



Anti-globalisation Vote: Imports Help, Exports Hinder

Antoine Bouët, Anthony Edo & Charlotte Emlinger*

Is trade globalisation changing the voting behaviour of French citizens through its impact on the labour market? Since 1981, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of votes cast against globalization in France. Part of this increase is due to the increased competition induced by the rise in imports of goods. However, this result is only driven by imports of final goods and not by imports of intermediate goods. Indeed, the greater exposure of national employment to these imports, which complement certain economic activities, has led to a decrease in the share of votes against globalisation. Similarly, exports have mitigated the rise in anti-globalisation votes through their beneficial effects on the economic activity of the regions concerned.

Trade globalisation is having an impact on the economic situation of French people. While it benefits everyone through lower prices for consumer goods and the diversification of available products, it can also contribute to the economic and social downgrading of those most exposed to competition from imports of goods already produced in France. For example, the growth in imports from low-cost countries has, on the one hand, led to lower prices for many consumer products (such as textiles, electrical appliances and electronics), which has improved household purchasing power. On the other hand, some imported goods are in direct competition with domestically produced goods, resulting in job losses in sectors exposed to imports. But increased trade in goods can also be beneficial when globalisation enables French companies to export. It can then stimulate activity in the sectors concerned, and improve wage conditions and contribute to job creations.

People's feelings about globalisation can therefore be ambivalent, with some seeing it as the cause of job losses and others seeing it as the beginning of new economic opportunities. Because of its economic effects via the labour market, voting in favour of political programmes that support or denounce globalisation should be modified, depending on the degree of

concentration of employment in the sectors most exposed to imports and exports at local level.

Differences in exposure to international trade, whether through exports or imports, in the French *départements* can be used to check whether these differences affect the share of anti-globalisation votes in the first rounds of presidential elections (from 1988 to 2022).

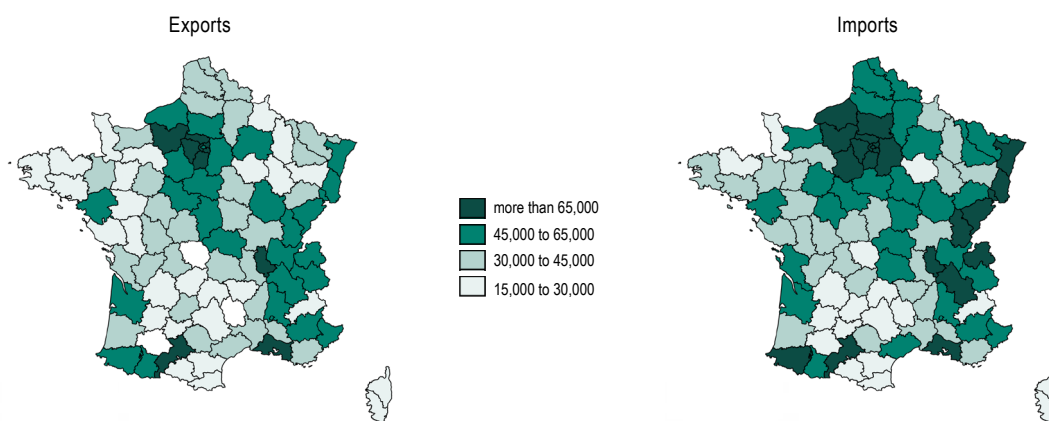
■ Geographical concentration of exposure to international trade

The impact of international trade on the labour market is the subject of an abundant literature, and CEPII has already highlighted in [2017](#) the main results of it, specifying in particular that trade openness generates winners and losers among workers depending on their sector of activity. For example, employment opportunities in a region that produces goods close to those that are imported are likely to deteriorate as a result of an increase in imports. On the other hand, jobs in a region specialising in the production of goods for export should benefit from their dynamism.

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Figure 1 – The increase in exposure to trade is concentrated in certain *département*

Change in employment exposure to trade between 1988 and 2021, by *département* (in dollars per worker)



Sources: Authors' calculations based on data from the 1982 census and the COMTRADE database.

