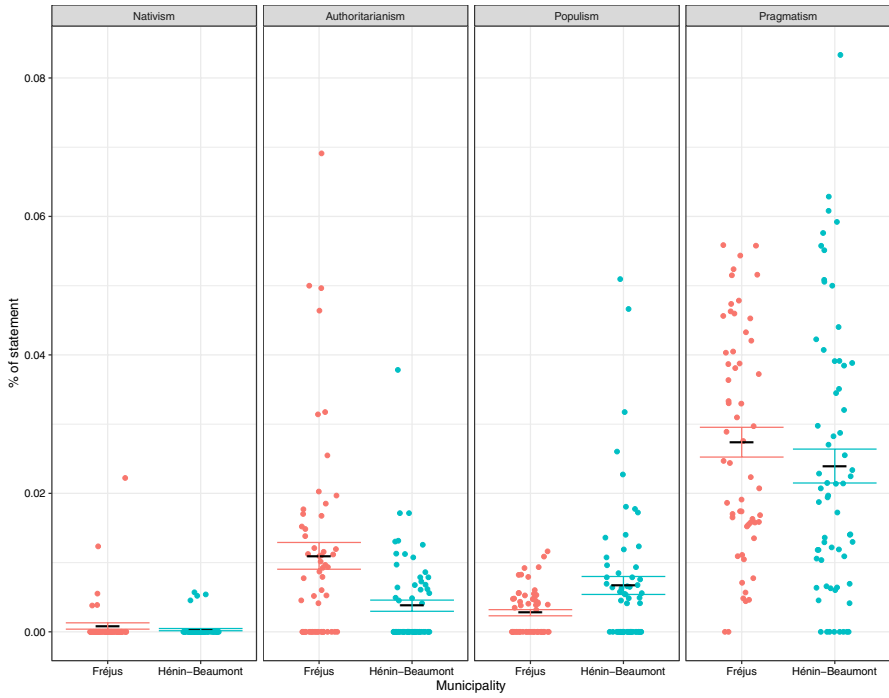
Fig. 1 Proportion of RN mayoral statements referring to ideological themes. *Sources* Hénin-Beaumont C'est Vous ! 2014–20, Fréjus Mag 2014–20

Table 2 Percentage of mayoral statements referring to ideological themes (*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$)

	Hénin-Beaumont		Fréjus		$T\ (df = 119)$
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Nativism	0.000326	0.00128	0.000838	0.00345	1.11
Authoritarianism	0.00378	0.00648	0.011	0.0146	3.57***
Populism	0.0067	0.0104	0.00276	0.00334	− 2.75**
Pragmatism	0.024	0.0196	0.0274	0.0162	1.05

The decision to reject asylum seekers is justified in terms of supporting their 'own people'. While the measure is purely symbolic, it sends an important message about national preference and who should be prioritised. Similar arguments were made in Fréjus regarding opposition to displaced migrants. In September 2019, the town council voted to remove 35 unaccompanied young migrants who were being housed in the town. However, such overt measures to signal nativism have been relatively

rare and have been often pursued in a more coded fashion. For example, again in the case of Fréjus, a decision was made to move the date of a market popular with North African traders from Saturday to Thursday with the Saturday market reserved for stands selling typical 'Provençal' goods. Another subtle example of nativism in the southern town is a reduction in subsidies for a local football club, a sport that is known to be popular among ethnic minorities.

Rather than Muslims or refugees, the outgroups that are most commonly targeted in both municipalities are Roma and other travelling communities. In Hénin-Beaumont, as early as May 2014 a local decree, later struck down by the courts, was introduced to target 'aggressive begging'. This measure was widely interpreted as being aimed at Roma people, although Briois claimed that he did not 'target a particular population'.[15] Other policies were more explicit, such as the decision to dismantle a Roma camp in July 2016, which was celebrated (with accompanying photos) in a post on his personal Facebook page and that of the municipality.[16] Later that same year a decision was made by the town council to deny a dedicated space for travellers in Hénin-Beaumont. Likewise, in Fréjus, David Rachline also opposed the opening of a space for travellers, but this was actually a decision for the CAVEM (*Communauté d'Agglomération Var-Estérel-Méditerranée*) the body that regroups several local municipalities. This illustrates the limits of local government control but also provides a useful excuse for PRR mayors to signal nativist intentions but then blame a higher power for their inability to enact them.

