

After Paris attacks, neo-fascists surge in polls for French regional elections

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Since the November 13 terror attack in Paris, the neo-fascist National Front (FN) has emerged as the main beneficiary of the law-and-order hysteria and the draconian police-state measures of the Socialist Party (PS) government. It is leading in polls for the regional elections of December 6 and 13.

According to an Ipsos poll, the FN would get 30 percent of votes in the first round of elections on December 6, beating the PS and the right-wing The Republicans (LR).

A BVA poll on November 29 showed the FN winning comfortably in the southeastern Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur region around Marseille, and the northern Nord Pas-de-Calais Picardie region around Lille. It may also win the Burgundy-Franche-Comté region. The BVA poll showed the FN making substantial gains in all of France's 12 regions.

The rise of the FN is the product of the bankruptcy of the PS and the escalating crisis of French capitalism. Millions of people are unemployed in France, and the PS is continuing to slash public spending with drastic austerity measures that are undermining the economy. Above all, the regional elections are taking place in an atmosphere of mass law-and-order hysteria launched by the government following the November 13 terror attack that killed 130 people.

Under the guise of a "war on terror," the PS is imposing unprecedented police-state measures and scrapping basic democratic rights. After the November 13 attacks, the PS imposed a three-month state of emergency, allowing the state to ban and crack down on protests, and place any individuals police claimed were a potential threat to public order under house arrest, without trial. The PS is pledging to amend the constitution to grant the president authority to exercise emergency powers indefinitely, effectively converting

France into a police state.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Manuel Valls justified these draconian measures and suggested they could be extended beyond February 26, 2016—when the state of emergency ends under the law adopted after the Paris attacks. He told Europe1 radio, "We should not rule out this possibility, obviously, depending on the threats, and we will have to act very responsibly."

Valls boasted of the massive police crackdown and of the many extra-judicial decisions to consign people to house arrest after the November 13 attack. According to Valls, "Since the attacks, over 2,000 administrative police searches and seizures (done without judicial control), were carried out, and 210 people detained, in the context of the state of emergency."

On the eve of the COP21 climate conference that began Monday, the government banned ecological protests and ordered police forces to crack down on protests in Paris, arresting and detaining over 300 protesters.

The drive of the PS government and the entire political establishment to destroy fundamental democratic rights is strengthening the FN. It is campaigning on the basis of calls for harsh law-and-order measures and anti-immigrant policies.

After the November 13 attacks, President François Hollande invited FN leader Marine Le Pen to the Elysée presidential palace, in the name of promoting "national unity." Supporting the three-month extension of the state of emergency, which has so far been directed above all at working class suburbs of France's major cities, Le Pen requested that the state of emergency "be used to go disarm the suburbs."

Le Pen also called for "the immediate cessation" of immigration into France. She endorsed the proposal of FN vice president Florian Philippot to deport all asylum

seekers currently in France.

The media are also beginning to discuss the possibility that the FN would emerge significantly strengthened at the national level from the upcoming elections, including possibly winning the next major election cycle, only a year and a half away: the May 2017 presidential elections.

“Will the attacks profit the FN in the regional elections?” *Lib é ration* asked, citing FN officials who said: “The left [i.e., the PS] and ourselves could be the beneficiaries. They announced measures and our proposals have been vindicated. The right is stuck between us.”

What is emerging ever more clearly is the bankruptcy of the entire ruling elite. Since he came to power in 2012—with the support of the PS’ pseudo-left satellites, the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA)—Hollande has intensified austerity, handing tens of billions of euros to big business, and launched multiple wars in Africa and the Middle East.

Under conditions where the trade unions and the pseudo-left have blocked the expression of the broad opposition that exists in the working class to Hollande’s policies, the PS calls for more austerity and war and for harsher police-state policies that only strengthen the FN. With the vast majority of the population deeply disillusioned with both the PS and LR, it has won significant electoral successes in European and local elections.

The socioeconomic collapse of French capitalism is epitomized by the Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie region, which the FN stands to win, but which the PS and PCF dominated for decades. Hit by deindustrialization and the closure of the coal mines, it has an unemployment rate of 12.5 percent, and one of the highest poverty rates in France. According to the state statistical agency INSEE, 1 million of the region’s 6 million inhabitants live in poverty.

The ruling class has no solution for these problems except repression and the drive towards authoritarian rule. The FN’s claims that the PS is adopting its policies have a distinct element of truth: the naked promotion of anti-immigrant chauvinism, authoritarian measures, austerity and imperialist war—which in earlier decades would have been the province of the FN—are now mainstream bourgeois politics.

Since coming to power, the PS has presided over the construction of a large police-state apparatus, legalizing mass domestic spying by the intelligence agencies and deploying the army inside France for domestic policing.

There is a real prospect that in less than two years this apparatus could be in the hands of the FN, a far-right party whose members have publicly defended the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, denied the Holocaust and justified French colonial rule in Algeria. This underscores that while the measures have been justified ostensibly to counteract terrorism, the police-state measures adopted after November 13 threaten the entire working class.



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