Figure 1 shows territorial differences in the exposure of employment to variations in imports and exports (Box 1) between 1988 and 2021. While France's average exposure to imports rose by \$56,500 per worker over this period, there are significant local disparities. Alsace, Normandy and the Jura have employment specialising in sectors that have seen a sharp rise in imports at national level over the period (automotive, industrial equipment), which is much less the case in the south and west of the country.

Some regions, such as Île de France, the Rhône Valley and Haute Garonne, specialise in sectors where France has seen both imports and exports rise sharply (particularly in the aerospace sector). As a result of the different sectoral specialisations of France's *départements*, the increase in trade since the 1980s has been felt very differently by people depending on where they live.

■ The rise of the anti-globalisation vote

Between 1988 and 2021, as France experienced a simultaneous rise in imports and exports, the subject of globalisation gained prominence in political discourse. A textual analysis of the content of the manifestos made by candidates in the first round of presidential elections since 1981 shows that opposition to globalisation has increased (Chart 2). The proportion of sentences in the manifestos that oppose globalisation in one way or another (from which pro-globalisation sentences have been subtracted, see Box 2) has risen from around 1% in 1981 to 4% in 2022.

By combining the textual content of the candidates' manifestos at the first round of the presidential elections with their electoral success, it is possible to construct a measure of the share of anti-globalisation votes (Box 2). This has risen from around 1% in 1981 to 6% in 2022 (Figure 2). This increase highlights the growing electoral success of the various

Box 1 – How is an area's exposure to trade measured?

A *département's* exposure to exports or imports of goods is calculated by summing the changes in trade per worker in each sector, weighted by the sectors' shares of total employment excluding services in the *département* in base year t_0 :

$$\Delta exposition_{dt}^V = \sum_s \frac{L_{dst_0}}{L_{dt_0}} \frac{\Delta V_{st}}{L_{st_0}}$$

With ΔV_{st} being the change in French imports ($V = M$) or exports ($V = X$) in sector s , between year $t-1$ and year t , $t-1$ being the year of the previous presidential election; L_{st_0} is the number of workers in sector s in base year ($t_0 = 1982$), L_{dst_0} the number of workers in sector s and *département* d in base year ($t_0 = 1982$) and L_{dt_0} the number of workers in *département* d in base year ($t_0 = 1982$).

When $\Delta exposition_{dt}^M$ is positive it means that employment in *département* d has known an increased import exposure from $t-1$ to t .

Box 2 – How is the anti-globalisation vote measured?

The anti-globalisation vote index has two components. The first concerns the anti-globalisation content of the discourse of the candidates in the first round of the presidential elections, which we extract by carrying out a textual analysis of their manifestos. For each of them, we calculate the proportion of sentences that relate to globalisation, distinguishing between expressions that oppose the movement of goods, capital or people and those that, on the contrary, are in favour of it. For each candidate c and election year t , we construct an anti-globalisation score NAM_{ct} which is equal to the proportion of anti-globalisation sentences (net of pro-globalisation sentences) in his or her manifesto:

$$NAM_{ct} = \frac{\text{sentences anti}_{ct} - \text{sentences pro}_{ct}}{\text{sentences total}_{ct}}$$

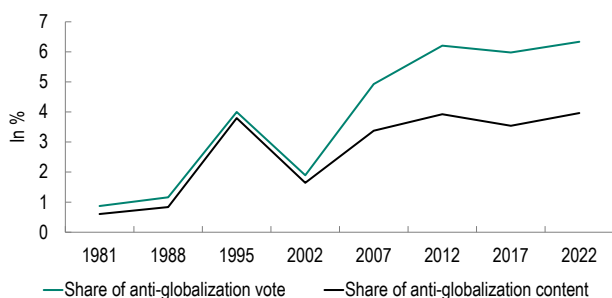
The second component of the index represents the share of votes cast for candidate c in *département* d in year t . The combination of these two elements makes it possible to calculate an anti-globalisation index, IAM_{dt} :

$$IAM_{dt} = \sum_c \text{votes}_{cdt} NAM_{ct}$$

This indicator is an overall measure of the vote for anti-globalisation ideas in each of the French *départements* in a given year.