As shown in Fig. 1, the analysis of the mayoral statements in the monthly newsletters reveals that nativism is rarely evoked in either case—and that it is absent from nearly all of the statements of the Hénin-Beaumont mayor. *T* tests show there was no statistically significant difference between the two mayors regarding this theme (see Table 2).

Authoritarianism

We conceptualise authoritarianism in the context of local government action as an intensified focus on security and policies to improve law and order. Municipalities are often functionally limited in this domain but in France they have power over the local police force (*police municipale*). As one might expect, in both our cases, there was a focus on increasing the numbers of local police officers 'on the beat', which was also a key campaign promise. In Fréjus, the budget for the municipal police was increased which led to the recruitment of new officers and the introduction of night patrols and those on horseback during the summer season. There was also an investment in new equipment such as vehicles and bullet-proof jackets. Similarly, in Hénin-Beaumont, there was an increase in the numbers of police officers, more frequent patrolling, the introduction of a new canine unit, and municipal police were also provided with firearms.

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[15] Hénin-Beaumont: Steeve Briois va représenter un nouvel arrêté anti-mendicité *La Voix du Nord* 21 July 2014.

[16] See the post and accompanying comments from local residents: https://www.facebook.com/briois.steeve/posts/1098224980252088/

These measures to fight petty crime and 'delinquency' were also complemented by the installation of over 100 CCTV video surveillance cameras around Hénin-Beaumont. The number of such cameras was also doubled in Fréjus reaching a total of 140 by 2019 and a neighbourhood watch scheme was introduced. We therefore see parallel policy outputs in our two cases regarding security. These policies to aid the police and decrease levels of criminality were also similarly stressed in their local newsletters:

> In Fréjus, we didn't wait to make the security of our townsfolk a priority, since 2014 this has been translated into increased resources for the local police which has also been reorganised to offer an increased presence as well as new brigades leading to positive and convincing results.[17]

In the southern town, there was also a raft of security measures following terrorist incidents, in particular the 2016 Nice attack. This involved the enhancement of security measures as part of a *Plan particulier de mise en sûreté* (PPMS), including the installation of panic buttons in schools in case of attack which would automatically alert the municipal police.

Indeed, the findings from the analysis of mayoral statements (see Fig. 1) suggest that authoritarianism is quite salient for both mayors. Being more frequently evoked then nativism in both cases, it seems to hold greater importance to the governing style of the RN local governments in both cases. Moreover, the findings also show a clear and significant difference between them (see Table 2), with authoritarianism more salient to the mayor of Fréjus ($t = 3.57***$).

Populism

The analysis of populism in local government action and policy outputs is harder to define (but see: van Ostaijen and Scholten 2014; Paxton 2019). Following the ideological definition of Mudde (2004), we consider as populist those actions that can be characterised as anti-establishment or anti-elite, as well as those framed as reflecting the 'will of the people' against elites. Such actions, and the rhetoric justifying them, are liable to heighten the sense of conflict between those on opposing sides of the political divide.

The local political relations are particularly strained in Hénin-Beaumont due to various tactics directed by the RN towards the local opposition. On several occasions opposition politicians have been sued by the administration in Hénin-Beaumont for supposedly defamatory comments made during council meetings. Opposition councillors have also been denied their right of reply in the town newsletter (an important tool for communication). Funding has been withheld from local associations which are seen as under the influence of the left. The RN administration in Hénin-Beaumont even evicted the local chapter of the Human Rights League (LDH—*Ligue des*

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[17] *Fréjus le magazine* n°09 January/February 2016. This and subsequent quotes from the newsletters are the authors' own translation from the French.

droits de l'homme) from its premises, owned by the municipality, due to its perceived left-wing oppositional character. These actions against opposition parties and associations are justified by an extreme majoritarian rhetoric according to which the RN, thanks to its electoral victory, represents the will of the local people and those who challenge it are undermining democracy itself.

