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In French voting, ultranationalist Le Pen shows his party is still in the game

By [Edward Cody](#)
Washington Post Foreign Service
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MARSEILLE, FRANCE -- For Jean-Marie Le Pen, it was a moment of personal triumph, recognition that his far-right National Front is still a force to be reckoned with and that the ultranationalist movement remains a landmark in the French political landscape.

France, Le Pen harangued regional leaders, is being weakened by Third World immigrants under President Nicolas Sarkozy's feckless policies while the country's budget deficits are ballooning out of control and the expanded European Union is condemned to collapse under its own weight.

"All the elements of destabilization, and even of civil war, are falling into place," he warned darkly.

Le Pen, his trademark silver mane brushed straight back and his face as pink as ever, issued his analysis Friday while presiding over the Provence regional assembly, in the southern city of Marseille, which held its opening session five days after a [regional election](#) in which the National Front slate, with Le Pen at its head, won about 23 percent of the vote.

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The score here was part of a nationwide comeback in which the National Front won nearly 10 percent of the overall vote and captured 118 seats in 12 of the 22 regions in mainland France. Le Pen's daughter and likely successor, Marine Le Pen, was one of the National Front's top scorers, with 22 percent of the vote in the northern French region of Nord-Pas de Calais.

The National Front's showing, here in Marseille and nationally, remained a minority of the vote and did not go beyond its successes in the 1980s and 1990s, when the

anti-immigrant group pushed its way into the thick of French politics. But it dispelled a widely accepted notion that Sarkozy, with his conservative stands in the 2007 presidential election, had siphoned off a large percentage of National Front voters.

The millions of French people upset over immigration and the increasing visibility of Muslims in Europe, it turned out, still find their traditionalist values in Le Pen's France-first views, rather than in Sarkozy's business-oriented conservatism. The party's success, Le Pen told reporters, was due in large part to "resentment against Sarkozy" and his failure to fulfill promises he made during the 2007 campaign.

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