Figure 2 – An increase in the anti-globalisation content of manifestos and anti-globalisation votes

Share of anti-globalisation content in party manifestos and anti-globalisation votes in the first round of the French presidential election



Notes: The share of anti-globalisation content corresponds to the share of anti-globalisation sentences (net of pro-globalisation sentences) in all the manifestos in the first round of the presidential elections. The share of anti-globalisation votes corresponds to the anti-globalisation index in Box 2 calculated at national level, i.e. with the share of votes cast for each candidate not at departmental, but at national level.

Sources: Authors' calculations based on candidates' manifestos and results of presidential elections.

candidates who make statements that call globalisation into question, particularly those on the far right. Although no candidate of this political orientation stood in the 1981 presidential elections, the only far-right candidate to stand in 1988 obtained 14.4% of the vote with a manifesto in which almost one sentence in five was opposed to globalisation. The uneven trajectory over the next two elections was linked in 1995 to an increase in votes for parties questioning globalisation, and then to a decline in the anti-globalisation content of their programme in 2002.

The anti-globalisation content of these manifestos is not exclusive to far-right parties, which are traditionally opposed to openness and trade. The rejection of certain facets of globalisation has increasingly featured in political debates on all sides, particularly when free trade agreements are signed. From 2007 onwards, for example, candidates on the traditional right also included substantial anti-globalisation content in their programmes. As a result, the far-right's share of the total number of anti-globalisation phrases in all manifestos has fallen from 84.2% in 1988 to 58.3% in 2022.

Since the 2002 presidential election, when Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the second round, the proportion of anti-globalisation votes has risen faster than the proportion of anti-globalisation phrases in the election manifestos (Figure 2). This widening gap shows that it is not only anti-globalisation statements that are on the rise, but also that people are increasingly voting for candidates who express more hostility to globalisation.

The proportion of anti-globalisation votes is unevenly distributed across the country (Figure 3). Concentrated around the Mediterranean, the Rhône valley, Alsace and the east of the Paris region in 1988, it is relatively more important throughout the north-eastern region in 2022.

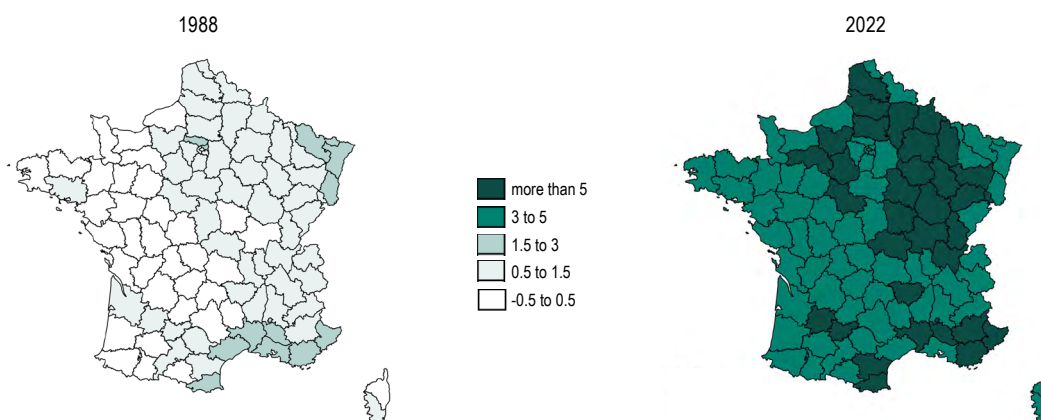
Contrasting effects of French imports and exports on the anti-globalisation vote

The anti-globalisation vote reacts differently according to the nature of exposure to international trade: increased exposure to imports favours the anti-globalisation vote, while an increase in exposure to exports reduces it (Figure 4). An increase in the indicator of exposure to imports of one standard deviation (around \$18,000 per worker) within a *département* increases its anti-globalisation vote by 0.17 percentage points. This order of magnitude means that increasing France's average exposure to imports by \$55,500 per worker between 1988 and 2022 increased the share of anti-globalisation votes by around 0.5 percentage points over this period. This corresponds to an increase of 10% in the share of anti-globalisation votes (from 1.1% in 1988 to 6.3% in 2022). This effect is explained in particular by the job losses that can result from increased competition from imports.