In the northern RN-run town, we also see the most blatant attempts to frame local decisions as an opposition between the will of the people and national elites. The decision to install a Christmas nativity scene inside the town hall, in contradiction of rules about government buildings remaining religiously neutral, was a clear example of the mayor trying to position himself as a defender of local interests and culture. This is also demonstrated through the cultural events organised by the municipality including a new and improved Christmas market. There was also a very deliberate attempt in Hénin-Beaumont to ride the wave of protest associated with the *Gilets Jaunes* protest movement that erupted in late 2018. In December of that year, representatives of that movement were invited to address a town council meeting by Steeve Briois at a time when the RN was attempting to harness this nationwide anger against President Macron. Both mayors have blamed the national government for restraining them in their actions. David Rachline often makes reference to a reduction in state subsidies for municipalities as a reason for being forced to make budget cuts in Fréjus. Elected officials there were also keen to point out that they express the democratic will of the people because they organised a referendum in 2017 on a construction project in the Saint-Aygulf neighbourhood (which was subsequently rejected).[18]

In both towns, campaigns have been orchestrated against the local media which are accused, in typical populist fashion, of promoting 'fake news'. Both *La Voix du Nord* in the north and *Var Matin* in the south have come under sustained attack in the municipal newsletter with the singling out of particular journalists. In Fréjus, it was announced in June 2016 that *Var Matin* would effectively be boycotted, and that the mayor and his deputies would only co-operate with its preferred journalists and means of communication. Opposition to *La Voix du Nord* was similarly virulent in Hénin-Beaumont, and in December 2015, the municipality decided to create a Facebook page called *La Voie d'Hénin* as a portal for 'alternative news' (sympathetic to the administration) as a means of countering the local press. In February 2016, the local newsletter was dedicated to the supposed misconduct of *La Voix du Nord* and its 'insults against the inhabitants of Hénin Beaumont'.[19]

The analysis of the mayoral statements provides further evidence that populism is more salient in Hénin-Beaumont, where terms related to an anti-establishment and conflictual style of political relations are more commonly used compared to in Fréjus (see Fig. 1). As shown in Table 2, there is a statistically significant difference between the two ($t = 2.75**$).

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[18] See the press release in which Rachline claims that this is a first in terms of direct democracy. http://www.ville-frejus.fr/actu/!/news/referendum-de-saint-aygulf-communique/.

[19] *Hénin Beaumont c'est Vous !* n° 19, February 2016.

Pragmatism

The analysis of what we term 'pragmatism' in the actions of the RN in local government is based on policies that address valence issues and/or are framed in such a way as to illustrate their own competence and moral integrity.[20] As outlined above, such actions are rooted in a central party-led strategy to 'mainstream' the image of the PRR party.

The RN representatives in both towns seek to display their moral integrity through policies that protect vulnerable local groups. Both mayors increased municipal support and subsidies to elderly residents and local associations. In Hénin-Beaumont, the municipality agreed to pay an annual subsidy of €750 to the charity *Les Restos du Cœur* and great emphasis was placed on such actions in the monthly newsletter. In addition to the regular newsletter, the city council of Hénin-Beaumont also publishes an annual guide for senior citizens (*Guide des Seniors*) to coincide with the national week celebrating older people.[21] This is echoed in the pages of *Fréjus le magazine,* where pride of place is given to policies designed to benefit senior citizens: an important consideration given the number of retirees in this part of France and the support that the party receives from older voters. Another example of the stress on moral integrity as part of the 'pragmatist' approach is the promotion of animal rights. In Hénin-Beaumont, a decision was made in 2017 to ban circuses with live animals. Such measures are less evident in Fréjus, despite a ban on bull fighting that included the slaughter of animals. Indeed, the RN administration in Fréjus appears less inclined to demonstrate a softer or more progressive side, which tallies with our expectation of satisfying a mostly right-wing electorate.

Yet the RN mayor of Fréjus, David Rachine, has certainly gone out of his way to illustrate his competence as a mayor, the other core element of the RN 'pragmatist' style, particularly regarding the management of the town's finances. In interviews, social media posts and his mayoral statements in the newsletter, he has constantly reminded his electorate that when he took over, the town had one of the highest levels of debt in the whole of France. The measures taken to reduce this debt, without increasing local taxes, have taken centre stage in Rachline's communication with citizens. This also grants him another opportunity to highlight both the austerity measures of the national government (with less state funds going to local governments) and the sins of the previous administration (because of their financial mismanagement). Likewise, in Hénin-Beaumont, the RN administration is keen to highlight their financial probity and commitment to lowering local taxes. This is highlighted in Briois's first mayoral statement after the 2014 election victory:

> Aware of the financial difficulties in which many of you find yourselves, we
> felt it was necessary from the very beginning of our mandate to respect one of
> our campaign promises: the lowering of local taxes which are weighing you

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[20] Steeve Briois himself defined his strategy as 'pragmatic'. 'A Hénin-Beaumont, le Front national manie la carotte et le bâton' *Le Monde* 16 June 2014.

[21] This is known as *la semaine bleue* and is celebrated in October. https://semaine-bleue.org/.

down and strangling you. That is why at the council meeting on Friday 25th April we voted on our first budget for the year 2014 and enacted a 10% reduction in the residence tax, one year in advance of what we had planned. The previous powerholders voted against this budget and the tax cut, preferring instead to play the role of an opposition that is hostile to the common good and votes against your interests.[22]

The focus on financial management including stabilising the budget and lowering taxes is a constant theme in the pages of the Hénin-Beaumont municipal newsletter, and often makes the front page. The June 2016 edition led with: 'The town saved from toxic loans'.[23] The ability of the RN administrations to redress their finances, including the renegotiation of various contracts, has been made possible by employing experienced personnel in key positions. These administrators have worked previously as high-level civil servants, and some are even graduates of France's elite National School of Administration (ENA).[24] Employing such technocrats is another means to demonstrate that the local government is apolitical and only focussed on competence. Local RN elected officials were also at pains to point out that they were working full time in their roles rather than these jobs being performed by people in retirement on a part-time basis (as is often the case in French local government).[25]

Despite the obvious examples of partisan politics being played by the RN mayors, not least with respect to their local opposition, the common mantra is that of a depoliticised mode of governing. According to this logic, the administration downplays the relevance of party-affiliation and the fact that the local government is run by the PRR. As Steeve Briois explained in a newspaper interview: 'There is no ideology, which is what our adversaries expected of us…it's not a political party that runs Hénin-Beaumont but a well-prepared team'.[26] In a similar vein, one year into his first term, David Rachline rhetorically asked a journalist 'Where do you see the Front National in my policies for Fréjus?'.[27] Around the same time, he explained that after winning the local election this allowed the party to 'demonstrate that not only are we capable of running a local authority but that we can also do it better than others…I am not the mayor of those who voted for the Front National, but of all the residents'.[28] In our interview with one of Rachline's deputy mayors, it was also stressed that 'local' and 'national' politics should be considered separate when running the local government:

> We don't play party politics, or national politics, when we run a city council. We run it in the interests of our residents, in the interests of the town itself, in relation to the state of its finances etc. So we're there to run the town, as I said

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[22] *Hénin-Beaumont C'est Vous !* n°01 June 2014.

[23] *Hénin-Beaumont C'est Vous !* n°23 June 2016.

[24] 'Ces énarques et autres centraliens qui se mettent au service du FN' *Le Monde* 8 December 2015.

[25] Interview with deputy mayors in Hénin-Beaumont and Fréjus.

[26] 'Six mois de mairies FN: Hénin-Beaumont, 3e volet de notre enquête' *La Voix du Nord* 11 October 2014.

[27] 'David Rachline soumet Fréjus à des économies drastiques' *Le Monde* 27 March 2015.

[28] 'Il y a un an, Rachline prenait la mairie de Fréjus' *Var Matin* 03 avril 2015.

earlier, like "a good family father" *[en bon père de famille]*. We're not there to play national politics, it's not a national issue.[29]

This supposedly apolitical and pragmatic approach to governing is occasionally betrayed by certain statements and policy outputs, such as those nativist, authoritarian and populist measures already mentioned above. The same interviewee also acknowledged that some of their voters undoubtedly lent their support to the party during local elections because of the policies of the national party. However, there is a distinct lack of spectacular or headline grabbing policies and the contrast with the governing of towns by the FN in the 1990s is noticeable. The 'pragmatist' approach has been pursued vigorously in Hénin-Beaumont and Fréjus and there is little to distinguish the approach taken in the north from that in the south. As shown by Fig. 1, the quantitative analysis of mayoral statements supports the similar level of salience in both towns, with Table 1 confirming a nonsignificant difference. Moreover, it shows the far greater weight placed by both RN mayors on a pragmatist approach in comparison with the party's core ideological concerns.