Focusing on the share of votes for parties considered to be on the extreme right of the political spectrum (such as the Rassemblement National), we find that an increase in imports per worker of \$55,500 increases this share by 3.4 percentage points. These results confirm those of a previous study in which the [author](#) estimates that an increase in imports from low-wage countries (from south-east Asia,

Figure 3 – An increase in anti-globalisation votes unevenly distributed across the country

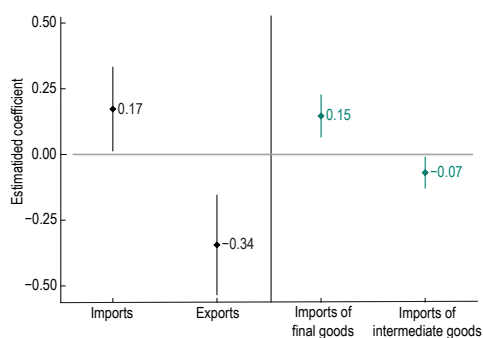
Share of anti-globalisation votes in the first round of the French presidential election in 1988 and 2022



Sources: Authors' calculations based on candidates' manifestos and results of presidential elections.

Figure 4 – International trade shapes the anti-globalisation vote

Effects of exposure to international trade on the share of anti-globalisation votes



Notes: The diamonds represent the value of the estimated coefficients; the vertical lines, the 95% confidence intervals. When these lines do not intersect the x-axis at zero, the coefficient is statistically significant: exposure to international trade has an effect on the anti-globalisation vote. The explanatory variables in the model are standardised so that the estimated coefficient indicates the percentage point change in the anti-globalisation vote in response to a one standard deviation increase in these variables.

Source: Bouët, Edo, Emlinger (2024)*.

* Bouët, Edo, Emlinger (2024), Does Trade Exposure Explain Anti-globalization Votes?, CEPII Working Paper, forthcoming.

including China) contributed to the success of the Rassemblement National (formerly the Front National) between 1995 and 2012.

Conversely, the increase in France's average exposure to exports, by \$46,200 per worker between 1988 and 2022, would have helped to reduce the share of anti-globalisation votes by 1.1 percentage points, and the share of votes for extreme right-wing parties by 7.9 percentage points.

This effect is undoubtedly linked to the economic benefits of increased exports, particularly in terms of job creation and lower unemployment.

The reactions of anti-globalisation votes induced by an identical variation in exposure to imports and exports are not symmetrical: the variation in the share of anti-globalisation votes due to an increase in exposure to exports is two to three times higher than that linked to a higher exposure to imports.

Changes in the proportion of foreigners in the population are also an important factor in understanding the rise in anti-globalisation votes. When this proportion increases within a *département*, the anti-globalisation vote also increases. This effect can be explained by the public's perception of the harmful effects of immigration on the economy or on crime, and can be found in studies on the effects of immigration on votes for the far right.

Contrasting effects depending on the type of goods imported

If an increase in a *département's* exposure to imports as a whole results in a rise in anti-globalisation votes, what happens if we distinguish between imported goods according to their use? Over the period considered here, from 1995 to 2022, only increased exposure to imports of final goods contributes to the rise in anti-globalisation votes. Conversely, greater exposure to imports of intermediate goods reduces the share of anti-globalisation votes. While an increase in imports of final goods per worker of \$55,500 increases the anti-globalisation vote by 0.65 percentage points, an increase in imports of intermediate goods per worker of the same amount leads to a fall in the anti-globalisation vote of 0.55 percentage points.

How can we understand these different effects depending on the type of goods imported? Imported final goods may be in direct competition with goods produced on national territory, while imports of intermediate goods may also contribute to the dynamism of the regions (in addition to their potentially competitive effects with certain activities on French territory). In particular, the negative impact of imports of intermediate goods suggests that some of them are complementary to the economic activities of the exposed regions by being reintroduced into the production process.

This asymmetrical effect according to the type of goods imported shows that the analysis of the impact of international trade on electoral behaviour is complex and must, to be complete, cover all its dimensions. Indeed, the share of anti-globalisation votes does not just reflect a geography of discontents linked to growing external competition from imports in certain sectors. Globalisation also has beneficial effects on local activity and job creation through exports and imports of intermediate products, which help to reduce the intensity of this vote. For the last ten years or so, successive French governments have given priority to competitiveness of the national economy. If this focus were to translate into better export performance, it should also have an impact on the voting behaviour of French citizens.

La Lettre du

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