Discussion and conclusion

This article aimed to assess to what extent the local government approaches of the RN vary between different regional contexts. The first hypothesis of uniform radicalism is not supported by the evidence. Nativism, the core of the PRR ideology, is barely evident in either mayor's statements and is used mainly symbolically in policy actions. Hostility towards Islam, while somewhat salient in the southern case of Fréjus, is entirely absent from the northern case of Hénin-Beaumount. We find more support for the second hypothesis of a uniformly 'pragmatist' approach. This is evident not only in the relative lack of radical measures from both cases, but also that their agenda and outputs are dominated by valence policies framed in such a way as to illustrate the party's own competence and moral integrity.

Despite these commonalities, there *were* significant differences between the RN mayors in the north and south. While both emphasised the authoritarian theme of law and order, this was salient to a significantly higher degree in the southern case. Such policies are not unique to the PRR, but also an important issue for centre-right parties. The RN mayor in Fréjus is thus likely responding to the context of party competition in which the previous local administration and strongest current opposition comes from the centre-right (as opposed to the northern case where left and green parties are the most significant opponents). Populism, on the other hand, is significantly more salient in the northern case of Hénin-Beaumont. This is especially evident in the mayor's confrontational stance towards political and civil society opponents, justified by rhetoric which divides local political actors into those who they claim represent the 'will of the people' and those, on the other hand, who are supposedly distant from local culture and acting to subvert local democracy.

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[29] Interview with deputy mayor in Fréjus.

Such anti-establishment performances can play a strategic function during a radical party's moderation, while the RN downplays their nativist and authoritarian concerns, the heightened political conflict facilitates the maintenance of their outsider identity and core support. The higher level of conflict in Hénin-Beaumont is also a product of the greater ideological distance between government and opposition in that case, compared to the generally right-wing context of Fréjus.

While we do therefore find *some* variation in the governing approaches related to the different regional contexts, as we set out to test in hypothesis three, overall we find remarkably similar governing approaches in both Hénin Beaumont and Fréjus. This is somewhat surprising given previous findings of the territorialisation of RN electoral campaigning and manifestos (Ivaldi and Dutozia 2018). This cross-regional consistency in their actions in local government can be explained in several ways. First, as a conscious decision on behalf of the national party (of which the two mayors in question are two key decision makers) to mainstream the party's image. Second, that party actors had learned the lessons of the disastrous attempts by the FN to run a handful of towns in the 1990s according to its core ideological programme. This framing of 'learning from experience' was used in interviews with RN actors.[30] In this way, this article highlights the capacity of PRR parties to learn from past experiences (at the local level of politics) and on that basis adapt party strategies (across the national territory). Third, as a product of the limited competences of the mayor and the constraints of the local level of government. This has come into sharper focus in recent years in France with the increasing prominence of the inter-communal bodies which regroup several small municipalities, the EPCI (*établissement public de coopération intercommunale*).[31] These manage some services previously under the domain of the municipalities and have a large say in overseeing economic planning and development.

This study focuses deeply on just two cases, which are taken to be emblematic of their regional contexts. The findings of a relatively consistent approach across contexts, and its connection to the central party's mainstreaming drive, are supported by further evidence. For example, a 'guide' to the pragmatist approach for all party candidates in advance of the 2014 election (Front National 2014a), and then the following year a document celebrating policies delivered in that manner (Front National 2014b). Yet given the close connections held by the mayors of Hénin-Beaumont and Fréjus to the central party, it would be worthwhile for future studies to evaluate the differences in governing

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[30] "In 1995, the mayors wanted to put their ideology into practice but that's not how you run a town. In my opinion, that was a fatal mistake. For us, we just want what is best for the residents of our town and perhaps that is also what has changed when we compare the FN mayors elected in 2014 with those who made those mistakes in the 1990s": interview with RN deputy mayor, Fréjus.

[31] Since the reform of 2010, all municipalities in France have been forced to join an ECPI. This was designed to reduce tax competition between municipalities, deal with a lack of fiscal revenues and provide public goods more efficiently (Abidi et al. 2020).

approaches from other mayors, in less mediatised settings. Comparisons with these other municipalities would be challenging due to their very small size which renders the pursuit of ideological strategies less likely. More fruitful could be the inclusion of the larger town of Perpignan, governed by the party since the March 2020 municipal elections.

Another way to test the influence of the central party over PRR-led local governments would be to add cases of towns that are also run by an ideo-logically PRR mayor but are not formally affiliated with the RN. For example, the independent Robert Ménard in Béziers, and Jacques Bompard of the small breakaway party, the League of the South, in Orange. Adding these cases would enable assessment of the extent of mainstreaming imposed upon PRR actors by local government participation, independent of the guidance from a central party wishing to improve its image.

Future studies could also conduct cross-regional comparisons of PRR par-ties in local government in other countries, and the varying extent of central party involvement. In Italy, for example, comparison could be made between municipalities run by the Lega in its northern heartlands with those more recently captured in the centre and south. The use of local government as a strategy by central parties is a largely overlooked aspect of the literature on the PRR (but see: Paxton 2021). Further subnational studies may shed new light on how these parties consolidate and develop, both organisationally and electorally. This article opens up this line of enquiry for other scholars and aims to inspire further analysis of how these parties operate at the local level, building on what we already know about how they operate nationally.

Appendix

See Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3 Key policies enacted in Hénin-Beaumont (2014–2020)

Policy and source	Date implemented/ discussed	N	A	P	PR
Announces 10% reduction in council tax (*taxe d'habitation*) at the very first council meeting (Farel 2015: 49) Further 5% reduction announced (Farel 2015: 241)	Apr-14 Mar-15				✓
Removal of the right of LDH to use a council building and demand for unpaid rent (VISA 2015: 33, Farel 2015: 50)	Apr-14			✓	
Anti-begging decree, unofficially targeting Roma (VISA 2015: 42, Farel 2015: 85). Later struck down by court in Lille (July).	May-14	✓	✓		
Agreement signed with *Restos du Coeur* charity (LVDN)	May-14				✓
Decision to no longer invite the PCF to commemoration events (LVDN)	Sep-14			✓	
Renegotiation of various contracts (telephone and heating) to save money (LVDN)	Oct-14				✓
Increase in numbers of municipal police, introduction of patrols with dogs and providing police with firearms (LVDN)*	Oct-14 Continuous		✓		
Decision to bring the statue of the patron saint (*la sainte barbe*) into the town hall, against the wishes of the local priest (Farel 2015: 168)	Dec-14	✓		✓	
Criticism of the local newspaper *La Voix du Nord* in the municipal newsletter accompanied by protest (Farel 2015: 187) Sustained attack on LVDN (VISA 2017: 77).	Dec-14 Feb-16			✓	
Mayor organises solidarity demonstration in wake of Charlie Hebdo attacks and includes leaders of local Muslim community (Farel 2015: 203)	Jan-15				✓
Decision to not include opposition's right to reply in the municipal newsletter (VISA 2015: 128)	May-15			✓	
Passes motion opposing the arrival of refugees in the town (VISA 2017: 60, Tondelier 2017: 78)	Sep-15	✓			
Denial of municipal funds to education charity for political reasons (LVDN). *Secours populaire* denied use of a building Witholding funding from other local associations (Tondelier 2017: 188)	Nov-15 Oct-16 Continuous			✓	
Installation of a nativity scene inside the town hall, subsequently outlawed by local court (VISA 2017: 118, VISA 2020: 119). Launch of local competition to design the best nativity scene in response to court case (VISA 2020: 120, LVDN)	Dec-15 Dec-16 Nov-17			✓	
Creation of *La Voie d'Hénin* Facebook page as another means of countering the local press.	Dec-15			✓	
Approval of CCTV cameras (LVDN) Installation of 8 CCTV cameras at the town hall (VISA 2017: 76) Installation of the first CCTV cameras around the town, originally scheduled to install 110 in total (VISA 2020: 121) and 126 by end of 2019 (LVDN)	Oct-15 Jan-16 March 2018 (announced April 2016)		✓		
Grants a construction permit for expansion of local mosque (Tondelier 2017: 69). Construction begins in May 2018 (LVDN)	Mar-16 May-18				✓
Dismantling of a Roma camp (Tondelier 2017: 80)	Jul-16	✓	✓		
Adoption of *Ma commune sans migrants* - charter against the acceptance of refugees/asylum seekers (VISA 2017: 151, Tondelier 2017: 84)	September/October 2016	✓		✓	
Denial of a dedicated space for travellers (*aire d'accueil des gens du voyage*) Further complaints against travellers (LVDN)	Dec-16 Jan-18	✓			
Animal rights policies including banning of circuses with live animals (LVDN)	Feb-17				✓
Refusal to take part in ceremonies marking the end of the Algerian war	Mar-17			✓	
Reduction in property tax (*taxe foncière*) announced Reduced again by 5% in 2019 (LVDN)	Apr-17 Apr-19				✓
Naming of a street after Arnaud Beltrame (gendarme murdered by terrorist in Trèbes)	Mar-18			✓	
Opposition politicians sued for defamation (Marine Tondelier in 2018 but before that David Noel and Stéphane Filipovitch)	Jul-18			✓	
Support for *gilets jaunes* protest movement (including invitation to speak at *conseil municipal*)	Dec-18			✓	
Increase in security measures for Christmas market (response to terrorist attack in Strasbourg)	Dec-18		✓		
Opposition to a subsidy for a fast food restaurant that doesn't serve alcohol (VISA 2020: 126). Over-ruled in CAHC.	Oct-19	✓			
Organising numerous local festivities and cultural events e.g. Christmas market, medieval festival, music concerts etc (Tondelier 2017: 185)	Continuous			✓	

N.B. N nativism, *A* authoritarianism, *P* populism, *PR* pragmatism

Table 4 Key policies enacted in Fréjus (2014–2020)

Policy and source	Date implemented/ discussed	N	A	P	PR
Removal of EU flag from town hall	Apr-14			✓	
Increase in numbers of municipal police, equipped with bullet proof jackets and new vehicles. Introduction of night patrols, police on horseback and a 'nautical brigade' (Farel 2015: 279). Budget for municipal police increased by €200, 000 and 15 new police officers (Di Méo 2015: 49).	Apr-14		✓		
Massive cut in subsidies for the *centre sociaux* in the neighbourhoods of Agachon, La Gabelle and Villeneuve (VISA 2015: 60, 87) and other local associations including sports (Farel 2015: 71) Closure of Villeneuve social centre (Farel 2015 : 154, Di Méo 2015: 37). Removal of the use of a municipal meeting halls for neighbourhood associations – AQVTDM (VISA 2017: 171), CDIGFP (VISA 2020: 139). Freezing of aid for *centre social* that was preparing food for homeless during Ramadan (Libé May 2018)	May-14 Sep-14 Jan and Feb 2017 May-18			✓	
Selling off buildings and land owned by the municipality to pay off the debt and renegotiation of debt (*Le Monde* March 2015, Var Matin Dec 2017). Debt reduced by €17 million.	Continuous				✓
Reduction in number of newspapers available in municipal library e.g. subscription to *Libération* cancelled. (VISA 2015: 95)	Dec 2014/Jan 2015			✓	
Decision to suspend the construction of the mosque in La Gabelle neighbourhood (VISA 2015: 99, Farel 2015: 156, Di Méo 2015: 43). More moves to block the opening of the mosque and announcement of a proposed referendum (VISA 2017: 28, Libé Sept 2015) Mosque officially opened but legal wrangling goes on (VISA 2017: 55) Court confirms illegality of construction permit but allow mosque to remain open (VISA 2017: 174)	Oct/Nov 2014 (overturned Dec 2014) July/Aug 2015 Jan-16 Mar-17	✓			
Reduction in subsidies for local football clubs with suspicion of racism as the sport if popular with ethnic minorities (Farel 2015: 262, Le Monde April 2015)	Apr-15	✓			
Inauguration of commemorative plaque for those who died fighting for 'French Algeria' (VISA 2015: 123, Farel 2015: 280) Regular commemorations of events such as rue d'Isly massacre (26th March 1962).	May-15 Continuous	✓		✓	
Increase in CCTV as well as neighbourhood watch scheme *citoyens vigilants* (VISA 2017: 56)	May-15		✓		
Asking artists who benefit from low rent council houses to help out looking after children in nurseries (Libé July 2015)	Jul-15			✓	
Moving the date of a market popular with North African traders from Saturday to Thursday. Saturday market reserved for 'Provencal' stands (VISA 2017: 97).	May-16	✓			
Criticism of the local newspaper *Var Matin* in the municipal newsletter and announcement that the municipality will only co-operate with its own journalists and means of communication. Removal of spaces reserved for journalists at council meetings (VISA 2017: 173).	June 2016 (standoff lasts for 18 months)			✓	
Anti-Burkini decree, in line with many other municipalities, later struck down by local court (VISA 2017: 146, Libé Aug 2016).	Aug-16	✓			
Adoption of *Ma commune sans migrants* - charter against the acceptance of refugees/asylum seekers (VISA 2017: 151, Tondelier 2017: 85)	Sep-16	✓			
Referendum in the Saint-Aygulf district on a plan to redesign a public square (*réaménagement de la place de la Poste*). Plan rejected by 76% (Var Matin Aug 2017)	Aug-17			✓	
Decision to not have bullfighting (*corrida*) in Fréjus. Originally agreed to shows with bulls that avoided excessive cruelty and killing (Var Matin Apr 2016)	Aug-17				✓
Installation of improved security measures as part of a *Plan particulier de mise en sûreté* (PPMS) including panic button for schools in case of attack, linked to municipal police (Var-Matin Dec 2017)	Dec-17		✓		
Taking opposition councillor Françoise Cauwel to court for defamation (Var-Matin Jan 2018).	Jan-18			✓	
Vote in council meeting to remove 35 unaccompanied young migrants who were being housed in a holiday camp in Fréjus and its closure (VISA 2020: 142, Var Matin). Followed by decree imposing a night time curfew on these migrant (overturned in Dec).	Sep-19	✓			

N.B. N nativism, *A* authoritarianism, *P* populism, *PR* pragmatism

Table 5 Dictionary of terms to detect the populist radical right ideology, and other ideological features

English	French
Nativism (immigration, Islam)	
border*, immigr*, * migr*, asylum, foreigner*, "national preference", *islam*, "muslim*, mosque*, quran*, halal, roma, gypsy, travellers, jungle, radicalization, communitarianism, invasion, veil, burka, burkini, secularism	"frontière*", "*immigr*", "*migra*", "asile", "étranger*", "préférence nationale", "*islam*", "musulman*", "mosqué*", "coran*", "halal", "rom*", "tzigane","gens du voyage", "jungle", "radicalisation", "communautaris*", "invasion", "voile*", "burka", "burkini", "laïcité"
Authoritarianism (security, law and order)	
CCTV, incivilit*, *legal*, arrest*, burglar*, delinquen*, surveill*, camera*, *securit*, crim*, army, police, prison, vandal*, drug*, violen*, tradition*, respect, terroris*, begging, brigade/squad, decree	"vidéo-protection", "vidéoprotection", "incivilité*", "*légal*", "interpellation*", "cambriol*", "délinquan*", "*surveillance*", "caméra*", "sécurité", "crim*", "*sécuri*", "armée", "police", "prison", "crimin*", "vandale*", "drogue*", "violen*", "respect", "terroris*", "mendicité", "brigade", "arrêté*", "appréhender", "arrestation"
Populism (anti-establishment, conflictual political relations)	
people, elit*, establishment, referendum*, betray*, deceive*, arrogan*, caste*, particrat*, scandal*, controvers, lie*, hostil*, agitat*, respect*, merit*, suffer*, hate*, revenge, gossip, bias, activis*, bitter, evil, dignit*, honour, narcissis*, insult*, slander*, defam*, *system, drift*, libel*, denigrat*, baseness, vindictive, discriminat*, anger, corrupt*	"peuple", "gens", "elit*", "establishment", "référendum", "trahi*", "tromper*", "arrogan*", "caste*", "scandal*", "polémique", "mensonge", "hostil*", "agitation", "mérite*", "souffrance*", "haine*", "vengeance", "biais", "amer", "aigri", "dignité", "honneur", "narcissisme", "insulte*", "calomnie", "diffam*", "système", "dérive*", "diffamation", "dénigr*", "bassesse", "vindicatif", "discrimi*", "colère", "corrompu*", "corruption"
Pragmatism (competence, responsibility, dedication)	
action, improvement, work, activity, move, waste, service*, dedication, willingness, dynamism, determination, neutrality, management, effective*, political, partisan, *responsib*, function*, sloppiness, delay, defeatism, immobility, commitment, efficiency, effort*, technic*	"action", "amélior*", "aménage*", "travail", "travaux", "activité", "bouge", "gaspill*", "service", "dévouement", "volonté", "dynamisme", "détermination", "neutralité", "gestion", "efficac*", "partisan", "responsabilité", "fonction", "laisser-aller", "retard", "défaitisme", "immobil*", "engagement", "efficacité", "effort*"

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